

RESIDENT EVIL

GENRE(S): Survival horror

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

DEVELOPED BY: Capcom, K2 (2014)

PUBLISHED BY: Capcom

RELEASED: March 22, 2002

Resident Evil had been quite the ride by 2002. Capcom had several projects in line, including a live-action film and the fourth main entry in the game series in early development for the Nintendo GameCube. Three of the latest games had already been ported to Nintendo's purple wonder. As for the very first game, Shinji Mikami wanted something quite different, in celebration of the franchise perhaps, but first and foremost he wanted to demonstrate, to himself and others, what his centerpiece could've been to begin with if it had the GameCube's technology backing it up. The next challenge was to make the remake an essential play to both veterans and newbies alike, since two different commercial versions of the original game already existed. Mikami and his very small team conquered obstacle after obstacle to create perhaps one of the greatest video game remakes of all time.

The game sold quite poorly, but unlike its stubborn creators, I'm willing to bet my balls it has a lot more to do with the platform it was released on instead of any other card they drew to step away from survival horror in the future. In 2014, the remake, accompanied by its GameCube-exclusive prequel *Resident Evil 0*, was re-packaged and -released on the PlayStation and Xbox lines as *Resident Evil Origins Collection*, and also separately on the digital platforms. The world was in balance once again, and finally, I could see this game to its end, after a long wait that filled my heart with grudge. Welcome to the renovated Spencer Mansion.

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 – including a specific test subject who lives in the catacombs deep under the mansion grounds.

Let's get the most important question out of the way first. Whether you ever played the original – and/or *Director's Cut* – it really doesn't fucking matter. To us old-timers, it's very clear where this all started from, everything is just so much bigger, and so different. The game was made to mislead, confuse and outright trick *Resident Evil* know-it-alls with a suckerpunch waiting around every corner, and just simply scare the hell out of total newcomers to the franchise as the survival horror experience it was always meant to be, with heavy emphasis on the "survival" part in the beginning of the game where any player, using any character, will most definitely struggle to simply find a way forward, all the while dodging yet another bag of rotting flesh. I do mean "dodging", 'cause it takes quite a while for you to find any damn bullets in this game. Double that if you're a veteran, actually, 'cause we all "know" where to go first. We can't get there. So let's think again. Should I try there? Or there? I can't get anywhere. Well, spoiler alert: if we old bastards want to get somewhere in the game, we should try the new places first.

"This mansion is gigantic! We could easily get lost!" proclaimed one Barry Burton in the original game, and this one's general size, depth and architecture immediately wipes the slate clean and create whole new standards. The main house has always been the most important "level" in this game, and that is why it has absolutely gone through the most changes. The second house is pretty much 1:1 with the original – except for the shark tank which is completely different, you'll see in one of the most panic-inducing

sequences ever experienced in the whole series – and I can't think of any truly essential changes made to the final lab's general blueprints either, but the mansion and whatever's underneath it is very, very different. In addition, you'll also finally be treated to a round trip in the very same woods you saw Alpha Team escape from in the very beginning of the game all the way back in '96. A fenced part of 'em, but still, it's nice to get out for a breath of near-fresh air in a short, but nonetheless all-new level.

We'll continue tearing through the changes in a bit, but let's talk about the characters. The story is pretty much the same – save for a whole new subplot – and even the script of the dialogue is the same, but it's phrased much better, and delivered by much better voice actors that actually sound like the kinds of people they're portraying. No more masters of unlocking or Jill sandwiches here – or rather, yeah, those same lines are basically still here, but they don't sound nearly as dumb. Also, the much more impressive visuals naturally go hand in hand with the voice acting to give these characters much more depth and plausibility they had ever had up to this point.

The basic map of rules for both Chris and Jill still applies. Jill is the beginner's game, and Chris' scenario is much harder for all the same reasons; Jill has more inventory space, easier and faster access to just about everything, including better weapons, and a partner watching over her back in several situations, to the point of enabling her to skip certain puzzles and boss fights. However, this time Chris also has his own perks; whereas Jill gets the lockpick in the beginning of the game as a special item locked outside of her main inventory, Chris has a lighter, which is a much more important item than in the original. Also, Chris has notably more health, and is a better shot, which translates to easier criticals – roughly about 30% of shots to standard zombies from a standard handgun result in splattered brains. Like I pointed out, the very beginning of the game is hard for both characters since it takes a while to find anything useful. Especially for veterans, which is just deliciously ironic.

