

## Dishonored

A story within a story - "Dunwall Tower: You have just returned from a journey of several months, visiting the other nations in the Empire to ask for aid in dealing with the Rat Plague. You must deliver their diplomatic response to the Empress, whom you serve as Lord Protector." These are the first words I see upon selecting "New Game." As of yet I have no name, yet I already have quite a clear depiction of who it is I am in the story. I am a protector, a messenger, a journeyman, a diplomat, and I live in a world of hierarchy. In addition, I have a vague understanding of the encroaching menace of plague. I am left to wonder at tales of my journey through the other nations, or even my path through birth, childhood, and adolescence; yet, I find such thoughts a distant past which quickly drift away as I face an uncertain and near future. All this begins my part in the larger story of a man's life in a capital city called Dunwall.

The narrative then quickly sets the stage for a tale of revenge. Upon my return to Dunwall I first spend some time playing with Lady Emily, the daughter of the Empress whom I serve and a person I am clearly emotionally attached to, before proceeding to the Empress herself. Along the way I interact with all NPCs, noting that each of them have about 4 responses before they no longer speak to you when pressing the action button. I also looked at the enclosed building structures, the sky, and the city buildings surrounding the tower in my immediate vicinity. It's a sunny day in a bright vibrant world that is suddenly brought crashing down with the assassination of the Empress by unknown, super-powered assailants and the abduction of young Emily. I was able to defend her against one assassin at first, yet I

was powerless to stop the 2 that took his place. I watched the two women I love be taken from me, one to a place unknown, and the other to a place I cannot ever reach. I am found with a dead Empress in my arms and branded a traitor by the Royal Spymaster (who I must note, I already do not trust due to his curt nature and sneering/envious attitude); and thus I spend the next 6 months in prison awaiting my execution.

Just in this first scene, the world itself establishes who I am – I discover that my name is Lord Corvo – and why I am going to do what I will do in the rest of the game. I must avenge a fallen ruler and return her child home. To do so I must find out who the assassins were and, more importantly, why they killed the Empress. Rather implicitly I have been told via my short struggle with the attackers that two-handed combat and supernatural abilities will be part of my arsenal as I walk down this path of darkness in my search for enlightenment. I find myself already intrigued by the narrative and wondering what I will find at the end of my search. Will it result in a satisfying sense of closure to a tragic inciting incident, or will it leave me wondering why such a tragedy was ever necessary?

The day before I am scheduled to die I receive a faint glimmer of hope from “a friend.” A note is slipped into my cell with my prison food with short, mysterious instructions and a key to unlock my cell. I quickly do so and acquire the weapons that have been left for me just outside it; however, I decide to talk to the prisoners in the cells of my block before beginning my clandestine journey past the prison guards. One tells me a story of his innocence, another wishes me to exact his

vicarious vengeance upon the guards as I make my escape, and the last requests that I free him. Though they are such small secondary stories, they help immerse me in the world because they permit me the illusion that while I may control my own fate within the virtual world. People with separate lives still exist even outside my own sphere of agency, yet my actions (or inactions) can still affect their lives (...or not). This is further compounded by my first death experience. I had just killed a guard who had spotted me in hiding and, as a result, been fatally slashed by another. As I lay dying, breathing my last breaths, and looking up at the guard who had just become my demise, he said to me, "You just made somebody a widow." The last words I ever heard before I died were that someone I had never met would hate me.

As was ever the way of most video games, death was not truly the end of my story. Continuing from my last save point, I spent the next several hours trying to sneak my way past the guards and escape the prison. I died many times (being that I'm playing on the hardest difficulty) until I finally made it outside the prison and escaped into the sewers. It is within these sewers that I first encounter the deadly rats that had been briefly foreshadowed in the first scene. A pair of unfortunate guards was completely consumed by a horde of them as I crawled through the ceiling above. The sheer, visceral, and bloody carnage of the scene finally brought to life the terror that the people of Dunwall were living in. I continued through the sewers pondering that, and contemplating the mysterious "friend I will meet soon," when I stumble across a journal. It is an account of a man named Damien suffering from the Rat Plague with his wife Amanda. He ran out of money to buy the elixir that would keep them alive and decided to spend his last hours with her in his arms as

the City Watch smashed through the houses in the streets above. Upon closing the journal I saw two rotting corpses, Amanda lying in the arms of Damien, their love eternal cut short by the unfortunate times in which they lived.

I have only scratched the surface of Dishonored; yet, I have lived many lifetimes, my own and those of others. I have discovered a world without honor; yet, I alone have been branded with dishonor. I must carry the sad stories I experience with me in order to set a course for the future in which they do not repeat. I must find a way to make peace with past in order to have a future at all. So is it truly vengeance that I seek? Am I solely looking for my stolen honor? Or is it something more? After all, the first thing I learned about myself is that I am "Lord Protector." And as I continue the game, I expect I will realize what it is that I truly want to protect.