

Review: 'The Darkness II' not worth embracing

February 14 2012, By DERRIK J. LANG , AP Entertainment Writer



In this video game image released by 2K Games, a scene is shown from "Darkness II." (AP Photo/2K Games)

(AP) -- When the demonic first-person game "The Darkness" was released in 2007, it was a twisted breath of fresh air among all the war simulators and space-marine romps.

AP video game reviewer Lou Kesten called it an "intriguing mix of stealth and first-person shooting."

Unfortunately, a sequel that's arrived five years later isn't as much of a revelation.

"The Darkness II" ([2K Games](#), for the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, \$59.99), developed by Digital Extremes instead of Starbreeze Studios, feels like an unworthy follow-up that's just a little too late. Jackie Estacado is back

as a mob boss possessed by an ancient baddie known as the Darkness, which appears as snakelike tentacles jutting from his back.

After two years of keeping the Darkness at bay, an assassination attempt reanimates those light-averse supernatural forces residing within Jackie, who is still reeling from the shocking death of his girlfriend in the first game. The story by veteran comic-book writer Paul Jenkins is frustratingly uneven, and the single-player campaign is far too short.

The sequel switches up the Darkness abilities, opting for a gory shoot-'em-up focus instead of open-ended sneakiness. With the two extra limbs, Jackie can use car doors as makeshift shields while wielding Uzis in both hands. They can also be used for bashing bad guys, creating ammo and slicing electrical wires.

The levels - a subway, warehouse, mansion, carnival, etc. - are not only cliched, they're also more linear than the first game's playgrounds. The never-ending barrage of religious fanatics attacking Jackie is pretty boring. They're too easy to put down and come in just a few varieties.

"The Darkness II" wisely trades the realistic style of the original for a more colorful cell-shaded aesthetic, recalling the game's origins as a popular Top Cow comic book, and old-school tunes like Ram Jam's "Black Betty" and Tone Loc's "Wild Thing" organically plopped into Jackie's urban environment make "The Darkness II" a more dynamic experience.

Besides those few flourishing touches, the only saving grace of "The Darkness II" is a fun multiplayer mode that extends the single-player campaign in ways that are more exciting than the single-player campaign itself. Players can embark on cooperative missions as one of Jackie's four assassin pals, each with their own Darkness-inspired powers and weapons.

I would have given an arm and a leg - or two demonic arms - for a "Darkness" sequel that combined the original's adventurous first-person gameplay with this second installment's ripped-from-the-comic-book style. Luckily for me, the hurried campaign and dumbed-down design of "The Darkness II" means I'll be keeping all of my limbs. Two out of four stars.

More information: www.embracethedarkness.com/

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