

**Game Title:** Resident Evil 4 **Platform:** Nintendo Gamecube, PC, Playstation 2, Nintendo Wii **Genre:** Survival Horror **Release Date:** January 11, 2005 **Developer:** Capcom Production 4 Studio **Designers:** Hiroshi Shibata, Koji Kakee, Shigenori Nishikawa **Author:** Steven Hammond

## **Introduction**

Resident Evil is a longstanding series which came on the scene in 1996, and consists of video games, comic books, novels, and movies. Each installment to the series has featured both new and familiar characters with hugely complex back stories detailed in previous games and other more traditional mediums such as novels and comics. Although Resident Evil 4 featured a new look and feel for the game series it stuck with the same mix of old and new characters. Some familiar characters were Leon Kennedy and Ada Wong, as well as bringing back old enemies such as Albert Wesker and Jack Krauser. Although not the complete cast, this section details several of the major characters in Resident Evil 4 because understanding them is important when trying to understand the story in general.

Leon Kennedy never seems to get a break. Six years ago, he was a cop in the infamous Raccoon City, the center of a man made epidemic known as the T-virus that turned normal people into mindless zombies. Now, Leon is a government agent, trained six years before his first assignment. Incidentally, the president of the United States has become the target of an act of terrorism, the kidnapping of his daughter. Leon reflects on his one day as a police officer with a disquiet attitude as he starts his new career with his first assignment, to recover the president's daughter, without knowing how difficult his day will be.

Being an installment of the Resident Evil franchise any player already has a set of expectations, the use of some familiar characters and a certain amount of suspense and horror. Keeping with the general form of the Resident Evil formula, Resident Evil 4 features many well developed characters with a certain amount of mystery around each one. On top of the familiar aspects of horror and tension brought on by enigmatic antagonists and twisted enemies, this game focuses on the relationships between characters and action based game play which further enhance the epic story.

## **Characters of Resident Evil 4**

**Character: Leon Kennedy** Archetype: The Hero Leon Kennedy is the main protagonist and player's avatar in Resident Evil 4. He was first introduced in a previous installment of the series and has developed into a complex character with uncertain relationships and deep morals. Being introduced as an ex-police officer in Resident Evil 4, it's clear his actions are driven by justice and a sense of duty, even taking great personal risks to accomplish what he believes is right. As the story develops it becomes clear Leon possesses more brawn than brains, often resorting to acts of extreme violence in difficult situations. In opposition with his actions, he has a great amount of compassion for the people who have proven themselves trustworthy, such as Luis Sera, and shows emotional complexity in his mysterious relationship with Ada Wong. Leon's premise is built throughout the game and dictated by his actions, to better understand himself and the characters that surround him. Despite numerous setbacks and complications his intrinsic sense of duty, and eventual bond with Ashley, drive him to complete this task.

Character: Ashley Graham Archetype: The Child First mentioned in the opening sequence, Ashley Graham is the president's daughter and the victim of a kidnapping whom Leon must rescue. Leon crosses paths with her relatively early on in the game, finding her in a shed behind an old church where her captors were keeping her. At first she is overcome with fear, thinking Leon is one of her captors, but fear turns to relief when Leon mentions the president, her father. Personifying fearfulness and timidity, she spends the majority of the game getting into trouble or cowering behind Leon's broad shoulders. As the story progresses, her actions change from simply preserving her own life to helping Leon as she spends more time with him. Along with these changes in her feelings for Leon, she's prone to mood swings brought on by the anxiety of the situations she goes through. Her unstable emotional state often gets in the way of her judgment which leads to her making poor decisions under stress. For example, if she is separated from Leon she will often be frozen in fear of her assailants instead of running away. At times, however, she shows surprising emotional and physical resilience in situations which she is clearly unable to rely on anyone but herself.

