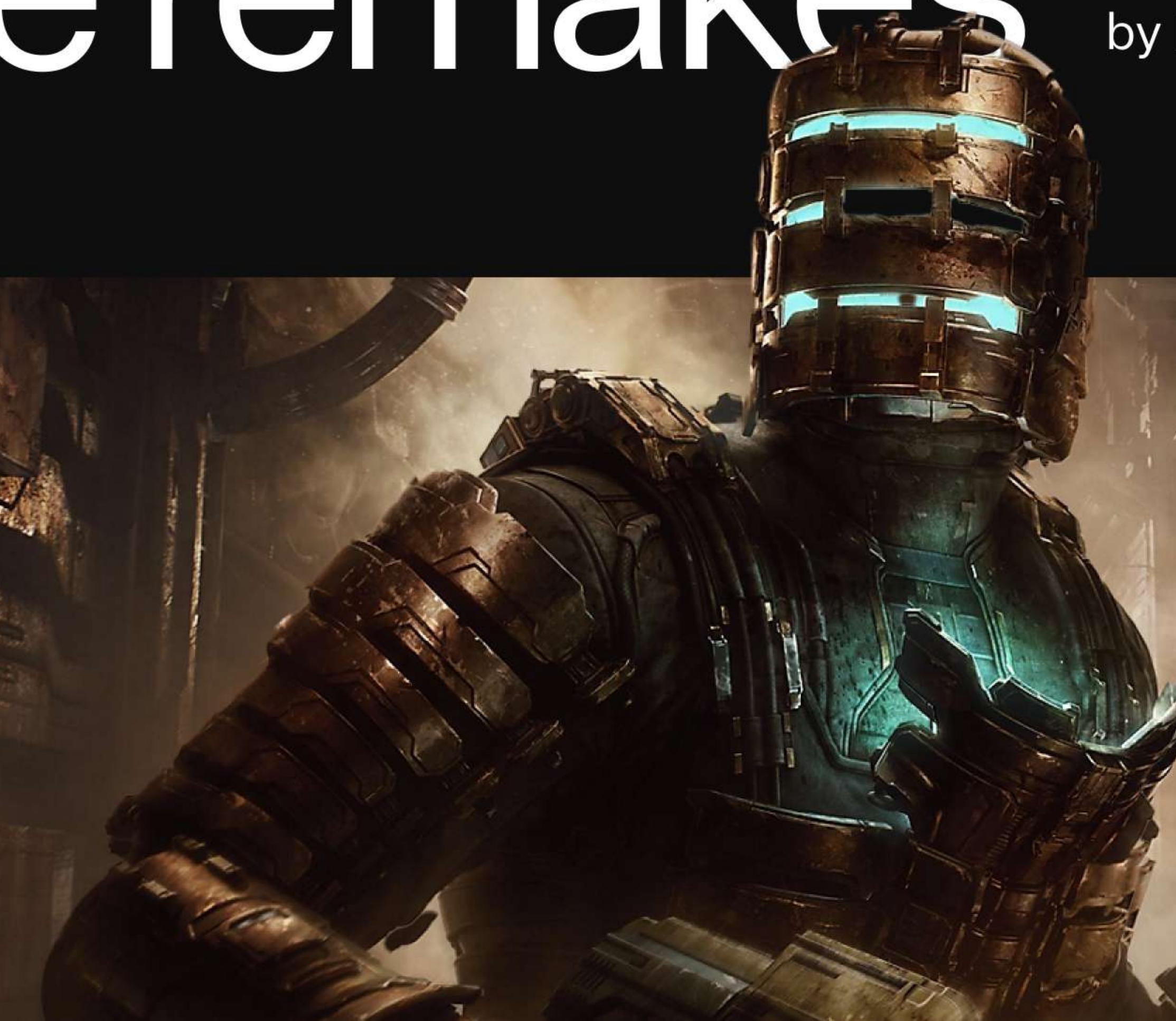


REPORT

# Art direction & gameplay in game remakes

An analysis of 7 case studies  
by Room 8 Group



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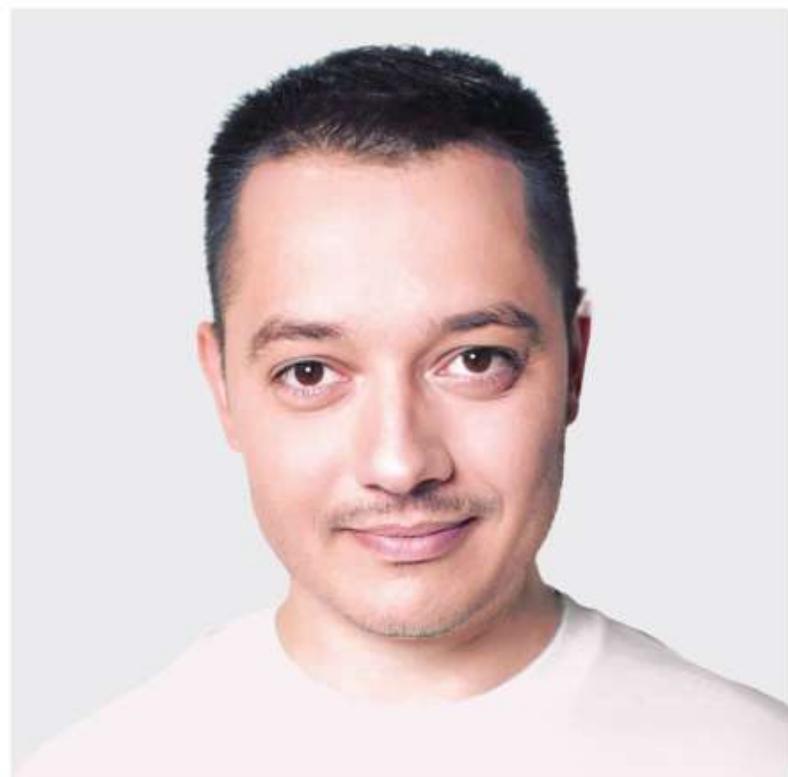
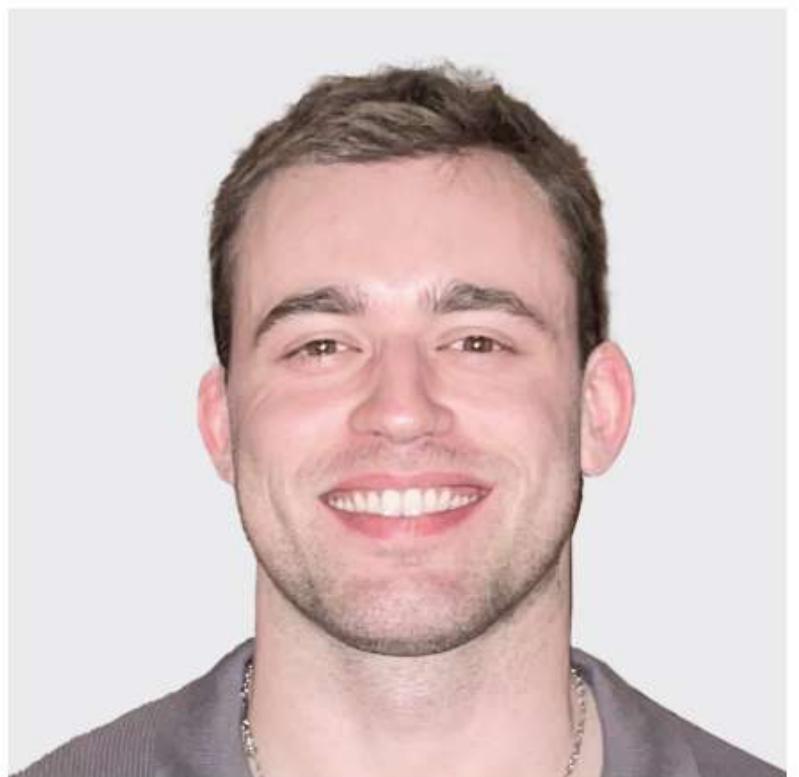
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# Contributors

With special thanks  
to our data partner:  
VG Insights

VG Insights—our data partner for this report—is a data analytics and market intelligence company with a focus on the games industry.

The company uses both third-party and primary research in its vast platform to provide everything from detailed game-level metrics to high-level market trends.



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# Introduction

As game publishers and developers approach the end of a difficult 2024, the rate of remakes released seems unlikely to slow.

Researching and developing new game IP is risky and expensive. Game development itself is more expensive than ever. Ownership of renowned IP is an asset, but a name is not enough. To thread the needle between honoring an old favorite and updating it for modern players requires courage—a willingness to take calculated risks.

As game-makers, we all understand the appeal of remakes. But many still get them wrong. Form can change drastically—perhaps more so than many realize—but what must stay the same is the feeling it evokes. The spirit of the original has to stay intact.

