The original Devil May Cry is still worth playing today

When you think of the *Devil May Cry* series, your mind likely jumps directly to over-the-top, stylish action filled with lots of demonic horrors and excellent leather jackets. That very particular vibe has become a franchise hallmark, and nowhere is it more apparent than in the recent *Devil May Cry 5*, which exudes wonderfully ridiculous action. It's a game where you can wield a motorcycle like a sword and juggle monsters using a pair of pistols. It's hard to not look cool while playing.

All of this makes the original *Devil May Cry*, which debuted on the PS2 back in 2001, particularly interesting to play now. It recently launched on the Nintendo Switch, and I've been slowly making my way through its blood-drenched castle. (The game's brief missions, which usually last around 20 minutes each, make it a great fit for portable play.) There's a lot that's still immediately recognizable as *DMC*: the slick swordplay, enemies like giant spiders and flying skulls, and yes, those leather jackets. But what's stood out to me the most is how *different* the game feels from its successors.

First, it's important to know a little bit of history. *Devil May Cry* didn't actually start life as a slick new action game from Capcom. It was initially the next *Resident Evil*, before the team decided to switch directions and turn it into something new. This context makes it especially fun to play now; you can see the tension between what the game started as and what it really wants to be.

As always, you play as Dante, a demon hunter who runs a demon hunting business called Devil May Cry. This leads him to a mysterious island that's home to a giant castle infested with all manner of horrors. And really, the castle feels like

something from a *Resident Evil* game. It's incredibly complex, with all kinds of rooms and doors locked behind cryptic puzzles. One minute you're in a library, the next you're plummeting down to a terrifying basement. There are ornate sculptures everywhere. And the whole experience has a very cinematic feel, thanks to the *Resident Evil*-style fixed camera angles, which lend everything a sense of gravitas.

Of course, that sense of familiarity starts to change as soon as you start playing. In its early days, the *Resident Evil* series was somewhat infamous for its stiff, slow controls. Moving around Raccoon City as Jill Valentine was a laborious process that led to the term "tank controls." Dante, in contrast, moves with speed and grace. He can fire guns in the air and then land with a satisfying crash of his sword. As you fight, the game will even rate you; spam the same attack repeatedly and you'll be called "dull." But chain together a series of moves and you'll be known as "stylish." The combat is constantly changing as you unlock new weapons and powers, adding more options to your repertoire.

It's in the combat that you can really see the game trying to push beyond its roots. While Dante is incredibly mobile, he's often stuck fighting in cramped hallways or tiny rooms. Sometimes those perfectly chosen fixed camera angles will obscure an enemy, or shift jarringly if you accidentally move into a new area. The action is still incredible even today, but it often feels constrained. It wasn't able to fully break free until later releases.

What's perhaps most remarkable about *Devil May Cry* is that while it serves as a fascinating time capsule, it's also still a lot of fun to play in 2019. Action games don't necessarily age that well; they often feel clunky and slow compared to more modern releases. But even after spending hours with the

much more streamlined *Devil May Cry 5*, I didn’t have many problems with the original, aside from still being terrible at fighting giant spiders.

If anything, *DMC5* made me appreciate the first *Devil May Cry* even more — Dante may be rendered in more simplistic polygons, but he’s just as cool as ever.

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