

Video Game Reviews: 'The Chronicles of Riddick, Assault on Dark Athena'; 'Wheelman' puts mayhem in the

by *Jeb_Haught*

DEVELOPER: Starbreeze Studios

PUBLISHER: Atari

SYSTEM: Microsoft Xbox 360 (PS3, PC)

PRICE: \$59.99

ESRB RATING: Mature

REVIEW RATING: 4 stars (out of 5)

For the first time, gamers can play as Riddick in 'The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena,'

the sequel to the popular sci-fi title "The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay." Photo courtesy of Starbreeze Studios.

Actor Vin Diesel plays Milo, an undercover agent with an uncanny ability to drive vehicles in "Wheelman." Photo courtesy of Midway. **REVIEW SCORING SYSTEM**

5 stars = Must Have

4 stars = Pretty Good

3 stars = Above Average

2 stars = Bargain Bin

1 star = Don't Bother **RATINGS KEY**

Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)

E: Everyone

E10-plus: (Everyone 10 and older)

T: Teen (13 and older)

M: Mature (17 and older) Many gamers scoffed at actor Vin Diesel when he created Tigon Studios and started making video games, but no one laughed at their surprise sci-fi hit, "The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay." Five years later, the official sequel has been released, and it adds new abilities and excellent visuals to the innovative stealth mechanics and stylish atmosphere found in the original.

In "The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena," players assume the role of the ruthless antihero Riddick (Vin Diesel) as he attempts to escape from the gigantic mercenary ship Dark Athena. Once again, the hunters become the hunted as Riddick effortlessly dispatches everyone who gets in his way, and even some who don't.

Like the original, the sequel combines projectile and stealth combat together to give players a wide array of tools with which to eliminate enemies. I prefer striking from the shadows whenever possible because, well, us nerds like to role-play and I love using Riddick's signature Ulak daggers. It's also more challenging than simply shooting enemies because most of them are mindless drones on predictable search patterns. Too bad the latter portion of the game forces the player to use gunplay more than stealth.

Realistic lighting that can be shot out (in most cases) to create sneaking opportunities enhances this title's stealth game play. Simply activate Riddick's handy Eyeshine enhancement and he can see in the dark like modern night vision goggles. I also appreciate the ability to hide downed enemies in the shadows so as not to alert more drones.

For the first time, gamers can play as Riddick and hunt other players in online multiplayer. Adding even more replay value is the addition of a visually remastered version of "Escape From Butcher Bay." As a result, there simply isn't a better bargain than "The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena."

'Wheelman' Puts Mayhem in the Driver's Seat

DEVELOPER: Midway

PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft

SYSTEM: Microsoft Xbox 360 (PS3, PC)

PRICE: \$59.99

ESRB RATING: Teen

REVIEW RATING: 3.5 stars (out of 5)

In the video game business, rushing the development of a movie-based game so it will be ready when the film is released is common, but who ever heard of a movie-based game being released months before the movie itself? Fortunately, "Wheelman" the game is a prequel to the forthcoming movie so the developers were able to work independently and not rush the process.

From the very beginning, the story of "Wheelman" is a mystery, and I still don't really know what's going on. As far as I can tell, Vin Diesel plays Milo, an undercover agent with an uncanny ability to drive vehicles. Sent to Barcelona, he starts working for local unsavory characters and ends up kicking everyone's butt and saving the day, or whatever.

This open-ended vehicular-based title plays like the old "Driver" series, as Vin becomes an undercover getaway driver for various unscrupulous activities. However, several over-the-top moves are available to give the game its own distinct feel, such as "airjacking" speeding vehicles by jumping from one to another. Players can also use the vehicle as a mobile weapon by initiating car melee attacks that slam the car sideways with great force.

Building up the focus gauge through reckless driving lets players activate turbo boost or a stylish Aim Shot that lets Vin shoot through his windshield in slow motion. Also available is the ultimate high-octane maneuver called "the "cyclone," which spins Vin's car 180 degrees and lets him shoot enemies while driving backward. Now that's cool!

If only the same attention were paid to the clunky shooting mechanics, "Wheelman" would be great! As it stands, I find myself struggling with the projectile combat but I really enjoy driving and slamming other cars off the road. It's a good thing that driving makes up most of the game play.

"Wheelman" is not nearly as in-depth as "GTA IV," but it does provide more driving fun than every single GTA title put together.

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