

RESIDENT EVIL 2

GENRE(S): Survival horror

AVAILABLE ON: GameCube, Nintendo 64, PC, PlayStation, Sega Dreamcast

DEVELOPED BY: Capcom, Angel Studios (N64)

PUBLISHED BY: Capcom

RELEASED: August 6, 1998

Resident Evil was Capcom's most critically acclaimed and commercially successful game of the decade. The development of a sequel began immediately after its completion, coinciding with the founding of Capcom Production Studio 4, with director Shinji Mikami appointed as its manager. Much to his own dismay when it came to *Resident Evil 2*, Mikami had to step to the sidelines and take on the role of main producer to avoid overworking himself, and *Resident Evil* planner Hideki Kamiya was brought in to make his directorial debut. Mikami and Kamiya's conflicting visions of the game reached the point that *Resident Evil 2* became one of the first games to take a brief dive in what we call development hell. Bordering on outright cancellation after the nearly completed project was trashed under Mikami's orders, the media and fans kind of lost faith in the sequel. *Resident Evil 2* finally hit the shelves in the late summer of 1998, and it seems Mikami and Kamiya found harmony in the end, because *Resident Evil 2* is not just the perfect sequel, but perhaps the best traditional survival horror game in history, and one of the defining moments of the original PlayStation.

Kids, back in those ye olde times, Internet wasn't an everyday thing – it was a precious commodity you could pretty much use only in schools and libraries unless your family was a good notch above the average variety of single parents working overtime just to get butter on everyone's bread. Most parents of all varieties – except professionals of the trade, of course – knew even less about the Internet than we did, we had to take courses in school where they taught you how to search for dog breeds in Altavista (the ancient equivalent of Google). Well, I searched for only one canine breed, and that was Cerberus from *Resident Evil*. I spent *every single precious minute* of my short time on the net to search for new tidbits of

information on *Resident Evil 2*. When they announced the project had been started from scratch even though monthly previews of the game had been pouring in for who knows how long, I wasn't disappointed. On the contrary, I was even more excited. As long as they didn't cancel it, I felt safe and fine. Why? 'Cause I didn't actually own a PlayStation at the time. I had no fear; I was convinced that if everything I'd already seen was actually horrible and had to be thrown in the trash in the wake of something much better, *Resident Evil 2* was going to be the best game in the world, and, if luck was on my side, maybe I'd have a PlayStation when it finally came out.

Luck was two thirds there; when *Resident Evil 2* came out – under a year after its “cancellation” - a friend borrowed the game to me, but I had to borrow the PlayStation itself from another source. The thing is, a memory card wasn't part of either one of these deals. Perhaps thanks to my extensive knowledge of the first game, I still managed to beat the game – or at least two parts of a four part game, that is. After many deaths in the hands of the final bosses of each. How could I possibly muster up the energy to play through a game that many times during a single week? I don't know, but I do know this: I just love shooting people in the face with a shotgun. I think I answered my own question there. I LOVED *Resident Evil 2*. I loved it beyond all comprehension of my more mature self. Well, not all – I still love it. It's lost a lot of its beauty and original appeal – yes, the remake plays a part in that, I'd be lying if I didn't admit it – but it's still a fuckin' banger in comparison to 99% of original PlayStation titles. Shooting the heads off four or five polygon zombies with a customized shotgun was a gas back then, it's a gas 28 years later.

Right now, before delving deeper into this masterpiece of horror, I'd like to make a fleeting point that the reviewed iteration is the *DualShock Version* of the game, just to inform you that one exists; I refuse to use analog controls, and there is no Advanced Mode like in *Resident Evil – Director's Cut*, there's just an additional “very easy” mode available, and also the “Extreme Battle” mode which is the same as the Survivor modes in the original, and is likewise unlocked after the first playthrough. This version of the game is available for free to all PSN users who own a PS5, in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the franchise. Why I'm playing this instead of the original is because my original copy of *Resident Evil 2* is

quite fucked up, it works of course, but probably not in the way it's meant to.

Over the course of one night, two months after the mansion incident on its outskirts, Raccoon City itself turns into hell on earth as Umbrella Inc.'s T-Virus spreads over the city like wildfire. A motorcycle-riding tomboy named Claire Redfield arrives in the city late at night in search of her brother Chris, who she hasn't heard from in quite some time. Meanwhile, a new recruit at the Raccoon City Police Department, named Leon S. Kennedy, arrives to his new workplace to find it infested with zombies. Claire and Leon team up to survive the viral outbreak, search for other survivors and escape the city.

