



, August 30, 2010 [<http://howtonotsuckatgamedesign.com/?p=982>] by Anjin Anhut.

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Today, we examine the characters and creatures from Valve's Left 4 Dead 2. Valve's designer did an outstanding job in delivering a new and fun approach to zombie mutants and gave us a roster of lead characters, that defy current game hero conventions. A closer look at L4D2's line-up reveals how much thought actually went into Valve's unique designs.



**From left to right:** Rochelle, Ellis, Coach, Nick.

There is something that makes the L4D2 characters stand out as a group. They are no idealized characters, like most video game heroes are, which makes them very accessible. Nobody's perfect, but everybody is likable.

**Rochelle** is an attractive young woman, but never ever inserts sexuality into the game. She is well dressed, has a nice body and good looking face, but never does anything seductive. While there are many woman in real life like that, in video games girls and women usually insert sexuality into a game. Well, maybe not in kid's titles. Also noticeable is that she is a black lead woman, which in video game land is also quite uncommon.

**Coach** defies all current gaming hero cliches at once. He is way older than the target audience, he is bald and overweight, not very agile and he is black also.

I mention that both characters are black, because it makes them stand out from the crowd of other video game heroes. Unfortunately, most black lead characters are made to fit a racial stereotype. With Rochelle and Coach, no racial stereotype is displayed. This is rare, very very rare. Try to name 5 video games with black lead heroes, where the hero is no criminal, no musician/DJ or talking in ebonics. Its kinda hard, isn't it?

**Ellis** is the closest thing to the actual young white male target gamer, most shooter games are aiming at. He is the closest thing to the guys who buy Modern Warfare and Halo and L4D2. He is physically fit and courageous, but to deconstruct him, Valve made him not the smartest guy. He is kind of slow and talks a lot and he is emotionally numb towards many aspects of the horrific situation the characters are in.

**Nick** is the closest thing to the male white lead characters that dominated the shooter genre. He has the proper age, he has stubble, wears a nice suit and is comfortable with guns. He would be a perfect fit for a GTA title. But he is broken. He is a drug addict and he is used to be stealing things, no impressive big heists or anything, just a wallet here and a cash register there.

With Coach and Rochelle Valve gave us characters, that usually never get a lead role in a video game from a big publisher. And with Nick and Ellis, Valve took what big publishers in general view as an idealization of their target gamer and damaged it, to make it something special. At least since Half-Life 2 and Portal, Valve showed how to make



Various regular infected from the game.

With the regular infected, basically the game's cannon fodder, Valve did a lot of generic jeans-wearing male and female zombies. But often enough they added some diversity in look and gameplay by varying the clothing and former occupations of the infected. While some of those infected just stood out from the crowd visually, like the ones in hazmat suits or the construction workers with their bright yellow helmets, others even asked for new strategies to beat them. The security guards in riot gear were tough to shoot down, because of their armor and the clowns made funny squeaky noises, that would attract special infected.

Before we take a look at the special infected individually, a few words about overall design themes here.

The special infected are a more advanced zombified mutation. Their bodies mutated in a way that would give them special powers and they are named accordingly. Visually their physical mutation defines how they look, with the exception of the Witch and the Hunter. All infected wear very basic clothing, but the kind of clothing they wear and how they wear it supports their abilities visually. We will examine how every special infected clothing and physical appearance suits their powers and combat strategies individually. Also of note is that the designers took good care of creating individual silhouettes for those creatures, so they could be easily recognized in the heat of battle and when you think of the special infected as carnivore animals, we get a diverse assortment of deadly predators.



From left to right: Charger, Hunter, Spitter, Jockey.

**Charger**, like his name hints at, charges towards the player to attack him. He puts his right side forward and starts to run, crushing everything in his path. His combat technique is asymmetrical and so is his appearance. His right side is swollen and heavy and his legs are thick and strong, so you can believe that he can build up quite some momentum. His right side is also crusted with a rock-like structure, making his ramming arm and shoulder virtually unbreakable. His left arm is small and thin, like he never used it. Along with the crust, this appears as if the Charger would be doing his juggernaut attack all his life already. His bib pants' strap on the right side is popped open, which emphasizes his suddenly swollen right section more than for example a damaged shirt would.

**Hunter** use stealth to prey on his victims. His strategy is by far the most advanced from the special infected, demanding planning and patience. His hoodie hides his face, like he is hiding in the shadows. His clothing is dark, so he becomes barely visible in the darkness. His pants are customized using duct tape, which hints at a rest of intelligence and strategic thinking.

**Spitter** is puking corrosive acid all over the place. The acid is colored in a cartoonish bright neon green, which even makes her skin glimmer in a light green glowing tint. Her mouth area is a wide open gap, burned by the acid, she is barfing. Her breast and her stomach are dangling sacks, as if the acid melted her inner body and her skin now only serves as a reservoir for the toxic green liquid. A bra is meant to keep everything from hanging and now supports the visual of her dangling skin bags.

