

With 'Dead Rising,' a new approach for a game adaptation

March 20 2015, byDerrik J. Lang



This photo provided by Crackle/Dead Rising: Watchtower shows, Jesse Metcalfe, in a scene from the film, "Dead Rising: Watchtower." The movie debuts March 27, 2015, on Crackle, Sony's free streaming video service. (AP Photo/Crackle/Dead Rising: Watchtower, Eric Milner)

When a pair of filmmakers first approached video game publisher Capcom about crafting a live-action movie based on their popular zombie series "Dead Rising," they were asked to prove themselves in a very specific way: The creators behind such video game franchises as

"Street Fighter" and "Resident Evil" handed the movie producers a game controller.

"They told me, 'Show me you love the game,'" said Tomas Harlan, who along with business partner Tim Carter, is the brains behind Contradiction Films. The independent production company last brought supernatural martial-arts fighters to life with "Mortal Kombat: Legacy," a series of web shorts set in the world of Midway's long-running punch-out series.

Harlan wasn't deterred. He'd already maxed out level 50 at home.

After showing off some zombie-evading strategies, "Dead Rising: Watchtower" was born. The straight-to-streaming movie is launching March 27 on Crackle, Sony's free, ad-supported online video service. (However, "Watchtower" can be viewed beginning Friday exclusively on the Crackle app for Xbox One and Xbox 360 consoles.)

Following the success of "Legacy," whose second-season premiere has amassed more than 20 million views on YouTube, Harlan and Carter wanted to create another game adaption on a similar small scale as the "Mortal Kombat" series. The pair said such minimalism affords them more freedom and fewer expectations than most Hollywood productions.



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"Our way of producing is very different than a conventional feature film that costs \$100 million," said Carter, who also wrote the script for the movie. "I think that most film studios usually have a standard operating procedure that you're not allowed to deviate from—and we deviate all over the place."

As attendance in [movie theaters](#) has dipped and streaming networks have strengthened, the duo also sees the digital medium as a boon, not a punishment. They're apparently not alone. Legendary, the production company best known for event movies like "The Dark Knight Rises" and "Pacific Rim," signed on to co-produce "Watchtower" as their first digital movie with Contradiction Films.

"This sort of project, by virtue of being digital, is a lot more nimble and

creator-focused than a big-budget film would be," said Carter. "That allows us to work more closely with the game developer and hold onto game canon in a way that wouldn't be possible if there were more cooks in the kitchen and it was a huge financial juggernaut."

"Watchtower" stars "Desperate Housewives" and "Dallas" co-star Jesse Metcalfe as a glory-chasing reporter stranded in a town being overrun by zombies and quarantined by the government. Virginia Madsen and Meghan Ory play fellow survivors, while Rob Riggle portrays Frank West, the protagonist from the first "Dead Rising" game released in 2006.

Unlike such game adaptations as "Doom" or "Resident Evil," which veered off from the original source material on the big screen, "Watchtower" strictly exists in the same fictional realm as the "Dead Rising" games. There, the drug Zombrex keeps humans from transforming into flesh-eating creatures and gardening and sporting equipment taped together usually make for the best weapons.

After decades of unfaithful renditions, the mere mention of the term "live-action video game adaptation" usually provokes groans from gamers, but Harlan and Carter see the stigma as an opportunity where others have frequently flopped. In fact, they studied every previous live-action game adaptation before going into production on "Watchtower."

"In the past, there were a lot of hatchet jobs by executives in Hollywood," said Harlan. "The intellectual properties were not authentic to them. They didn't grow up with them. It wasn't things they experienced. They just thought it was valuable and tried to adapt it in a very traditional, linear way. There's been a lot more failures than successes."

Harlan and Carter are already working on three more [video game](#)

adaptations, and just because they think they've mastered bringing interactive fiction to life on a shoe-string budget doesn't mean they always want to keep pinching pennies.

"We'd like to do this at all levels because certain games and story choices require different budgets," said Carter. "We're approaching this with a thin-end-of-the-wedge strategy, and we're proving ourselves at this level. Hopefully, we're winning loyalties on both the studio and [game](#) development sides, which will give us freedom when we move to bigger budgets."

More information: www.crackle.com

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Citation: With 'Dead Rising,' a new approach for a game adaptation (2015, March 20) retrieved 19 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-03-dead-approach-game.html>

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