The devil is in the details. That is why this report will focus on the art direction and gameplay of seven of the best examples:

METROID PRIME REMASTERED ↗  
RESIDENT EVIL 2 ↗  
RESIDENT EVIL 4 ↗

FINAL FANTASY VII: REBIRTH ↗  
SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS ↗  
DEMON'S SOULS ↗

DEAD SPACE ↗

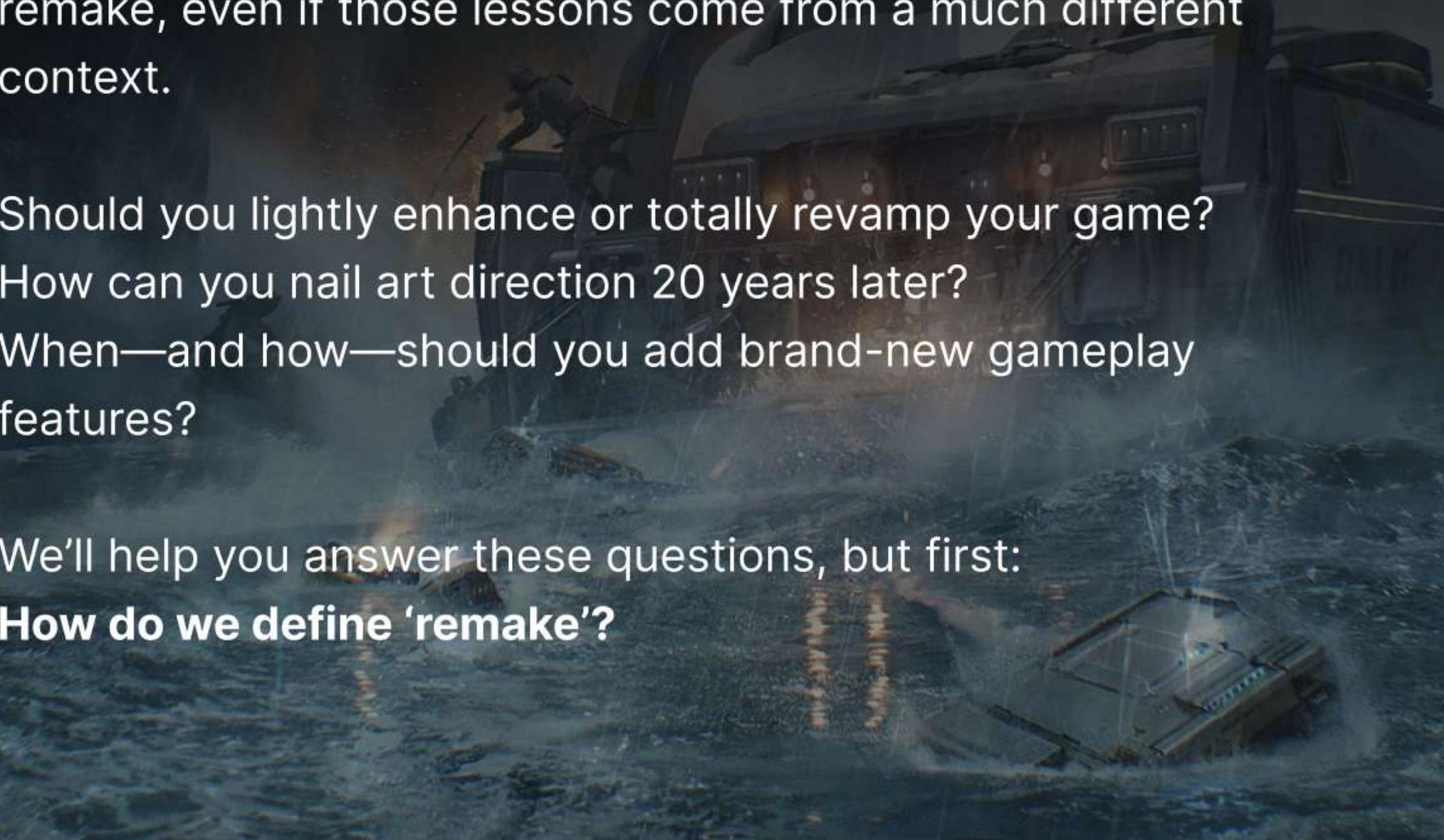
# The aim of this report

Our goal with this report is to demonstrate to publishers and devs the different options they have when remaking a game. Whether a total overhaul of an original is required (*like Resident Evil 2*), or a close recreation (*Shadow of the Colossus*), depends entirely on the game.

We hope to draw out philosophies of approach—to extract lessons from previous remakes that you can apply to your remake, even if those lessons come from a much different context.

Should you lightly enhance or totally revamp your game?  
How can you nail art direction 20 years later?  
When—and how—should you add brand-new gameplay features?

We'll help you answer these questions, but first:  
**How do we define 'remake'?**



# Preview and definitions

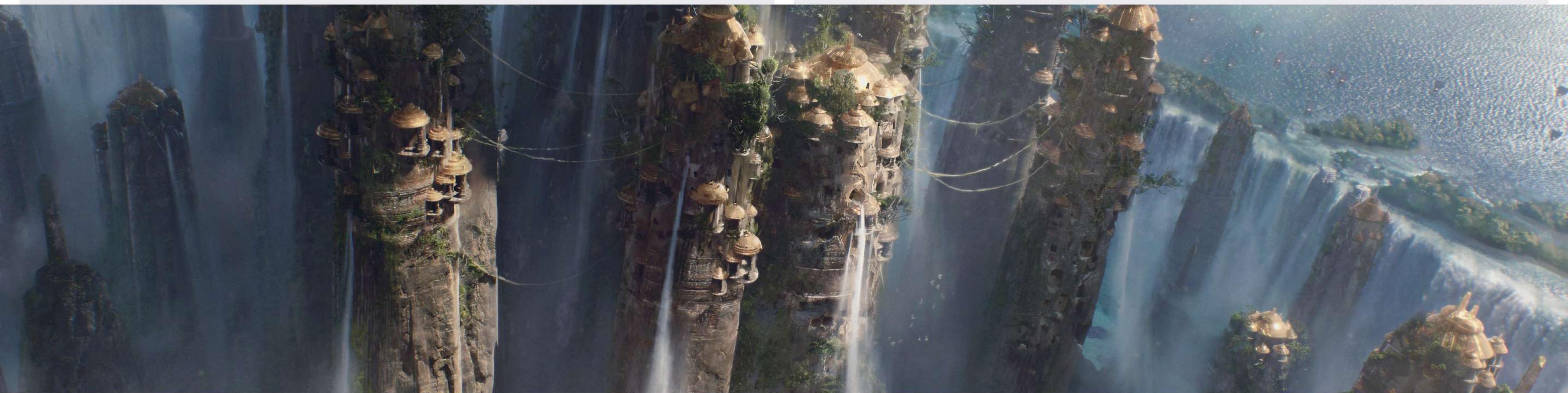
We will take a closer look at some of the 'best' remakes ever made, through two lenses: art direction and gameplay.

## What is a remake?

The lines between terms like 'remake', 're-release', and 'remaster' often blur. To avoid confusion, 'remake' will be the term we use most, even for titles like *Metroid Prime Remastered*, which, despite its name (and minimal gameplay changes), was still a ground-up rebuild of a 21-year-old game using a new engine. For the purposes of this report, it is considered a remake.

## What makes a remake good?

We have judged a game's quality by its overall reception from fans and critics. We've used average Metacritic and IGN scores, reviews, average Steam ratings, and other similar criteria to gauge the overall reception of a game in terms of perceived quality. We've taken a qualitative, case-study-based approach.



## What about a remake's financial performance?

Financial performance is a small factor in our report. While some, like *Resident Evil 4* (case study #3 in this report), are huge successes, others are not, despite how beloved they are to those that played them. *Dead Space* (case study #7) is, to fans and critics, a stellar achievement, yet if reports are to be believed it didn't generate enough revenue for EA to remake *Dead Space 2*.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, critics and fans adore *Metroid Prime Remastered* (case study #1)—“one of the best first-person shooters ever made,” according to IGN<sup>2</sup>—but the latest figures from Nintendo show it sold 1.09m copies about a month after launch.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, this report will not factor financial performance as strongly as critical reception or fan reception. While perceived quality doesn't always lead to financial success (especially in today's market), there is some evidence that financial performance is correlated with a game's quality<sup>4</sup>. Plus, a high-quality game has more chance of growing a 'long tail'—in other words, to have staying power. This gives game-makers a strong foundation upon which to release extra content, release sequels, and keep sales consistent months and years after launch.

We'll offer insight on how to release a remake that is technically well executed and that people love. Our focus is on perceived quality, which sadly doesn't always lead to runaway financial success.

## Why art direction and gameplay?

Execution in art direction and gameplay show the degree to which a publisher or developer understands the appeal of an original release.

