

“DEAD RISING 2: CASE ZERO” (Video Game Review)

Written by Doug Norris

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Way back in 2006 at the dawn of the Xbox 360 era, Capcom ushered in the runaway smash hit DEAD RISING. Seeming passable at first glance, with the cover suggesting a potential DAWN OF THE DEAD ripoff, the game became a surprise success.

Regardless of escort missions with uncooperative AI and clunky aiming controls, players clamored to wreak havoc throughout the shopping-mall playground of blood-spattered destruction, leaving trails of zombie corpses and fallen psychopaths behind as they turned anything and everything the mall offered into a weapon. Gamers took to DEAD RISING so much that its gritty, self-serving, pug-faced protagonist Frank West even became a sort of cult hero, garnering homage from the fellow zombie-smasher LEFT 4 DEAD series and appearing as a playable character in the fighting game TATSUNOKO VS CAPCOM.

Flash forward to 2010, and DEAD RISING 2 has become one of the medium’s most highly anticipated sequels. Leaked trailers began appearing on YouTube as early as 2008, with footage of undead hordes lumbering across casino floors in droves several times larger than in the previous installment. Early news of “combining weapons” had fans champing at the bit to get their hands bloody again. E3 and San Diego Comic-Con gave fans even more news, screens and video of the upcoming zombie splatterfest. And on August 31, Capcom released DEAD RISING 2: CASE ZERO, an Xbox 360 exclusive prequel to the new game.



CASE ZERO introduces us to Chuck Greene, the protagonist fighting his way through a zombie-infested outbreak area in the dusty setting of Nevada. We join Chuck and his daughter

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Katey as they pull their bloodstained pickup into the small and eerily quiet town of Still Creek. Distracted by news reports of a military quarantine, Chuck and Katey lose their wheels to a thieving-happy survivor, and are left in your hands to find a way out. Did we mention that Katey has been infected and needs regular doses of the rare and expensive suppression drug Zombrex to quell her eventual zombification?

DEAD RISING 2's promised updated features are very much evident in CASE ZERO. First and probably most important is the ability to combine weapons. Any item appearing in the game with a “wrench” icon can be combined with another selected item to form a superweapon of destruction—with the aid of Chuck's infinite supply of duct tape, the sound of which will become music to players' ears. Right out of the gate, Chuck takes a baseball bat and a box of nails and crafts a spiked bat that would make Mick Foley giddy with excitement. In the first installment, players could implant showerheads into zombie skulls, resulting in some of the more gruesome outcomes. In CASE ZERO, Chuck combines a bucket with power drills to create the worst possible choice of hat for any out-on-the-town ghoul. Propane tanks and nails? Pitchforks and shotguns? Car batteries and yard tools? Smashy smashy!

Updates to the game play itself include improved physics and greatly improved aiming controls. The AI doesn't drag you down nearly as much during the escort missions and can actually prove helpful, not only when wielding weapons but also while blazing a path through the quickest way to a directional point. The graphics are a lot sharper, which means that the blood stands out better: Fountains of gore gush from zombies upon attack, and the more carnage Chuck creates, the more crimson he makes the scene. His weapons become heavily bloodstained with use, as do the surrounding landscapes and Chuck's choice of attire. Luckily, there's plenty of wardrobe (men's, women's and children's) for Chuck to don so he can always stay fresh and clean.

Unlike normal demos that just give you a slice of the larger whole, CASE ZERO provides a full playable level that will be unavailable in DEAD RISING 2. What's more, your achievements, points, level-ups and unlockables will all carry over to the actual game, so anyone downloading CASE ZERO will receive more rewards upon the sequel's release. CASE ZERO does seem a tad short, in that it's insanely difficult to complete all tasks within the tiny 12-hour window; but, as with its predecessor, players can simply ignore any task at hand and spend those hours slicing, dicing, smashing, exploding and shredding every once-taxpaying zombie victim trudging around the dusty streets of Still Creek. At only 400 points (\$5), anyone looking to get a taste of the sequel prior to release or just have their first experience with the DEAD RISING franchise should consider this a steal. Besides, who doesn't want to duct-tape chainsaws to the ends of a boat oar and paddle through a sea of undead?

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