

Sherlock Holmes vs Jack the Ripper Review

Ding ding! Round one! Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, step up and witness an epic battle for the ages! In the same legendary league as Ali vs. Foreman, Freddy vs. Jason, Hogan vs. Andre, or Susan Boyle vs. a mirror, it's the Victorian age's greatest detective vs. its most infamous and gruesome killer! In the blue corner, the genius, the mastermind, the gentleman, the scholar, the world renowned super sleuth, Sherlock Holmes! And in the blood soaked red corner, the vicious, the evil, the perverse, the loathsome, notorious serial killer, Jack the Ripper! For the thousands in attendance, and the millions playing around the world, Ladies and Gentleman, lets get ready to ruuuuummmmmbbblllllllee!!!!

Cheesy intro out the way, Sherlock Holmes vs. Jack the Ripper is the latest outing for everyone's favourite Victorian detective, and sees him on the trail of the real-life killer, who ran terror through the streets of London, lurking in the shadows of its seedy, grimy back alleys, and left its population quaking in fear at the mention of his very name. Any fan of the crime-solving genre will relish the chance to catch one of history's most notorious killers, and with such a dramatic backdrop, atmospheric setting, and a clash of two characters so obvious and appropriate you almost wonder why they haven't been matched up sooner, you realize the game already has some key components on hand to produce something special. Whether it really capitalizes on these strong foundations, and whether it builds a solid game on top of them, is another story...

PC fans have seen this kind of game for decades, the modern day point-and-click adventure if you will, and the genre is still growing strong there. Over on the Xbox however, things are a tad different, with only a select few games, namely the CSI ones, capturing the same crime/puzzle solving spirit, and with more point-and-click adventures available on Xbox arcade than in actual retail, the genre is yet to really reach its full potential here. Enter Sherlock Holmes vs. Jack the Ripper, (or CSI London:1888 as I like to call it!) an immersive, atmospheric, chilling, gruesome, and challenging adventure game, and one that will surely help make the case that we could use more games like this on the console, and less half arsed, generic shooters!

Gameplay:

Any fan of the point and click/adventure genre will be right at home here, with the usual "seek, find, use" routine put to work as expected. As it was originally a PC port, the lack of mouse and keyboard is apparent, and at first the button assignments feel a tad niggly. It's nothing you won't get used to though, and as you progress through the game, you become so immersed in the story that you barely even notice. And the story really is the game's strong point. The events unfold as history recalls them, with the story, played from Sherlock Holmes's point of view, closely following the real-life crimes of Jack the Ripper himself. The contrast between the two characters and two different lives works well, making the cut-scenes of Jack's murders, from his own chilling perspective, all the more spine tingling. The story itself is well told, with fine scripting, and accurate dialogue that help sell the whole era to you. Interestingly enough, the game can be played in either a first person mode, or the more traditional "moving-around-the-screen" method which this genre is known for. Playing in 1st person proves easier, as you see angles and clues that may be harder to spot in the more traditional method, and it almost feels a tad like Fallout in a sense, whereby in 1st person, you approach people and initiate conversations, look for clues, and apply actions. The comparisons end there however, as Sherlock Holmes isn't half as deep as the aforementioned game, and at times feels very thin and generic. But the parts where Jack the Ripper's murders are analysed are particularly effective, with detailed investigative procedures immersing you well in the murder scenes. As the story progresses though, it does become rather irritating when you get sidetracked by a random mission, more often than not running a "goodwill errand" for someone you need information from. Unfortunately, there's too many of these for my liking, and they just distract you from the main story. Obviously, this is the developer's way of fleshing out a story to make a longer gaming experience, but in practise, it just draws you out of the main plot, as rarely do they make any contribution to the game's key story, it's characters or its atmosphere.

Graphics:

Poor, barely PS2 standard, and not the best way to appeal to the mass market in terms building demand for more of these types of games to be released. It reeks of an older PC port, and unfortunately doesn't quite let you appreciate the full atmosphere of the game, like the story and

audio do such a good job of achieving. The idea of allowing you to personally investigate Jack the Ripper's victims is what many gamers will relish, and one of the great opportunities that the game sets itself up for. But unfortunately, it's one that is completely wasted, as the expected real-life gruesome, horrific, gritty images of murder victims, are replaced instead by cartoon dummies. Yes, cartoon. Dummies. They bare no relation to the rest of the visual theme, look incredibly out of place, and suck you straight out of the atmosphere. A real wasted opportunity to really set this game off, and one that stinks of trying to tone the game down in order to earn a lower age rating, and so appeal to a bigger audience. Despite the fact that young gamers won't even touch this kind of game anyway...

Sound:

One of the game's high points. The music is excellent, really creating a chilling mood and solid atmosphere representative of the theme, era, and even location. The voice acting is generally good, but Sherlock Holmes himself seems a tad miscast, as the actor voicing him is one of the weakest in the whole game, and for such an important role, (and given the fact that he speaks more than anyone else, ALOT more...) you'd think they'd have given the part more thought. Still, overall, the audio in the game is great, and helps build the sense of immersion and dread that the story rightly deserves.

Longevity:

As enjoyable and rewarding as the game is, and chilling and compelling as the story proves to be sometimes, unfortunately, Sherlock Holmes vs. Jack the Ripper seems destined to be one of those games that once played, you'll never touch again. With 1000 achievement points easily obtainable in just a single playthrough, and no extras or multiple paths to explore, there's really no justification for a second playthrough. Unless of course, you'd like to keep reliving the murders of Jack the Ripper through his own eyes. In which case, I'd recommend some serious therapy... you sicko you...

Overall:

Despite the lack of truly compelling gameplay and any kind of replay value, I would still recommend this game due to its rewarding and involving crime and puzzle solving elements, and obviously, because of its strong story. Sure, the characters, particularly the annoying lead, can tend to waffle on a bit, but overall, they help build the atmosphere and set the scene for the events that transpire. For history buffs, it lets you look into a slice of life at the time, a poor, desolate, and frightened London. And for pure gamers, it offers a unique and intriguing puzzle solving experience, that proves both rewarding and compelling. It does feel a tad under accomplished though, and you do get the sense it could have been so much better, but as it stands, it's still a game worthy of your time and attention. Just wait for it to hit the bargain bin, as paying over £20 for this game would be as big a crime as Jack the Ripper committed himself.

Review By: Andy - Overall Rating 7 (out of 10)



Overall:

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