

## = System Shock 2 =

System Shock 2 is a first @-@ person action role @-@ playing survival horror video game for Microsoft Windows , OS X and Linux , designed by Ken Levine and co @-@ developed by Irrational Games and Looking Glass Studios . Originally intended to be a standalone title , its story was changed during production into a sequel to the 1994 PC game System Shock ; the alterations were made when Electronic Arts ? who owned the System Shock franchise rights ? signed on as publisher . System Shock 2 was released on August 11 , 1999 , in North America .

The game takes place on board a starship in a cyberpunk depiction of 2114 . The player assumes the role of a soldier trying to stem the outbreak of a genetic infection that has devastated the ship . Like System Shock , gameplay consists of combat and exploration . It incorporates role @-@ playing system elements , in which the player can develop skills and traits , such as hacking and psionic abilities .

System Shock 2 received positive reviews , but failed to meet commercial sales expectations . Many critics later determined that the game was highly influential in subsequent game design , particularly on first @-@ person shooters , and considered it far ahead of its time . It has been included in several " greatest games of all time " lists . In 2007 , Irrational Games released a spiritual successor to the System Shock series , titled BioShock , to critical acclaim and strong sales . System Shock 2 had been in intellectual property limbo following closure of Looking Glass Studios . Night Dive Studios were able to secure the rights to game and System Shock franchise in 2013 to produce an updated version of System Shock 2 for modern personal computers . OtherSide Entertainment announced in December 2015 that they have been licensed the rights from Night Dive Studios to produce a sequel , System Shock 3 .

## = = Gameplay = =

Like in its predecessor , System Shock , gameplay in System Shock 2 is an amalgamation of the action role @-@ playing game and survival horror genres . The developers achieved this gameplay design by rendering the experience as a standard first @-@ person shooter and adding a character customization and development system , which are considered as signature role @-@ play elements . The player uses melee and projectile weapons to defeat enemies , while a role @-@ playing system allows the development of useful abilities . Navigation is presented from a first @-@ person view and complemented with a heads @-@ up display that shows character and weapon information , a map , and a drag and drop inventory .

The backstory is explained progressively through the player 's acquisition of audio logs and encounters with ghostly apparitions . At the beginning of the game the player chooses a career in a branch of the Unified National Nominate , a fictional military organization . Each branch of service gives the player a set of starting bonuses composed of certain skills , though may thereafter freely develop as the player chooses . The Marine begins with bonuses to weaponry , the Navy officer is skilled in repairing and hacking , and the OSA agent gets a starting set of psionic powers .

The player can upgrade their skills by using " cyber @-@ modules " given as rewards for completing objectives such as searching the ship , and then spend them at devices called " cyber @-@ upgrade units " to obtain enhanced skills . Operating system ( O / S ) units allow one @-@ time character upgrades to be made ( e.g. permanent health enhancement ) . An in @-@ game currency called " nanites " may be spent on items at vending machines , including ammunition supplies and health packs . " Quantum Bio @-@ Reconstruction Machines " can be activated and reconstitute the player for 10 nanites if they die inside the area in which the machine resides . Otherwise , the game ends and progress must be resumed from a save point . The player can hack devices , such as keypads to open alternate areas and vending machines to reduce prices . When a hack is attempted , a minigame begins that features a grid of green nodes ; the player must connect three in a straight row to succeed . Optionally , electronic lock picks , called " ICE @-@ picks " , can be found that will automatically hack a machine , regardless of its difficulty .

Throughout the game , the player can procure various weapons , including melee weapons , pistols

, shotguns , and alien weapons . Non @-@ melee weapons degrade with use and will break if they are not regularly repaired with maintenance tools . There are a variety of ammunition types , each of which is most damaging to a specific enemy . For example , organic enemies are vulnerable to anti @-@ personnel rounds , while mechanical foes are weak against armor @-@ piercing rounds . Similarly , energy weapons cause the most damage against robots and cyborgs , and the annelid @-@ made exotic weaponry is particularly harmful to organic targets . Because ammunition is scarce , to be effective the player must use it sparingly and carefully search rooms for supplies .

