

RESIDENT EVIL : DOUBLE FEATURE

| RESIDENT EVIL | RESIDENT EVIL – DIRECTOR'S CUT |
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| GENRE(S): Survival horror | GENRE(S): Survival horror |
| AVAILABLE ON: PC, <u>PlayStation</u> , Sega Saturn | AVAILABLE ON: <u>PlayStation</u> |
| DEVELOPED BY: Capcom | DEVELOPED BY: Capcom |
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30 years ago, both yours truly and his perception of video games changed drastically. As I was already a fan of the horror genre in the world of movies at the tender age of 12, but completely oblivious to how interactive horror worked – I was not into PC games, I read a lot about 'em though – *Resident Evil* undoubtedly blew my mind. Not only was *Resident Evil* the first survival horror game to see worldwide release on a console, it was the first PlayStation game I ever got my hands on. It turned my world around in about 17 and a half ways. The incredible graphics and the genuine horror elements of this one game were just the beginning of my transition from a Nintendo kid to a full-blown PlayStation fanboy. Just a year and a half after the original, Capcom released *Resident Evil – Director's Cut*, which was produced as an apology to the fans for the outrageous delay of a true sequel; some technical improvements were made and the content of the game was shuffled up a little bit, but it was basically the same game, and wasn't planned for any higher purpose than that. As years have gone by, both versions of the original game have been lost in time and memory, as the remake eventually came and pretty much swept the floor with them, but let's pretend we only have these two to choose from. In that case, *Resident Evil – Director's Cut* is the better choice for numerous reasons, and I'll tell you what I can, but for that – as well as out of respect for the product – we need a review of the very original *Resident Evil* as well. So, in commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the greatest and longest-running survival horror franchise of all time: here's a double feature. We'll start by going all the way back to the beginning, and this was actually my first run of the unbridled original game in 29 years.

The game's production began as far back as 1993 on the SNES, some time after *Alone in the Dark* had made its debut on home computer systems. As just about everyone even slightly knowledgeable about the history of *Resident Evil* knows, the original script was adapted from an earlier Capcom title, *Sweet Home*, which was loosely based on a Japanese horror film of the same name, and released only in Japan. The game's creator Tokuro Fujiwara considered "remaking" the game himself, but instead, he passed the duty on to young designer Shinji Mikami, who had previously worked on Capcom's Disney-related products. According to Fujiwara, Mikami understood horror better than him, and knew exactly what to do to scare players shitless. He wasn't wrong there.

In 1994, development of the game moved from a 16- to a 32-bit environment, allowing Fujiwara and Mikami to trade ideas for a dynamic 3D environment similar to that of *Alone in the Dark*. So, what we had here was a 3D mansion all set for exploration. What they needed now was a story, and a set of playable characters. This is where they ultimately took a drastic turn to sever the rest of the game's direct ties to *Sweet Home*. Narrowing the game's playable characters down to two – after playing around with a similar team of five as in *Sweet Home* – they decided to create each character their own unique scenario, each of which features the respective character all alone, with a sidekick to occasionally help them out, but spending most of their time taking care of themselves somewhere else. Well, to make it in this most evil residence in the world, you'll have to have *some* combat skills, right? Right. So this is not a film crew here. They're not here for fun. They're an elite police unit, forced into a predicament they're not trained for – in other words, they can defend themselves, but it would help them to understand what they're defending themselves against.

So, in 1996, producer Fujiwara and director Mikami welcomed us to *Biohazard*, which went on to be globally known as *Resident Evil*, due to some trade issues with a certain shitty American band. The game was a massive hit, a horror masterpiece if you will, and even its flaws are considered the stuff of legends; its voice acting in particular is hilarious cult stuff you simply cannot get enough of. Yet... (see what I did

there?) ...with *Director's Cut* in existence, I simply must address some technical issues which don't necessarily render the original completely unplayable, but at the very least extremely frustrating in comparison to the 1997 re-release. We'll talk about them later, though. First, let's go over the basics of *Resident Evil* – those who came in late, pay attention. This is how we rolled back in '96.

S.T.A.R.S. (Special Tactics and Rescue Service), a hand-picked team of elite operatives within the Raccoon City Police Department, is dispatched to investigate a string of brutal, cannibalistic murders on the outskirts of Raccoon City. Bravo Team heads in first; when all contact with them is lost, Alpha Team follows their tracks to the dark and dense Raccoon Forest, where they are attacked by a pack of rabid dogs. The helicopter pilot panics and flees the scene, leaving the four survivors of the attack – marksman Chris Redfield, B&E specialist Jill Valentine, weapons specialist Barry Burton and captain Albert Wesker – to seek shelter in a large mansion shrouded by the trees, which is unfortunately occupied by flesh-eating zombies and other monsters. As the survivors seek the means to escape the area altogether, they slowly uncover the truth behind the horrors around them, involving a well known pharmaceutical company and their secret biological experiments.

