

-Early Notes-

{Masami Ueda - RPD Hall (Resident Evil 2 Remake)}

Resident Evil, what is there to say about it? It's become one of the longest-lasting video game series of all time, and arguably the most indelible horror franchise in video gaming in general. Spanning over 26 years across four generations of video games, Resident Evil has been one of my absolute favorite things growing up. In fact, I am younger than Resident Evil by only four months. It'd be fair to say that RE has shaped my horror sensibilities thoroughly.

Outside of Clock Tower, a series I would love to deep dive some other day, RE is probably my favorite horror series. This may come across as clichéd, but I've seen so many videos talking about Resident Evil and yet I've never truly felt that they all have done proper justice. I love the videos from Sphere Hunter, TheGamingBritShow, and even Noah Caldwell-Gervais's stunning seven-hour video on the series. Don't get me wrong, I think what they have to say is excellent takes on the games, even if I don't agree 100% with what they say; I just don't feel they are full deep dives or get into the minutiae of Resident Evil as a series.

For what they are worth, they detail everything you need to know about Resident Evil concisely enough that they work for what they're aiming for. I personally have always been interested in the smaller details, the little subtleties, and how they all tie into the bigger picture of the franchise. My hope is that this series can catch on, or that I just happen to acquire enough self-motivation to push further than just this initial project. So I'd like to start from the beginning if I can help it.

First things first though, the length of this primary video, which I imagine comes as a great shock to everyone, but I don't really think it should come as a surprise. Long-form videos are becoming a thing on the YouTube sphere, and it has to do with YouTube's chapter system that neatly breaks up segments for the viewer's own pleasure. It allows for many topics to be able to be conveniently lumped into a single video, and it doesn't really require the extra effort for it as well. So obviously I'm going to do a long-form video myself. This will actually be my very first, so I apologize in advance if things seem too fast, too slow, or too sloppy. I'm working with practically none of the advantages that other YouTubers have, including access to some basic programs to make things look tidier. I'm constrained by budget and obviously by accessibility.

With all of that said, I'm sure there are a lot of people screaming at the screen or typing furiously at me to just get to the point of this whole thing and discuss Resident Evil already; that wouldn't be doing due diligence, though. This is not just a retrospective of the series. This is a detailed video essay on the context and history of the early series and if I don't discuss everything that led to Resident Evil's release, I'd feel like I didn't do a good enough job. It'd feel... incomplete, at least in my opinion.

Before we can discuss Resident Evil properly, we have to discuss *why* it became a thing; that would involve discussion on a game that came out six and a half years before RE1. Regrettably, I can't even do that to start things off. I'm a semi-thorough bastard and I like discussing things nobody else really cares about. Possibly for my own amusement, maybe, but that's beside the point. If we want to get to Resident Evil, we're going to have to discuss Capcom in the late 1980s.

-Capcom in the Late 80s-

{Michael Wyckoff - Analog Sunrise (Boneworks)}

While today Capcom is a giant of third-party gaming known for series such as Ace Attorney, Monster Hunter, Street Fighter, and of course Resident Evil, in the late 1980s, Capcom was an entirely different beast. Capcom by then had begun to shed their reliance on arcade games for a menagerie of titles for the Nintendo Entertainment System. They were, for a time, known for Mega Man, Ghosts & Goblins, and some excellent Disney-related games. The man responsible for the success of Capcom in the early days was a designer, director, producer, and later executive, by the name of Tokuro Fujiwara.

Fujiwara had overseen or even helmed a list of incredible titles for the NES and Arcades, such as those related earlier, the entire NES Mega Man collection, Duck Tales, and Bionic Commando, among others. As an aside, Capcom's choice to co-opt themselves with Nintendo in the mid-1980s was probably a smart choice. After all, Nintendo's flagship console was responsible for the literal resurrection of the video game market in the Western Hemisphere. Following the video game crash of 1983, Western markets had no stomach for outdated consoles such as the Colecovision, Atari 2600, or Intellivision.