The game includes a research function . When new objects are encountered in the game , especially enemies , their organs can be collected and , when combined with chemicals found in storage rooms , the player can research the enemies and thus improve their damage against them . Similarly , some exotic weapons and items can only be used after being researched . OSA agents effectively have a separate weapons tree available to them . Psionic powers can be learned , such as invisibility , fireballs and teleportation .

= = Plot = =

= = = Backstory = = =

In 2072 , after the Citadel Station 's demise , TriOptimum 's attempts to cover up the incident were exposed to the media and the corporation was brought up on charges from multiple individuals and companies for the ensuing scandal . The virus developed there killed the station 's population ; the ruthless malevolent A.I supercomputer named SHODAN controlled , and eventually destroyed the Citadel Station in hopes of enslaving and destroying humanity . After a massive number of trials , the company went bankrupt and their operations were shut down . The United Nations Nominate ( UNN ) , a UN successor , was established to combat the malevolence and corruption of power @-@ hungry corporations , including TriOptimum .

In 2100 , 28 years later , the company 's failed stocks and assets were bought by a Russian oligarch named Anatoly Korenchkin , a former black market operator who sought to make money in legitimate ways . He re @-@ licensed and restored the company to its former status in the following decade . Along with producing healthcare and consumer products , Korenchkin signed weapons contracts with various military organizations , private and political @-@ owned . The new UNN was almost virtually powerless with Korenchkin exercising control over them .

In January 2114 , 42 years after the Citadel events and 12 years into rebuilding TriOptimum , the company created an experimental FTL starship , the Von Braun , which is now on its maiden voyage . The ship is also followed by a UNN space vessel , the Rickenbacker , which is controlled by Captain William Bedford Diego , son of Edward Diego , the Citadel Station 's infamous commander and public hero of the Battle of the Boston Harbor during the Eastern States police action . Because the Rickenbacker does not have an FTL system of its own , the two ships are attached for the trip . However , Korenchkin was egoistical enough to make himself the captain of the Von Braun despite being inexperienced

In July 2114 , 5 months into the journey , the ships respond to a distress signal from the planet Tau Ceti V , outside the Solar System . A rescue team is sent to the planet 's surface where they discover strange eggs ; these eggs , found in an old ejection pod , infect the rescue team and integrate them into an alien communion known as the Many . The infection eventually spreads to both ships and the ships are overrun with the virus . The virus overruns most of the crew .

= = = Plot = = =

Owing to a computer malfunction , the remaining soldier awakens with amnesia in a cryo @-@ tube on the medical deck of the Von Braun , being implanted with an illegal cyber neural interface . He is immediately contacted by another survivor , Dr. Janice Polito , who guides him to safety before the cabin depressurizes . She demands that he meets her on deck 4 of the Von Braun . Along the way ,

the soldier battles the infected crew members . The Many also telepathically communicate with him , attempting to convince him to join them . After restarting the ship 's engine core , the soldier reaches deck 4 and discovers that Polito is dead . He is then confronted by SHODAN . It is revealed she has been posing as Polito to gain the soldier 's trust .

SHODAN mentions that she is responsible for creating the Many through her bioengineering experiments on Citadel Station . The Hacker , who created her , ejected the grove that contained her experiments to prevent them contaminating Earth , an act that allowed part of SHODAN to survive in the grove . The grove crash @-@ landed on Tau Ceti V. While SHODAN went into forced hibernation , The Many evolved beyond her control . SHODAN tells the soldier that his only chance for survival lies in helping destroy her creations . Efforts to regain control of XERXES , the main computer on the Von Braun , fail . SHODAN informs the soldier that destroying the ship is their only option , but he must transmit her program to the Rickenbacker first . While en route , the soldier briefly encounters two survivors , Tommy Suarez and Rebecca Siddons , who flee the ship aboard an escape pod .

