

RESIDENT EVIL 4

GENRE(S): Third-person shooter, Survival horror

AVAILABLE ON: GameCube, Nintendo Switch, PC, PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Wii, Xbox 360, Xbox One

DEVELOPED BY: Capcom

PUBLISHED BY: Capcom

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Resident Evil 4 entered development as early as 1999. If *Resident Evil 2* was once stuck in development hell, *Resident Evil 4* brought the term to a whole new level. Production was started over a total of four times, at least that's the number we know of. The most famous draft is the one Hideki Kamiya made first; Shinji Mikami liked it, but told Kamiya to make a whole new IP based on it because its tone was so far from the source material; thus, *Devil May Cry* was born. Mikami ended up working the final draft himself, ditching the more faithful concepts in the between because he felt the "old" *Resident Evil* filled with jumpscares and zombies had run its course. He wrote a whole new story revolving around a fan favourite character to establish an immediate connection to the classics, but opted for a dark, grotesque, fast-paced, action-packed third-person shooter instead of a straight-up horror game. It could've been a catastrophe, but let's just say there's a damn good reason this Nintendo GameCube exclusive not only came home to the PlayStation 2 just a few months into its original release – as a heavily revamped version – but it was re-released on every major home console in some form up until 2019, when it last arrived on the Nintendo Switch. *Resident Evil 4* might not be the most definitive *Resident Evil* game in the traditional sense, but it is still one of the greatest and definitely most influential video games ever made.

The reviewed item is the PlayStation 4 version, which is identical to the PlayStation 2 version save for the HD upscaling and a more modern control setup. There are no quality-of-life "cheats" or shortcuts here, this is the genuine product that I chose just because it's easier on the eyes, and since I have beaten the original for about a million times and know this game inside out, I thought it'd be nice to get some Trophies for my troubles. I use the term "troubles" very lightly here, because the magic of this game

hasn't gone anywhere. I can sincerely say I like the original version more than the 2023 remake.

Six years have passed since the destruction of Raccoon City and Umbrella Inc. has been put out of business for good. Former police officer Leon S. Kennedy, who was one of the few to survive, has since undergone extensive training as an FBI special agent working directly for the President of the United States. When the President's daughter Ashley goes missing, Leon is assigned for search and rescue. He follows Ashley's trail to a small village in rural Spain, and is overrun by hostile locals who are seemingly possessed to prevent him from accomplishing his task or merely leaving the village alive.

Back to the days I bought the PlayStation 2. I had just recently finished *Resident Evil Code: Veronica X* and then I heard that the final draft of *Resident Evil 4* had finally been completed, after the longest shuffle ever, and it was coming... but only for the Nintendo GameCube. It took many, many long years for the *Resident Evil* remake and *Resident Evil 0* to make it out of the GameCube purgatory, so you can't mock me for losing my shit back then, there was nothing that would've indicated a possible release of *Resident Evil 4* on the PlayStation 2. I kinda applauded Nintendo for the golden opportunity they finally had to break out of the family-friendly mold that had been their curse for the longest time, but I had no intention of jumping camp and I was furious at the same time. Just literally days before the game's release, Capcom revealed that their "exclusive" deal with Nintendo didn't include the *Resident Evil* franchise, and a PlayStation 2 port, complete with an extra single-player scenario, was already in development. I guess Shinji Mikami himself wasn't fully aware of the company's plans for his product – he was so pissed off he ended up leaving Capcom after fulfilling his contract. Well, there were certainly millions if not billions of extremely (trigger-)happy PlayStation 2 owners when this sick puppy of a game finally fell into our hands.

Resident Evil 4 ditches the old tank controls and fixed camera for the sake of a dynamic over-the-shoulder view and aiming system seen in oh, so many fabulous games since, including every consequent *Resident Evil* game and remake of an old one, except for those with their main focus on first-person – but that's jumping ahead quite a bit. It should be said right away that although *Resident Evil 4* is all about fast-

paced, relentless action, it doesn't mean the horror is all gone. The story, the general tone of the game, the level design, all of these start to remind you more of classic *Resident Evil* the deeper you get into the game. And yes, of course, all of it is much more connected to the old lore than the game would initially have you think; it just delivers one punch at a time, as a perfectly paced game should. After you're done with figuring out how this game works, that's the time to start connecting the dots, little by little. Thankfully we already have a familiar guy leading the way... although he's changed quite a bit from his days as a dumb rookie who couldn't even chase down a girl in high heels. Nope, I'll never forget that.

Leon is now armed with an incredible physique, a formidable set of varying combat skills and an even more impressive deck of cheesy one-liners, all of which come together creating the icon of a man he is today among the *Resident Evil* community. The game is split into several chapters spread across a total of three completely different areas. Your primary mission, as Leon, is to find the President's daughter, deal with her kidnappers who are the just about the craziest redneck cult you've ever seen, and find the means to escape – since it's a *Resident Evil* game, the way you came in is never the way out. Your enemies, again, are not mindless zombies; the common villagers are living, breathing human beings with the abilities to strategize and coordinate. However, since their tricks are quite easy to learn, the game chucks new types of environments and enemy types your way at a solid pace. Just some quick examples include high priests with steel masks that protect them from headshots, big guys that have stellar hearing, Wolverine-like razor claws and just one weak spot to compensate for their lack of eyesight, and of course, the famous chainsaw guys heavily featured in most of the promotional art related to the game – what's funny though, they aren't seen all that often, nor do they have any special significance to the plot. Of course there are actual monsters as well; the further you get, the less humans you will encounter on your journey through these cursed lands.