Graphically, the game is virtual miles ahead of its predecessor from every possible viewpoint. The environments are naturally more varied, since we're switching to a much larger area to begin with, the characters have more actual face – ugly and emotionless mugs, of course, but at least we can consistently make out their features – and I think the most important factors here are general balance and contrast. It's still a good-looking game, and when it comes to the cutscenes, the doll-ish CGI matters none when you think what would've happened if they brought back the live-action FMV's from the first one. There's much more dialogue in this game since there are more human characters, and the most important parts of the story gain a bit more depth and a lot more cinematic feel when they switch from the gameplay graphics to the CGI.

...More dialogue, huh? You guessed it: that's one area where the leap forward is the shortest one. The voice acting isn't quite as rancid as before – the actors even use their own names, and they've done other work – but there are still some hilarious moments that make you wish you could pause the game during dialogue, because you'll either be laughing too hard, or just thinking too hard to hear what comes next. I don't have any actual favourites here that come to mind, but the character of Sherry Birkin is a small kid in a survival horror game, that pretty much says it all about her. Oh, and of course, Leon's repeated line: "ADA, WAIT!" This one's really mind boggling, because nearly every time Ada separates from Leon, she's standing less than two feet away from him, then starts to run in the opposite direction. Leon just stands

there, reaches out his hand and says "ADA, WAIT!" Why doesn't he just grab her by the arm or something? Or run after her? Can a chick in high heels and such a tight dress really outrun a police officer? I tell you, the state of law enforcement these days... that reminds me of another one. "You're a cop, right?" asks Claire, who's sitting right next to Leon, fully dressed in uniform, in a cop car. My guess is as good as hers. OK, in all honesty, I could write a whole book about these, but we don't have time for that right now. Let's check on what they actually did better, and what *Resident Evil 2* is all about as an individual game.

The basics look the same. You play as either Leon or Claire. This time, you don't pick one from the menu, you instead use their disc. Disc 1 is Leon, Disc 2 is Claire, and the main reason why each character has their own disc is something I'll return to in just a few clicks, but let me say this much right now: there's no "easy mode" here. Claire has the lockpick stamped outside of the main inventory as did Jill, but this time also Leon has a special item, the lighter (which is quite funny since it's a well-established lore fact that Leon doesn't smoke, Chris at least did and he didn't have one, God damn it). Neither character has an actual advantage over the other. So, it's all a matter of preference this time? On the absolute fucking contrary. And here's why there are two discs: Leon and Claire's starting games (A and B) are completely different from each other. The weapons are different, the puzzles are different, the key items are different, the bosses are different, and finally, both characters have their own major subplots which heavily involve their companions and the other different characters they meet along the way.

So, let's say we're playing Claire first, that makes the starting game "Claire A". After the end credits roll, you are prompted to start a game called "Leon B". The A and B scenarios take place at the same time – you will question logic a lot of times especially during the B run, but that's beside the point – and the B scenario is always the harder one, the "Chris Mode" for you fans of the original, regardless of the character. After playing both scenarios, you will unlock an extra character and his very own game mode, but let's talk about that nearer the end. You'll be prompted to switch things around for Leon and Claire – if we started playing Claire first, now we should try Leon first and Claire second. In short, the main game consists of a total of four scenarios. It's not quite as simple this time.

Also, not quite as simple as the last time around is the gallery of enemies. Yeah, zombies are around a plenty, and I do mean plenty. Lickers replace Hunters, and man, these bastards know how to make an entrance. Not only are they scary as fuck to begin with all the way to their gravelly gargle, but they can kill you with just a couple of licks from their tongues – my brother used to call these guys "Gene Simmons" before their codename was officially revealed – if they're close and precise enough. Luckily there is one weapon, or more specifically, a certain type of ammo that can one-shot these fuckers. The bosses range from a giant sewer alligator to different abominations spawned from just one drop of the new G-Virus, to a colossal, seemingly immortal stoic barbarian in a trenchcoat, who is also a fan of big entrances. He is called Mr. X, or the Super Tyrant, and he exists to make you crap your pants.

If you in any way consider the game itself an easy ride or yourself a seasoned *Resident Evil* fan, then the additional game modes are just for you. The 4th Survivor, unlocked by hacking through any A and B combination, adds a new character to the mix; an Umbrella special agent codenamed HUNK, in an ultra-difficult survival mission where your goal is to make it from the sewers to the R.P.D. roof with limited resources and naturally, through a whole truck full of the worst of the worst the main game has to offer. Tofu Survivor is basically the same mission, but you play as a walking block of tofu – Japanese humour at its best. To unlock this, you need to play through a total of six scenarios of your preference, in a row, in under two and a half hours each, with an A ranking from each – ouch.

An old acquaintance of mine said it best when I was struggling with my final words on *Resident Evil 2* back in the days of the original VGMania: "*Resident Evil 2* was the life and death of survival horror. There will never be another game as genuinely scary and action-packed at the same time." Well, perhaps he spoke prematurely, although I do agree that the balance of the original article is something horror game developers haven't quite been able to replicate since. *Resident Evil 2* is a true 32-bit masterpiece.

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