With the transfer complete , the soldier travels to the Rickenbacker and learns both ships have been enveloped by the infection 's source , a gigantic mass of bio @-@ organic tissue . The soldier enters the biomass and destroys its core , stopping the infection . SHODAN congratulates him and tells of her intentions to merge real space and cyberspace through the Von Braun 's faster @-@ than @-@ light drive . The soldier confronts SHODAN in cyberspace and defeats her . The final scene shows Tommy and Rebecca receiving a message from the Von Braun . Tommy responds , saying they will return and noting that Rebecca is acting strange . Rebecca is shown speaking in a SHODAN @-@ like voice , asking Tommy if he " likes her new look " , as the screen fades to black .

= = History = =

= = = Development = = =

Development of System Shock 2 began in 1997 when Looking Glass Studios approached Irrational Games with an idea to co @-@ develop a new game . The development team were fans of System Shock and sought to create a similar game . Early story ideas were similar to the novella Heart of Darkness . In an early draft , the player was tasked with assassinating an insane commander on a starship . The original title of the game , according to its pitch document , was Junction Point . The philosophy of the design was to continue to develop the concept of a dungeon crawler , like Ultima Underworld : The Stygian Abyss , in a science fiction setting , the basis for System Shock . However , the press mistook System Shock to be closer to a Doom clone which was cited for poor financial success of System Shock . With Junction Point , the goal was to add in a significant role @-@ playing elements and a persistent storyline as to distance the game from Doom .

The title took 18 months to create with a budget of \$ 1 @.@ 7 million and was pitched to several publishers , until Electronic Arts ? who owned the rights to the Shock franchise ? responded by suggesting the game become a sequel to System Shock . The development team agreed ; Electronic Arts became the publisher and story changes were made to incorporate the franchise . The project was allotted one year to be completed , and to compensate for the short time frame , the staff began working with Looking Glass Studio 's unfinished Dark Engine , the same engine used to create Thief : The Dark Project .

The designers included role @-@ playing elements in the game . Similar to Ultima Underworld , another Looking Glass Studios project , the environment in System Shock 2 is persistent and constantly changes without the player 's presence . Paper @-@ and @-@ pencil role @-@ playing games were influential ; the character customization system was based on Traveller 's methodology and was implemented in the fictional military branches which , by allowing multiple character paths , the player could receive a more open @-@ ended gameplay experience . Horror was a key focus and four major points were identified to successfully incorporate it . Isolation was deemed primary ,

which resulted in the player having little physical contact with other sentient beings . Secondly , vulnerability was created by focusing on a fragile character . Last were the inclusion of moody sound effects and " the intelligent placement of lighting and shadows " . The game 's lead designer , Ken Levine , oversaw the return of System Shock villain SHODAN . Part of Levine 's design was to ally the player with her , as he believed that game characters were too trusting , stating " good guys are good , bad guys are bad . What you see and perceive is real " . Levine sought to challenge this notion by having SHODAN betray the player : " Sometimes characters are betrayed , but the player never is . I wanted to violate that trust and make the player feel that they , and not [ only ] the character , were led on and deceived " . This design choice was controversial with the development team .

Several problems were encountered during the project . Because the team comprised two software companies , tension emerged regarding job assignments and some developers left the project . Additionally , many employees were largely inexperienced , but in retrospect project manager Jonathan Chey felt this was advantageous , stating " inexperience also bred enthusiasm and commitment that might not have been present with a more jaded set of developers . " The Dark Engine posed problems of its own . It was unfinished , forcing the programmers to fix software bugs when encountered . In contrast , working closely with the engine code allowed them to write additional features . Not all setbacks were localized ; a demonstration build at E3 was hindered when it was requested all guns be removed from the presentation due to then @-@ recent Columbine High School massacre .

