

Review: Knights of 'The Order' battle Victorian monsters

February 19 2015, by Lou Kesten



This photo provided by Sony Computer Entertainment America LLC shows a scene from the video game, "The Order: 1886" (Sony, for PlayStation 4, \$59.99), in which Sir Galahad defends an alternate version of Victorian London. (AP Photo/Sony Computer Entertainment America LLC)

When a game has "1886" in the title, you expect to see a few familiar characters: Sherlock Holmes, perhaps, or Jack the Ripper, or Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. You don't expect the lead to be Sir Galahad.

And yet, here the crusty old geezer is starring in "The Order: 1886" (Sony, for the PlayStation 4, \$59.99). Turns out King Arthur's search for

the Holy Grail paid off, rewarding some of the Knights of the Round Table with immortality.

Galahad is joined by Round Table veteran Sir Perceval, the apparently ageless Marquis de Lafayette and a much younger version of Lady Igraine in a long-running battle against "half-breed" humans who can morph into fierce, feral monsters—werewolves of London, if you will. Meanwhile, a murky rebellion against Queen Victoria is brewing, and the powerful United India Company appears to be up to some shady business. All this comes together in a conspiracy that threatens the stability of the entire world.

The gorgeous, sepia-toned images of "The Order" will look familiar to fans of "steampunk" fantasies like Alan Moore's "The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen" comics or the video games "Dishonored" and "Thief." Massive airships float through the skies, while the grimy streets are crisscrossed by elevated, electric trains. There's the usual assortment of desperate orphans, con men and prostitutes, along with the occasional cameo by historical figures like Nikola Tesla and Charles Darwin.

The level of creativity isn't quite sustained by the gameplay. "The Order" is essentially a "Call of Duty"-style shooter, with period-specific firearms supplemented by more fanciful weapons like an electricity-powered arc gun or an explosive thermite rifle. It's a strictly linear and somewhat old-fashioned experience, alternating hectic firefights with lengthy, non-interactive cut scenes to advance the plot. There are some awkward fistfights to break up the rhythm, as well as a few welcome stealth scenarios that degenerate all too quickly into bullet-riddled chaos.

Most of this is quite well-executed: The gun battles are tense and lively, while the dramatic interludes are sharply animated and well-acted. Several scenes, unfortunately, climax with hoary "quick time events" in which you have to press buttons to match onscreen prompts, dissolving

the sense of cinematic immersion that the rest of "The Order" works so hard to achieve.

This is the first original title from California-based Ready at Dawn Studios, known for portable versions of popular franchises like "Jak & Daxter" and "God of War." It's a well-earned leap to a bigger stage, and the developers prove they have the chops. For about eight hours, "The Order: 1886" delivers a convincing alternate London. If there's a sequel (which the abrupt ending clearly aims at), I'd like "The Order: 1887" to give me more time and freedom to explore its intriguing world. Two-and-a-half stars out of four.

More information: theorder.playstation.com/

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