

Resident Evil (2026)
A New Route Through Raccoon City

Review

By Sydney Buckholt

Zach Cregger knows how to make an audience squirm. From the shocks of **Barbarian** (2022) to the twists of **Weapons** (2025), he has built a reputation for finding humor and unease in the depths of horrific events. With *Resident Evil*, he brings that instinct to a franchise with a devoted following and a long history on both the big screen and arcade screens alike.

The film stars Austin Abrams (**Weapons**, **Whalefall**) who plays Bryan, a medical courier trying to complete a delivery while Raccoon City descends into chaos. He has none of the training or confidence we might expect from a *Resident Evil* protagonist which gives the audience a brand new POV of someone trying to survive the horrors we've all come to know.

At times, the film feels like a side mission from the games: Bryan has a destination, something important to protect, and an escalating series of obstacles between him and safety. Abrams and Cregger gives the character an innocence that makes even his smaller victories satisfying throughout the film. It's easy to imagine ourselves surviving a zombie outbreak when we are safely in the seat of a movie theater but Bryan's character offers a less flattering, and probably more honest, picture of how most of us would fare.

To aide in his quest to get to Raccoon City General, Bryan is equipped with a few weapons but the one that pulls through for him time after time is something unheard of; comedy. The humor in the film works because of how absurd the situations are. Bryan reacts like someone who has never had to conserve ammunition or make life-or-death decisions, even if the audience knows exactly what kind of world he has entered. It's not unheard of to have some humor in horror, especially considering the amount of one liners we've been subjected to by one of *Resident Evil*'s most prominent characters, Leon S. Kennedy. But there is such a thing as too much comedy which could take away from the dire situations and pull us out the idea that we're in a zombie apocalypse. Viewers looking for sustained dread may find that balance frustrating. I did, at times.

Of course, I'm not judging this film based on my devotion to the video games. Having watched plenty of video game movie adaptations in my day, I understand and respect that people have different visions for the stories and sometimes they are not what we expect but they still work. This is not to say that fans shouldn't care about how a beloved game is adapted. Its characters, atmosphere, and rules are part of what made them love it. Yet judging every film by how closely it retells the game can leave little room for a new story. Cregger's *Resident Evil* is an answer to that problem: rather than asking us to watch another version of a hero we already know, he lets us experience Raccoon City through someone who has no idea how to survive it.

The franchise's film history suggests there is room for more than one approach. The original **Resident Evil** (2002) movie received poor reviews from critics, yet its series went on for five sequels. This alone proves that its success does not settle whether those movies captured what players loved about the games but that a screen version can build an audience of its own.

Which then begs the question: Does an adaptation need to recreate a game's story, or can it tell a new one that feels true to the experience of playing it? The familiar details throughout Bryan's journey are fun to spot, but they are most effective when they serve his fight to survive. For me, that is where the movie comes closest to the spirit of Resident Evil.

Resident Evil is an entertaining return to Raccoon City, carried by an unlikely hero and an amazing filmmaker willing to take a different route through familiar territory. Its humor sometimes cuts into the dread I wanted it to sustain, but Bryan's vulnerability gives the horror something worth holding on to. The games and their film adaptations can coexist when the movies have a story of their own to tell. This one does, even if its balance of scares and laughs will not work for everyone.

Rating: 4 out of 5 stars