

Rebuild is a very promising mod which aims to enhance the gameplay of *Half-Life 2*. My main complaint with HL2 is that it suffers from the developers thinking more of atmosphere and exploration rather than gameplay, ergo its gunplay and combat is quite boring and repetitive. I'm not saying HL2 is bad, but its replay-ability is affected by the aforementioned, leaving the community ever so eager for mods such as this.

At first glance Rebuild appears to inherit some basic stuff from MMod and one can assume it is to be a successor; sadly, it seems Rebuild needed a bit more time in the oven, and perhaps, a tad more playtesting, if any.

The first thing you'll notice in Rebuild is its new player movement speed. Now, don't get me wrong, I like fast-paced games, but *Half-Life 2* was very intentionally designed around slow, limited player movement. Rebuild's forced sprint ruins HL2's challenging sections; a prime example is the headcrab shelling scene at the end of Route Kanal; I was able to very swiftly skim through the section with ease, without taking a single hit of damage.

Puzzlingly, the acceleration speed for the Airboat was increased, though this might just be me.

That brings me to my next issue – damage. In a valid attempt to make the tuning of HL2's sandbox more challenging, the developers of the mod have slightly amplified the damage of certain enemies, namely the combine soldiers. I can see why they did this, and while it may be a "skill issue" on my part, I think it was overdone. In Nova Prospekt there was a very overstimulating section shortly after the Antlion Guard fight where there were soldiers coming from every corner. I was overwhelmed very quickly. Granted, I was on Hard mode, so I came down to Normal – still very overwhelming; so, I brought it down to Easy – and still, I was easily getting my arse handed to me by these soldiers. Additionally, a core complaint of the combine soldier still stands here, as they haven't improved the Shotgun Soldier one bit. How come they can fire 3 shots a second without pumping, yet the player can't? It's such a cheap attempt at making an enemy harder, and I think the mod's developers should have addressed that.

What makes this damage tuning even more confusing is the fact that the Civil Protection officers were piss easy to take down with the Glock, and don't get me started on the Antlion Guard, which was again even easier to take down due to the addition of the increased player speed. This would also ruin the Antlion Guardian chase in EP2, as the whole point of that section is the tension raised by the limited Sprint. By removing that limitation you can just infinitely sprint and jump away from the Guardian, eliminating any fun, horror, or tension from that setpiece.

When a video game, especially one which is already critically acclaimed for years to come, has a certain design decision, before changing it, one should consider why it was there in the first place. Like a shot in a film, or a bar in a piece of music, everything is carefully decided and is deliberate.

A couple of other things that Rebuild does is change certain details, which in my mind is a welcome change, despite a couple of opinions I have about it. I really like the new sounds, except for the Black Mesa Glock sound, the wood footstep sound, and the tile sound. In my opinion the BM Glock sound doesn't fit HL2's pistol at all, and they should have kept it as the original, as for me it is one of the HL2 sound effects that has aged the best. The same goes for the footsteps I just mentioned, or perhaps use the ones from *Half-Life: Alyx*. They don't sound like wood or tile at all, they sound kind of "wet." That being said, this is 100% subjective.

An unwelcome change I observed is the red blood effect on your screen. I can see what they were trying to do but my problem is that it happens far too often and obstructs too much of the HUD. Clearly, there is no specific behaviour the client code is looking for when displaying the blood effects, because you could be on 100 HP, and only take 1 damage to your suit armour, and the blood will display. It's very distracting. It should be attuned to only display when your health is  $\leq 25$  and needs to stay away from the HUD and the middle of the screen. I would suggest that the devs look at how Call of Duty 4 did this effect.

Another problem I'll mention despite the developer's acknowledgment is the Helicopter shaking effect... I mean, it's quite silly, especially in Water Hazard. It's not needed at all. We can already see and hear the helicopter. Nearby helicopters don't give people head spasms or cause an earthquake.

One thing I'll mention before I wrap up is the odd decision to rename Point Insertion to "Ashes." It sounds 'fine' on paper but it's kind of stupid once you're in the game – because right after G-Man says "wake up, Mr. Freeman, and smell the ashes," it says "ASHES" on your screen. It looks quite goofy. Keep the original chapter name.

On the flipside of my complaints, Rebuild has a very clean settings menu allowing the user to choose what enhancements they do or don't want, and Discord RPC is quite nifty. The weapons sounds (apart from the Glock) are amazing, as are the new models, although the Grav Gun is too small and clips off visibly. I have decided to prioritise the negatives over the positives in my review as I aim to bring these to the developer's attention. Regardless I have a lot of respect for this mod and its developers and I really look forward to its evolution. Uranium Team is a promising alliance of creators and I think by listening to feedback they can drive Rebuild through the roof and give "Overcharged" and "Cinematic Mod" a grave.

Before I conclude there are a couple of technical bits of feedback and suggestions I'd like to provide which may only appeal to the mod's programmer(s).

1. Store the code on GitHub for tracking, continuity, and cross-collaboration. This also allows for more accurate bug reports.
2. Statically link the Discord RPC library to the Client DLL, negating the need to ship discord-rpc.dll as it will be "embedded" within client.dll.
3. In your client, use SteamUGC to detect if the user has any Steam Workshop addons subscribed and warn them to turn it off as it may hinder their HL2R experience (which it evidently has). This is easily done as HL2R uses AppID 220.
4. Ship the mod's assets in VPKs for quicker install times, and potentially quicker load times.

Ergo, I give Rebuild a 6/10 – the effort and passion is worth commending but its changes leave an equal amount of room for improvement.