

RESIDENT EVIL 4

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

AVAILABLE ON: MAC, PC, PlayStation 4, [PlayStation 5](#), Xbox Series X

DEVELOPED BY: Capcom, K2 (PC), M-Two (PC), Buzz (PC), Imagico (PC)

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2019's *Resident Evil 2* remake blew the bank. Not only was it hailed as perhaps the greatest video game remake of all time, it was also widely considered the greatest game in the *Resident Evil* franchise, and credited – together with *Resident Evil VII: Biohazard* – for the revival of classic survival horror. There was only one direction for the *RE2* team to take, and it was to be their most challenging road yet: to completely remake a game that had just been re-released in its original form for the umpteenth time, to reviews nearly as great as ever. How can one improve on the golden standard of third-person shooters, that simply *works* on every level, 18 years after its release? Is it capitalism I smell? Perhaps so, but what choice do I have here? Since it's based on perhaps the greatest game of its generation, there's just no end to my curiosity. ...And I stand amazed. *Resident Evil 4* is marvellous; it's executed just as professionally as the previous remakes, the narrative is vastly improved, it's more of a horror game than the original ever was, and it feels much bigger in every way. Altogether better than the original? Well, that's a really tough call. It's definitely not as impressive and wholesome as the previous remakes, and they went a bit too far with the survival aspects, considering the base nature of the game.

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.

When I heard they were remaking *Resident Evil 4*, I was kinda surprised for a few reasons. If I was in charge, I would've picked *Code: Veronica* as the next dress-up target, 'cause while that game is well appreciated within the *Resident Evil* community and for good reasons, it's still not enjoying the mainstream recognition it deserves. Here we are kinda skipping the game's whole existence, seemingly just because it doesn't have a number, and jumping straight into a game that practically hasn't aged a day as it is, strictly as a game. The narrative of *Resident Evil 4* always needed work, no doubt about it, but it was just the kind of game that fed off its macho energy and no one really cared how it fit into the series or its continuity by ways of storytelling and character behaviour. It was – sorry, is – just such an amazing piece of work. The remake pushes for a more realistic and human, more chaotic, unpredictable, traditional survival horror experience. As it was in the case of *Resident Evil 3*, some memorable parts are completely deleted from the narrative, but all of it is replaced with whole new content. The game clocks in at between 15 to 20 hours at an average playthrough, just like the original, as all three main maps – the village, the castle and the island – are heavily expanded and rearranged.

Let it be known at this point that if you think they fucked up by dropping some of your favourite classic content out, you might want to check out *Separate Ways*. The classic extra scenario returns as paid DLC, and there's plenty of stuff from the original main game that's been re-edited and written into Ada's whole new storyline. Ironically, this DLC version of *Separate Ways* feels like a 100% more integral part of the whole story than the original PlayStation 2 on-disc minigame. The debriefing format of the original narrative is canned, as well as the single and simple objectives for each chapter; instead, *Separate Ways* is like any modern *Resident Evil* game, just shorter. It comes complete with unique features such as Ada's "spy-eye" which she can use to solve certain types of puzzles – a high-tech version of the visualizer used in *Resident Evil 2* – and a grappling gun which she uses to get around faster and as a fancy melée tool. I don't want to talk about *Separate Ways* any further, since it's not part of the retail, but I wanted to take this chance to show my appreciation; even if the base remake fails to capture the old magic from time to time, *Separate Ways* is sincerely a much more satisfying product than its previous iteration.

Back to the beginning. Since the whole gameplay is built on the very same frame that was basically created through the original game in 2005, it must've been so hard for the developers to create an experience as essentially different as the original game. That's where the much more sensical narrative comes in. Leon's truly shocked at everything he sees and experiences, he's humble, brooding, a little insecure and traumatized, and genuinely afraid of not being able to accomplish his mission. He's the polar opposite of his 2005 one-liner-spitting macho machine. Another character that completely differs from her previous version is Ashley Graham. No longer the sniveling, spoiled brat who doesn't even have the skill to climb ladders by herself, Ashley completely understands her predicament and the fact that she has no hope of surviving without Leon. So, she won't be running away from you this time, at least not on purpose. That brings us to what it feels like having her around, gameplay-wise.

This is one of the things they got right. Ashley no longer has her own health meter so you don't have to worry about having to upgrade her stats, it never meant shit anyway. She will still most likely die from any single bullet or misplaced stab from your own end, but when it comes to enemy attacks, she can withstand two consecutive strikes. Before a couple of specific bouts against strong enemies, you can force Ashley out of harm's way by having her hide, but you can't just tackle her into every trashbin you see. She is built different, she's meant to be more of a collaborative partner than just the lost puppy from before. Man, I really love Ashley in this get-up, and I also appreciate the chemistry between her and Leon, something that was practically non-existent in the original game.