Since Jill's lockpick doesn't work on the main doors anymore, just some older piece of shit shack doors, both characters need to follow the exact same path throughout the game. There ain't a lot of changes

besides the things Jill can skip and Chris can't, and of course some very brief moments when their respective partners create specific scenes, some of which are unique to the remake. As long as we're talking about scenes unique to the remake, we'll have to mention Lisa Trevor – one of Umbrella's first guinea pigs who starts to haunt both characters at a slow and steady pace after the first round of the mansion is complete. She's best described as a Quasimodo-like tragic creature, a recluse monster with superstrength and some brain activity, however she's completely batshit insane and no longer in touch with reality due to her very long time in captivity. Certain files found from specific locations shed light on her backstory and why she was chosen, and what's best, these files also tell us more about Umbrella in general, as I think their antagonism was always kinda shallow up to this point. Even more files appear that outright connect this game's story to some games made in between such as *Resident Evil 2* and *Code: Veronica*, which is awesome but beside the point – Lisa is a fine addition to this game's many horrors.

Once again aimed at veterans and newbies alike, the other horrors come in many forms. Almost every puzzle in the game is either completely, or partially revised. Also, a choice few of them change a bit on each playthrough, preventing the lazy ones to slack or skip through certain sequences. As for the setpieces – dogs jumping through the window, etc. - not everything happens the way you remembered it. Not even every boss fight takes place where you think, and there are more of them. Assuming this is your first time, there's bound to be backtracking and a LOT of frustration with your inventory limit as you can't safely step anywhere without a certain selection of weaponry and healing items.

You'd wish that the aforementioned only applies to the lingering smell of a boss fight or getting to that one previously unvisited room after so much work. (These usually come in a package, I agree.) However, in this remake, even already defeated zombies can later turn into your worst nightmares – depending on the environment, they can be worse company than Hunters. That is why you're prompted early on to dispose of their bodies, usually by burning. For this, you need a lighter and some gasoline which is found from a few of the save rooms. You can see the problem here, right? Inventory space, that's it. For Chris, it seems only half a problem since he already has the lighter, but he also has two fewer slots than Jill. I think

this idea was probably the worst one the developers had that ended up in the final product, the rest – like invisible enemies – were reserved for the unlockable difficulty modes. In all honesty, I also think it's definitely not necessary to burn the bodies unless you're a beginner in absolutely no rush to beat the game, you don't mind all the backtracking, and you suck at the controls even worse than the average player.

And there it is, the worst thing about the whole game since its conception on the GameCube and all its consequent versions: the controls, and not only them, but the control scheme's unholy matrimony with the wonky, fixed camera. You can absolutely change back to the classic tank controls, no problem, but know this: whenever you're running from enemies, or past them, and trust me when I say you will be doing this a lot, the tank controls make it impossible to survive unscathed. The analog control makes manouvering much easier, but I think I once said they do not work well with a fixed camera, and here's the solid proof. Thankfully, whichever control scheme you choose, you have all sorts of defensive weaponry at your disposal outside of your main inventory. Whenever you get grabbed and have at least one small dagger or flash grenade hanging from your belt, you'll get some breathing room with minimal damage received... but I really don't think the developers added these in to compensate for shitty controls. Or, if they did, I'd really like to have a sitdown with them. But I digress.

Even though it's a remake, it's still an early *Resident Evil* game. It was made before *Resident Evil 4* and from source material that was all about tank control, so we cannot simply go blasting the game without rational thought; it was easily the best product of the franchise in its own time, and on all other accounts, still an absolutely magnificent game at the time of its long-wanted multi-platform release. If they end up doing another remake, that's fine by me and I'll gladly take it, but for now, this 2002 game is the definitive version of the original *Resident Evil*, I'm glad it came along and it can't get any more terrifying than this.

9.0