

Review of Assassin's Creed II

Assassin's Creed II is the second game in the Assassin's Creed franchise. This time the ancestor Desmond is retracing is Ezio Auditore da Firenze. The game is set in 15th century Italy during the Renaissance and is played in Florence, Tuscany, Romagna Forli, Venice, and Rome. Back with Desmond, Lucy, a fellow assassin, frees him and takes him to a new location where a team of assassins have created their own animus and want Desmond to train by reliving Ezio's life from the time he began learning to be an assassin. The information learned in the first game is continued in this next installment. The storyline is richly detailed and fun to discover.

Where Assassin's Creed failed, Assassin's Creed II has improved. The open worlds are still there, but now there is a better way to travel quickly between cities and regions than by horseback. Also, the worlds are now completely open because Ezio, it appears, is a better swimmer than Altair and can traverse the water. This comes in handy in Venice, a city built on the water. Also, the repetitive quests are done away with. Every quest is necessary to the story and is different from the last. Gone are the annoying information gathering missions. While the mechanics for things like eavesdropping and pickpocketing are still used, they make sense to the story. The game has gained an element of fun and adventure which the first game was lacking.

Some new features which are exciting have to do with upgrades. Since Ezio is a city boy, born the son of a banker, a new game feature is the ability to buy items from shops around the cities. One of these is armour. Now the player can give the character better armour to increase their protection. Along with armour there are more weapons. Instead of being stuck with the weapons given to the player, they can decide which weapon suits their style of fighting. There are several swords and short swords to choose from. Throwing knives can be purchased. Also, a second hidden blade is introduced along with a hidden pistola and a blade which can hold poison. These upgrades to the hidden blade make stealth kills more interesting and add a new ranged kill. Combat can now be tailored to the player's strengths in a way that Assassin's Creed did not allow. This feature borrows from roleplaying games for the customization. Obviously, only hardcore gamers or more than casual gamers will use this feature to its full potential, but it is definitely a step in the right direction for Ubisoft.

The enemy in Assassin's Creed II remains the Templars, but in their newest incarnation. The Templars are still some of the most difficult enemies to dispatch, but there are now more kinds of guards. There are guards with pikes which are harder to kill. There are guards with heavier armour who carry maces which allow them to hit harder. The most difficult guard is the fully armoured brute guard. They hit as hard as a Templar and counter kill doesn't work on them. A stealth kill or a distance kill with knives or the pistola are the best methods. The added guard types allow for a more interesting battle. If there are several different kinds of guards in one group, the player is forced to change their strategy depending on which guard they are currently facing. This makes the combat in the game fun and keeps the player on their toes.

Hiding in the game has changed as well. Before, roving bands of scholars were the best way to move about dangerous areas. Now, groups of civilians are used for hiding, or the player can hire a group of

courtesans to accompany them. Either way allows the player to move about unseen in areas where guards are on high alert. Hay bales, rooftop shelters, and benches are still hiding features and still very useful to the player when escaping pursuit. Though, when trying to throw off some guards, the best way is the water. If it is deep enough to dive in, the player can jump in and swim away to throw off pursuit. Guards are like Altair, either they can't swim or they are allergic. While this is a helpful mechanic, it seems a little odd especially in a city like Venice where the guards would have grown up around the water. They should be able to swim. Also, there are times when Ezio is wearing more armour than the guards and they still won't jump in or they die when pushed in. So, it can't be that they will sink to the bottom. It's odd, but very helpful to the player.

All in all, Assassin's Creed II is a sound game. The mechanics are well thought out and well executed. The story is engaging and fun. The gameplay is varied and fun as well. The combat is more interesting than before. Ubisoft definitely listened to players and learned from their mistakes in Assassin's Creed. As a sequel, this game is definitely better than the first, which is not generally the rule with sequels.