Gameplay shines a light on the audience: it changes because user preferences change as technology and expectations evolve.

Art direction is a litmus test for a dev's ability to recreate the feeling of an original game using modern lighting capabilities, better design tools, more powerful game engines, and so on.

To explore graphical and performance improvements by themselves would be pointless; all remakes should improve here. What the best remakes show is how to leverage such improvements in a way that befits the style and tone of an original game. Art direction and gameplay are microcosms of how a game-maker sees its IP.

# Case studies: Ratings

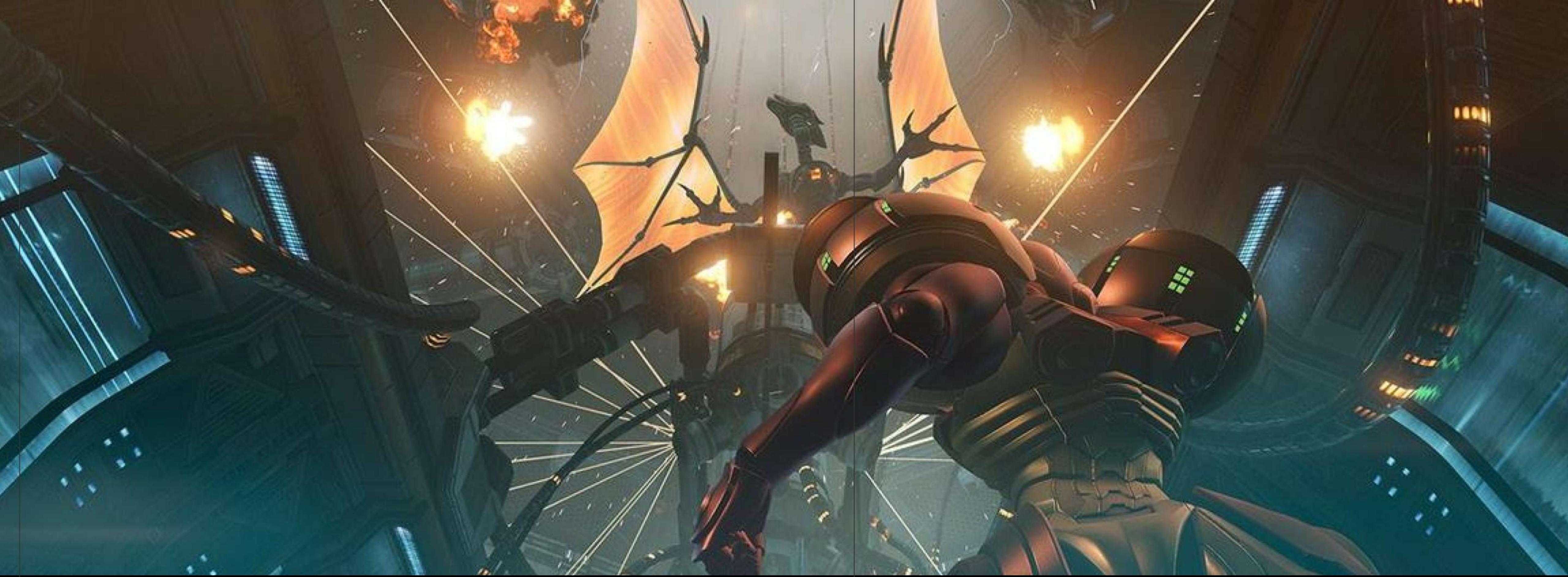
Title	IGN Review score out of 10	IGN avg user rating out of 10	Metacritic Metascore out of 100	Metacritic user score out of 10	Other
Metroid Prime Remastered	10	9.1	94	8.9	Nintendo Life: Review score 10/10 Average user score 9.3/10
Resident Evil 2	9	8.8	91	8.9	Steam: Overwhelmingly Positive
Resident Evil 4	10	9.3	93	8.1	Steam: Overwhelmingly Positive
Final Fantasy VII: Rebirth	9	9.1	92	8.9	PlayStation Store: Average user rating 4.71/5
Shadow of the Colossus	9.7	8.7	91	7.9	PlayStation Store: Average user rating 4.38/5
Demon's Souls	9	8.5	91	8.9	PlayStation Store: Average user rating 4.43/5
Dead Space	9	8.8	89	8.4	Steam: Very Positive

## Why Room 8 Group?

We're a leading external development partner worldwide. We cover full-cycle and co-development, art, QA, and more for the world's biggest publishers and developers.

We've helped make smash-hit remakes, co-developing both *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare II* (2022) and *III* (2023). We helped bring character and environment art to life in the *Dead Space* remake (case study #7 of this report), acclaimed for its art direction. Since 2011, we've worked on hundreds of projects every year, each with its own challenge. Our knowledge—and, crucially for remakes given their dynamic nature, our adaptability—is substantial.





CASE STUDY 1:

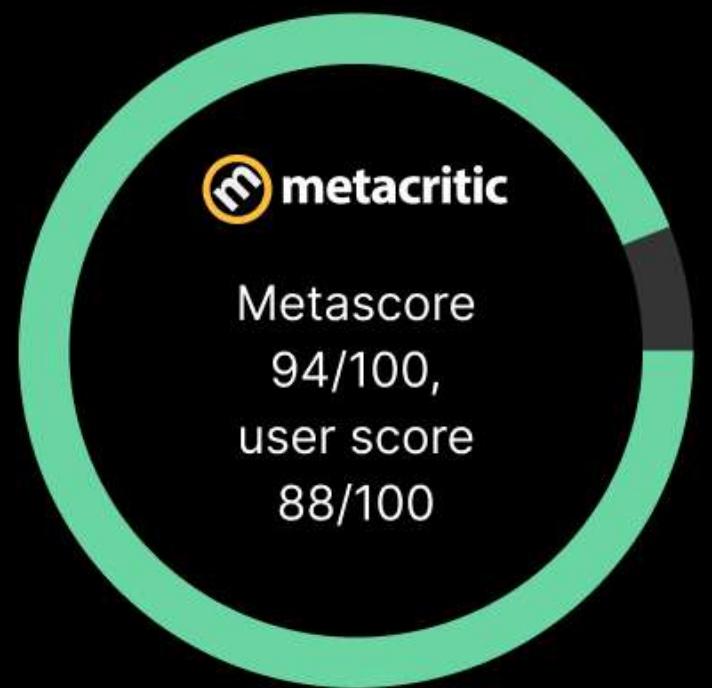
# Metroid Prime Remastered

Developer: Retro Studios

Publisher: Nintendo

Engine: RUDE Engine

Time separating original and remake: 21 years



LESSON:

# Why it pays to rebuild your game from scratch—even if the end result is a close recreation of the original

To many people, an original game simply repackaged and re-released years later, with only surface-level graphical and performance updates, is insufficient. How then did *Metroid Prime Remastered* (2023) avoid criticism? In fact, how did it get the exact opposite reception, with IGN calling it “one of the best first-person shooters ever made”?<sup>2</sup>

If your game holds up well, only the subtlest changes are needed. But even if you want your remake to be a one-to-one recreation, *Remastered* shows us that you should still rebuild your game from scratch.



## The art style of the original (2002) remains largely the same.

However, visually *Remastered* is far more than a port to a new-gen device. The graphics have been overhauled to make the game truly immersive for modern players. Lava bubbles, rain trickles, the protagonist's reflection appears in her visor far more vividly when she shoots energy beams in the dark. Water ripples, luminous insects light the way, tactile props like giant twisted trees now fill derelict rooms. The world has a level of depth and detail that wasn't possible in 2002.

### ***Remastered* takes full advantage of the fact that lighting in games is now a niche unto itself.**

Lighting specialists can work their magic to guide the player during gameplay in ways that were not possible in 2002, and Retro Studios plays with these new capabilities. *Remastered* has a beautiful baked lighting solution with light propagation, including bounce lighting, subtle shadowing, and immersive fog.

Continue reading 

The biggest change to *Remastered*'s gameplay is the new controls. Though the original is beloved, many felt one of its only flaws was a control system that took some getting used to.

*Remastered* kept the old control scheme as an option but modernized the default, lowering the barrier to entry.

The dev added the option of dual-stick controls, similar to contemporary first-person shooters, as well as gyroscopic aim assist. This is a major change from the original GameCube version which, in 2023, may have been too cumbersome for most.

Besides UI and HUD improvements, there aren't many gameplay changes to speak of. Sometimes gameplay mechanics hold up decades later. Retro Studios knew *Metroid Prime* (2002) was a wholly unique experience, and the game has a cult following; tampering with the core gameplay loops would have taken too much from the *Metroid Prime* experience.