Character: Ada Wong Archetype: The Trickster Ada Wong is a mysterious woman from Leon's past who first appears to rescue Leon while dressed in an unconventional red dress. Throughout the game, she crosses paths with Leon a number of times, helping him at times and occasionally at gunpoint, her real agenda is not made clear until the end of the game. She was hired by an unknown party to recover a sample of the mind controlling virus Las Plagas and mirrors Leon's movements throughout the majority of the story. Unlike Leon, however, she relies more on her skill and acrobatics to evade opponents, as opposed to Leon's "run and gun" methods. At times, Ada appears to be a callous and uncaring individual, showing no feelings toward Leon and receives little affection back from him, but there is an obvious connection between the two characters. In the final cut scene Ashley asks Leon about her and he responds saying, "She's like a part of me I can't let go. Let's just leave it at that." This makes it clear how Leon feels about Ada, but all the player has to judge of Ada's feelings are what they can deduce from her brief interactions with Leon.

Character: Osmund Saddler Archetype: The Devil Osmund Saddler is the mastermind behind the cult Los Illuminados and the main antagonist in Resident Evil 4. A persuasive and charismatic man, he is the personification of evil. In order to lead his cult, Saddler infects his followers with a mind controlling disease known as Las Plagas. His lust for power led him to capture Ashley Graham and infecting her with the hope she would return home to infect the higher ups in the US government. Leon first meets Saddler when he rescues Ashley, near the beginning of the game, but their interactions become much more frequent in the latter parts of the story. The impression Saddler gives as the player gets to know him more is a cross between that of an old, and slightly senile, grandfather that everyone loves to be around and a manipulative mob boss that's willing to get what he wants at any cost. He is usually jovial and slow to become angry, even with insults being said to his face. For example, in a piece of dialogue Leon mentions Saddler's old age and tendency to forget names, and Saddler cheerily chuckles about the comment before reassuring Leon of his imminent demise. At the end of the game Saddler reveals his true self, morphing into a hideous spider-like creature in a last ditch effort to eliminate Leon and Ada at the same time, but the two heroes manage to put Saddler down with considerable effort and teamwork.

Character: Jack Krauser Archetype: The Shadow Jack Krauser was once a government operative and a friend of Leon Kennedy, but appeared to die in a helicopter crash in a time before Resident Evil 4 takes place. In Resident Evil 4 Krauser plays a devious double agent hired by Osmund Saddler to kidnap Ashley Graham and Albert Wesker to steal a sample of Las Plagas from Saddler. Demonstrating himself as very deadly and incredibly ruthless, his inner character is strikingly similar to Leon at a psychological level, but with a few key differences. Krauser's body has been twisted by genetic mutation to the point where he is barely recognizable as a human, a reflection of his twisted psychological state which has made him a recurring antagonist in the Resident Evil series despite his beginnings as Leon's friend and comrade. His premise is to cut away his past affiliation with the people he once knew by killing Leon. Krauser finds his chance by lying and manipulating his employers, associating with Ada Wong, and biding his time while stalking Leon and Ashley. Leon and Krauser eventually meet in a knife fight in which Leon narrowly escapes, and again in a suicidal gunfight in which Krauser is defeated once again. Although he appears to die, the fate of Krauser is unclear, he has cheated death several times previous to his latest encounter with Leon.

A list of minor characters include:

- Hunnigan, Leon's aide and contact in the government agency he works for, she contacts him via radio throughout the game to inform him of his newest objectives and offers advice on his current situations.
- Luis Sera, a researcher who once worked for Saddler to develop the virus Las Plagas, but betrayed him to help Leon and Ashley in an attempt to atone for his crimes against his fellow man.
- Salazar, the infected castellan, or keeper, of a castle which Leon and Ashley must journey through. Salazar's hubris is overconfidence and is eventually killed by Leon for it.
- Bitores Mendez, or better known as "The Big Cheese," is the head of the village in which Leon begins his journey and metaphorically ushers Leon into his long struggle through the story.

