

Game Narrative Review

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Game Title: Red Dead Redemption 2

Platform: Console (PS4 and Xbox One)

Genre: Action/Adventure Game

Release Date: October 26th, 2018

Developer: Rockstar Studios

Publisher: Rockstar Games

Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Dan Houser

Overview

Red Dead Redemption 2 is an action/adventure game set in 1899 during the rise of a more industrial civilization while the *wild west* is declining. 1899 marked an end to the age of outlaws and gunslingers. The only thing left for any remaining gangs was to be hunted down and destroyed.

The player avatar is Arthur Morgan, a senior gun of the Van Der Linde gang trying to save everyone in the gang while they still have lives to save. The plot of *Red Dead Redemption 2* follows Arthur as he fights against change, trying to stay free while civilization quickly spreads across the frontier.

Characters

- **Dutch Van Der Linde (Mentor)** - Seeking revenge and breaking rules along the way, this character is the definition of an outlaw. Dutch Van Der Linde is the founder of the Van Der Linde gang and stands up for freedom. He believes the gang can bring change to the world and bring about a “savage utopia”. However in 1899 as civilization is becoming more industrialized and the Wild West begins to die. Dutch realizes he is fighting a losing battle and instead of doing

what's best for the gang, he has one goal and that is to stay free. In order to stay free, he is willing to do anything and shoot anyone who stands in his way.

- **Arthur Morgan (The Hero)** - Dutch's most trusted senior gun and the player's eyes in the Van Der Linde gang. Arthur is somewhat^[d4] the bulldog of the Van Der Linde gang, if something needs to be taken care of then he can get it done right the first time. Dutch had raised him as a child and spoke to Arthur about values and killing for good reason. Arthur was raised to be everything the gang stood for, so the moment Dutch begins to decline into madness Arthur begins questioning Dutch's true values.
- **Micah Bell (Arthur's Foil)** - A hot-headed thief who is an obvious^[d5] threat to the integrity of camp from the first mission you complete with him. Micah is the camp's embodiment of chaos and destruction which goes against everything the gang stands for. When people start to lose faith in Dutch's plans and begin questioning his authority, Micah continues to follow him and becomes Dutch's trusted advisor.
- **Eagle Flies (The Innocent Youth)** - Son of Chief Rain Falls, Eagle Flies is a Native American sick of being treated poorly by the government and watching his dad try to talk things out. His patience is quickly spread thin when the government decided to go back on an arrangement and he no longer believes his father is capable of saving their people^[d6]. Eagle Flies wants to fight back and Dutch uses Eagle Flies' anger to fuel his own ulterior motives.
- **John Marston (Hope for a better tomorrow)** - A somewhat wayward protege of Dutch, always choosing the gang over himself and his family. John Marston is the family man of the gang, being the only one with an actual family in the gang. When things begin to get tough, Arthur wants him and his family to get out safe. However, when Dutch catches wind of this, he begins to stop trusting John and believes him to be the enemy. John quickly becomes Dutch's scapegoat as to why everything the gang stands for begins to crumbling.

Breakdown

Upon entering the world of world of *Red Dead Redemption 2* you are first presented with analog text appearing on the screen, "By 1899 the age of outlaws and gunslingers was at an end. America was becoming a land of laws...Even the west had mostly been tamed. A few gangs still roamed but they were being hunted down and destroyed". You are a member of one of these gangs being hunted down and being destroyed. This sets the tone for the rest of the game as you are then immediately found to be in a gang that's currently being tracked down for a recently botched heist. The government is preparing to destroy you.

Chapter 1 then focuses on introducing you to Arthur Morgan and his importance to the Van Der Linde gang. Offscreen the gang just recently tried to rob a ferry in Blackwater which forces the

gang to run away. They go north into a large snowstorm in hopes of escaping the authorities and upon arriving at a camp spot, Arthur has pressing matters to take care of. First of all, John Marston has gone missing after the heist and secondly the camp needs resources or else they will all starve to death. These tasks are promptly handled by Arthur who tracks down John through the snow during the snowstorm and then approaches a currently occupied home of the rival O'Driscoll gang with Dutch Van Der Linde and recently recruited Micah Bell. After killing all the O'Driscolls in sight, Micah sexually and physically threatens the girl inside, prompting Arthur to run in to find Dutch telling Micah to stop. When Micah finally rushes the lady, Sadie Adler, Dutch steps in and pushes him back. Telling Sadie to calm down and that they will take her in knowing that the O'Driscolls had killed her husband.