**The game plays to the strengths, and minimizes the weaknesses, of the Nintendo Switch.**

Visually, it doesn't over-rely on textures and instead makes full use of improved lighting capabilities. "[Areas] look and feel integrated in a way that we don't see from many Switch games," wrote Eurogamer.<sup>5</sup>

Some remasters increase framerates and sharpen graphics but don't do the legwork of overhauling assets.

Even if the end result is something that looks the same as the original, it still pays to rebuild them with modern capabilities.

This will ensure they read better and represent real life more closely, rather than simply porting original models onto more sophisticated hardware while only upscaling the textures.

## Summary

If you already have a classic game to work with, and it holds up well, updating it for a modern audience might only take the subtlest tweaks. Retro Studios overhauled *Metroid Prime*'s art assets but kept most things where they were in 2002. Gameplay still felt great 21 years later, so the dev kept much of it the same.

But what if gameplay feels dated? How might you make wholesale changes without desecrating your original? For that, we turn to the *Resident Evil* franchise.



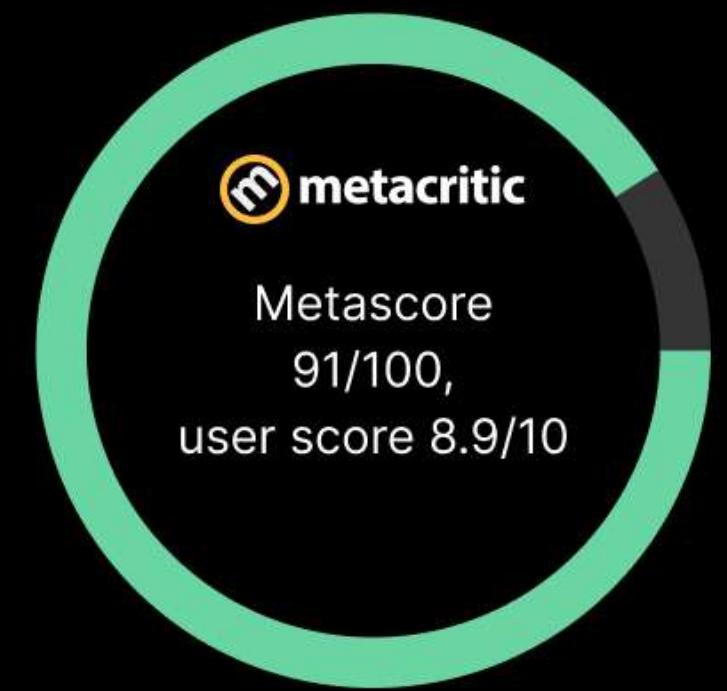
CASE STUDY 2:

# Resident Evil 2

Developer: Capcom  
Publisher: Capcom

Engine: RE Engine

Time separating original and remake: 21 years



# How to transform gameplay and breathe life into a decades-old game

If *Metroid Prime Remastered* is a masterclass in staying true to an original, *Resident Evil 2* (2019) is a tour de force in how to remake a game from the ground up.

After Capcom took the franchise back to its survival-horror roots with *Resident Evil 7*, the *Resident Evil 2* remake—directed by Yasuhiro Ampo, who worked on the original 1998 game as a programmer<sup>6</sup>—was a full-blown recreation of a classic, and is adored by critics and *Resident Evil* fans. Here's how the team did it.



The art direction for the original *Resident Evil 2* was purely functional. A fully 3D environment of course wasn't possible on PlayStation 1, so Capcom pre-rendered the backgrounds as static images. When the player walked outside the camera's field of view, the view would cut to the adjacent rendered background. It was fluid enough at the time to make the experience playable.

Fast-forward to 2019: the games-industry norm shifted to the first- or third-person view. In fact, the third-person over-the-shoulder view used in this remake was revolutionized by *Resident Evil 4* in 2005.

The art direction of the remake is the same, philosophically speaking, as the original. But with modern capabilities, Capcom had full liberty to explore the environment. As such, lighting and other visual elements throughout the scene had to be placed strategically to guide the player, showing just enough to keep the player guessing what was around the corner. The *Resident Evil* IP always had cinematic flair, and in fact, cinematics in the remake stayed the same; but in 2019 the *Resident Evil 2* story could be told with the grace of a movie director.

Both the remake and original make full use of the technological limitations of their respective eras. Both are the definition of photoreal as far as real-time rendering is concerned.

A lot changed on the gameplay front.

The goal of the game is somewhat metroidvania in style—go to the police station, find clues, et cetera—and this is the same in the remake. But other gameplay elements felt very old and needed an overhaul.

To ease the transition—given that, however old-school, the original is beloved among fans—the *Resident Evil* games offer a number of different control schemes to let the player decide how much they want to fully embrace the new gameplay style.

The remake used a full 3D movement system and a more modern over-the-shoulder view that had become standard by 2019. The player can now aim while moving, making movement and combat more fluid.

Beyond that, it feels superfluous to talk about gameplay changes: the difference between the original and the remake is night and day, and we could go on forever.

**The key thing to note is that the playing experience today was put first. Capcom wasn't afraid to reinvent**

Continue reading 

# Summary

Capcom seems to have a sixth sense of when to keep something the same and when to reinvent it entirely. Just as importantly, the company is bold enough to execute when major changes are needed—and this is made clear by its treatment of our next case study, *Resident Evil 4*.

*Resident Evil 2*'s gameplay based on careful calculations of what players would want from the game 21 years later—while keeping the game's essence the same through its grim world, haunting enemies, and vulnerable main characters.



CASE STUDY 3:

# Resident Evil 4

Developer: Capcom  
Publisher: Capcom

Engine: RE Engine

Time separating original and remake: 18 years



Review score  
10/10,  
average user  
rating 9.3/10



Metascore  
93/100,  
user score 8.1/10



Steam user  
rating:  
Overwhelmingly  
Positive

# Why you should prioritize the present-day experience over nostalgia—even if that means changing core parts of a classic

Remaking *Resident Evil 4* (2023) was perhaps an even greater challenge than *Resident Evil 2*; both are considered classics, but 4 is more recent, and while elements of gameplay might feel dated today, Capcom had to be more careful not to upset fans by making changes so drastic they harmed the game's identity. The company took some calculated risks with *Resident Evil 4*—and they paid off.

IGN scored the game a perfect 10. On Steam, the game has an 'Overwhelmingly Positive' rating with around 93,000 reviews. It is one of the best remakes ever.

Some devs, if they had a classic like *Resident Evil 4* (2005) to work with, might have been overprotective. Capcom was bold enough to make huge fundamental changes to freshen the experience, such as overhauling the combat system and even tweaking the tone of the dialogue.



Art direction was overhauled.

### It now has a grittier, darker tone.

The number of cocky quips from the protagonist, Leon, was reduced (though they weren't removed entirely). Visual assets like characters and environments were imbued with rich grimy detail that wasn't possible in 2005.

### The color palette was made deeper, richer, more varied.

It finally tore away from the gray-brown palette plaguing PS2- and PS3-era games. Keeping with the realistic tone, colors and patterns feel better researched. All this makes for a more believable rural Spanish setting.

### Lighting was leveraged to make a scarier, darker atmosphere.

Capcom played with lighting and shadow to a much larger degree to add to the sense of terror. (As you might've noticed already in this report, a theme of good remakes is good use of modern lighting capabilities.)

Environment and character design was reimagined with more complexity, made scarier than the original. Buildings feel more lived-in. Layouts of spaces like the castle were made more maze-like.

"If we remade the game so players do the exact same thing as the original, that's not really going to be fun or interesting"

**Kazunori Kadoi**, Game Director, *Resident Evil 4* (2023)<sup>7</sup>

Back in 2005, the player couldn't move while aiming their weapon; Capcom didn't want to enter the "shooting/army-type genre".<sup>8</sup> But in 2023, this fixed-camera gunplay feels clunky and unusual.

### Capcom knew it had to change core elements of combat.

In 2023, the player has the ability to move while aiming and shooting. But in order for Leon (the game's protagonist) not to be too powerful, enemies were made faster, more aggressive, and more numerous.

To accentuate the new gameplay, the player now has a parry ability. Parrying is fluid and gives the player more opportunities to unleash Leon's signature melee attacks. However, to "keep a sense of tenseness,"<sup>7</sup> the knife Leon uses to parry can now break. This adds a strategic element to combat.

"In modern games, even regarding combat there's more than just fighting. You can escape, use stealth; there's lots of choices."

**Yasuhiro Ampo**, Director, *Resident Evil 4* (2023)

Continue reading 

# Summary

Many elements of *Resident Evil 4* that were central to the original experience changed drastically in 2023. Yet the remake was a massive success. Start from first principles, and don't be distracted by the reputation of your original. Be honest with yourself about what does and does not hold up today, and be bold enough to make big changes where needed. With both *Resident Evil 2* and *4*, Capcom has given us two shining examples of how to remake beloved titles.