= = = Release = = =

A demo for the game , featuring a tutorial and a third of the first mission , was released on August 2 , 1999 . Nine days later , System Shock 2 was shipped to retailers . An enhancement patch was released a month later and added significant features , such as co @-@ operative multiplayer and control over weapon degradation and enemy respawn rates . A port was planned for the Dreamcast but was canceled .

= = = End @-@ of @-@ support and source code leak = = =

Around 2000 , with the end @-@ of @-@ support for the game by the developer and publisher , remaining bugs and compatibility with newer operating systems and hardware became a growing problem . To compensate the missing support , some fans of the game became active in the modding community to update the game . For instance , the " Rebirth " graphical enhancement mod replaced many low @-@ polygonal models with higher quality ones , a " Shock Texture Upgrade Project " increased the resolution of textures , and an updated level editor was released by the user community . In 2009 , a complete copy of System Shock 2 's Dark Engine source code was discovered in the possession of an ex @-@ Looking Glass Studios employee who was at the time continuing his work for Eidos Interactive . In late April 2010 , a user on the Dreamcast Talk forum disassembled the contents of a Dreamcast development kit he had purchased . In 2012 significant unofficial updates for System Shock 2 ( and other Dark Engine @-@ based games ) were published .

= = = Intellectual property debacle and re @-@ release = = =

The intellectual property ( IP ) rights of System Shock 2 were caught for years in complications between Electronic Arts and Meadowbrook Insurance Group ( a subsidiary of Star Insurance Company ) , the entity that acquired the assets of Looking Glass Studios on their closure , though according to a lawyer for Star Insurance , they themselves have since acquired the lingering intellectual property rights from EA .

In October 2012 Stephen Kick of Night Dive Studios , seeking to bring the game to modern systems , started negotiations with the rights holders and was able to secure the rights . Kick worked with

GOG.com for a timed @-@ exclusive release on their digital distribution website on February 2013 , where the game was the most requested to be added to the catalog . This version , considered by GOG.com to be a " collector 's edition " , includes updates to the original game to make it work on modern systems while still allowing user @-@ made modifications to be applied , and contains additional material such as the game 's soundtrack , maps of the Von Braun , and the original pitch document for the game . The update rights also allowed a Mac OS X version of System Shock 2 to be subsequently released on June 18 , 2013 through GOG.com. The title was later also available on Steam on May 10 , 2013 . On April 2014 a Linux version was also released .

Since then , Night Dive Studios also acquired the rights to System Shock , releasing an enhanced version of the game in September 2015 . Kick has reported they have acquired full rights to the series since then .

= = Reception = =

System Shock 2 received over a dozen awards , including seven " Game of the Year " prizes . Reviews were very positive and lauded the title for its hybrid gameplay , moody sound design , and engaging story . System Shock 2 is regarded by critics as highly influential , particularly on first @-@ person shooters and the horror genre . In a retrospective article , GameSpot declared the title " well ahead of its time " and stated that it " upped the ante in dramatic and mechanical terms " by creating a horrific gameplay experience . Despite critical acclaim , the title did not perform well commercially ; only 58 @,@ 671 copies were sold by April 2000 .

Several publications praised the title for its open @-@ ended gameplay . With regard to character customization , Trent Ward of IGN stated the best element of the role @-@ playing system was allowing gamers to " play the game as completely different characters " , and felt this made each play @-@ through unique . Erik Reckase writing for Just Adventure agreed , saying " There are very few games that allow you [ to ] play the way you want " . Alec Norands of Allgame believed that the different character classes made the game ? diverse enough to demand instant replayability " . Robert Mayer from Computer Games Magazine called System Shock 2 " a game that truly defies classification in a single genre " , and ensured that " the action is occasionally fast @-@ paced , it 's more often tactical , placing a premium on thought rather than on reflexes . "

A number of critics described the game as frightening . Computer and Video Games described the atmosphere as " gripping " and guaranteed readers they would " jump out of [ their ] skin " numerous times . Allgame found the sound design particularly effective , calling it ? absolutely , teeth @-@ clenchingly disturbing " , while PC Gamer 's William Harms christened System Shock 2 as the most frightening game he had ever played . Some critics found the weapon degradation system to be irritating , and members of the development team have also expressed misgivings about the system . The role @-@ playing system was another point of contention ; GameSpot described the job system as " badly unbalanced " because the player can develop skills outside their career choice . Allgame felt similarly about the system , saying it " leaned towards a hacker character " .