This first chapter establishes Dutch Van Der Linde as a good guy, not unlike a modern day Robin Hood. He believes his gang is on earth to represent freedom from civilization and industrialization. He envisions a "savage utopia" and his members believe in his vision.

Chapter 2 focuses on introducing the player to the various personalities of the camp. This plays out very slow as the game takes its time making you run errands in town and hunting animals to provide for the camp. This approach to the game may take longer than other introductions however it works toward establishing a connection between Arthur Morgan and the player. Requiring long, drawn-out tasks that force the player to think and feel more involved with every small detail at the camp. This slow exposition is then replaced by the seemingly successful heist of a train belonging to business magnate, Leviticus Cornwall, owner of Cornwall's kerosene and tar.

Leviticus Cornwall juxtaposes the Van Der Linde gang by being the opposite of everything they stand for. Apart from being robbed by the Van Der Linde gang, Cornwall stands for a new age. Every factory has his name on it and he publicly speaks about using people in order to get to where he wants to be. The Van Der Linde gang has always been known for stealing from the rich and helping the poor. While always taking people in and making them feel like family, even one of the O'Driscolls whom they capture during chapter 2. The Van Der Linde gang believes in giving people a second chance, but Cornwall is only concerned with money and industry. The gang threatens his future and this prompts Cornwall to hire the Pinkerton agency to track down and arrest Dutch

This chapter marks the beginning of the rising action of the game. You have learned the characters and everyone's main role in the game and now you are doing what the gang is known for. You are enjoying the land of outlaws and gunslingers.

Chapter 3 has the gang planning their next big heist after the failed Blackwater heist. Two of the oldest families, the Braithwaites and the Grays in the town of Rhodes have been set in a decades-long battle over old money that neither family actually knows about. This feud and gossip about these riches give Dutch reason enough to explore the possibility of finding the money for themselves. To do this he splits the gang in two, effectively trying to get buddy-buddy

with both sides in order to figure out where the money is hidden. This play between both houses is interrupted by Colm O'Driscoll wanting to discuss a truce with Dutch. Dutch and Arthur show great discomfort in this but the gang convinces them that if this can end their war then it would be worth it. Arthur is then kidnapped however while watching over Colm and Dutch's exchange of words. They torture Arthur relentlessly to lure Dutch into a trap, but then Arthur escapes with a shotgun wound in his shoulder. Arthur is taken out of commission for a few weeks while the rest of the gangs deal with the two families. When Arthur feels well again he is found in a state of distrust, taking everything with a grain of salt. Arthur and a group of four set out to do a protection job but they arrive at the town and it is deserted. After being caught by the families and losing one of their members, Arthur returns to the camp to find out Jack, John's son, is missing. Dutch rallies every gang member together in a beautiful moment of loyalty to apprehend the Braithwaites about Jack.

This chapter follows the gang as they try to make enough money to escape the law the only way they know how. You are doing the big "one last heist" for Dutch so the gang can finally settle down however things do not go as planned and as a result of this members are betrayed, kidnapped and killed. Is Dutch losing his so called finesse?

Chapter 4 explores John Marston's thoughts after Jack was recently captured. Jack is saved quickly into chapter 4 and John begins to doubt Dutch and the gang. In the beginning chapters the game makes it clear that John's real family does not feel loved by John and John is always choosing the gang over them. However when his family is actually threatened he begins to think maybe the gang is digging themselves into a hole and poses the question, is it worth it?