To say it like I would imagine Barry Burton in his 1996 prime: "your weapons are your best weapons". The game's action sequences are all about dealing with massive hordes of enemies. Trash-talking ain't gonna help, although Leon seems to think so; the only language these guys understand beyond their very

limited Spanish vocabulary is the universal language of firepower. Mastering precision in shooting is the single most important key to your success in this game. There is no auto-aim, this is all up to you. Headshots are the classic way to go, of course, but you can also shoot enemies' legs to keep them from moving for a brief time, or their hands to disarm them. You can use the environment to your advantage, and a swift roundhouse kick to a stunned opponent is often almost as good for crowd control as a well-aimed shotgun blast or a timely placed hand grenade. By pressing and holding L1, you switch to your combat knife. As always, it usually ain't worth shit in combat, but it's a good tool to vandalize the environment; there are a lot of crates and barrels to loot for money, ammo and consumables. At long last, you can reload your weapon on the go, and won't have to check in to the inventory to be able to time it well; actually, you can't reload your weapon in the inventory screen at all.

The inventory went through the most major overhaul from the days of classic *Resident Evil*, however this was to be a one-time deal after all. Instead of six to eight slots, we have a small suitcase that can be manually arranged to take in more small stuff that can initially be fitted in there. There's a total of four different sizes of these cases, which can eventually be bought from the merchant known as, well, the Merchant; a legend in his own right. This guy sells you weapons, buys off any valuable treasures you might find along the way, and happily tunes up your existing array of guns into deadly tools of genocide. He's also in charge of Target Practice, a recurring shooting gallery minigame where you can win collectable Bottle Caps, and through them, some extra money. The minigame's seriously quite damn good, and particularly beneficial practice if you suck at aiming.

Resident Evil 4 isn't wholly devoid of puzzles, but there are a very few of them, and there's no punishment in any of them involved. You can try anything without the poison gas of old, and since the key items take up their very own place outside your main inventory, you can pretty much guess which goes where – and if you can't, then the game just bluntly tells you to use this or that item. This game is all about the brawn, not the brains. And this is one fine bridge to the lame parts.

Although the game remains a sharpened axe to the face after all these years, there's no denying there's a blunt side to it as well, and that's its often criticized use of Quick Time Events. Starting out as an occasional quick setpiece to keep players on their toes, and featuring quite well in a fun homage to the first *Resident Evil* film, the frustration with these reaches its absolute peak in an endgame sequence that is basically a long, unskippable cutscene and a one-shot boss fight at the same time. I'm not kidding when I say my brother – who absolutely loved the game itself and it was easily his franchise favourite – hated QTE so much he nearly rage quit the game just because of this one sequence, which literally takes place two to three hours towards the end of the 15-hour game.

Another common criticism regarding *Resident Evil 4* is all about the character Ashley Graham herself, and it saddens me to sign this one as well. In a game *still* partially stigmatized by the franchise's history in bad voiceover work, it really comes as no surprise that particularly a damsel in distress sounds horrible. The worse thing is she never shuts up when she's in danger, be it immediate or passive, and the worst thing is her being around altogether. About a year before *Resident Evil 4*, came *Silent Hill 4: The Room*, and if the developers ever took cues from Konami – I really don't know for sure – they certainly didn't look how escorting Eileen worked out. While Ashley has surprisingly good A.I., she is not immortal, she has a lethal tendency to squat right in front of you even when you're just breaking containers for resources, and yes, she dies from any shot from the player, be it a gunshot or a knife wound.

All versions besides the GameCube original and the Oculus VR version come complete with *Separate Ways*, which is unlocked after you finish the main game once. It's a short, 4- or 5-hour story that plays out in the style of a classic B scenario (or Chris scenario if you prefer), starring Ada Wong on a mission of her own which sheds more light on the plot, establishing the most direct connection with the rest of the *Resident Evil* franchise. It's a good, challenging dessert with its specific kinks; the Merchant shows up, but you can't tune up any of your limited weaponry, and the healing items don't have as much kick. Plus, the final boss fight is just ass, much worse than anything you'll have suffered thus far.

Of course, all the unlockable content from the original is still very much intact as well – including another version of *Mercenaries*, and an arcade-style, short and very difficult minigame again featuring Ada, promptly titled *Assignment Ada*. There's a theater mode, and finally, for the first time in *Resident Evil* history, a New Game+ mode complete with new weapons and the chance to tune up your previous ones beyond their maximum limits. Just one round of this masterpiece ain't enough, you know it and they knew it when they made it. Aside from its enormous difficulty spike at the very end, *Separate Ways* is so good and so important to the franchise lore; you have to at least play that once, if for some very odd reason you end up disliking the game.

Shifting my thought back in time to 2005; *Resident Evil 2* might've been the most balanced one. *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* was the best horror game. *Resident Evil 4* was just about the most overhauled game ever; the most versatile, widely celebrated game in the original franchise even among non-horror fans. It's so damn difficult to explain its greatness, especially to anyone who wasn't there when it first landed. There's never been anything like it, and there never will be. Even with a few cracks in its identity, *Resident Evil 4* is a masterpiece.

9.5