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Dead Rising
Developed by Capcom
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Call zombies what you will—ugly, slow, or just plain metaphors for modern American society. I call ‘em fodder. Fodder for my gun. And my 2x4. And my baking soda box. And my stuffed teddy bear. And anything else that you might find in your typical Midwest mega mall. As Frank West, photojournalist, you arrive at *Dead Rising*’s Willamette Mall with two purposes: to take pictures of zombies, and then destroy them. Amidst all of the plot, people saving, and un-zombified boss battles, it’s the sandbox gameplay of seeing how many zombies you can dispatch with everyday items that makes this game so enjoyable. But while *Dead Rising* is a fun game with high production values, a few flaws get in the way of a truly great play. Every time you get into a groove and start to become immersed in the game, one of these flaws will come along to remind you that this *is* just a game, and yes, you *have* been playing for that long, and you need to go do your laundry. At times I even found myself leaving *Dead Rising* to play another game because I just didn’t want to deal with some minor qualm that led to major frustration. *Dead Rising* has great potential, and puts forth an honorable effort, but a few more weeks could have fixed a few of the more biting issues that keep this from being a really great game.

I love that there are tons of items at my disposal; everything becomes a weapon, and I mean *everything*. And if you run out of things to pick up, you have a plethora of moves with which to tear zombies apart. One aspect of gameplay that needs reworking, though, has to be the terrible boss fights. They mostly all consist of the same patterns, requiring no special use of the environment other than to pick up weapons to swing or shoot with. Not only that, but in a game full of zombies, why are all of the boss fights with people? They break the pace of the rest of the game and are aggravating, especially with bad save points.

I don’t ask a lot of save opportunities in a game, but I ought to be able to save my game before important or otherwise challenging tasks. I ought not to have to fight through three major events in a row before I get to save my progress. This irritates especially when you realize you cannot select “retry” after you die during the third event. Some may call this challenging

gameplay. I call it bad design. Also, it doesn't make sense that you cannot quit to the menu from the game or load a saved game from within your current game. *Dead Rising* forces you to reset the machine, or die, to make it back to the title screen in order to reload from a previous save point.

The timed structure of the game is a nice way to drive home the survival factor of a zombie game in a way that games like *Resident Evil* don't usually pay attention to. The RPG elements are nice, as are the multiple endings and unlockables. These coupled together with the fact that you can start a new game at any time with the old character status from a previous game makes for added replayability and provides a feeling of accomplishment with each zombie that you dispatch. While it is fun to whip out your camera and take all manner of pictures in the game (you are a photojournalist by trade, after all), the camera gameplay device ends up feeling gimmicky; you could go the entire game without taking a single picture and it wouldn't matter. You are rewarded for taking good pictures with extra experience points, but for what my time is worth, I'd rather be smashing zombies.

As for the game's camera: yes, you can adjust it, but it is still horrible; you constantly find yourself having to reposition it. And if this wasn't bad enough, some weapons have moves that change the camera angle to show you an up close and personal shot of the zombie's head flying off. This interrupts the action and causes aggravation when you get grabbed by a zombie after becoming disoriented from an abrupt camera movement. I agree that the cinematic beheading that the sickle yields is a blast to watch. I don't need to see it every time I behead a zombie.

Outside of a few minor inconsistencies in style, the level design is great and the textures and models are top notch. It takes one look at Frank's face to admire the work that went into the bump mapping and texturing. Even the blood spurts look great—a necessity in the zombie genre. Every piece of the game, visually speaking, has been carefully crafted, and the effects are a sight to behold. At times, though, there are inconsistencies within style or execution. Kent, another character in the game, is a good example of mismatched art styles. He is a caricature both in look and animation, and ends up feeling out of place in a world full of realistic and believable characters. But despite the occasional mismatch in style, the game delivers a next-gen experience in graphics.

With all of the attention to detail in the creation of a zombie-filled world, it's too bad that the story is so paradigmatic. The usual zombie tropes make appearances in *Dead Rising*, from shuffling feet to bloody noses and groans. *Dead Rising*'s setting screams *Dawn of the Dead*, and boasts a story that is equally uninspired, except maybe by George Romero. It unfolds as any fan of the genre would expect, including the thematic focus targeting greedy, commodity driven, meat-loving Americans. With so many things to pick up and play with, where the player is exercising his right to bear mannequin arms, lead pipes, frying pans, and any other manner of commoditized goods, this game seems to be contradicting its own message. Maybe this is ok though, if one looks at it from the same perspective as movies like *Sin City* or *Kill Bill*.

Despite my concerns with *Dead Rising*, I had a blast playing this game. The core gameplay of wading through armies of zombies sold me, even though the frustrating save system, uninspired boss fights, and "seen it before" story failed to impress. There are no words to convey how much fun it is to watch Frank leap frog one zombie to roundhouse kick the one behind him, finishing off with a sweep of the sickle to fell the other five zombies that still stand.