I’m boycotting DEAD ISLAND, and you should too. I’m serious. Never in my life have I seen such a blatant use of false advertising to gain buzz for a product that is literally nothing like what was originally promised.

Confused? Four years ago, DEAD ISLAND was announced as a zombie game where you are trapped on an island overrun with the undead and must escape. All was quiet until about two months ago when the trailer for DEAD ISLAND was released, (you can view the trailer here), and excitement for the title went through the roof, with some calling it the best game trailer ever made. Why? Because it showed a dark, serious, somber and emotional take on the zombie genre, showing a family trying (in vain) to protect their daughter from a ravenous pack of the undead. It focused on their relationships and the horror of trying to save someone dear to you. In short, it was a breathtaking trailer that got people excited for a zombie game that took the subject seriously, focusing on the difficulty of surviving an outbreak with one’s family intact.

Since this initial trailer, every piece of information released about the game not only undermines what seemed to be the tone of the advertisement, but also makes it seem like the trailer was a blatant bait-and-switch on the part of the game makers. Now granted, I know that the trailer was composed of pre-rendered footage (i.e. not actual gameplay), but the expectation was that it was at least showing the tone and themes of the game…

Unfortunately, it seems like that was a crock. A serious take on the genre? Well, one of the characters you play as is a wisecracking up-and-coming rapper named Sam B, who walks around spouting funny one-liners with his name tattooed to his chest. Serious. Pictures have been released showing big boss zombies in straightjackets that are the size of three story buildings. Serious! You use weapons like an electrified machete, and can upgrade your

character with super moves such as the ability to punch the heads clean off the undead in a bloody frenzy. So serious!

What the hell is this? What could have been a great step forward for the zombie genre in the gaming market has fallen flat on its face into what other developers have already done. Sorry guys, but DEAD RISING has already been made, so if you were looking at making another tongue-in-cheek zombie game, they’ve got the market corned. LEFT 4 DEAD’S team-based mechanics and “boss” zombies have also been done. The only thing left (and the thing originally promised) was a completely serious look at the undead—no jokes, no laughs, and no goddamn head-punching super moves.

Of course, this is not the first time a game has used a misleading advertisement to sell itself—promising emotional content not contained within the actual game. While I do enjoy the GEARS OF WAR series, everyone remembers the “Mad World” trailer that seemed to imply a much deeper emotional core to a standard (if particularly well-made) 3rd person shooter. Wrong—you kill aliens. The end. Yes, they did put effort into the narrative with the sequel, but the fact remains that the original didn’t make good on the trailer’s promises. But even with that taken into account, GEARS OF WAR was still a dark and dreary game, which is something that DEAD ISLAND doesn’t seem to be. It’s the equivalent of advertising NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, and then selling people RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD: RAVE TO THE GRAVE—it’s outright dishonest.

Now while I could rant about the issues of game advertising for days, the reason I bring up DEAD ISLAND is because it’s a horror game, and the fact that horror, in any form, tends be the most falsely advertised and misrepresented of any genre out there.

Lets talk movie ads. Horror films are especially notorious for having trailers that don’t accurately portray what the film will be about. AMERICAN PSYCHO was advertised as a regular slasher film. BLACK CHRISTMAS, quite possibly one of the most refined slasher movies ever made, was originally advertised like a grindhouse flick. Scores of more intellectual (for lack of a better term) horror films have been advertised much differently in order to sell them better. Not only that, many horror trailers contain scenes not in the actual film—images literally put in only to tantalize people into going to the theater. A recent example (although a terrible film) was THE ROOMATE, and the fact that a scene in the trailer where the roommate is lying in bed next to the main character, stroking her in her sleep, isn’t actually in the film. That’s merely the tip of the iceberg though—hell, in the 70’s and 80’s, horror trailers were famous for containing gore that didn’t wind up in the actual movie due to censorship.

And now this problem has come to games. DEAD ISLAND’S trailer is, quite frankly, a fraud—an imposter for the real thing. Now I’m not saying that DEAD ISLAND will be a bad game, what I’m saying is that it’s not what it was advertised to be, to the point of seeming purposefully, deceptively different. And I’m pissed, wondering exactly who was responsible for this falsely advertised mess.

Horror fans, I don’t actually believe you should boycott this game—you’re all capable of making your own decisions. What I do want you to do is be mindful of what exactly it is that you’re buying, and to ask where you draw the line on false advertisement.

I hope I’m wrong about DEAD ISLAND. Maybe I’m overeating about the information pouring out. Maybe they’ll go the emotional route now that many game journalists are finding issue with how different the actual product is.

But who knows? I have been misled before…

{jcomments on}