

"RED DEAD REDEMPTION: UNDEAD NIGHTMARE (DLC)" (Video Game Review)

Written by Doug Norris

Wednesday, 03 November 2010 16:30



When Rockstar announced a zombie-themed add-on pack for the near-perfectly designed RED DEAD REDEMPTION, my reaction hovered “interested” but bordered on “skeptical.” Sure, Rockstar rarely disappoints, but the thought of adding zombies to an otherwise zombie-free realm of the old west seemed a tad silly to me. Knowing the DLC would wind up on my review plate, I figured this would touch on the ridiculous...I thought I could adopt a faux-cowpoke persona and try to romanticize about “ruslin up zombies” or crack lines about the dead rising to steal my gold. I could come up with zombified nicknames for the stars of Western-themed cinema, throw in some zombie-killing stagecoach modifications, and tie it all up with the risen corpse of James Polk forging westward expansion of the Zombified States of America.

I can't, for I do not want to do any injustice to this game...it's that good. UNDEAD NIGHTMARE has more action, more scares, and more fun than most full-release horror games, and it's only a \$10 download. It's so good it doesn't even warrant more of a review than me saying “Go buy this now,” and you playing, smiling, and possibly drooling.

From the story's onset, Rockstar spares no time in unleashing the classic horror buildup to the first scare moment. We meet John Marston on a dark, rainy ride home from a hard day rebuilding his ranch. In chilling foreshadow, a Peter Cullen-esque narrator warns of the wild ride in store for Marston as he shakes off the cold and joins his family for dinner. After sleeping off the storm, the family awakes to their estranged drunken uncle attacking Marston's wife in a fit of rabid bloodlust, and she, in turn, attacks her son. Marston caps drunk-uncle, hogties wife and child, and sets off to town in search of answers, only to be met by unruly waves of bloodthirsty (un)humans. At this point, we should probably emphasize that UNDEAD NIGHTMARE does not follow the true canon of RED DEAD REDEMPTION. Players will encounter characters – living, dead, and undead – whose storylines will skew far from the original discourse, and there's no other way to imagine this type of setting. By stepping out of the main context and not tying it into the story, Rockstar gains the liberty of setting towns ablaze, having Marston kill those who once helped him, and turning plot-pivotal characters into horrific monsters.

Marston continues the story riding from town to town, clearing out attacking zombies, helping the remaining survivors, and continually gaining clues as to resolve this unwanted increase in population for New Austin. From burning cemeteries littered with coffins to rescuing lost

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members of survivor groups, from finding ammunition for holed-up survivors to joining hunting parties after popular mythical beasts, the roughly 30-odd towns to which Marston must travel can keep players busy and scared, with one emotion never ruling out the other. Upon entrance to a town, players will scramble in search of high ground to thin out the first wave of zombies, as they swarm faster than any pair of mountain lions ever could. Though most of your time is spent looking for safety, you have to occasionally stop and marvel at the intricate character design on RED DEAD's undead – some of the best depicted zombies in a video game to date.

Matching the action's intensity, UNDEAD NIGHTMARE rewards players in broad and frequent measure. If you're after some bloody destruction, heads burst, limbs fly, and blood gushes as Marston blasts his way through the zombie onslaught. If story's more your game, take the time to listen to every cut-scene, as the dialogue is packed with hilarious tongue-in-decaying-cheek humor while not straying from the general sense of isolated fear expressed by any apocalypse survivor. If RED DEAD's hunting grounds are more to your liking, enjoy tackling the most dangerous game as the random wild-animal encounters have been replaced with packs of wandering zombies that will yank you off your horse quicker than you can say Nigel West Dickens. And that's just the single player. UNDEAD NIGHTMARE's multiplayer option gives your online buddies the chance to join up in a posse to end all posses, as waves of the undead charge your one horse town in an adrenaline-fueled, ammo-dumping, blood-splattering zombie slay-fest. Fans of LEFT 4 DEAD or BORDERLANDS will enjoy (and Valve should take note) the extra care and craft Rockstar applied to the multiplayer aspect, squeezing just as much fun as possible into this add-on pack.

Rockstar undoubtedly delivers one of the better zombie-apocalypse experiences to date. With the right amount of camp, scare, kitsch, fright, blood, and action, UNDEAD NIGHTMARE should be a must-have on any RED DEAD REDEMPTION gamer's list. Download it today and try your hand at thwarting off the undead in the Wild West. A bit of advice – like any zombie survivor should know, stay mindful of your ammo.

RED DEAD REDEMPTION: UNDEAD NIGHTMARE is available for download on XBOX LIVE (800 MS Points) and Play Station Network (\$9.99).



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