In Japan, the video game crash had not actually affected the market nearly as bad as it did in the West, if at all. Capcom itself happened to be one of the biggest byproducts of this scenario. Video games in Japan had already established themselves as the new medium for a nation that was seeking technological advancement (and distractions for the rebellious youth) after rising from the ashes of World War 2 forty years before. Nintendo's choice to release a console to the Western market was a risky endeavor even two years after the crash in 1985. It clearly paid off— I don't think there's any exaggeration to say Nintendo is single-handedly responsible for the Video Game industry being what it is today because they took that risk.

With this context in mind, Capcom moving from the established stomping grounds of the arcade scene towards a console gaming market proved to be a worthy venture. Mega Man was a massive hit for the company and later games in the series expanded the prestige of Capcom as a gaming company that prized quality over quantity. While personally, I am not a huge fan of the Mega Man series (I'm more partial to Konami's Castlevania, which is a can of worms not worth opening), I do give it the respect it deserves. I also will say Capcom had a lot of unheralded masterpieces in the NES era that is largely forgotten today in favor of their current IPs. Bionic Commando and Mega Man are uncommon save for possibly a comeback game every 10 years or so. Capcom tried to remaster Duck Tales, but it was seen as a shallow cash grab and didn't sell as much as Capcom expected, and other tertiary series' such as Ghosts & Goblins (and the spinoff Gargoyle's Quest) are properly dead and will likely never see another release again. It's a sad fate for the games that brought Capcom to the forefront early on, but I don't believe Capcom is crying over spilled milk and missed opportunities... how the hell do I get this back on track—

-Sweet Home-

{Jasper Byrne - The Director (Lone Survivor)}

By 1988, Tokuro Fujiwara had been granted the position of General Manager of Console Division for Capcom. His vision brought a much-needed nuance and in the following year, all their successes led to some freedom for creative expression. 1989 was an interesting year for Capcom. They were riding high on the successes of earlier games and started creating some works that were outside their wheelhouse. They released some hits such as Final Fight, Duck Tales, Strider, and Mega Man 2. The massive financial success of at least three of those games must have made Capcom feel pretty good about their decision to stick with the NES.

While I cannot confirm this, I imagine Capcom was looking to expand its portfolio outside of niche arcade games and family-friendly titles into more mature experiences. Capcom probably saw competitors such as Namco releasing graphic games like Splatterhouse and Konami's Castlevania with their Gothic and otherwise "spooky" atmosphere and felt they wanted to make one for themselves. Hell, even Bandai released a humorously creepy game in Monster Party by 1989. Capcom possibly felt like they were being left behind in an advancing video game industry that was just finally starting to dip its toes into the potential for horror. It is from here that we are introduced to a man by the name of Juzo Itami.

Juzo Itami was markedly not a video game person. He had nearly nothing to do with video games at all since he was an actor, screenwriter, and director by trade. However, in 1989 he had an idea for a horror movie that Capcom saw potential in. The two groups met and managed to ink a deal in some fashion or another for a video game tie-in to the film. The game and movie's video distribution would be set to release during the Christmas season of 1989, and both would be produced by Itami himself. For the video game, Tokuro Fujiwara was placed as director.

What mattered most to Itami was that the game followed the same basic premise and plot points as the movie. This "blank check" of sorts allowed the developers to experiment a little and step outside their comfort zone with what they were exactly able to do. Tokuro had visited the film studio to collect ideas for the video game but was persuaded by film director Kiyoshi Kurosawa to not follow the film directly and do whatever felt comfortable.

During the development of the video game, Tokuro Fujiwara stated in later interviews that he had felt limited by the Famicom (the Japanese version of the NES) and its graphical capabilities in general. For a game as mature and graphic as this would be, Fujiwara wanted to create an oppressive and creepy atmosphere that would stick with the player after the game had finished. The result of months of hard work was released to the public on the same day as the film's video release. Both the movie and game were released under the simple title: "Sweet Home."

