

## CPYU 3(D) REVIEW

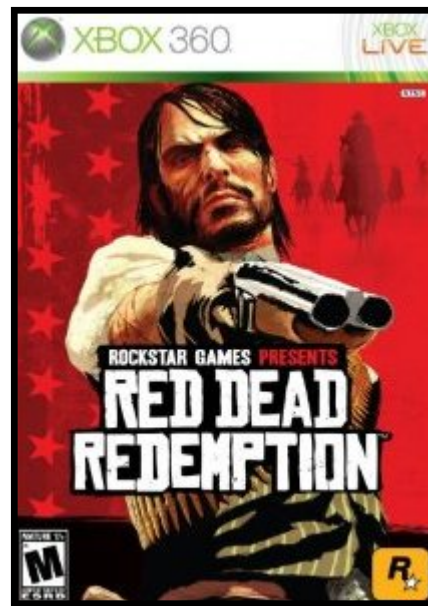
# Video Game: *Red Dead Redemption*

By Greg Jones

**Background/summary:** *Red Dead Redemption (RDR)* is the latest release from acclaimed game design studio Rockstar. Famous for their work with the *Grand Theft Auto* series, Rockstar places their amazing open world, remarkable physics engine, and storytelling visions back at the turn of the century. Though many are calling *RDR* the “Old West,” it is in fact a hybrid and modernizing West. The main character is John Marston, who is living out the story of “bad guy gone good” through vigilante justice. This game tells the story of Marston’s redemption.

### Discover: What is the message/worldview?:

- The game is full of killing like many other games on the market today. The difference between this game and many of the others is the realism of the violence. The “euphoria” physics engine used by Rockstar in this game allows for more realistic blood spatter, falling physics, and overall animations. One of the signature features of this game is the “Dead Eye” shooting mechanic, which allows the gamer to slow down the action and “paint” targets over enemies in slow motion. This allows the gamer to wound an enemy by targeting limbs or non-lethal shots, or specifically target vitals such as the head, or, as is often the case, hit multiple targets with devastating lethal shots.
- The storyline, as mentioned, is about redemption. Marston wants to repay his former gang for leaving him to die by killing them in an effort to keep his own family safe. Only by ensuring that his former gang mates are no longer a threat can Marston settle with his own family. Though this is a form of vigilante justice and redemption for him, it does not leave much opportunity for his former gang mates to see their proverbial light.
- One of the unique features of the game is the “fame” and “honor” system. When Marston is put in different situations throughout the game, gamers are offered the opportunity to grant mercy, or carry out vigilante justice. Actions decided by the player throughout the game affect Marston’s fame and honor. For example, helping an innocent civilian who is being attacked by bandits will gain Marston “honor.” Shooting and killing these bandits does not have a negative effect on Marston’s honor, but helping the civilian has a positive result. These different ranks of fame and honor bring with them different “perks” in the game.
- The game includes an extensive single player experience that includes the open world options of several side challenges, mini games, as well as the main story line. A gamer can spend literal hours at a time hunting, gambling, and completing missions. Some of the activities are completed in five to ten minutes, while others may take half an hour. This vast single player mode will make for hours of playability and an unprecedented opportunity to make Marston’s character your own (including customizable outfits, unlockable activities, weapons, and horses).
- The game features a multiplayer mode as well. In multiplayer, gamers compete with other players via Xbox Live or Playstation Network. The multiplayer Free Roam mode puts a twist on the online gaming lobby, allowing gamers to complete challenges or kill one another. From that “lobby,” gamers can load into typical player versus player games such as gang shootout (team death match) and gold rush (a variation of capture the flag).



### Discern: How does it stand in light of the biblical message/worldview?

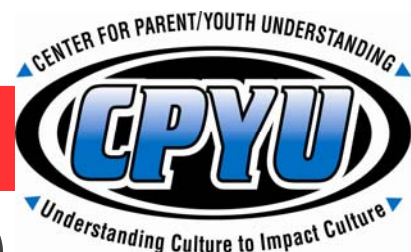
- Like many other games, the first biblical concept to consider is the very basic command “Thou shalt not kill.” Though many of the victims of Marston’s bullets are “deserving” due to their lawless ways, they are after all, humans. Do they not deserve the same grace that Marston has received, along with the opportunity to “earn” their own redemption?
- There is an underlying tone in this game that a man can “earn” his redemption through correcting his wrongs or changing his ways. Ephesians chapter 2 tells us that true grace and redemption comes through Jesus Christ alone.
- Ultimately, in an effort to straighten his own misdeeds as a gang member, Marston is now killing people in the name of “justice.” Jesus teaches forgiveness and love for our enemies, not vengeance. In this sense, it teaches a message that is directly in opposition to a biblical worldview.
- Oddly enough, this game does an exceptional job of recreating nature. Though most would not see this as part of the “worldview” of the game, it really does, in some way, point to creation and its beauty. Since God says that His creation is a testimony to Him, in some ways this recreation is also a testimony. Though gamers learn to hunt and kill the creatures in the game, they also use the products of those hunts (meat, skins, feathers, and even plants) for earning money and better resources.

### Decide: What do I do with it?

- This is definitely not the type of game to dismiss immediately. Though it includes killing and violence, it is a remarkable opportunity for parents and youth leaders to discuss the biblical concept of “redemption.” Encourage gamers to talk about their feelings regarding killing and death, but also how it feels to “do good” in the game. When given the opportunity to offer mercy, does it clearly seem like the “right thing” or does vengeance seem more gratifying?
- One interesting moral point in this game is that of the prostitutes, who inhabit the brothels in many of the towns. Rockstar games are the same developers, as mentioned, of the infamous *Grand Theft Auto* series, which notoriously allowed gamers to pick up prostitutes and “use” them for a health boost in the game. However, when gamers attempt the same “trick” in *RDR*, Marston’s character replies to the woman of leisure a comment about being a married man. So this man who kills hundreds of people in the course of the game and his life takes a moral stance on marriage. This is definitely an interesting conversation point. How does morality work on a sliding scale and how do we do this in our own lives?
- Ultimately this is a game that should be carefully considered. It is NOT for gamers under “R movie” age by any means. It contains a “cut scene” with nudity and obviously repetitive violence that is realistic and adult. All of those negative points aside, it is an opportunity to discuss concepts like “honor” and “redemption” via a format that may allow gamers and their friends to open up in a way they may not when talking about the situations in their own lives.



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