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Man, this game makes me sad. I will confess two things right away. First I am heavily influenced by the fact that I absolutely loved Fallout 4 and thus was really excited for a next installment of the franchise form that point of view. And I came out very disappointed. And second: I did not finish this game. I usually think you should never review a game you haven’t finished but in this case it’s also part of the story. I respect the courage behind a daring move made by Bethesda but the result did not make me happy. The basics for greatness are all there, so what went so wrong?

1

When this game was about to come out, I was so excited that I took a day off to enjoy it. I got it early, had snacks ready and was bouncing around excitedly all the time during the install. Then the game started up and I though “Hell yes, Fallout time!!!”. As soon as I saw the title screen with some destroyed playground, and the character creation procedure I was feeling it. The game kicked off in the vault with the classic Vault Boy cartoons explaining things about surviving in the wasteland and I was full on hyped. Stepping outside, fighting the first few shit tier enemies with a knife, grabbing some edible herbs and playing some banjo in an abandoned watchtower, I was in the clouds. This lasted for about 4 hours, sadly.

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The basic gist of the game is to (once again) survive in the postapocalyptic wasteland, this time in West Virginia. In case you’re not familiar with Fallout, it’s an open world RPG and everything is in real time. The setting is basically my favorite setting ever as it is a really cool fictional futuristic 1950’s USA. Futuristic & 50’s at the same time probably sounds strange, but you’ll get it once you see it. There is something amazingly nostalgic about walking around these destroyed remnants of the true American Dream with some Nat King Cole (or similar) on the radio. And Fallout also has one of my most appreciated RPG character development schemes, with both stats and perks which really allow you to grow a character and develop play style you identify with. The main difference is that 76 goes full online0multiplayer, even to the point that there are no NPC’s at all. Big mistake.

2

It probably is unfair in a way that I judge this game so much by what is it is not. In a way it is precisely because I love Bethesda’s former work so much that I loathe this one. Of course there is good things to be said about 76 as well. As I said, the world and style itself is still classic Fallout and thus great. The character creation as well as the photo mode are good. The perk system is classic Fallout even though the worse multiplayer gameplay makes it feel less impactful since the game lost some core mechanics to player to player interactions taking the main stage. The system with perk cards is an interesting addition though. The crafting system improved as well. You can make and upgrade weapons, armor and various items like explosives this encouraging you to always look for scrapable material or items.

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The biggest fun-killer is that a few hours into the main questline, you realize that everyone is dead anyway and you will never find a vibrant hub filled with interesting characters, side -quests and allies but that you will be chasing trails to dead people the whole time. For me such a big part what makes Fallout so great is that when exploring you never know who you’ll find where, and what will happen. In any cave you can stumble on a resident raider group, there’s towns with different societies and you will make many interesting friends and enemies. Not in this game you won’t. I have the feeling that it’s not just the multiplayer part which makes it bad, but also the lore and world are somewhat off in. The scorched as main enemies are super lame, especially taken into account that there are no raiders or other human enemies. The story of a disease which makes people sick and make crystals form inside them and turn them into stone sounds more like something from bad fantasy stories than Fallout. This is too bad because it does look like Fallout 76 actually ads more interesting animal-like enemies.

3

Another issue I have with this game: it’s very clunky. The shooter gameplay in Fallout has never been that great, which was completely fine because it was more about using the V.A.T.S. system rather than shooting in real time (V.A.T.S. a time stopping ability which lets you target specific enemy parts; the RPG way of combat in Fallout). They removed the time stopping power because obviously that’s impossible in a multiplayer game, but they haven’t fixed the gameplay well enough for real-time only battle. The last time I played the game determined to give it another shot and to enjoy it, I quit at some point because a standard battle was just too janky too enjoy as the enemies were glitching and twitching all over the place. And that’s more then a year after launch. How I longed to place a well-aimed headshot in V.A.T.S. in prior Fallout games and watching the head fly off in slow motion… but that’s gone too.

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While the build and grow your own camp addition is cool in and of itself there is again a big problem. It replaces something which was way better. First of all moving it is a pain in the ass because it an block if the terrain is even slightly different (which it basically always is). But even more, it’s kinda lame to just build a camp in a dead world. And nothing happens when you’re out of the game: no attacks, raids or economy. Everything is dead. My favorite part of the Fallout 4 building was seeing settles come into your town, building a trade network, coming back to see that they have fended off some attacks in my absence. In the end game you could even grind for legendary loot by increasing the difficulty and having more regular, really hard enemy attacks on settlements and thus making it worthwhile to get good equipment for all defensive settlers. All gone as well.

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I was also just mad when I found out that the conquerable workshops (i.e. places where you can build stuff and get resources after you conquer them) stop being yours when you stop playing. This feels so contrary to the idea of a game where you build things and create your place in the world. Wtf man so I conquer it, build some stuff, defend it once, and if I stop playing say 1,5 hour later I lose it and did all that for a negligible amount of resources gained within that time? Yo mama Bethesda. I want to make defenses that keep up (or not) in the face of attacks while when I’m not playing, see what’s left when I’m back. This is just bad execution of what is in essence a good idea.

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They really should’ve added a step in between Fallout 4 and 76 of introducing player interaction, f.e. by keeping the building mechanics of 4 intact but adding the ability to trade with other players, or even send raiding parties to their settlements. But removing NPC’s and settlements fully and “replacing” it with multiplayer mechanics is in my opinion a huge mistake which kills what should’ve been a top 5 PS4 game for me. And maybe after that add some feature of being able to really interact with players, or visiting other’s players world and from there see. But to completely change course like this is in my view a big mistake.

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I was legit sad and surprised how they could something which was so good (Fallout 4, but 3 and New Vegas as well) to ruining so many of the great features. The bold move by Bethesda completely misses the mark for me, but I am happy for the people who enjoy it. The reason the score is still pretty high is because of the world, setting and Fallout style of perks and character development are still awesome, but a lot just sucks. There’d better be a proper Fallout 5 soon.