## **Breakdown**

From the beginning of the creation of storytelling one of the most prominent reasons for the conveyance of fiction has been to evoke some sort of emotion out of the audience. When games were first made their purpose was clear, to provide a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction for their players. Because of their closely related goals, these two mediums go hand in hand with each other in the form of story based games. When closely examining the story based background of Resident Evil 4 many parallels can be drawn between the game and its fictional narrative roots. By providing a complex main character with a clear premise and challenging goals the game is a great example of how these story based elements can make a good game really great.

One of the most prominent devices in movies and books is the hero's journey. In short the hero's journey is the process in which a protagonist embarks on a life changing excursion full of challenges and strife, but eventually overcomes everything to arise triumphant. In this case, Leon Kennedy fits the classic definition of a hero, he acts selflessly for the good of those around him in the face of great danger. He is the type of character who puts forth an image of complete confidence to inspire his allies and provoke his enemies, even if it's in contradiction with his own beliefs of his chance of success. This formulaic process has been used countless times in media and narrative story telling with a plethora of twists and small changes to keep it compelling, but the basic structure is always the same. The hero of any story starts from relatively humble beginnings to become a participant in something much larger than he or she first believes. Once the full weight of the situation becomes apparent the hero is unable to stop the process and return back to the world they once knew. Seeing the only way out is forward, the hero persists in trying not only to survive, but to succeed in changing the world around them for the better. After much struggle, the hero accomplishes their goal and continues their life afterward, master of their own world.

The plot along which Resident Evil 4 takes place closely resembles this formula, beginning with Leon Kennedy departing from his natural world. Most stories begin with the part of the hero's journey known as the Ordinary World and the Call to Adventure. Resident Evil 4 begins with a short cinematic in which Leon is riding with two Spanish police officers to an undisclosed location while revealing his back story to the player. He speaks about his past experiences with the T-virus, which is very similar to the Las Plagas that infects the enemies of Resident Evil 4, and how his new occupation as a government agent has led to his current situation. Leon reveals that he has recently been given his first assignment, the protection of the presidential family, and that the daughter of the president, Ashley Graham, has been kidnapped by the Los Illuminados, a dangerous cult. The car eventually comes to a stop at a small cabin on the outskirts of a farming community where Leon departs the vehicle and begins his journey.

After the opening cinematic ends Leon is contacted by his aide on his mission, Hunnigan, who informs him of a few details about his surroundings and what his next course of action should be. The brief interactions with Hunnigan throughout the introductory part of the game can be linked to the Meeting with the Mentor in the hero's journey, preparing him mentally for his challenges ahead. Leon's first encounter with one of the locals drives home how dire the situation is. When he enters the cabin near the car he asks a man inside about Ashley, to which he responds by attacking Leon with a hatchet. Leon nimbly evades the attack and draws a firearm, but doesn't fire on the man. This moment is the only time in the game when he shows this restraint, and only shows it for a moment before killing the man. The introduction of the game ends with Leon killing waves of similarly mindless farmers armed with pitchforks and other improvised weapons. This decision to act with such conviction and violence is paralleled by aspect of the hero's journey known as the Crossing of the Threshold, Leon has made the decision to act in a way from which there is no turning back.

The majority of the game makes up the next portion of the hero's journey, the Tests, Allies, and Enemies, as is common in story based games. This Road of Trials, as it is sometimes known, is represented by the Ganados, the followers of Los Illuminados and mindless folk Leon must kill, in their many forms while protecting the ever helpless Ashley Graham. One of the Ganados, Bitores Mendez, is responsible for causing Leon himself to become infected by the Las Plagas and his major trial throughout the game becomes finding how he can rid himself, and Ashley as he discovers, of the virus before they both lose control and become Ganados themselves. Along his way, Leon discovers an unlikely ally in Luis Sera, a researcher for the Los Illuminados. At first Luis and Leon find each other by chance and are forced to become allies to survive against a common enemy. Luis discovers the condition Leon and Ashley are in and offers to help them, only giving the explanation that it makes him feel better. This meeting with Luis can be thought of as Atonement with the Father, another step along the hero's journey, in which Luis offers to help, but only after he discovers he can trust Leon and his objectives. In one of the most emotionally devastating moments of the game, Luis appears from a door with a sample of Las Plagas in one hand and drug that will help Leon in the other, but Luis is dispatched mid sentence by Saddler, sending Leon back to square one in terms of ridding himself of the virus. This act is immediately followed by Leon promising to kill both Saddler and Salazar, one of Saddler's most powerful lackeys.