You play as either Chris Redfield or Jill Valentine, and this is far from a question of preference. By all means, Jill's scenario is the "easy mode" of this game. With Jill, you have immediate access to better weapons and more resources, item management is easier – Jill has two extra slots in her inventory, which have just got to be her bra cups – she has a more useful partner, and it's even possible to skip certain segments of the game without punishment, if you know what, how and when to do that. Jill even has her own special item locked down outside her main inventory. It's the lockpick – since she's the "master of unlocking" - which grants her said immediate access to resources, and allows her to make progress faster since she doesn't need all the keys to make her way through the mansion.

Both characters work towards the same endgame following the same path, but their stories play out very differently. In the beginning of Chris' game, Barry goes missing, soon followed by both Jill and Wesker. In

Jill's game, Chris goes missing, followed by Wesker, while Barry stays by Jill's side, however takes off in the opposite direction for efficiency, and meets up with his comrade from time to time to offer his aid in various ways – for example, taking care that Jill doesn't turn into a Jill sandwich. I've just got to throw these in randomly, I can't help myself. It's not just the dialogue that's rancid, it's the way these guys interpret it. So, Chris is all alone, for a while. He soon bumps into a Bravo Team survivor, a medic named Rebecca Chambers, who has her own special traits, but isn't quite as thoroughly useful as Barry.

By the first look and feel, suffice to say that *Resident Evil* has aged surprisingly well. I don't get people's hatred towards tank controls. Back in the time, everyone in my school played *Resident Evil*. Sure, we were a few years short from the age rating, but who the fuck cared? Not our parents, that's for sure. Hell, my stepdad walked in this one time and caught me in the middle of the most violent and close-up headshot you can get in this game, laughed and said "good job". Well, as I was saying before I got sidetracked, there were some guys who said the game would be good if it wasn't for those damn clunky controls. It was not just the tank movement, there were some guys who would've preferred to fire weapons or use the knife with just one button. OK, today these are fair beefs to have, I admit that, but in that time, the controls for movement gave the game even more unique character than it already had, and they were easy to learn. As for having to use the shoulder button to aim, and a face button to fire, that was just fucking cool and comfortable. It gave you unique control over combat, unlike any action game that came before. Unfortunately, this here's the bridge that takes us to the point where the original game fails.

The camera is absolutely horrible. There's an extreme amount of blind spots and angles spread across the whole game at the most inconvenient locations, at the most inconvenient times – usually meaning you have the more advanced monsters on your tail. Zombies aren't that bad; they make a lot of noise, they're slow, and can't hide around corners very well. Dogs and Hunters can. Hunters show up in the game quite late, and luckily you don't have to deal with them very long, but the thing about these fuckers... let's say you're caught in one of these blind angles, and you hear a Hunter's footsteps, but simply cannot see the creature, not even after stepping directly in its line of vision. You are given a millisecond of time to react

when it starts running, and pray to God your precious heavy bullet hits. Why pray? Don't we have automatic aim? Take a guess. I'll spoil it for you: no. When this feature was originally introduced, I thought it was shit, the most useless thing ever, but now, going back to this particular title, suffering too many one-shots from those scaly-ass motherfuckers, and wasting tons of all sorts of ammunition due to the camera fucking me up the ass in all sorts of situations, proves that classic *Resident Evil* just doesn't work without auto-aim.

Another thing exclusively wrong with the original game is the lighting, including the complete absence of highlighting. The characters stick out like sore thumbs against the pre-rendered environment. Well, at least we can see THEM clearly. However, interactive objects are completely lost in the background, and even me, who has beaten this game – or at least the re-release – something like a hundred times, not once in little over a decade though, finds himself sucking his thumb trying to figure out how to solve this or that puzzle, since obviously there's something "missing" from the room. It ain't missing. You just can't see it. Same indeed goes for the lack of any type of item highlighting. I dare say there's something hidden in nine out of ten rooms in the game, but to find that hidden something, you need to walk around the whole damn room, and keep mashing the action button, 'cause chances are you don't see shit. The underground cave leading up to the final lab is the absolute worst. It looks confusing to begin with, the passages and doors are so God damn hard to see as it is, and the boulder sequences are such nightmares that almost had me give up on this run. Well, they kinda did, since I only beat the game using Jill, but I decided that to keep hold of some degree of sanity, I should move on to the *Director's Cut* and "continue" from there, as Chris.

