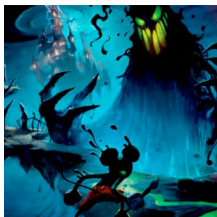


Disney Epic Mickey Review

Written by mike smith

Wednesday, 24 November 2010 22:01 - Last Updated Thursday, 25 November 2010 22:06



Disclaimer: I'm a hardcore fan of the 3D platformer and a diehard Disney dork. Now, that's not to say you too must be able to tell the difference between a Horace Horsecollar and a Clarabelle Cow in order to enjoy Epic Mickey. Nor does it require you to have played all the Jak, Ratchet & Clank games, or everything ever released on N64... but it certainly does help. And judging by those criteria alone, Epic Mickey is absolutely breathtaking.

For animation nerds, it's going to be nothing short of a godsend. Epic Mickey tells a sorta true story about very real Disney characters and what happens to them once they're forgotten. The game takes place in Wasteland, a warped, scuffed re-envisioning of Disneyland that is essentially an afterlife refuge, where cultural castaways can live on in peace eternally. And it's overseen by the granddaddy of tragically squandered potential, Oswald the Lucky Rabbit. Never heard of him? He was – make that is – Walt Disney's first popular creation, but a squabble between Walt and Universal Studios meant Oswald would be banished to obscurity and his destiny rewarded instead to another big-eared cartoon rodent.

That last part is historically accurate, actually. If it weren't for the Oswald turmoil, there'd be no Mickey Mouse, or possibly even a Walt Disney Company. And if it weren't for Mickey Mouse, Oswald could've had all the fame and glory bestowed on the world's most recognizable character.

The two are not enemies in the game, though. Oswald's built The Wasteland in according to Walt's vision, so it's an instantly recognizable doppelganger of Disneyland, albeit a bit darkened and skewed. There's a crisis occurring here, and what Mickey's estranged sibling wants more than anything is to get the famous mouse out of the Wasteland as soon as possible.

I hate to spend so much of this review harping on the (back)story and characters, but the

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thousands of pieces of Disneyana tucked into every fiber of Epic Mickey's being is inarguably part of the game's charm. And recognizing them, especially for an animation enthusiast, is a wonderful, nostalgia-fueled game in and of itself. Now for the game itself. It's possible that I, as a Disney fan, was a bit more easily won over by the inspiration than someone with no vested interest in animation would be. But I think these are some of the most elaborate, well constructed platforming levels I've ever seen.

It's not just about pointing out fifty-year-old Mickey posters, Tomorrowland rockets and the Nautilus from 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea (although... OMFG!), you're also looking at some of the most complex, vast, and impressively branching game environments the genre's ever seen.

The gothic take on Disneyland has made for wonderfully realized meta-verse almost anybody will recognize immediately. Outside of a slightly crappy camera, I haven't fallen so head over heels with the look, feel, and play of a third-person platformer since the original Banjo-Kazooie. And through it all, Mickey runs, jumps, and spins attacks with all the grace found in Mario Galaxy, only with collectibles Disney fans will find infinitely worthwhile.

Add to that, you've got the ability to restore or remove parts of the world with the power of Paint and Thinner. Add platforms, activate nodes, erase objects to reveal hidden items, solve environment puzzles, and use it as a passive or offensive weapon. The incalculable number of ways Mickey can interact with the world is simply staggering. And complain all you want about the lack of HD, but I haven't seen anything on Move or Kinect that leads me to believe that those controls could pull off running at full speed while accurately firehosing gallons of paint with the grace of the Wii Remote. (Although, it's probably just a lack of interest... Who's up for more bowling?!)

The ability to use the entire game like an interactive canvas will undoubtedly entertain kiddies for hours, but there's something far more hardcore hiding underneath the Epic Mickey's surface. This world is alive, and all too aware of what you're doing. Everything Mickey does matters intensely, and in ways never entirely predictable. Wasteland inhabitants respond to you differently depending on what you do, and your actions can then indirectly affect what quests open up to you in the game.

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OCD gamers like me might even get a little frustrated, as Epic Mickey forces you to make crucial decisions with very little guidance and sometimes... there's no going back. There's a morality system in play and sometimes you'll see where it's going, sometimes you won't. Other times you'll be presented with a noble task, and then a faster, easier way out. I got stuck on one such quest and still haven't quit punching myself for essentially bargaining my way out of it. That said I absolutely applaud the fact that there are options. In fact, seeing, doing, and collecting everything in Epic Mickey is impossible to do in a single playthrough. But it's hard to fault a game for offering ample incentive to replay it.

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