

Zombie Annihilation, with Some Frustration: “Dead Rising 2,” for Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3

Written by Luke Hamilton

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When faced with a zombie apocalypse, you can flee in terror, or you can fight back and have some fun with the flesh-munchers. *Dead Rising 2*, released in late September, offers the latter approach with flair in Fortune City, a faux Las Vegas. It’s definitely the most delightful zombie romp in video games, but it’ll eat your brains if you’re not careful.

Players step into the shoes of Chuck Greene, a contestant on the zombie-killing game show *Terror Is Reality*

. Competing for prize money to cure to his infected daughter, Chuck is in for a surprise when the confined zombies are released, and he is framed for the terrorist act. He’s got 72 hours to clear his name before the military arrives, and countless zombies and psychopaths stand in his way.

As horrifying as this scenario sounds, *Dead Rising 2* presents it in a willfully silly, campy fashion. Survivor characters have ridiculous motives for sticking around – such as delivering the mail or finally hitting it big on the slots – that fit surprisingly well with a sin-city setting. There are so many survivors that it takes multiple runs through the game to enjoy them all, but you can also just leave them for dead. Who’s going to know anyway?

Gameplay has three major components: killing zombies, exploring Fortune City, and completing the occasional mission. Goal-oriented tasks are active at specific points in the 72-hour window, so you can miss them entirely if you dawdle too long. You have the option to restart and try again, or you can skip them and just enjoy mindless zombie mayhem.

If you see an item in the game, chances are good you can use it however you see fit. Change your style at any clothing store (even into ladies’ and children’s garments), attack the dead with whatever you can find (clubs, knives, jewelry, stuffed animals, condiments, etc.), and scarf down food to survive.

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Creative madness is encouraged with the new feature of weapons you make with a workbench and duct tape. Some improvements seem standard, such as putting nails in a baseball bat, but then you’ve got over-the-top combinations such as a mobile electric chair built with a car battery and a wheelchair. These weapons grant extra experience for each zombie killed with them, helping Chuck get stronger and craft even more crazy concoctions.



Little touches – both for better and worse – made an impression on me. Chuck can drink alcohol in place of eating food to restore bits of health, but drink too much and he’ll slow to a crawl and begin puking – and the zombies will slip on the vomit in a gross yet funny flourish. Movement and combat gameplay work well enough, but only when you’re fighting zombies. Psychotic survivors hit harder, don’t get stunned, and move almost twice as fast as Chuck, requiring dead-on evasion and striking accuracy for you to survive. And it might sound like a petty gripe, but why can’t players manually make Chuck run faster? If I were in a casino full of zombies – actual ones, not standard slot jockeys – I’d be moving more quickly than a casual jog.

For a game with hundreds of zombies on-screen at any time, the graphics hold up fairly well. Cinematic scenes look and sound good between missions, and there’s very little slowdown in gameplay processing. This comes at a price, though, as entering a new area is bogged down with loading times long enough to walk into the other room and grab a drink with time to spare. It’s understandable, but it really hinders game immersion.

Dead Rising 2 is great fun for randomly slaying zombies, but it requires planning if you want to get serious. Luckily, though, you don’t need to get serious. This is the video-game equivalent of *Zombieland*

, so enjoy the little things, especially with chainsaws duct-taped to a kayak paddle.

Dead Rising 2 is now available for Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 for \$59.99 (regular edition) or \$79.99 (collector’s edition). For this review, the author completed the story several times.

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