While John is beginning to doubt Dutch and the gang is trying to recover from their loss in Rhodes. Dutch is trying to plan his second "one last heist" by using Saint Denis mob boss, Angelo Bronte. Dutch and the gang get comfortable in Saint Denis gathering intel on the mayor and the rich families in town. While Dutch is getting what he can out of Bronte, Dutch's second in command Hosea is planning a big heist on the bank. Bronte offers that the train station keeps loads of money and is not very well guarded but leads Dutch and crew into a trap. This does not sit well with Dutch at all though. After escaping the police, Dutch wants to teach Bronte a lesson for messing with the Van Der Linde gang. However, after kidnapping Bronte, Bronte talks to Dutch about how he is a fool and that the world will catch up to him. Dutch is enraged by Bronte reminding him that the world is no longer influenced by Dutch Van Der Linde and Dutch kills him in cold blood, feeding him to an alligator. At camp, the Pinkerton agency's Agent Milton catches up to them and offer the gang a final chance to give up Dutch or else they will begin hunting them down. A cutscene plays out where everyone in the camp loads their gun in response to Milton. Milton leaves and Dutch says they need to rob the bank now and get out of town. Hosea and Abigail go to cause a distraction while Arthur, Dutch and company rob the bank. After getting the money, agent Milton has Hosea at gunpoint trying to negotiate with Dutch for Hosea's life. Milton reminds Dutch that he is no longer playing games however and shoots Hosea down. After trying to escape the bank, more losses take place when John is arrested and

another young member is shot down. Eventually Arthur, Dutch and those still alive escape on a boat headed to Cuba for the start of Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 is in many ways the beginning to the end. John Marston's faith in the gang is fading away and it is becoming clearer that the gang is no longer capable of beating the system. Dutch may be an outlaw legend but the time of outlaws is at an end. Dutch's ways do not work with the new civilization being built and he is not willing to accept that.

While travelling to Cuba, the ship is destroyed in a storm and the gang who ended up on the boat after the heist are now found in Guam. After getting separated, Arthur wakes up exhausted and beaten on the beach, proceeding to find Dutch. Once found, Dutch immediately gives Arthur a task where for the first time Arthur refuses Dutch's request. Arthur needs to rest and Dutch takes this as an insult. After escaping the island, Dutch believes he can no longer trust Arthur, that Arthur "must be too tired". Once the gang rejoins the ones they left behind in America, Arthur goes back to Saint Denis to get information on John's whereabouts however once there he falls off his horse and becomes extremely sick. Arthur goes to the doctor and is told that he has tuberculosis and he will soon die. After returning to camp, the gang is apprehended by the Pinkerton agency once again but the Van Der Linde's escape once more to Beaver Hollow. Dutch's lover Molly however admits that she has been talking to agent Milton because Dutch no longer gives her any attention. Susan shoots Molly down because she "knew the rules" and the gang members are torn in what to believe anymore.

This story is fully forming into a tragedy at this point. With good times in the beginning with the camp just hunting and providing for themselves. To the introduction of a problem, "the government is onto us, we need money". The government and industrialization is inevitable however and the gang is having recurring events of failure. Also Arthur is now having a complete reversal in character now that his life has been put on a timer. His main priority is no longer Dutch, but making sure everyone can get out alive.

The final chapter is Dutch's sudden drop into insanity. While before he was slowly losing his magic outlaw touch, now he has just given up on fighting back against the system. He has realized that "change is inevitable and you can't fight back" so now he is going to survive at whatever cost. After saving John from prison, Arthur is met with backlash from Dutch because that was not a part of the plan. Dutch finds it convenient that Abigail escaped the bank heist when Hosea was killed and awfully lucky that John was only arrested. Despite taking in both Arthur and John as children, Dutch no longer believes he can trust neither of them and begins to confide in Micah. Arthur tries to reason with Dutch but without Hosea, Dutch no longer has a voice of reason, only Micah who has been known for violence and destruction.