At a point near the end of the story Leon travels after Saddler to an island, representing the enclosure of his enemies with no where left to run. This portion of the game parallels the section of the hero's journey known as Approaching of the Cave in which Leon knows he will meet Saddler and one of them will die. At one point on the island Hunnigan informs Leon that a helicopter has been sent to back him up, and not a moment too soon as Leon finds himself vastly outnumbered and out gunned on the island. In a display of utter ruthlessness, Leon and his new support tear through hundreds of Ganados until the helicopter pilot informs Leon that he's out of ammunition. A short dialogue between Leon and the pilot reveals that they know each other personally. The conversation is cut short as the pilot is shot down by Saddler and another of the Ganados wielding a rocket launcher, killing yet another of Leon's allies.

With the death of Leon's friend, the plot progresses onto what is known as the Ordeal in the hero's journey. It's clear that very little stands between Leon and Saddler. In a personal battle that began long before Leon stepped out of the car with the two police officers, he faces Jack Krauser. Krauser is the representation of what Leon may have become if he had been evil, a man of inhuman strength and stamina whose only purpose is to kill his enemies. In an attempt to kill Leon at any cost, he rigs a tower with explosives with the hope that if he can't kill Leon and escape at least he will be able to end Leon's life along with his own. Krauser reveals his true form to Leon, a twisted representation of a man with a huge claw where his right arm once was. After dispatching Krauser, Leon finds an underground laboratory where he is able to cure both himself and Ashley of the virus that infects them. In a short period of time Leon has eliminated the metaphorical evil that clouded his heart in the form of Krauser and his physical impurities by removing the virus. This purging of his system, and of Ashley's, is linked to the Reward, another step in the hero's journey.

It is at this point when Leon sees that it is time to leave once and for all, the point in the journey of the hero known as Returning Home. As he and Ashley make their way off the island Leon knows there is one last obstacle that stands in their way, Osmund Saddler. When Leon finds Saddler he is startled to see the elusive Ada Wong bound and hanging by a rope several feet off the ground. Saddler is caught by surprise when he finds that Leon is free of the mind controlling virus and Leon takes Saddler's moment of surprise to cut Ada down with a well aimed knife throw. Saddler shows his anger for the first time when he realizes that Leon has destroyed his plans by curing Ashley of the virus and metamorphoses into a huge grotesque four legged spider like creature of immense strength and resilience. This final form of Saddler, both physically and emotionally, represent the step in the hero's journey known as the Resurrection, in which Saddler reveals his true self to Leon. Leon, with the help of Ada, is able to kill Saddler and notices the sample of Las Plagas near his corpse. In a twist, Ada demands the sample at gunpoint and informs Leon of her plans to destroy the island in a matter of minutes as she flies off in a conveniently timed helicopter. Fortunately, Ada also provides Leon with the keys to a nearby jet ski which he uses to escape in the nick of time to return Ashley home, representing the final step in the hero's journey, the Returning with the Elixir.

Like the main characters in every installment of the Resident Evil franchise, Leon Kennedy must go through immense ordeals in order to survive his situations. At first, Leon is bored with his mission, thinking it will be easily resolved by simply inquiring about Ashley's whereabouts from the local farmers. Even after he is first attacked, Leon holds onto the ideal that violence will not be necessary for a few moments while holding a gun toward his assailant. Leon takes the first step away from his old reality when he pulls the trigger, killing the man. Soon after, Leon finds himself surrounded on all sides by death, dealt by his own hands and by the hands of his enemies, at one point he even doubts he will find Ashley alive. For a portion of the game Leon still believes he can solve the issues he faces with as little violence as possible, the first time he meets Osmund Saddler he doesn't draw a weapon. In his meeting with Saddler, Leon discovers he's been infected with the mind controlling virus Las Plagas, and suddenly Leon realizes his success of the mission will determine his own life as well as Ashley's. With his own mortality at stake, Leon becomes ever more desperate to succeed, and even more murderous.