To balance it up, let me have some harder stuff off my chest. First of all, the enemies with the more advanced version of the parasite now come in three different forms instead of just one. The first ones show up quite early on; just a faster version of a standard enemy, and then, the classic one with the giant tentacle for a head, but then, a while later, at the most inconvenient of times – specifically a time that was already nightmare fuel back in the day – bigger tentacles that split open into something that resembles a flesh-eating plant. Have just one of these guys lingering too long among a swarm of crazies, make one

mistake, and you're dead. At least the classic flash grenade trick works – and the game bluntly tells you about it! - but the thing is, unless you're playing easy mode, you won't be finding those bangers just lying around all that much. Or anything else, for that matter. This is exactly where the survival element of this here remake takes things a step too far.

The original game was non-stop action without the survival element. What was most essential to keep that game from falling apart was that there was always the proper amount of loot at your disposal, and the variety of it was based on what you had and what you needed. Here, it's the complete opposite at its worst. For the absolute most part, there are five different types of standard field loot in this game: money, herbs, gunpowder, resources and handgun ammo. All other types of ammunition and explosives are extremely rare finds, and you'll need to craft them yourself using said gunpowder and resources. When I mentioned the nightmare fuel before, I was speaking of the notorious water room; all players of the original game know that one all too well. It's the one where you first have to fight your way through a ridiculous army of enemies, then provide Ashley with cover fire as she splits from Leon to raise the platforms from beneath the water so they could continue on. The weapon you almost absolutely need here is the sniper rifle. Even if you can manage without the sniper rifle, your ass is cooked if you run out of bullets, since you cannot even reach the position Ashley is in, much less help it when she's carried away by an enemy. That can happen in this game, unfortunately, and in the worst case, you'll have to start the whole game over. Even more unfortunately, this water room is just one example of a situation where it's perfectly possible to completely run out of bullets with no chance for the slightest refill. And no, this isn't just a problem on the more difficult gameplay levels, it can be a problem on the standard difficulty as well. Needless to say, it would go against my ethics to honor this kind of bullshit by calling it "challenging".

All QTE based setpieces are completely deleted from the game to be loosely integrated into real-time combat. You can use the knife to parry attacks with one button, dodge unblockables with another and stab stunned enemies in the neck to kill them instantly with a third button. While these improvements are basically some of the best modern gameplay the remake has to offer, there are some types of

encounters where the thrill turns into something completely different. A prime example is a boss fight where you're constantly bringing up the menu to whip up yet another batch of decent firepower, then coming back into the game and desperately trying to reload your weapon when the game interrupts you by telling you to dodge. Another even better example came up earlier – try to deal with a horde of enemies when there's one of those head-eaters in the middle. Just one hit is all it takes, regardless of your condition, and it's only avoidable by a hasty parry that sure as shit isn't part of your crowd control pattern.

I'll go to the good stuff once more before I wrap this up along with the whole remake part of the *Resident Evil* marathon, and it all comes down to our beloved Merchant. There's a total of one hundred treasures to find in the game, as well as an undefined number of spinel gems, all of which are of interest to our quite talkative Aussie friend. Starting with the treasures themselves, each one has a base value just like before, but unlike before, you can improve their value by combining jewelry any way you want, you don't need specific jewelry to go with specific items, and by discovering the ultimate combination, you can raise a 20K item's value all the way up to a 100. It takes a bit of patience to find the proper item and that ultimate combo; it's not necessarily very advisable to just sell everything at once. With spinels, you get access to the Merchant's exclusive stock, which is comprised of a variety of stuff ranging from treasure maps to weapon parts you can't get from anywhere else. Since the spinels are very rarely found from the field, the Merchant offers you something you can earn them from: Requests. (Get it? RE Quests. Heh.)

These are derived from the classic medallion hunt of the original game, which repeats here, several times in different locations – in *Separate Ways* as well – but there are also special encounters with ultra-strong enemies, errands which have you collecting and selling specific loot, other seek-and-destroy types of quests besides the medallions and a few special tasks. These are really, really fun side missions, which work wonders to calm down the game's relentless pace. The same goes for the shooting gallery, which has had a massive makeover all the way to the prizes. Instead of the bottle caps that were there just for show, you get charms you can actually attach to your item case to provide you with all sorts of different

perks. You need three tokens for each prize; if you absolutely suck at shooting (which might be a huge problem in the long run, by the way), you can buy gold tokens from the Merchant's exclusive stock, which is of course a very welcome alternative, but the bad news is, that the prizes are completely random, and it is very possible to get something you already have.

Despite heavy problems in a few areas, *Resident Evil 4* is a fantastic game and all because of its impressive size, gameplay mechanics, hugely improved cinematic values, voice acting and stellar graphics it's just as much of a must-have for veterans and more recent franchise fans alike. But, is it as good and fresh as the original upon its arrival? No. Is it friendly? No. A hard, unpredictable game is one thing, but the way the game feeds off its own element of survival, which was not present in the original, is just plain unfair. The repeating threat of an unwinnable state is something we gamers should not have to tolerate in this day and age.

8.5