Other flawed or outdated elements were removed, like quick-time events (QTEs), instead making such actions available during regular gameplay. Escorting Ashley was one of the original's few bugbears, which is largely resolved in the remake.

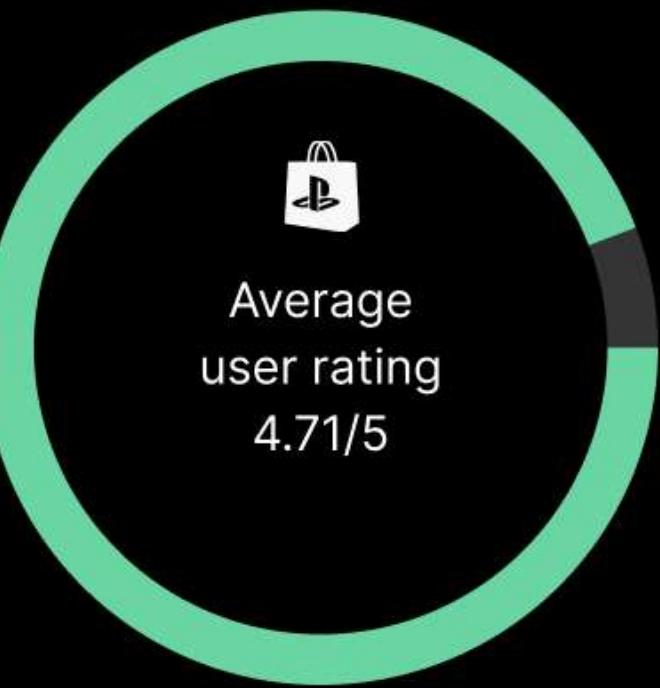
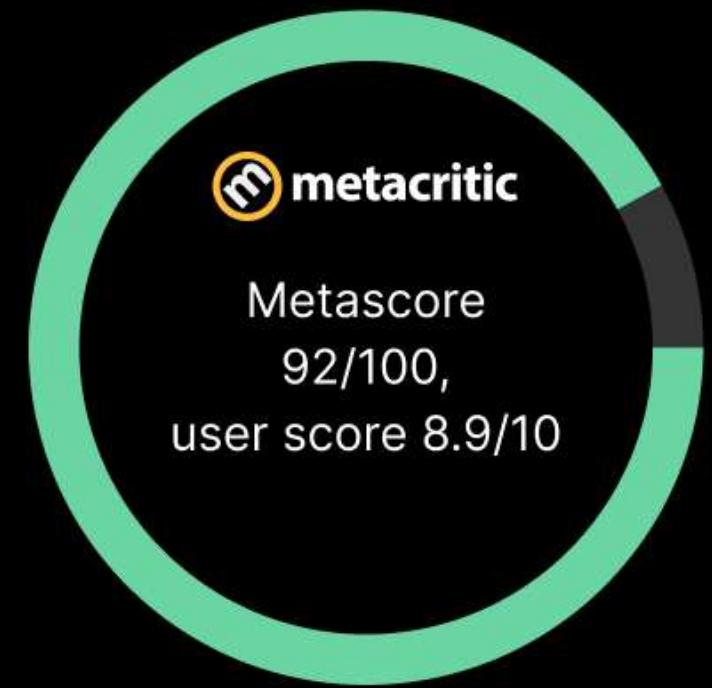


CASE STUDY 4:

# Final Fantasy VII: Rebirth

Developer: Square Enix  
Publisher: Square Enix

Engine: Unreal Engine 4 Time separating original and remake: 26 years



LESSON:

Use the legwork you've done in your franchise thus far; mix and match the best features from different installments if necessary

*Final Fantasy VII* (1997) is arguably the most beloved installment in the franchise.<sup>9</sup> 2024's remake, *Final Fantasy VII: Rebirth*, is a good example of strategic planning that spans multiple releases.



The *Final Fantasy* devs have worked on fleshing out the franchise's universe over the decades. This means that for *Rebirth*, important gaps were filled in: the overall architecture of the franchise has been solidified, character design has matured, and the visual style has become more realistic.

**The art direction itself for this IP is more than 37 years in the making.  
This makes it easier to add to or reinterpret any given segment.**

With worldbuilding having taken place over many years, the studio could step away from a mere one-to-one reproduction—as long as they respected the source material.

The current-day photorealistic visuals have retained a stylized aesthetic that stays true to *Final Fantasy*'s charm. This balance of stylized and realistic was refined in *Final Fantasy XV* (2016), eight years before *Rebirth*'s release.

The environments in the original *Final Fantasy VII* were mostly pre-rendered, 2D backgrounds (which were great for their time) that created the illusion of 3D space but were static. The game's locations, while artistically rich, were not fully explorable in 3D. In the remake, environmental design is expansive and fully 3D, giving players the freedom to explore vast areas in real time. *Rebirth*'s open-world design is a direct evolution of the design of *Final Fantasy XV* (2016) where players could traverse large, open landscapes with varied ecosystems and where towns were intricately designed to feel like lived-in spaces.

Continue reading 

Square Enix took advantage of the work it had done in recent installments and mapped a new gameplay experience onto the story of *Final Fantasy VII*, all while preserving its core experience.

**In recent years, Square Enix has moved toward a more action-oriented combat system.**

This began with games like *Final Fantasy XV* (2016) and evolved in *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (2020) and *Final Fantasy XVI* (2023).

*Rebirth* continues this trend with a hybrid combat system that blends tactical, menu-based commands with the real-time action that has become a hallmark of more recent *Final Fantasy* games. It builds on *Remake*'s (2020) system, which introduced the ATB (Active Time Battle) gauge that slows time during real-time combat, allowing players to issue commands to party members.

This was a direct modernization of the classic turn-based system from the original *Final Fantasy VII*. Square Enix also updated a number of other features that were commonplace when *Final Fantasy VII* first released. Players can now see enemies on their map, thus removing random enemy encounters, giving the player the choice of if they want to engage or not.

These changes show you can modernize your property while preserving the story you want the player to experience. Modern controls and gameplay systems allow a new generation of players to experience the characters and world that so many others already love.

*Rebirth* builds on this by adding vertical exploration, with areas that include cliffs, mountains, and multi-level structures.

This verticality and freedom to explore offers a fresh visual perspective on iconic locations from the original *Final Fantasy VII*.

## Summary

With *Final Fantasy VII: Rebirth*, Square Enix showed that lessons learned in recent years can and should be applied to remakes. The company honors the original's touching story and imaginative world design but leans on the modern evolution of the *Final Fantasy* franchise to elevate it, and to make it more accessible for modern audiences. If your IP is many decades old, it could be worthwhile to study *Rebirth*.



