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How playing the evil way reveals that Fable 3 is broken and so is its promise of choice. Lionhead's laughable treatment of the dark side.

Moral Choice As USP

A big argument for playing any Fable game is the promise of choice. Moral choices is what sets Fable apart from many other action adventures and RPGs, its USP, if you will. The player gets to define, if he is a good boy/girl or a bad boy/girl by choosing which quests to complete, how to interact with NPCs and deciding between good and evil options in multiple choice moments. The choices are usually painted very black and white, with no gray space to compromise and the games are often criticized for this. I actually don't mind. To me it is fine to choose between being Darth Vader or Obi Van Kenobi. But when the Vader option reveals itself to be underdeveloped, incoherent, hollow and plain broken, this is where I get severely disappointed.

Premise Versus USP – A Recipe For Disaster

When playing as an evil hero in Fable3, as advertised, major portions of the game just fall apart. Fable3's narration, presentation and many aspects of the gameplay follow the overarching two-part-premise of the story. Part one: You are the young prince or princess and your brother is the tyrant king of Albion. The people of Albion need to trust you to be a better king than your brother is, to put you on the throne via revolution. Part two: When King you need to fill the kingdom's treasury, to prepare for the attack of the uber-generic darkness. Every coin counts for the survival of one citizen. Which might cause you to decide against the good of the people and be as much a tyrant as your brother was, just to save money for the treasury. While this makes a fun premise and is engaging to play, if you feel like being the good boy, there is no space for being evil here.

In the first half, the premise demands you to get the trust of the people, which does not go along with running amok in towns, stealing, slaughtering civilians or insulting the people of Albion, at all. And according to the premise, all the "evil" decisions as king are made to save lives, which also totally contradicts the ruthless and bloodthirsty things I can do as the evil hero. Lionhead was not only struggling to get their good-guy-only story to work with the bad-guy way of playing, they didn't even try.

See No Evil

Seriously, the generic townspeople give me valid feedback for my evilness, running away, screaming, cursing me and begging for their lives and so does my character model, becoming more and more bleak, growing black eyes and a demonic face. But all the key characters, story-relevant cut-scenes and most painful, the ending completely and utterly ignore, what I do. The disconnect between my actions and the way the story progresses is not just awkward. It is simply broken.

In an early part of the game, in a town called Brightwood, the town chief applauds me and tells me how much hope I give to his people, while the corpses of innocent shop keepers and pedestrians are lying everywhere and the blood of the Brightwood citizens is still dripping from my blade. No signs of fear, hate or even discomfort with what I've just done, no warnings, no pleas, just a big fat thank you. The same spoken dialogue and animations, as if I was playing the good-guy routine.

After countless of those broken moments, after I murdered hundreds by hand, enslaved my people and made them hunger and suffer by my decisions as King, the day arrives, when the darkness attacks. The game allows me to take all the money from the treasury away for myself to spend. To defend everybody in Albion, the treasury needs to be filled with 6.500.000 coins. I take every last coins for myself and 6.5 million people get killed because of that selfish act. And what ending do I get?

After all was said and done, after I was a monster on the streets and as cruel as possible on the throne and after I purposely let literally all (!) citizens of Albion die, the game itself in the form of the Theresa character, tells me, that I'm brave, reasonable and have my priorities straight, Æ√Ñ~ð

No! No! I was a murdering, selfish slime. I was Albion's doom. From the first minute on, I decided to bring hunger, suffering, despair and death to the people. It's just that the game didn't give a shit about my decision. Lionhead promised me choice. But with their good-guy-only storyline and careless execution, Lionhead broke that promise. It's laughable and disappointing at the same time.

How To Fix It?

Moral choices in games like Fable or Mass Effect are more style than substance. Instead of deciding between right and wrong, real moral dilemmas, the player gets to decide how he wants his avatar to behave and the in-game world to react to him. It's about playstyle, variable content and the feeling of influencing the virtual world. In the case of Mass Effect, the premise of the hero, who fights to save mankind overall never gets compromised by choosing the renegade (bad guy) behavior. When Shepard does his renegade schtick it can get pretty ugly, but never do we get the impression that Shepard doesn't care about saving people. Shepard's methods are questionable, his attitude bad, his feelings cold and his way with enemies merciless, but he is doing what he does to save us all.

The bad guy behavior in Fable 3 is condescending, 100% selfish and inhuman. It's not about attitude and methods, it's about hating people, abusing people, wanting people to suffer and die. You can't let the player define the hero to be a monster and still have the story treat him as a hero. It just doesn't add up. Lionhead should have been either more sensitive with the evil playstyle options or should have supported a story branch with a villain as the protagonist.

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