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Avoiding the Revenge - Reviewing the Pacifist Runⁱ

The main game tagline states: "Revenge is everything". Even the name *Dishonored* relies on the theme of defending ones honor and pride; the first guideline for the player to follow. The protagonist Corvo Attano, a bodyguard for the Empress of Dunwall, is wrongfully imprisoned for her murder in the harbor city of Dunwall; a Victorian and steampunk nuanced game world. Corvo has to escape the city prison and make his way to friendly allies, a rebel party called "the Loyalists", who then send Corvo on missions to take out the current monstrous reign who has brought turmoil and a rat plague to the city. The reign is formed by an organized police of soldiers. They are reinforced by the institutionalized and militarized Overseers, who base their order in the religion of the Abbey of Everyman. Corvo is placed in the typical narrative role of the One who will save the city and correct the wrong.

I set on playing the game with the choice of a non-lethal gameplay. This is called in the game as low-chaos (contra high-chaos). The decision can be though revised throughout the game; does the player follow: "a less dark outcome", as the game literally describes, or do they make the game all about chaos. Making the decision beforehand, I knew what to answer in choice-making scenes as the moral system in the game world was analogic to the meat world. Doing this I could review how the game supported this path and how the religious milieu played to it.

For player reflection and comparison, the results of past decisions were presented in visuals or cutscenes where outcomes of chaotic or low-chaotic actions were depicted. Multiple hostile bodies counted for more plague infested rats and numbered contaminated zombie-like Weepers. To stay on the pacifist route, avoid being detected, search for alternative ways to accomplish missions, and to restrain from the revenge

narrative took effort. The stealth way required judgement where to jump, to move quietly and to assess the environment where to move. On multiple occasions I wanted to blast an Overseer’s head off, but this would have ruined my clean statistics, while these built on body count and detection. In addition, *Dishonored* has exceedingly adult themes due to these specific choices, not to mention the adult content varying from grotesque killing scenes to pictures of extreme sexual fetishism.

On low-chaos, hostile opponents can be handled with sleeping darts or a sleep-chokehold. They slip into unconsciousness followed by a slight snore. Rats and Weepers can make the game more difficult, but the preliminary actions also mold the religious milieu and especially how Corvos spiritual mentor, the Outsider, presents himself.

Religious Milieu

Religion is depicted as opposing or defending compared to the protagonist and the player. In the narrative, religion is a theme that heavily signifies societal hierarchy in Dunwall. From this viewpoint it describes Corvos role as the savior rising from the lower class having the power to choose the city’s faith. Corvo follows the underdog role using magic abilities in missions and tasks. The use of magic in the Dunwall’s world is not supernatural, but rather signifies the outlines of the city’s religious law and social order. The city is torn by a dichotomist religious and supernatural hierarchy between the high class Overseers, and the common citizens, who are shown to have heathen beliefs, magic, and the deity Outsider on their side. In the religious war the Overseers actively thrive to extinguish the people’s beliefs, however the city walls and sewer passage ways graffiti tell a hopeful story: “The Outsider walks among us”.

The Deity Versus the Commoner

The Outsider is pictured as the typical trickster god – nor good or bad. After missions, depending on how chaotic the gameplay has been, the Outsider varies in feedback, narrates and reflects past actions in speeches aimed to Corvo. Interestingly the Outsider does not refer to outcomes as good or bad, or moralize. He merely describes happenings as “interesting” or in lines: “I expect a good show”. However, if we look at the Outsider speeches when Corvo does the morally right solutions the Outsider speeches are slightly more positive. The final ending with a clean low-chaos slate, narrated by the Outsider, is praising and joyful. Otherwise, in a high-chaos finish the Outsider describes a dark future to Dunwall.

The Outsider is the main, even spiritual, mentor on Corvo’s journey, but there is a subsidiary supporting-role that has more impact regarding to the actual outcome. Samuel the Boatman, the non-religious, ordinary and simple boatman that transports Corvo around Dunwall saves him near the story’s end. It is not the deity who saves Corvo, but it is the humble compassionate commoner who shows the most kindness. Samuel is important to the player, even though he is more of a narrative character than an interactive one. Samuels’s sympathies lay entirely on Corvo’s side, while the Outsider is amused by Corvos actions, as a toying demiurge.

Conclusion

On the outside *Dishonored* is a vast exploration of revenge emotions. When taking the low-chaos route, the revenge however becomes insignificant. To player enjoyment,

ⁱ A term used in the game community to describe a non-lethal or morally right game play. The gaming style can be a challenge or express player identity. Pacifist Run is especially a challenge style when used in games that do not offer or have a non-lethal option by default.