

Game Review - Dread - U5527991

LINK TO VIDEO - https://livewarwickac-my.sharepoint.com/:v/g/personal/u5527991_live_warwick_ac_uk/EQvnbDmhau5AtU5jJoJG30BAVgzbu03g-WXmG7UfioP-g?e=Ya0Xqc

TRANSCRIPT -

As someone who's not the biggest fan of horror movies, I'll forever be in shock of just how much I enjoy the horror RPG Dread. Created by Epidiah Ravachol and Nat Barmore and published by The Impossible Dream, the game calls upon the hosts to lead their players through a classic horror adventure. Whether that's a zombie apocalypse or your classic haunted house, the Sky's the limit. Meanwhile, characters are led to craft classic horror archetypes using a character sheet made out of a questionnaire before letting the host lead them through a tale of suspense and fear. But when most RPGs use dice to tell their story, Dread uses a wooden stacking tower game, branded or otherwise.

The use of the tower is absolutely the most unique aspect about Dread, and its effect on the game is palpable. The physical representation of stress, fear and panic as laid out by a game that naturally induces stress, fear and panic is brilliant and something I can't do justice to by simply describing. If the tower is to fall, the last player to have touched it is removed from the game by character death or by other means, and so this means that every pull from the tower is at risk of imposing truly dire consequences.

The game has a mechanic built into its systems, allowing someone to purposely knock over the tower and sacrifice their character for the betterment of the rest of the group. This just further adds to the suspense of later pulls, as every pull truly could mean life or death. Players are scared to touch the very table that they're playing at out of fear of knocking over the tower, and I think that goes to show just how effective this game mechanic is.

As for the RPG itself, the rule book is well designed and laid out, with extensive rule explanations, example character questionnaires and their associated responses so that players can see how a game is built from the ground up and an example scenario for new players to start with. It is littered with tips for both players and hosts, setting groups up to play out an effective horror scenario.

As a frequent host of Dread, I found it one of the easiest RPGs to introduce new players to due to the sheer simplicity and familiarity of the mechanics. The rule book goes into extensive detail about the minutia of the game, but so long as you understand the principle of pulling blocks from a tower, you can get a fantastic grasp on the game relatively quickly.

So, can this game have applications as a serious game? I think this is an incredibly hard question to answer, notably because the definition of a serious game is forever changing. Most definitions contain some semblance of the idea that they are games created 'not with the primary purpose of pure entertainment.' (Loh, 6) By this standard, I don't think Dread can be considered a serious game. At its core, the introductory chapter of the game describes Dread as 'a game of horror and hope. Those who play will participate in a mutual telling of an original macabre tale. The goal of Dread is to sustain the delicate atmosphere that invokes the hand quivering emotion that lends itself to the game.' (Ravachol, 5). A powerful image, but not one rooted in education in any real form.

So is there anything to be learnt from Dread? Well, in my opinion, there's things to be learnt from

anything and everything we do. Any RPG develops an individual's ability to problem solve, to work collaboratively, and to think imaginatively. These soft skills are vital in the modern era of education and in the working world, and RPGs are and always will be a fantastic way to develop these.

However, as Arthur Graesser suggests in his exploration of serious games, 'there are several games that help learners acquire shallow knowledge and skills. (...) In contrast, there are very few games that promote the acquisition of deep knowledge, strategies and skills. (...) Yet deep learning is essential in modern societies where there is a serious shortage of expertise in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.' (Graesser, 86-87) Asides from perhaps looking at the physics or mechanics of the tower if you were curious, I don't think there's much exploration to be done into STEM fields or factual learning through the World of Dread.

However, on one final note, it's worth remembering that the beautiful thing about RPGs is that people can create their own scenarios, their own worlds, their own stories, using the RPG systems to guide them. So if someone chose to pick up Dread and create a scenario about the end of the world in which players needed to create a cure for an illness, using their own knowledge of biology and chemistry to do so, then they absolutely could. Do I think that this would work? Not necessarily. But is it a way that Dread could be transformed into a serious game? Quite possibly. The versatility of the game means that it can be catered to the needs of the players. So long as the tone of the game maintains that horror aspect, I believe that players can do whatever they choose with the material.

Dread retails for \$12.00 or about £9.50 on DriveThruRPG, which I think is well worth the money. Of course you need to have access to a tower stacking game, but off brand versions of these come for as little as 4 pounds both in stores and online, making the overall game experience super affordable. As an RPG and game alone, Dread is truly one of my favourites, and for that I believe it earns A5 star rating for its ease, accessibility and versatility. As a serious game, I think it has some potential but lacks the strength seen by other games built with the serious purpose in mind, and for that it earns a rating of two stars.

So there you have it. If you're looking for a way to learn something, then Dread perhaps isn't the right game for you. But if you're looking to dive into a world of horror, fear, suspense, and uncertainty, then venture forth and embrace that formidable feeling of dread.

Works Cited

Graesser, Arthur et al. 'Deep Learning and Emotion in Serious Games' *Serious Games : Mechanisms and Effects*, edited by Ute Ritterfeld, et al., Taylor & Francis Group, 2009. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/warw/detail.action?docID=448317>.

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