Dutch uses the war between the U.S. Army and the Native Americans to gain an upper hand. Dutch no longer tells Arthur that there is one last heist, instead it is "I have a plan". While Dutch uses the hot headed Native American, Eagle Flies, son of the chief. Arthur is confiding in Rain Falls, the chief who does not believe in war but a peaceful resolution. Dutch manipulates Eagle

Flies into rallying his fellow Native Americans to go to war against the Army and disobey his father's wishes of peace in order to create a shroud around Dutch's actual plans. When they launch an attack on the oil refinery, Dutch reveals to Arthur that this was all apart of his plan in order to secure the bonds stored in the office of the refinery. He tells Arthur that he is willing to do whatever it takes to get the gang to safety and using Eagle Flies was the way to get there. However when the army grabs Arthur, Dutch takes this opportunity to sneak away and Eagle Flies saves Arthur from death but also takes a bullet to the stomach. Arthur takes him home to Rain Falls but he dies on the way there and Arthur realizes everything Dutch is doing is wrong and no longer stands for what the gang believed in. Arthur's final wish is to get John and his family out alive so they can live the life Arthur wanted with his old lover. When robbing a train belonging to the U.S. Army, John is shot off his horse and Dutch goes to get him, returning to the gang with the news that John had been killed however. When the gang goes back to camp after their successful heist, they learn that Abigail has been kidnapped. Dutch is ready to go save her but Micah convinces him that it is too risky and will get them killed. Arthur decides to do it on his own with the help of Sadie Adler however since Dutch is too far gone to be reasoned with.

After reaching Abigail and fighting Agent Milton, Milton ridicules Arthur for not realizing the Pinkertons had an inside man all along. Milton tells Arthur that Micah had been such a good informant for the agency that he is the reason they were able to take down Dutch before Abigail kills Milton. Arthur returns to the camp ready to expose Micah and make it clear to the camp exactly what has been going on. While arguing with everyone that Micah is the enemy, John wanders back into camp furious about being left to die by Dutch. Arthur tells everyone that they better pick a side before shots are fired when the Pinkertons show up to kill them all. Arthur and John escape the Pinkertons but are then chased down by Dutch and Micah. Arthur knows this is John's chance to take his family and run so Arthur gives him his things and makes a final stand against the Pinkertons and Micah. While fighting Micah and being beaten to near death however Dutch steps in and tells Micah they need to leave before the Pinkertons arrive. They leave Arthur to die on the mountain side watching the sunset.

The story of Arthur Morgan comes to an abrupt end as he saves John and gives him passage into the first Red Dead Redemption. After being a first hand witness to Dutch showing his true nature and no longer being the man the gang followed, Arthur has seen too much. Dutch's arrogance has bested the Van Der Linde gang and the characters are given a final decision of dying criminals or living to be a better person.

Strongest Element

Red Dead Redemption 2 has a way of using every character and the world to its advantage in order to further the story of Arthur Morgan. The creators implement the literary feature of a

crowd also known as a chorus. When starting the game, it is evident that your camp is full of people that are considered your family and best of friends. This is furthered by every interaction you have with them and how missions turn out. The atmosphere and weight of the situation as you progress throughout the game do not only show in the rising action of every mission, but it also shows outside of the main story by using crowd elements. The crowd is *Red Dead Redemption 2*'s trump card. In chapters 1-3 the game establishes a bond between you and the camp members, allowing access to side missions involving hunting/fishing, playing games of dominoes or poker with them, even drinking and singing at night. However as Dutch begins to put the camp into more risk with larger scale heists and starting wars with everyone who gets in his way, your camp members do not react well to this. They begin to antagonize you everytime they see you, other members become increasingly worried and ask you for advice. After getting sucked into the world, it is easy to get lost in the story as it pushes you to keep doing various degrees of missions for the camp. However, your actions are remembered in the towns you go to and the camp who remind you the kind of person you are becoming.

Unsuccessful Element

In the first installment of *Red Dead Redemption*, a major plot point was when John Marston left America and went to Mexico as part of the rising action in the plot. This move was very successful at the time because players were surprised by a whole new environment that fits well with the story and extended the main map. *Red Dead Redemption 2* unsuccessfully seeks to recreate this twist when chapter 5 finds Arthur in Guarma, a small island off the coast of Cuba. While at first sight, this seems to be a cool plot point, it serves no purpose to the overall storyline. During your time in Guarma, it shows the only time Arthur rejects Dutch when he favored rest over what Dutch requested of him. This one instance of rejection then serves as the reason that Dutch deems Arthur disloyal for the rest of the game. Dutch does not show this sense of distrust in you until returning to America and mocking Arthur for needing to rest instead of giving him the job of moving horses. Dutch's fall seemed very rushed and unnecessarily foolish, constantly choosing Micah, the crazed gunner who joined the gang only months ago, over Arthur who has been in the gang since he was orphaned.

