

“BIOSHOCK 2” (Video Game Review)

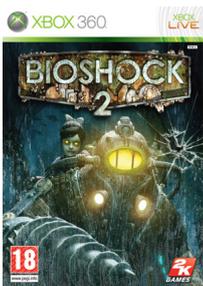
Written by Doug Norris

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2K's original BIOSHOCK game added a new twist to traditional first-person shooter storytelling, the onset of madness created by utter isolation in a crumbling dystopia. The Randian beliefs of Andrew Ryan led to a world where every man truly served himself, but by the most violent means necessary. The new sequel, BIOSHOCK 2 (available for Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and PC), takes players back to the horrendous city of Rapture, though through a more bubble-domed view.

BIOSHOCK 2's single-player campaign picks up roughly 10 years after the first installment ended. After the deaths of Rapture's biggest players—founding father Ryan and revolt-leading Fontaine—a new faction of citizens seeking a revivification of Rapture have given power to Sophia Lamb. Unlike Ryan's belief in the power of the individual, Lamb feels that true strength lies in community and family. Under her dominion, the Little Sisters of the first game have become Big Sisters, extremely agile, violent and less subservient versions of the Big Daddies. Lamb uses them to scavenge the Atlantic, kidnapping little girls and creating her army of Little Sisters to aid Rapture in rebirth.



Players assume the role of Project Delta, one of the earliest prototypes for the Big Daddy model, the half-human/half-monster mascot of Rapture. Rest assured, strapping on the boots of a Big Daddy has its share of benefits. Aside from adopting Little Sisters and harvesting the dying citizens of Rapture for genetically enhancing ADAM, the Big Daddies carry an assortment of construction tools (drills, rivet and spear guns) that can transform into much deadlier weaponry than your average pistol. The new artillery in BIOSHOCK 2 vividly defines the horrific violence that Big Daddy represents. As players plunge a drill into a blood-gushing Splicer or pin one against the wall with a spear through the eye socket, one can almost feel the guardian bond to the Little Sister and the hatred toward those responsible for the utopia's fall. Attacking Big Daddies (a necessity to adopt their companion Little Sisters) now almost feels cannibalistic, and watching them from afar as they brutally defend their girls from the maniac Splicers makes the

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bond between the Daddies and Sisters seem much more nurturing and real.

The city of Rapture itself, the real star of the first game, does its predecessor proud by continuing that desolate feeling of unbearable loneliness and being trapped in a collapsing hell. One of the new features added to the landscape allows players to travel outside the underwater structures and traverse the ocean floor. No longer does the sea serve as merely a piece of moving artwork behind the mayhem; stepping into its depths transforms the scenery from decaying industry to flourishing life, surrounding players with the vivid colors of coral and the delicate ballet of swimming sharks. Rapture’s old favorites still exist to aid your quest (vending machines, gun turrets, health stations) but now offer a much easier hacking method, as the pipe-dream minigame mechanics have given way to a stop-the-needle-in-the-shaded-area method, reachable from afar with the aid of the hacking-tool dart-gun. Hacking the machines with great precision will allow for player rewards, like the health station dispensing a health kit or the turrets causing more damage.

BIOSHOCK 2 introduces a multiplayer option, set in the days before Rapture’s collapse. Gamers assume the role of a Splicer and embark on the standard options (deathmatch, team-based battle, protect-the-base, etc). The more unique features available include donning a Big Daddy suit during battle, giving the player more armor and stronger attacks, and using Little Sisters to harvest ADAM. Adding those gals creates a new level of difficulty, as players must protect their adoptees from the onslaught of on-line players craving an ADAM boost.

Amidst the change in production team, Internet grumblings of die-hard fans and the simple matter of being cast in the shadow of a critically revered game, BIOSHOCK 2 had quite a high bar to reach. Though it doesn’t present any groundbreaking gameplay or genre-changing elements, it does more than continue the story. Taking the Big Daddy role offers a view of Rapture that only enhances the terror began in the first, as players become both a fostering bodyguard and a gruesome monster attempting to conquer and survive in a hell which he was created to serve. Andrew Ryan claimed that “Rapture can become *your* city as well.” If continuing sequels deliver as BIOSHOCK 2 does, we all could only be so lucky.

{jcomments on}