Written by Doug Norris
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Ever gone to a live event like the circus, a donkey show in Tijuana or Carrot Top? You might walk away a pretty happy customer for the ticket price, possibly recounting the events to your friends—“I can’t believe he was wearing a Hillary Clinton mask while riding that bearded lady!” (applies to all three)—and coercing them to see it in the future. Then down the road, you hit up the same venue hoping to recapture the magic, only to find that it’s still the same show, regardless of what subtle changes were added—“Instead of a Hillary mask, it was an iPod costume…I didn’t get it.” The friend may enjoy, they may not, but you feel cheated, even though the profiteering entertainer never intended to change up their act. Welcome to DEAD TO RIGHTS: RETRIBUTION.

RETRIBUTION, available for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 from Volatile Games/Namco Bandai, rejoins us with Jack Slate and his loyal four-legged partner Shadow, and amazingly, the game looks just like you rejoined them on the previous-gen consoles. Right from the gate, the visuals seem dated and the controls feel jerky and stiff. Once you get into the meat of the action, you’re running Jack around, disarming criminals in bullet-time, executing counter-moves for cinematic knockout sequences, ducking behind any available piece of shielding furniture or structure to avoid the onslaught of bullets from the worst shots since the Stormtroopers (the galactic kind, not the goose-stepping ones). If anything about this seems familiar, it’s probably because you played the exact same thing in 2002. With clunky camera movements, frustrating close-quarters combat and moronic AI, most players will be reminded of why they didn’t get too into the original DEAD TO RIGHTS.

Most levels consist of subduing enemies who differ slightly in haircut, attire, or artillery. Jack wipes out a couple dozen, then may face a level boss or—*gasp*—a larger group of the same enemies. Each break for story gives you a dark and murky blah blah blah out-of-control criminals blah blah blah good, honest people blah blah blah corruption must be stopped blah blah. If you’ve never seen a Hong Kong action flick, a LETHAL WEAPON movie or even an intense shootout on any variation of LAW & ORDER, you

might
actually be enthralled by the gritty crime drama and grizzled cop stereotypes. Otherwise, move on.

Being a sequel, and the first foray on next-gen consoles, RETRIBUTION would not be complete…is “complete” the right word…without giving gamers something new to sharpen their incisors. For this outing, Shadow has become not only more playable, but a crucial element in the game’s progression. During the stages that star Shadow, players can use his size, speed and canine traits to solve puzzles, open certain doors, find key cards and even pick up enemy heartbeats with his subsonic hearing for stealth detection. If that doesn’t have you panting, Shadow has some wicked combat moves of his own, including this game’s claim to fame: the Scrotality. That’s it, gamers, that’s what the developers knew would draw your hard-earned dollars—60 bones given to your local retailer so you can make a dog chomp down on a bad guy’s baby-juice bags.

RETRIBUTION is not completely without its charms, delivering some hard-fisted action and plenty of gushing gory results. Scrotality’s obviousness aside, any time Jack disarms a perp and immediately returns fire, the ensuing head shot pops the villain’s face like a syrup-filled piñata. It’s pretty gross, and the first couple might make you say, “Oh daaaamn!!!” But after 20 or so, Jack doesn’t find much else to do to keep gorehound action fans salivating. Likewise, most of Shadow’s attacks turn into similar bloodbaths, as he generally goes for the throat, thigh or forearm. Atta boy.

The Venn diagram of dog lovers and gamers doesn’t have too broad an overlap, and not all those in the middle are out for blood. If you’re dying to play in canine guise, go find a copy of OKAMI, but don’t look to DEAD TO RIGHTS: RETRIBUTION to teach you any new tricks. There are better combat-action games out there, and better ways to spend your hard-earned $60 (see above for circus, donkey show, Carrot Top).

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