Highlight

Having the ability to customize your horse may seem to be a cool pastime, however, not in this game. Your horse is an extension of your character that you must feed, groom, and overall care for more than your own character. *Red Dead Redemption 2* requires you to take the time to care for and bond with your horse. After a certain amount of time and actions are done, your bonding level increases allowing the horse to perform more actions. *Red Dead Redemption 2* makes it no secret that your character's horse is no small diversion from the main story.

When traveling, if your horse becomes dirty then you must groom her in order to keep her stamina up. If gunfire is heard or predators are lurking nearby then you must spend the time to calm the horse down. When the horse's stamina core begins to decay then you must take the time to feed her in order for her to regain energy.

This all culminates into one giant moment in the story when YOUR horse. The horse you keep buying revives to keep on hand for, the horse you keep personally calling by name when your character whistles. When your horse is killed during the climax of the game. Stopping all action to go into a cutscene where Arthur decides to stop running and hold the horse in his hands. While being yelled at that they need to go, Arthur just holds the horse as she dies and tells her she did good.

Critical Reception

AngryJoeShow - Joe Vargas - 9/10

Joe believed the story of *Red Dead Redemption 2* did enough to keep the player entertained throughout despite one seemingly pointless expedition out of America that felt forced to mimic the first *Red Dead Redemption*. Joe believes the end could have been slightly different however the game definitely lives up to its namesake *Red Dead Redemption*

Vargas, Joe, director. *Red Dead Redemption 2 Angry Review*. *YouTube*, AngryJoeShow, 13 Nov. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMWf8IIYNsl&t=869s.

IGN - Luke Reilly - 10/10

Luke Reilly talks about the multiple layers of detail on every character and how every character can be seen as 3-Dimensional. *Red Dead Redemption 2* has set the bar for storytelling with Rockstar's greatest storytelling to date that takes itself seriously instead of satirical. This results in supremely well-earned emotional moments with great payoffs.

Reilly, Luke. "Red Dead Redemption 2 Review." *IGN Boards*, IGN, 25 Oct. 2018, www.ign.com/articles/2018/10/25/red-dead-redemption-2-review.

Lessons

- The crowd can tell a story as effectively as a cutscene can. While playing *Red Dead Redemption 2* the gang is constantly interacting with each other and the main character Arthur. During these conversations they very often talk about their past life or current events going on in the gang. Instead of having NPCs who stand their waiting to give you your next mission, *Red Dead Redemption 2* makes it more organic and gives life to every character by having them react to the game world.
- Open world games do not necessarily need to be RPGs to have role playing game elements. *Red Dead Redemption 2* constantly gives you options to be morally good or bad throughout the game and these options gives the player a sense of connection to Arthur. The things you do have consequences and it is entirely up to the player to decide whether or not they want to be the protagonist or the anti hero.
- Good elements in one game do not necessarily make them good in every game. Common practices to keep the player engaged are to introduce new elements or whole new environments that were not present in the first half of the game. While introducing a new environment in the form of Mexico was a highlight of the first *Red Dead Redemption*. going to Guarma in chapter 5 does not feel essential to the overall story being told. It feels very forced into the story as if they came up with a beginning and an end but then needed to fill the void with something to make the game last longer.

Summation

Red Dead Redemption 2 set out to accomplish a goal that nobody thought possible. When the Rockstar company made the first *Red Dead Redemption* they set a bar for graphics and storytelling. Games with this caliber of story are rarely seen in the industry and they managed to raise the bar even higher with *Red Dead Redemption 2*. From the story to the attention to detail in the plants, they took nearly every aspect of the first game and made it better. No stone was left unturned in the making of this game, being so realistic it is sometimes nerve-racking. Everybody involved with the making of this game served to push this game to the limit consoles are constrained to. The story of Arthur Morgan and the fall of Dutch Van Der Linde has made for the best story of 2018 and has set a standard for being the best gameplay design and narratives have to offer.

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