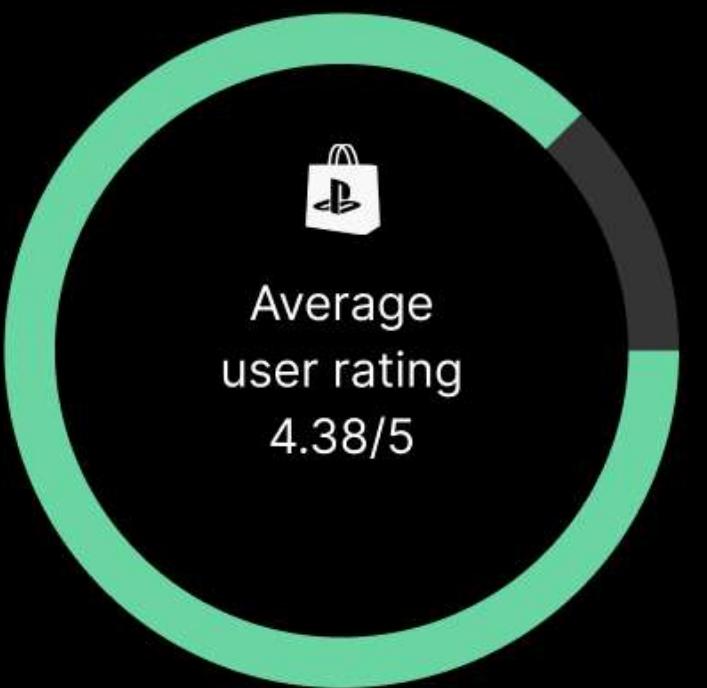
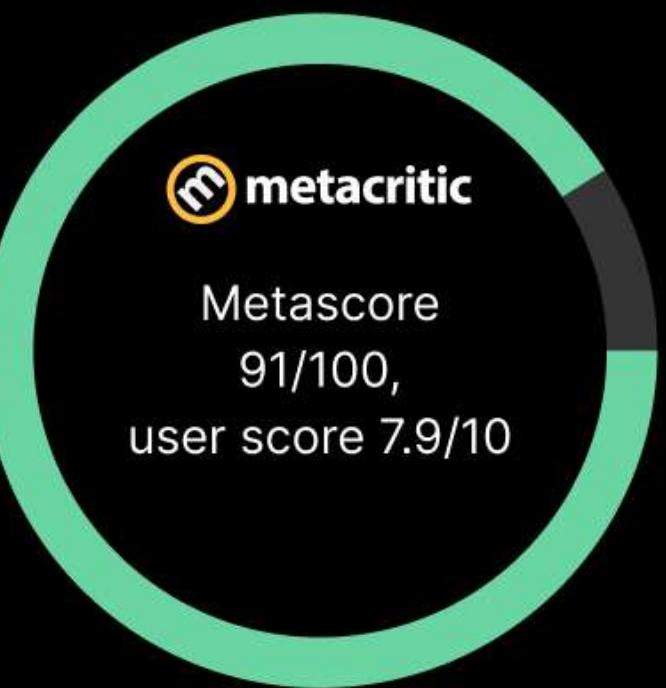
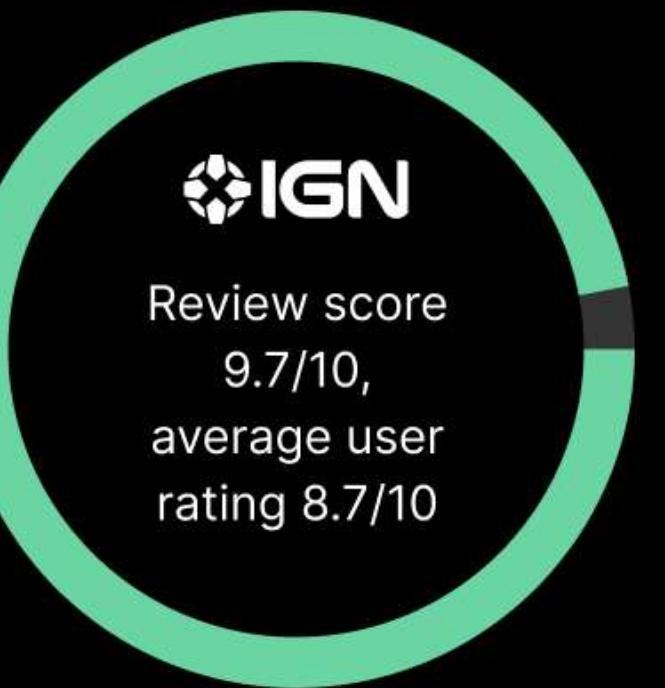
CASE STUDY 5:

# Shadow of the Colossus

Developer: Bluepoint Games

Publisher: Sony Interactive Entertainment

Engine: Custom (Bluepoint) Time separating original and remake: 13 years



# Less is more

When the *Shadow of the Colossus* remake came out in 2018, not much about the game's experience had changed (the original came out on PS2 in 2005).

Why, then, is it consistently ranked among the best remakes of all time?<sup>10, 11</sup>

If it were a straightforward remaster with a cranked-up resolution and a simple port to a new platform, IGN wouldn't have scored it 9.7/10,<sup>12</sup> nor Metacritic 9.1,<sup>13</sup> nor Destructoid 10/10;<sup>14</sup> et cetera.

So how did Bluepoint do it?



IGN called the original *Shadow of the Colossus* a “true masterpiece in terms of art direction”. The game did not need fundamental aesthetic changes. The question for developer Bluepoint was: How do we leverage modern tech to amplify the melancholic, solitary, awe-inspiring feeling of the game?

### Improved visual fidelity 13 years later enabled much more detail for in-game assets.

The fur of colossi (the game's bosses), grass, cliff faces, and so on have tactile detail that improves the world's already jaw-dropping immersiveness. Landscapes were filled with lush vegetation, weather effects, and textural complexity.

### Players can see right onto the horizon in the remake, adding a sense of the game's massive scale.

This was hidden in the original because of short draw distances.

Bluepoint added dynamic lighting and shadows, making the game feel more alive. Sunlight, fog, and ambient lighting in various biomes (like caverns or open plains) now look more cinematic, giving the remake a more realistic and atmospheric feel.

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Very little about the gameplay changed in the remake, but of the things that did, nothing took away from the essence of the original.

Game performance used to buckle in the presence of colossi, the game's giant bosses. Bluepoint fixed that in 2018, which added to the game's immersiveness during close combat.

### One of the biggest changes was the modernization of the control scheme.

The 2005 version had controls that some players found clunky. The remake introduced refined controls with smoother input responsiveness and updated button mapping (though the older controls are still available in settings).

The remake features a more responsive and less intrusive camera system. While the original had moments where the camera felt awkward, particularly during intense battles, the remake's camera is smoother and more dynamic, adapting better to both the environment and player movements.

The cinematic feel of the game is preserved but refined, allowing players to enjoy more immersive views of the world without as much camera frustration.

The remake retains the minimalist HUD of the original but offers subtle improvements for clarity. Information like health and stamina are presented in a cleaner way without disrupting the game's immersiveness.

Such changes are subtle, because subtlety is all that was needed.

The original *Shadow of the Colossus* was acclaimed for its timeless art direction. Bluepoint let the base game do the talking.

## Summary

Ask yourself how well your game holds up today. *Shadow of the Colossus* was lauded at launch, and its greatest strength was its awe-inspiring spirit. Gameplay emphasized exploration, solitude, mystery; its art direction was ethereal, desolate, melancholic. It would have been foolish to tamper with this. Unlike *Final Fantasy VII: Rebirth*, which needed wholesale gameplay changes, or *Resident Evil 4*, which transformed its art direction, *Shadow of the Colossus* as an experience held up remarkably well. Still, as we learned with *Metroid Prime Remastered*, you should still rebuild your game using a modern toolkit. Bluepoint did this to great effect.



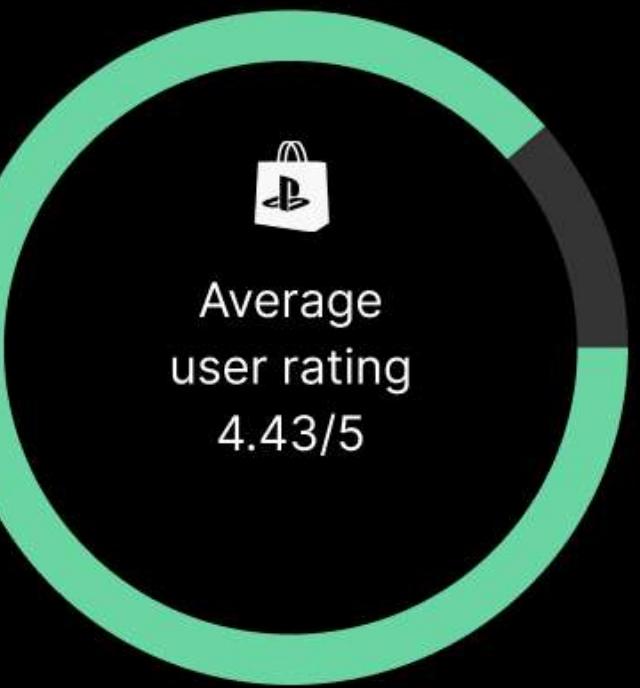
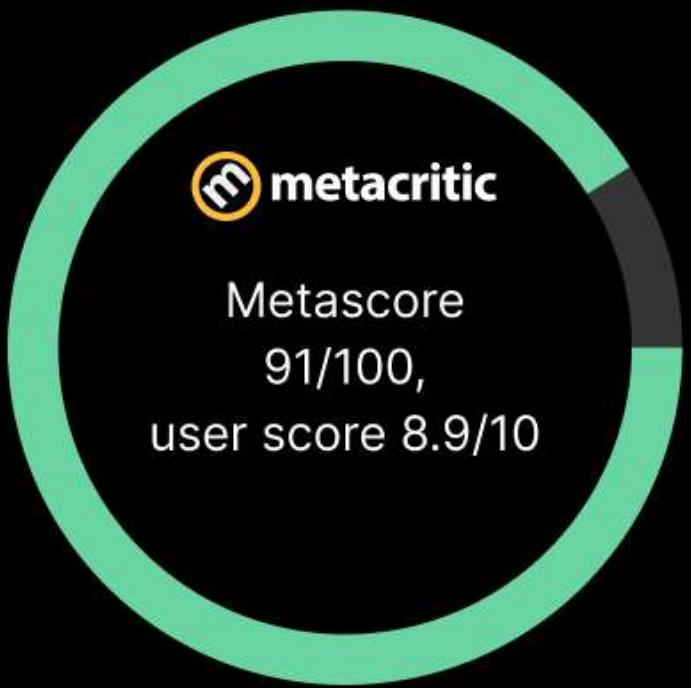
CASE STUDY 6:

# Demon's Souls

Developer: Bluepoint Games

Publisher: Sony Interactive Entertainment

Engine: Custom (Bluepoint) Time separating original and remake: 11 years

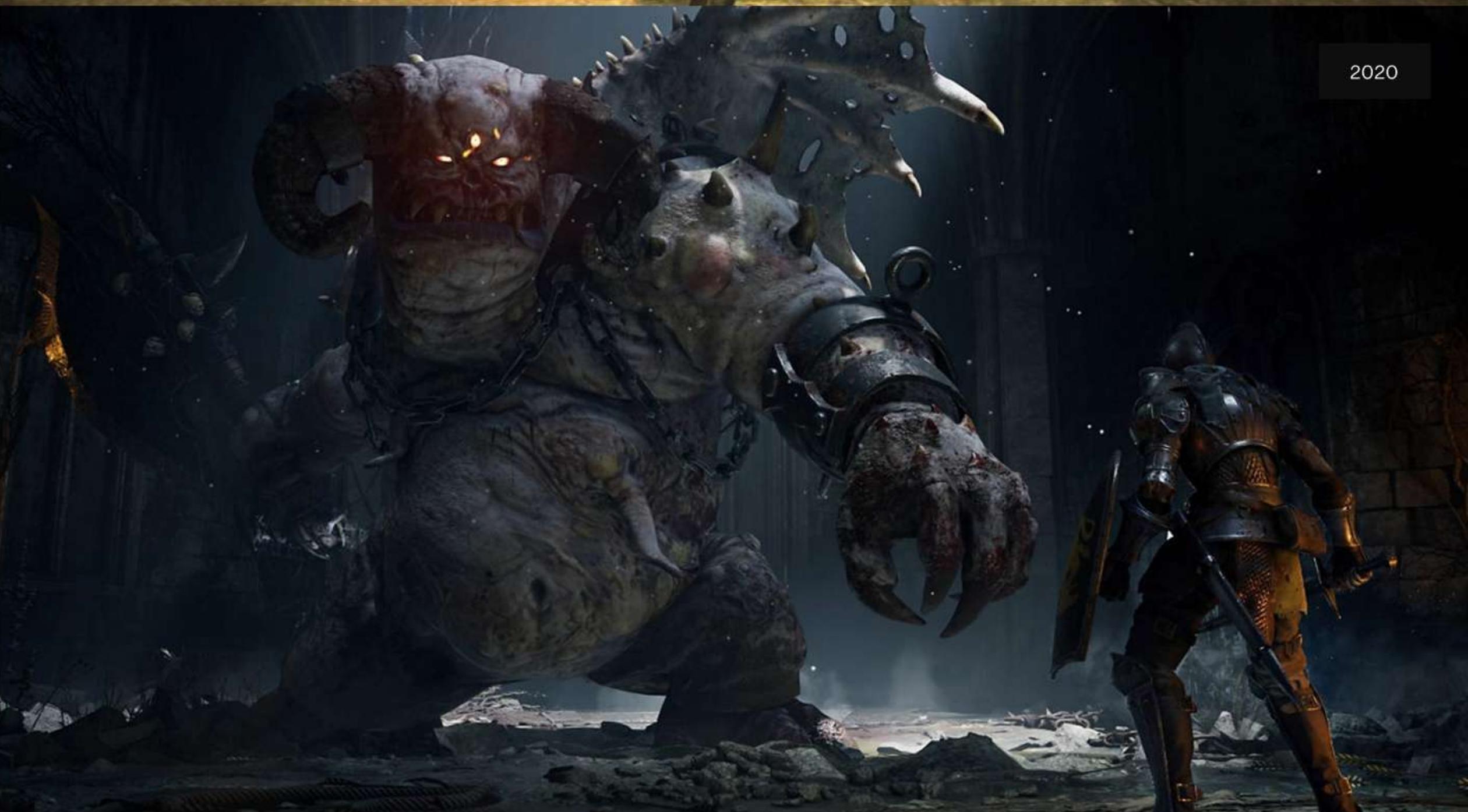


# When to stay true to an original— and when not to

If *Shadow of the Colossus* and *Metroid Prime Remastered* are close recreations, and *Resident Evil 2* and *4* both make major changes, *Demon's Souls* is somewhere in the middle.

*Demon's Souls* (2020) chose not to incorporate gameplay features that were established in post-*Demon's Souls* (2009) *Dark Souls* games. Some people didn't like this.

The remake looks very different to the 2009 original—making full use of the then-brand-new PS5's power—but gameplay is almost the same. It raises an interesting question: When should you stay faithful to an original game, and when should you reinvent features?



The task for *Demon's Souls* dev Bluepoint: How do we keep the dark, gothic elements of a modern classic while also increasing its immersiveness 11 years later?

Bluepoint had the luxury of a brand-new-gen console to work with, and so it was able to place the game right on the cutting edge of what was possible technically. Built with a proprietary engine using the original *Demon's Souls* as the foundation, the art direction in the remake is a staggering achievement.

As far as the game's style and tone, not much has changed. But the technical enhancements take the sense of immersiveness to another level.

**Increased realism was the result of vastly improved visual fidelity.**

#### **Asset design was improved dramatically.**

Everything in the game, from bosses like the Firelurker to regular NPCs, are richly detailed. Armor even has scratches and intricate emblazonry.

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Gameplay in *Demon's Souls* (2020) is almost one-to-one with the original (2009) from a gameplay perspective.

In fact, one of the game's few criticisms was the fact that, unlike *Final Fantasy VII: Rebirth*, which pulled features from more recent franchise games, elements of gameplay which later became standard in *Souls* games were not added to the *Demon's Souls* remake.

In *Souls* games after 2009, Estus Flasks simplify healing; 'bonfire' checkpoints enable fast-travel (and replenish Estus Flasks); weapons are simpler to upgrade. None of these things were added to *Demon's Souls*. Some people loved this,<sup>15</sup> but it was also a common criticism among fans and journalists.<sup>16,17</sup>

Some quality-of-life improvements, like polished rolling and movement and the ability to send items to storage without lugging them to a checkpoint, were praised. But the gameplay stayed mostly the same—to a fault, some believe.

We understand the difficulty with such decisions. Might too many changes have taken away from the *Demon's Souls* experience (which after all is the game that birthed the Soulslike movement)? Might that have led to even more criticism?

**Dynamic lighting has transformed the player experience.**

Areas like the Boletarian Palace and the Tower of Latria play with light and shadow to create a daunting experience for the player.

Despite the visual updates, Bluepoint preserved the original game's haunting and oppressive atmosphere, keeping the general sense of despair intact. Level layouts, color palettes, and architectural designs remain largely faithful to the original.

## Summary

When it comes to remakes, there is no exact science, no rulebook on how to do it perfectly. *Demon's Souls* (2020) was still received very well, and the criticism it got for not adding newer *Souls* gameplay features wasn't universal nor resounding. The important part, as ever, is to be laser-focused on recreating a sense of immersiveness—and keeping the 'soul'—pun intended—of the game the same.



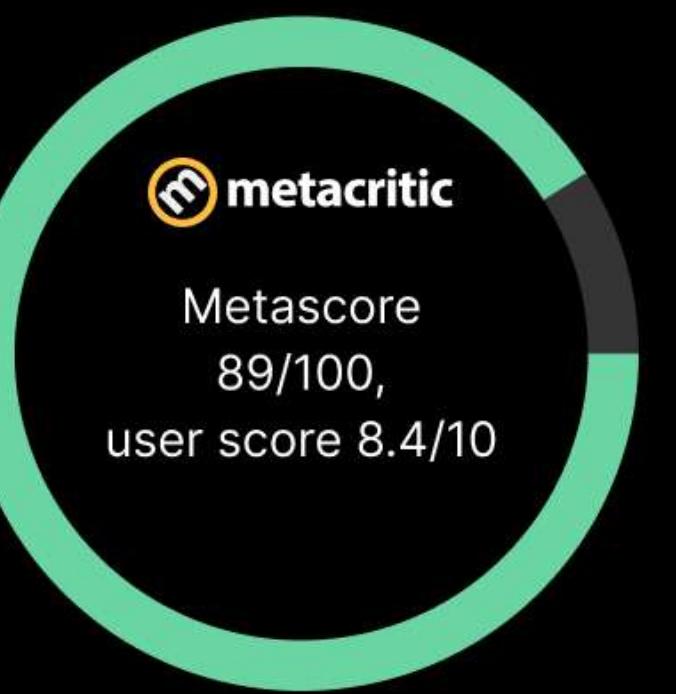
CASE STUDY 7:

# Dead Space

Developer: Motive Studio  
Publisher: Electronic Arts

Engine: Frostbite

Time separating original and remake: 15 years



# Approach your remake methodically; consider clarifying the ‘pillars of experience’ in your original and ensure all parts of your remake are built on them

