

“RED DEAD REDEMPTION” (Video Game Review)

Written by Doug Norris
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Rockstar Games embodies the industry standard: They set the bar, then they raise it. The GRAND THEFT AUTO franchise laid the foundation for their cash-vacuum production, and yet they continue to improve on the model. RED DEAD REDEMPTION not only continues the time-honored tradition of wreaking havoc in an open-sandbox environment, it redefines it with topnotch story-writing and character depth, positioning itself as a Game of the Year candidate.

REDEMPTION is a follow-up to 2004’s RED DEAD REVOLVER, but in no way resembles the shooter-style setting of its predecessor. Merely borrowing the Old West theme, REDEMPTION uses an open-world canvas to tell the story of John Marston, a former outlaw begrudgingly turning over a new leaf. Under the pressure of federal agents and the threat of losing his family, Marston sets off on a journey to eliminate his former gang cohorts, leaving a bloodstained trail across the sands of the American frontier.



The plot alone sucks players into teetering on the line between outlaw and hero, as you live and breathe Marston’s hurt and anguish. From his pained expressions to his soft but gruff voice to his propensity to tell women he’s happily married, Rockstar has truly developed a character also fit for page or screen.

Gameplay resembles that of the GTA franchise: You can change the radio station on your horse, jump it off cool ramps, pick up hookers in your stagecoach and do drive-by shootings on them when you’re done to get your money back. I kid. REDEMPTION provides a desert playground where Marston can walk, run, jump, ride horseback, drive a stagecoach...pretty much traverse the land in any fashion capable of the time. What sets this game apart from Rockstar’s sandbox predecessors is the level of involvement and array of activities. You can spend the day galloping across the plains, shooting and skinning animals for fur and meat, or you can find one of the many backroom Texas Hold-’em tournaments that seem neverending.

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You can pitch a game of horseshoes, stop a stagecoach robbery, enter a quick-draw match, bare-knuckle box in a saloon, herd cattle across miles of open plains...all without ever entering the story missions.

What's more, the game-play mechanics have never felt more realistic. Looking over your cards during a game of poker can happen as frequently and frantically as if you were in a casino or trying to take your friends' weekend \$5 buy-ins. Have Marston shoot down a potential hanging victim by firing his rifle at the gallows and splitting the rope, and you'll feel just like Clint Eastwood freeing Tuco in *THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY*. The “Dead-Eye” feature, carried over from the previous installment, lets Marston slow time to a crawl and pinpoint his bullets' destination. Once released, the final result pays off in a bloody explosion for anyone on the receiving end of Marston's gun barrel. Indeed, Rockstar has spared no expense in reminding players just how bloody Americans made Westward expansion. Whether putting slugs in enemies or carving up the spoils of a victorious hunt, Marston sprays a fair amount of crimson across the desert.

REDEMPTION employs the Good/Evil character-development option popular in many open-world environments, but what sets it aside from others is just how evil you can be. Marston can assault people by any method his hands are capable of, including but not limited to beating people with blunt objects, trampling them with horses, lassoing and dragging them across fields of cacti and tying them to train tracks. To top it off, the AI-controlled denizens of the Western world begin to either fear or respect Marston based on just how good or evil he becomes. Shoot a couple of criminals, the local police will speak in friendlier tones and more women will greet you in the streets. Shoot a town full of innocent civilians and a horde of livestock, people will run when they see you walking in their direction. REDEMPTION really lets you become a true hero or villain, with varying degrees of the spectrum.

REDEMPTION also boasts an on-line multiplayer option, quite similar to that offered by *GTA IV*. Players can choose varying modes of a shootout gameplay revolving around capture the flag, protect the base or free-for-all. Also included, and reminiscent of *GTA IV*, is the free-roam option, which allows players to join other on-line amigos to form “posses.” Players can then take their gangs throughout the landscape, hunting animals, warring with computer- and player-controlled factions or simply exploring the world.

Finding enjoyable play isn't hard to come by with developers building and expanding upon universally acclaimed game engines and beloved franchises. Rarely, however, does a game such as REDEMPTION combine topnotch play and a gripping storyline comparable to the annals of award-winning screenplays. So saddle up and ride to your nearest retailer to rope

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yourself a copy of RED DEAD REDEMPTION as soon as humanly possible. Once you walk a dusty mile in John Marston’s shoes, you may never want to leave.



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