Along with Deus Ex , Sid Shuman of GamePro christened System Shock 2 " [ one of the ] twin barrels of modern [ first @-@ person shooter ] innovation " , owing to its complex role @-@ playing gameplay . IGN writer Cam Shea referred to the game as " another reinvention of the FPS genre " , citing the story , characters , and RPG system . PC Zone lauded the game as a " fabulous example of a modern @-@ day computer game " and named it " a sci @-@ fi horror masterpiece " . The title has been inducted into a number of features listing the greatest games ever made , including ones by GameSpy , Edge , Empire , IGN , GameSpot and PC Gamer . IGN also ranked System Shock 2 as the 35th greatest first @-@ person shooter of all time . SHODAN has proven to be a popular character among most critics , including IGN , GameSpot and The Phoenix .

= = Sequel = =

System Shock 2 has amassed a cult following , with fans asking for a sequel . On January 9 , 2006 , GameSpot reported that Electronic Arts had renewed its trademark protection on the System

Shock name , leading to speculation that System Shock 3 might be under development . Three days later , Computer and Video Games reported a reliable source had come forward and confirmed the title 's production . Electronic Arts UK made no comment when confronted with the information . PC Gamer UK stated the team behind The Godfather : The Game ( EA Redwood Shores ) was charged with its creation . Ken Levine , when asked whether he would helm a third installment , replied " that question is completely out of my hands " . He expressed optimism at the prospect of System Shock 3 , but revealed that EA had not shown interest in his own proposal for a sequel , and was not optimistic with regards to their abilities . Electronic Arts did not confirm a new title in the series and allowed the System Shock trademark registration to lapse . Redwood Shores ' next release was 2008 's Dead Space , a game with noted similarities in theme and presentation to the System Shock series .

In November 2015 , Night Dive Studios , after acquiring the rights for the System Shock franchise , stated they are considering developing a third title in the series . In December 2015 , OtherSide Entertainment , a studio founded by former Looking Glass Studios designer Paul Neurath , announced they were developing System Shock 3 with rights granted to them by Night Dive Studios . OtherSide had acquired rights to make sequels to System Shock some years before this point , but did not have the rights to the series name , which Night Dive was able to provide . The sequel will feature Terri Brosius reprising her voice for SHODAN , and will include work from original System Shock concept artist Robb Waters . Warren Spector , the producer of the first System Shock , announced in February 2016 that he has joined OtherSide Entertainment and will be working on System Shock 3 .

= = = Spiritual successors = = =

In 2007 , Irrational Games ? briefly known as 2K Boston / 2K Australia ? released a spiritual successor to the System Shock series , entitled BioShock . The game takes place in an abandoned underwater utopian community destroyed by the genetic modification of its populace and shares many gameplay elements with System Shock 2 : reconstitution stations can be activated , allowing the player to be resurrected when they die ; hacking , ammo conservation , and exploration are integral parts of gameplay ; and unique powers may be acquired via plasmids , special abilities that function similarly to psionics in System Shock 2 . The two titles also share plot similarities and employ audio logs and encounters with ghostly apparitions to reveal backstory . In BioShock Infinite , Irrational Games included a gameplay feature called " 1999 Mode " , specifically in reference to System Shock 2 's release year , designed to provide a similar game experience , with a higher difficulty and long @-@ lasting effects of choices made , that would remind players of System Shock 's unforgiving nature .