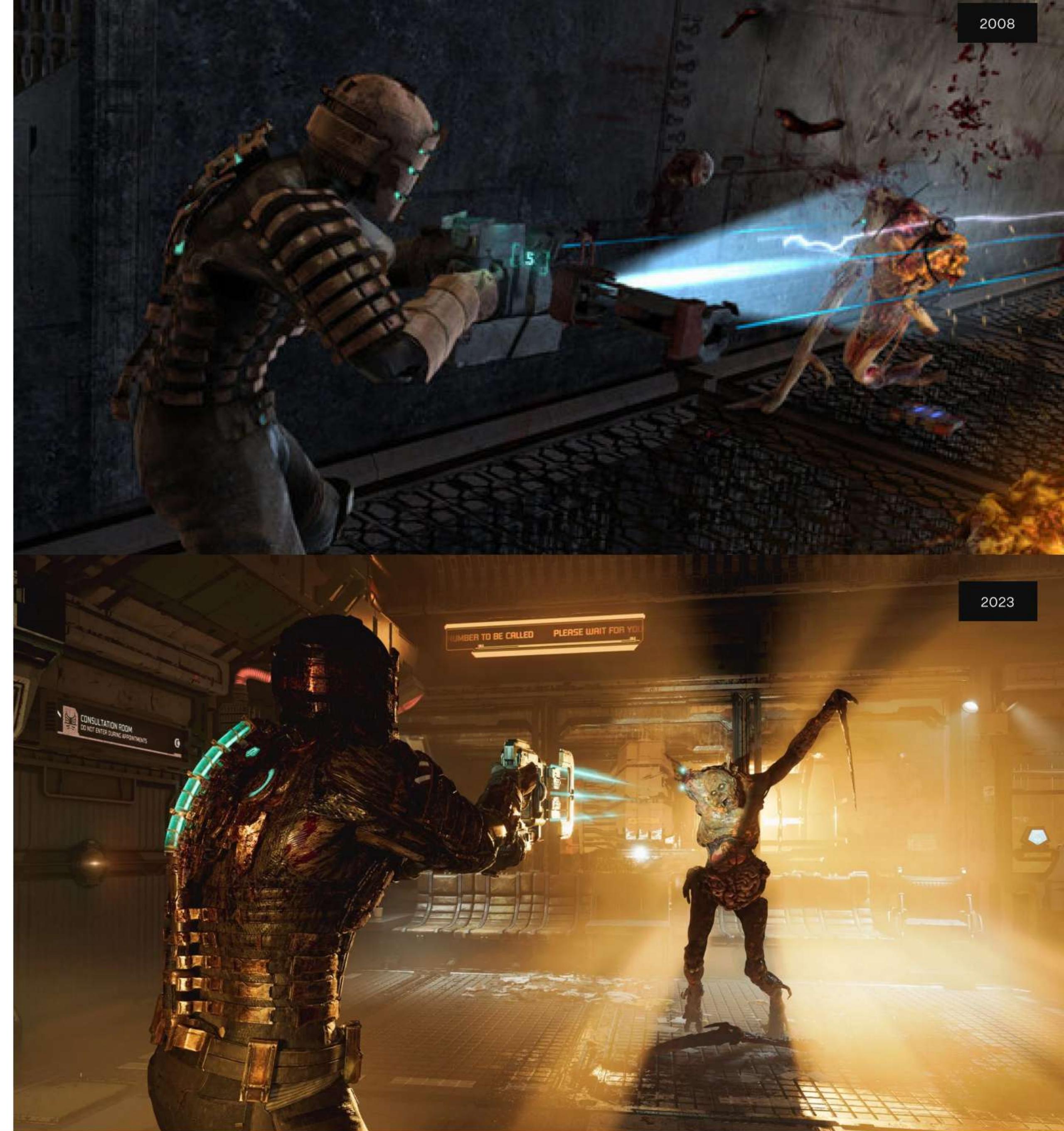
For the *Dead Space* remake—which, like *Metroid Prime Remastered* and *Shadow of the Colossus*, was a close recreation of its original—Motive Studio leaned on ‘pillars of experience’ from the original,<sup>18</sup> and built everything it did around that.

## They were:

1. Sci-fi horror
2. Unbroken immersion
3. Creative gameplay

“Any novelty, enhancement, enrichment, or whatever had to fit inside one of those pillars”

Roman Campos-Oriola, Motive Studio



In this remake, *Dead Space*'s trademark industrial sci-fi horror feels the same as it felt in 2008, but developer Motive Studio made some subtle yet impactful changes.

The game's art style and visual language—bleak, utilitarian, oppressive—remains intact. The remake makes use of modern graphical tools while keeping the original style. The USG Ishimura is still a cold, mechanical labyrinth; the enhancements only serve to make it more immersive.

**The original game's claustrophobic corridors and dimly lit environments are faithfully recreated and indeed amplified with dynamic lighting.**

Lighting is one of the standout enhancements in the *Dead Space* remake (lighting as a relatively new niche of game development has been a recurring theme in this report). The use of real-time volumetric lighting and shadows, along with enhanced fog effects, makes the atmosphere more ominous. Flickering lights and malfunctioning equipment add to the sense of dread.

The original game's clever use of light and shadow was already central to its immersiveness, and the remake builds on this well.

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Gameplay in *Dead Space* was far from overhauled, but it was modernized and improved in important ways.

**Weapon aiming is tighter. Controlling the protagonist is easier because he moves better, especially when running or turning.**

The player can now float in all directions in zero-gravity sections; before, they could only jump from one point to another. These changes are subtle but they make gameplay feel tidier.

Motive Studio knew not to change too much. Core elements like resource management and puzzle solving remain intact.

The core gameplay loops of the 2008 original remain unique and fun, so fundamental changes weren't necessary.

**Exploration is more rewarding.**

The USG Ishimura is now a fully connected environment. This allows for seamless exploration and backtracking. New sidequests and story elements were also added, making the experience of exploration and mission completion feel more rewarding.

**Design is more intricate.**

While environment layouts are mostly the same, they have been rebuilt with an extra level of detail. Isaac Clarke's suit, which our 3D art team at Room 8 Group worked on, now has extra armor plates, shows signs of damage from combat, and generally has a lot more depth. Dismemberment of necromorphs is made even more satisfying by its enhanced gruesomeness.

All of this strikes a balance between keeping the game's visual philosophy the same while enhancing elements that add to its immersiveness 15 years later.

## Summary

Motive Studio was calculated in how it approached its remake of *Dead Space*. Its 'pillars of experience' approach is something other game-makers can learn from. Strip away the form, the embellishments: what are the core actions or principles that made the original game unique? Nurture or recreate them at all costs.

# Key takeaways

1.

It pays to rebuild a game from scratch, even if your desired outcome is a game similar in appearance to its original (*Metroid Prime Remastered, Shadow of the Colossus*)

3.

Pay attention to how gameplay norms have evolved, and be bold enough to remove outdated parts—even if they were important to your original (*Resident Evil 4*)

5.

Remaking a game is about recreating a feeling, even if many things on the surface change (*Resident Evil 4 art direction*)

7.

Make the most of modern lighting capabilities in your remake (*Metroid Prime Remastered, Resident Evil 2, Resident Evil 4, Dead Space*)

2.

When you've made improvements to your franchise in more recent games, add them to your remake (*Final Fantasy VII: Rebirth, Resident Evil 2, Resident Evil 4*)

4.

The older your game, the more creative liberties you can probably take (*Resident Evil 2 gameplay, Final Fantasy VII: Rebirth gameplay*)

6.

Use modern tech to recreate the immersiveness of your original by adding rich details and textures to environments, characters, and levels (*Demon's Souls, Metroid Prime Remastered, Dead Space*)

8.

Consider conceptualizing your original's 'pillars of experience' and build your remake on them (*Dead Space*)

Crisper graphics and higher resolutions, by themselves, may not be enough to warrant a new game (and for fans, a new price tag). The best remakes use newly-found capabilities to recreate the feeling of immersiveness that their respective originals delivered for an older generation.

If you're planning your next remake, we can help...

NEXT STEPS

# Looking to remake a game? Work with us.

If you'd like to learn more about how we can take  
your project to the next level, let's talk!

CONTACT US



DEAD  
SPACE



# About Room 8 Group

Room 8 Group is an end-to-end strategic partner in external game development. Working across all platforms, we provide creative and technical expertise across game development, technology, art, trailers, and QA for AAA and AA games.

Since 2011, we've built creative partnerships with world-leading publishers such as Microsoft, Nintendo, Ubisoft, Sony, Gameloft, Take2, EA, and more. While leveraging our own cutting-edge tools and R&D capabilities, we've co-created award-winning projects for video game IPs and franchises including *Call of Duty*, *Diablo*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Star Trek*, *The Walking Dead*, *Doctor Who*, and many more.

Through primarily organic growth, we are proudly independent, now home to around 1,300 specialists based in Europe, North America, and South America.

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