Along his journey, Leon finds he has two allies that help him on his way. The first is Luis Sera, a man who is uncannily knowledgeable about the virus he and Ashley have contracted, and proves to be a useful ally and undeniable friend. Luis insists on helping Ashley and Leon, and when asked why he responds, "Because... it makes me feel better." It's clear that Luis is full of an overburdening guilt that drives him to destroy the virus he helped create. During a cut scene soon after, as mentioned above, Luis appears with everything he needs to cure Ashley and Leon, as well as absolve his own guilt. Just as the tension and anxiety of Luis's fate is at its highest and it appears Leon will be saved, Luis is brutally murdered in front of Leon's eyes. The death of his friend sends Leon deeper into his psychological rage, he feels he no longer wishes to spare anyone associated with Los Illuminados from death. The second ally comes near the end of the game, in the form of the helicopter pilot who assists Leon on the island. With no tricks or guile, the helicopter is a representation of exactly what Leon believes he needs, more firepower. Backed up by a helicopter armed with rockets and large machine guns, Leon shows relief for the first time since arriving on the island. This relief turns to misery and uncontrollable rage when the pilot dies, and Saddler adds insult to injury by referring to Leon's friend as "A pesky insect."

The psychological state of Leon helps progress the story very well, giving Leon a reason to continue his journey and keeping the player interested. Because this state of rage Leon goes into cannot be sustained realistically, it would be emotionally draining for a real person, and become uninteresting for a player, there are times in which the tension is released in the form of very satisfying cut scenes or actions. For example, immediately before Luis dies, Leon and Ashley become separated which heightens the tension, but they are soon reunited and embrace. The act of Ashley running into Leon's arms is representative of her willingness to allow his protection over her and their mutual desire to remain in each other's company. It's clear that there are feelings between Leon and Ashley throughout the game, this feeling of the player's avatar being desired further enhances the game. Although this relationship could be mistaken for them falling in love with each other, it is more well defined by a paternal relationship in which Leon feels responsible for Ashley's welfare. The second and final time they embrace is after they purge themselves of the virus. This also happens to be very soon after Leon's friend, the helicopter pilot, had been shot down, relieving the tension of another very emotional series of events. This emotional roller coaster that Leon rides throughout the game adds to his character, showing how he copes realistically with extreme emotional situations.

### **Strongest Element**

Like most games in the Resident Evil series, the cast of characters are all layered and complex individuals that show amazing depth. As mentioned above, Leon closely follows the hero's journey as he physiologically and psychologically progresses through the story. One of the most compelling components of great character design is the use of relationships between characters. Resident Evil 4 does a remarkable job of creating a complex spiders web of character relations, and maintaining every character's uniqueness through their distinctive personalities and objectives. For example, Ada Wong and Jack Krauser both work for the same man with similar objectives and at times act as allies. This alliance is shaken by their opposing feelings toward Leon, Krauser wanting Leon dead and Wong saving Leon's life several times. It would be impossible to convey the relations between every character without a fine retelling of the story, but Resident Evil 4 concisely and precisely conveys them without the addition of unneeded plot elements.

### **Weakest Element**

Without exception every great piece of literature or work of art has some flaw in it that is a reminder of its overall imperfection. In the case of Resident Evil 4, the biggest flaw came in the beginning of the game, at the start of Leon's journey. The complete hero's journey usually involves a step in the beginning known as the Refusal of the Call, or a time in which the hero decides that adventure is not for them and wishes to call it quits before they take the first step. Although Leon's complacency towards his first assignment is obvious it isn't a compelling connection to this step in the hero's journey. The game could have been enhanced from the very beginning with the addition of some reasonable way for Leon to leave his mission behind. For example, if he declared it was his solemn belief that Ashley were dead to Hunnigan, and she responds sympathetically by declaring she will order a pick up as soon as possible. Further along the storyline, when Leon discovers Ashley and finds they both have been infected by the virus would have been a much more compelling portion of the story by this inclusion or something similar.

