

“RETRIBUTION” Is Yours

Written by Brian Patrick O'Toole
Sunday, 09 May 2010 09:03



Volatile Games and Namco Bandai's recently released DEAD TO RIGHTS: RETRIBUTION is the latest incarnation of the classic series that pits a lone-wolf cop and his faithful dog against the scum of fictional Grant City. This franchise has always been known for its innovations in a very well-worn genre: the third-person shooter.

RETRIBUTION, available for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360, holds nothing back with the amount of violence and arterial spray it displays as you fight your way through assorted thugs and puzzles. In a medium that is seemingly always up against some kind of censorship issue, it was refreshing that developers threw caution to the wind and delivered on the gore.



DEAD TO RIGHTS: RETRIBUTION project director Imre Jele was kind enough to take a few moments out of his busy launch schedule to answer some questions about the game.

FANGORIA: After a four-year hiatus, what led to this from-the-ground-up reimagining of DEAD TO RIGHTS for the next-gen systems?

IMRE JELE: Working on an established franchise had some huge advantages over working on a new IP. This way, we could rely on experience gathered from the earlier games. The original DEAD TO RIGHTS offered some really cool features and characters we wanted to keep, but we also recognized we couldn't simply make a sequel. We needed to restart the story from ground zero and apply a similar approach to the design as well. This way, we did not simply copy ideas

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from the previous game, but instead used their underlying concept to create something new and exciting.

FANG: Violent action games have certainly evolved since we last saw Jack Slate and Shadow, his faithful Malamute companion. How does this new entry in the series keep up with its recent blood-splattered brethren?



JELE: DEAD TO RIGHTS was always defined by its no-holds-barred attitude, and we wanted to make sure that the new entry also stood out in today’s violence-heavy action-game market. We decided very early on to avoid creating a realistic murder simulator and instead opted to make a highly stylized, hyper-realistic actionfest. We kept hallmark features, like Jack’s takedown, but made the execution moves bloodier, messier and more over the top. We followed a similar approach with other aspects of the game, such as Jack’s hand-to-hand combat moves or Shadow’s attack animations. If something fit the game’s high-octane action mood, we kept it, even if it raised difficulties in development or balancing. At the same time, we cut out anything that slowed down the pace.

FANG: Several franchises have watered down their more recent entries—*cough* RESIDENT EVIL *cough*—in hopes of capturing a “wider audience.” How did you balance the two audiences, hardcore fans vs. casual gamer?

JELE: DEAD TO RIGHTS: RETRIBUTION’s core combat system combines third-person shooting with fighting mechanics. We wanted to create a seamless and consistent experience, one where the players could not only move from one combat style to the next, but also have good reason to use both, and I believe we succeeded. Mixing hand-to-hand combos with gunplay to create a unique fighting approach was great fun, but it also meant the game

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becomes very complex, which could alienate players who aren't fans of both shooting and fighting genres.



To address that, we created a system where it's easy to “look cool” while taking bad guys out, while simultaneously providing enough depth for experienced players to explore. Throwing bad guys over ledges, disarming enemies or using takedowns on them comes easily in early levels. However, later on, you can explore the mechanics in greater depth by using the tactical effects of destroyable covers, specialized weapons and multihit combos.

FANG: Back in 2002, the slo-mo “bullet time” effect was all the rage in video games, but DEAD TO RIGHTS and MAX PAYNE did it right. What innovation has been made to this effect for 2010?

JELE: “Bullet time” is a great feature, and there are some excellent games out there that use it well. However, what we wanted to do with DEAD TO RIGHTS: RETRIBUTION was to introduce a fresh approach to the usual mechanics, one where it supports and enriches the other features rather than take the focus away from them. Because of that, we had to be very cautious not to put too much emphasis on our Focus Mode. The most important characteristic we introduced is that players can only collect Focus Mode time by playing the game well. Skillful actions like head shots, combos or counters are rewarded by extra seconds of slow-mo, which can then be used to save the player in tough situations by slowing down time to take accurate shots or to time hand-to-hand moves perfectly.

FANG: I was able to play an early build of the game, and was very excited to see that RETRIBUTION stays with the third-person perspective and doesn't go all first-person CALL OF DUTY on gamers. Can you talk about that decision and how it affects the play?

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JELE: We kept the third-person camera for the Shadow playable sections of the game, but made several changes to the way we portray the world around our dog-hero sidekick. Some are more obvious, like how we desaturated the colors to represent the fact that dogs are colorblind, or how we changed the camera's position and movement. But the most important difference is Shadow's stealth vision. Pulling the left trigger makes Shadow crouch down and move around silently. While in this stance, Shadow can rely on his heightened senses, his exceptional hearing and sense of smell, which is represented by the ability to see through walls and other obstacles. Players aren't only able to tell where enemies are, but can also see their alert state—ranging from neutral to engaged—marked with different colors. The bad guys fighting Shadow are efficient at first, but get more and more panicky as they lose their buddies.



FANG: Was the choice to make Shadow a playable character introduced early in the development stage, or was it a shout-out to fans of the series?

JELE: We decided to give Shadow his own playable sections at the very beginning of development; however, it took a lot of experimentation to find the right pacing, balancing and controls for him. We wanted to make sure that those playable sections provide a very different experience. Playing as Shadow is our “driving section,” so to speak. Shadow doesn't have a gun and is very vulnerable to gunfire, so it made sense to tailor those environments around stealth with the occasional bits relying on speed, while playing as Jack is all about being as loud as you can and punching bad guys in the face.

FANG: This game has some very violent, bloody moves. Did you struggle with any censorship issues? And if so, what moves didn't make it into the game?”

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JELE: We had considered the possibility of making the game less violent, or at least creating an alternative version for more sensitive regions. But that would not have been right—it would not have been a real DEAD TO RIGHTS game. At the same time, this game is not solely about violence; that’s really just decoration. The entire game is over the top. We’ve created larger-than-life villains requiring a larger-than-life hero.



FANG: Shadow has some very violent attack moves, and yet there is one obvious special move missing—flaming pee! How come?

JELE: Actually, he does pee on dead enemies! [*Laughs*] That was a joke we just couldn’t leave out!

FANG: Can you share some special/exclusive hints, codes or tips for FANGORIA readers?

JELE: Players are awarded with a medal at the end of every level. Getting gold requires speed and skill and the use of a wide variety of play tools. Using counters a lot is a great way to get a good variety score. And the best way to do counters is continuously block until the enemy gets frustrated and starts using heavy attacks. Those are the easiest to counter.

FANG: What are your feelings on game-to-movie adaptations? Are their plans for a film adaptation?

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JELE: It is up to Namco Bandai Games to decide on the future of the franchise, of course, and there are many factors to consider. My personal opinion is that DEAD TO RIGHTS would make an awesome movie, following the traditions of the best '80s action pictures.

Thanks to Imre Jele, Namco Bandai, Volatile Games and especially 47 Communications' Hiro Ito for the help. Look for my full review in FANGORIA issue #295. Now go and play DEAD TO RIGHTS: RETRIBUTION—there's a Scrotality award waiting to be won! You heard me: Scrotality!



{comments on}