Time has treated many aspects of *Resident Evil* well – for example, I thought the loading would telegraph the jump scares a little too obviously, luckily I was wrong – but not the most important ones. It's largely a frustrating drag, and what frustrates the most about it, is the lack of those trivial, tiny, teeny-weeny, almost atomic tweaks it would need to retain its original shine. But, the fact remains, that if your plan is to marathon every *Resident Evil*, any version of the 2002 remake simply doesn't cut it. It's a game you

must play, for sure, and I'll be sure to tell you why very, very soon, but you know nothing about *Resident Evil* before playing some version of the original game. ...And that is where the *Director's Cut* is pretty much your only choice.

7.3

As stated earlier, *Resident Evil – Director's Cut* was mainly an apology to expecting fans. *Resident Evil 2* had been in production for a good while and was slated for release in the summer of 1997, but Shinji Mikami dumped the whole project just months before completion and had his team start from scratch, because he found the prototype altogether dull and unimaginative. The first game was then taken under some repairs in accordance to community feedback to tide fans over for a few more months. While some critics and fans immediately shrugged the game off as a cash-in attempt, and some genuinely didn't like the subtle changes, the simple truth is that *Resident Evil – Director's Cut* is better than the original game. Or should I say, it's the whole package.

The game – or compilation if you will – consists of three different modes. Standard Mode is the original game, with some technical improvements – the camera angles are still shit, though. Training Mode offers the same content but with a notably easier difficulty level. Advanced Mode is the actual *Director's Cut* version, and it is best described as "*Resident Evil Plus*". It's the same game, just bigger, harder, and even a bit faster.

Before this gets all about repeating myself, let's cut to the chase. Let's start with the audiovisuals. The camera angles are completely changed in numerous areas, mostly towards something much more sensical. The contrast between light and dark, as well as the balance between polygon graphics and the pre-rendered backgrounds is so much better. All interactive items are easier to spot. Sidetracking a bit speaking of those interactive items; if you happen to stumble on another re-release dubbed the

"DualShock Version", just leave the analog control be. It's a nightmare, especially when it comes to having to push something. DualShock brings absolutely no extra value to tank control-based gameplay in a fixed environment. Then to the sound... although there's no completely new dialogue, the game progresses in a different order, and pretty much leads you to alternative scenes that were not part of the original's natural course. For example, Chris' discovery of Richard after the latter's run-in with that "huge monster" – which I never remember witnessing in the original – is just legendary stuff, even more delicious vocal diarrhea than Jill's better known meeting with poor Richard. Since I already mentioned it, let it be known that the *DualShock Version* actually features a re-recorded musical score as well, but that's all I will say about that complete unnecessary.

The puzzles are still all the same, but almost every key item in the game is found somewhere else than usual, which naturally correlates to the order of things, especially in the case of Chris, who doesn't have the lockpick to get by slightly faster from the get-go. All in all, I would say Jill's scenario is about just as difficult as Chris' was in the original game. The exact same workarounds are still available to her at all times they're possible to exploit.

On to the best part: auto-aim. If you're not into the item shuffling and other in-game advances of the actual re-release, and are determined to beat the game as it was, you'll be damn glad to know that auto-aim is included in each version of the game found on this disc. If you read the first part of this double feature, you'll know I'm not just talking about changes to difficulty level here, I'm mostly talking about the camera angles. There are a few spots in the game I could name as specific impossibilities to survive without getting your head slapped right off your shoulders before you can yell "rape", or wasting at least one or two precious bullets without auto-aim. In the Advanced Mode, these spots in particular play out much easier with the benefits of the new angles and the auto-aim combined, but it's all balanced out by higher damage taken from standard enemies throughout the line. Plus, the zombies occasionally gain these "speed boosts", especially when they appear in packs, and it seems that also, the more cramped the environment is, the more likely they are to suddenly "jump" or "float" towards you. Scary stuff. Even for a

veteran.

In retrospect, *Resident Evil – Director's Cut* is a true PlayStation classic, and I'll admit that by including a version of the original game, slightly improved in the right places, on this same disc, Capcom made sure we would never forget about that one either. The re-release was the perfect snack to tide us over for the masterpiece that was to come, and once again, even though the remake ended up wiping all floors of the mansion on both versions, there's still something delightfully itchy and tasty about this old school trailblazer.

8.5