Since open world games have been technological commonness, we have seen all types of games styles hatch out of it. From Minecraft to Watchdogs, walking by the Elderscrolls series, developers put players up against impressive amount of content to mess with, sometimes making the universe they play into more than believable. But what happens when you put Dead Island and GTA into the same soup?

What could have been a fun hiking trip ended up as a zombie bloodbath for Marcus Campbell and his friend. Just berthing by the dock, it is not clear why some random people are trying to eat them but they soon find out most people have become cannibals.

The setting is quite simple but it does not look like a pretext for zombie killing. The first experiences with combat will make you understand it quickly enough: being outnumbered is not necessarily an opportunity for muti-kill more as an opportunity for taking advantage of your enemy’s lack of grey matter. Adapting your combat style to the particular context into which the confrontation takes place is the major challenge. Because the fighting system is not revolutionary by itself, the variety in contexts makes it versatile enough to lift it above an enjoyable level. On an occasion you might be in a claustrophobic shed with half-a-dozen mutants while on another you might see a horde of them coming from afar. Needless to say that tackling the later with a baseball bat is not the most reasoned option… given you have the chance to possess a riffle and some bullets.

Ammo is not the only valuable resource in the game. Unless you get filthy rich, you will have to fight with melee weapons most of the time.

Fighting against packs of zombies while alone or with a single friend is a precarious enterprise. Bringing food, medical supplies are not the only things that will ensure you a long safe trip: weapons themselves can break on use, which make their choice the most important one. Evaluating your possibilities according to your current resources is very common in State of Decay. In fact, resource management may be the most important part of the game as much for your personal exploration belongings as for the camp you dwell in.

Surviving alone in such a decayed state (see what I did there?) would not be a realistic scenario, which is why you will spend most of the game collaborating and living by strangers that are in the same situation as you. But sharing is not always an altruistic act, especially in those kinds of situations. By scavenging inhabited homes and deserted stores, you collect essential goods for your little village, which needs a certain amount to be kept functional. In exchange, you get influence points which are then used to ask favors or take supplies from the camp stash. The game does a great job at making you feel like you are always short on supplies, which forces you to put aside seemingly more important tasks to devote your time to pure survival. This stressful feeling is not a negative one, it greatly contributes to providing the tense atmosphere that the game is covered with.

However, this urge to act on general needs does end up making you wonder if you are not missing an important point. While it is quite remarkable that they do not feel like chores, repeatedly doing those small scavenging hunts do not contribute to any noticeable leap forward on the story line. Doing the side quests by numbers seem to trigger world events where your attention is needed, eventually moving the story forward. Being fed with evolution in the plot only bit by bit ends up being a bit disappointing once you realize it. While this is an ambiguous question for the player from the time he realises it and then remaining throughout the game, it literally changes the perception it has toward the actions to take, sometimes in a negative way.

Fortunately, this games does not die on this shortcoming. Exploration by itself remains an exciting part of the game. As night and day goes by, you come to know the dos and don’ts of the times of day. Watchtowers will enable you to manually look around and mark important landmarks resource wise, and as, even though the day, exploring is dangerous, planning such exploration adventures will be entertaining ones.

Along my journey in this dead land, I fought many monsters, from human shaped ones to gigantic mastodons. Men and women from both camps were taking part in the battle and some of both perished. The ability to play as a man or woman in the game is entirely choice of the player as, twenty minutes in, you meet the first playable female character, the first from a wide range of unique characters. Some games have the characteristic to make the player identify himself to its character. In those cases, it only is one more reason to have female characters so women playing those games will be pleased with such opportunity.

The universe of State of Decay is a well threaded one. Starting from the versatility of combat that emerges from its simplicity to the survival and management that is omnipotent, the game plunges you into a tense atmosphere. This context and its characters will get you involved in the story, making you regret your actions as you recklessly got one of them killed. Coming back to our initial question: what happens when we mix Dead Island and GTA together? An oddity that cannot be overlooked: State of Decay.

Pros: Omnipresent atmosphere of survival

Stimulating resource management system

Good replayability

Cons: Disappointing story development

State of Decay is a survival game on all of its facets. Forcing you to carefully manage your resources, the game successfully draws you away from the ideal path that you always strive to regain. Either it be with allies that you convince to follow you on a mission or alone, you always are forced to carefully plan your trip out of the camp. State of decay successfully recreates the classic zombie outbreak scenario, this time, designing it so well you it is a believable one.