### **Highlight**

One of the greatest methods of holding a player's attention is with a truly evil villain. Resident Evil 4 has a plethora of characters along a large spectrum of what could be considered "good" and "evil" from Jack Krauser, who stands in the gray area between either extreme, to Saddler, whose lust for power drives him to extreme actions. Although clearly an antagonist, Krauser's actions are driven by a shallow desire for personal revenge, as often a trait in characters of the hero archetype as in many other. On the other hand, Saddler is driven by an inhuman lust for power, and his desires are manifested in the form of extreme acts of mass terrorism and violence. He is armed with the motivation and the means to enslave a vast number of people. Every time Saddler makes an appearance a small amount of his inner character is uncovered, revealing his true self as a cold and calculating individual, virtually devoid of any emotion or temper. Saddler is not a man that can be reasoned with or persuaded away from his current path by any means less than lethal, and it makes him a very compelling villain.

### **Critical Reception**

Until this installment in the series, the Resident Evil games have been a cult classic for a niche audience. Going over budget and taking more time than first anticipated, Capcom took a plethora of risks in producing this game. The risk paid off, it has been one of the most critically successful games of all time, topping IGN's *Top 99 Games of All Time*, Nintendo's *Top 20 best Gamecube Games of All Time*, and being named the *Game of the Year* by Spike TV's Video Game Awards. It was decided to develop the game across several platforms because of the increased production time, and every version of the game was a critical success on its platform. Even though the game was released 2005 it has managed to receive critical review and be regarded by several awards and recognitions every year from 2004 to 2007.

### **Lessons**

- 1) Well developed characters are one of the most important elements in games. A player's avatar is his or her connection to the game world. Without an interesting and realistic character to associate with a player will quickly become bored with a game. In the case of Resident Evil 4 the plot is relatively formulaic and unoriginal, but the addition of compelling characters such as Leon Kennedy, Ashley Graham, and Ada Wong keep the game compelling through the choices they make and the relationships they maintain. Leon constantly faces situations which test his physical and psychological constitution, and displays human error on more than one occasion. Without these displays of humanity, the main character would become predictable and ultimately uninteresting. Ashley is constantly getting into trouble which causes Leon, and by extension the player, to take unnecessary side trips along the plot. Her helpless nature adds to the story and the atmosphere of the game to create a sense of urgency in

Leon's actions. When Leon is cornered and appears doomed Ada Wong often makes an appearance and rescues him. When Leon is caught by surprise and nearly killed by an inhumanly strong man it's Ada who serves as a quick distraction to aid in his get away. This sense of human frailty, however scarce, in Leon serves to make his character all the more compelling, and adds to the complicated web that is Ada's inner character and her relationship with Leon.

2) Games are supposed to be played and enjoyed. There are several mediums of pure storytelling which can make use of a complex plot that tells an amazing story, this is not the case with story based games. The story should be an element that makes the game more enjoyable, but doesn't detract from game play. Throughout the game, Resident Evil 4 has several cut scenes that are used to advance the plot and explain a character's motivation, but most are only a few seconds in length and only a few longer than one minute. Dialogue between characters is often short and informative, introducing characters without keeping the player from the game experience for too long. The use of short dialogue often comes across as a series of cheesy one liners, but keeps the game moving and holds a players attention.

### **Summary**

The Resident Evil series has always been successful, but this installment pushed it to a new level. Capcom took a risk by changing the original formula, and the gamble payed off tremendously. Resident Evil 4 evokes a sense of urgency and horror through the use of extraordinary character design and plot development that come together to make this game an incredible experience.