**Jockey** jumps on the backs of survivors and rides them, while biting ferociously into the shoulder and neck area of his prey. He is a small creature, so survivors would be able to carry his weight. His hunchback references, how his victims

look, when he rides them. His arms are roughly the same length as his legs and his hands are very big. So, he is not only able to cling onto his victims back, but also his physical appearance resembles a monkey. His cut off jeans and the worn out tank top articulate his arms, legs and hunchback.



**From left to right:** Tank, Witch, Boomer, Smoker.

**Tank** is the big hulking mutant from the bunch. He is all about punching, smashing and throwing things. Basically all action happens in his upper body section. Even when walking, he moves forward using his long oversized arms, like a gorilla. His upper body muscles are so swollen, his neck, head and hands are buried under them, accentuating the unnatural transformation. His legs are of no particular interest, and so his pants and shoes are intact. His upper body section, on the other hand, gets fully displayed, by him being completely shirtless. Note how the Charger's asymmetrical body makes both big guys easily distinguishable.

**Witch** is a walking fly trap. She lures humans close to her, by pretending to be a scared and hurt girl in need of help and comfort. When you get to close and get her attention, she enters a vicious rage mode, biting, scratching and slashing. Her sobbing and crying makes her appear vulnerable, and so is her visual appearance. Thin, weak looking, half naked, wet and dirty, cowering in corners... her look supports the overall fragile character, she wants us to see in her. And the fact that her body is not as damaged as other zombies are, allows us to believe that she is still human.

**Boomer** works like a land mine. You get to close and he explodes. He damages nearby survivors with a strong shock wave and spurts of green acid, akin to the substance the Spitter is gushing out. His clothing shows mostly his bloated belly, while giving less attention to the chest section and lower body. His skin is covered in giant blisters, threatening to burst every second, adding another hint at his way of attacking.

**Smoker** are attacking by lashing their tongue around their victims neck and choking them. The big tentacle tongue grows out of their face, beneath heaps of boiling blisters. These blisters burst and release smoke, hence the name Smoker. The rest of his body is of no interest and covered in clothing.

L4D2 features very thought out creatures, which are more like different species, than just simple variations of zombie mutations. And therefore L4D2 features the most diverse zombie line-up in a game yet. Designers should also take note of all the tiny details, that enhanced the individual features of each zombie species. The human characters are a bold move against prominent game hero conventions and the game still sold. I hope you found this analysis of the characters and creatures of L4D2 insightful and take some inspiration from it.

See ya.

## 8 THOUGHTS ON "CHARACTER DESIGN: LEFT 4 DEAD 2"



millena mota

on **March 28, 2013 at 3:08 pm** said:

essa with é foda né ela tem uma unha grande se eu quase morro com uma imagina com 52 numa sala só um se vocês pesquisarem fotos do left 4 dead 2 with vocês vão ver o tanto de with ne uma sala para passar de fase é o 1 tem o 2 o 3 o 4 o meu é o 1 bjs obrigada por sua compartilhacao em ler esse comentário



admin

on **March 28, 2013 at 3:12 pm** said:

Hey, okay, that was portuguese, I guess. Well, tha's what google says, you said:

"this is fucking with her right has a large nail if I almost die with a 52-imagines a room only one if you pesquisarem photos of

left 4 dead 2 with you will see both of ne with a room to spend the first phase is has the 2 3 or 4 is my first bjs compartilhacao thanks for your reading this comment.”

Feel free to try it yourself in english. Cheers.



Afmdiniz  
on **July 12, 2013 at 11:55 pm** said:

dood, even i cant understand what he said! (i am from brazil and i speak portuguese too).  
lets say he feel scared about the witch's desing... (he's portuguese is terrible, even google cant translate that shit)



maxwell  
on **January 2, 2013 at 5:10 am** said:

lool i never really paid attention to spitters titties any way in the picture jocky stands next to tank so in the first picture on the top you see alot of tank and on the bottom one you see alittle of jocky.



corey  
on **August 17, 2012 at 10:51 am** said:

i want to make a zombie



cptjacksparrow  
on **May 24, 2012 at 6:31 pm** said:

You say left4dead2 does use racial stereotypes because both rochelle and coach say the word ass and shit a whole lot.



Nino Aguilar  
on **October 8, 2011 at 11:15 pm** said:

love your break down of their design! pointing out the subtleties of their clothing to compliment and hide importances of their function has been really insightful!



Anjin Anhut  
on **October 9, 2011 at 12:18 am** said:

Hey there.  
Glad you dig. Thanks for dropping by.