{Junko Tamiya - Enemy Encounter (Sweet Home)}

[Insert Sweet Home Trailer]

-How to Experience Sweet Home?-

{Windows 96 - Visage}

I suppose then the question that folks have now is "What is the best way to experience Sweet Home?" I don't think people have this question; I'm probably just being pedantic with this particular subject, but I do feel it has some relevance to the conversation in regards to which is a better overall experience. The movie and game do have key tonal differences and do diverge slightly in the narrative, even if they both essentially tell the same basic story. With a movie and a game tie-in, it becomes a pretty simple matter of which you prefer: Do you prefer the movie first, or do you prefer the game first? Both bring a different kind of experience to the fold that one would expect from something along the lines of say, Goldeneye for the Nintendo 64.

I suppose I'll speak very briefly on the subject before we get into the game properly. Both the movie and game are different styles and while both follow the same story structure, their viewing will have a somewhat negative consequence for each other if seen back-to-back. So how does one solve the issue of both being so closely tied to one another that they ruin the surprise if experienced in either order? I have two solutions that will ease the player into having a nominally better experience with Sweet Home.

1.) Play the video game first, and then watch the movie. While admittedly this doesn't solve the entire issue of the movie being spoiled, the video game is the one I want people to go in with a fresh set of eyes for. It's the one that set the bar for Tokuro Fujiwara and Capcom to later utilize in Resident Evil, and it's one of the best-aged games on the system. Watching the movie afterward doesn't have nearly the negative consequences as the other way around. This leads to my second solution...

2.) Only play the game. You heard me right! My secondary solution is to damn the original question entirely and just play the game; after all, you don't *need* to watch the movie to have the full experience. The game does a spectacular job of doing everything right in such a way that even if you've never seen the movie, you have everything you need to fully appreciate what Sweet Home is. What is Sweet Home anyways?

-Sweet Home: The Video Game-

{Junko Tamiya - Battle Theme (Sweet Home)}

Sweet Home is a top-down Role Playing Game designed in the vein of contemporary RPGs such as Final Fantasy, Dragon Quest, and the Ultima series; the major difference between those games and Sweet Home was that Sweet Home was more horror-action focused. The choice to utilize the RPG style was actually in service to the story of Sweet Home; for a video game it was pretty multi-layered and with several main characters, it made sense to make everyone playable. There are five playable characters in Sweet Home, each of whom is not just some copy & paste cut-out of classical RPG tropes.

Each character has a specific purpose both narratively and functionally. I'm going to take some time to wind through each character, and I understand it'll be kind of annoying to veterans who have played this game a thousand and one times, but I suppose I do have to point out that this game is not just written for the super fans in mind, albeit they will be the ones most likely to have stuck by this long in a video about Resident Evil... despite us not talking about Resident Evil yet. **(You pedantic twat!)** The whole purpose of this video is to give my perspective on the series as a whole and I very much count Sweet Home as a member of the Resident Evil series— if not in an honorary capacity. I want people to play Sweet Home just as much as I want people to understand its relevance to Resident Evil. Getting back on track though, the characters in Sweet Home all serve a different purpose from one another and do have pretty marked differences between them.

{John Carpenter - Opening Titles (Prince of Darkness)}

Kazuo is the de facto leader of the group (as he's the first-named character) and is equipped with a lighter that serves a myriad of uses; it is mostly used for clearing roadblocks and lighting certain areas of the game, but it also deals special damage to certain types of enemies. Kazuo also has the largest starting and maximum health pool of any character; he additionally is the strongest fighter in the game to boot, making him an extremely effective combat character throughout the game.

Akiko is the game-assigned medic and her best asset is the medical bag that she carries with her. This is no exaggeration, but Akiko is the most important playable character of the main five; her first aid kit is an invaluable tool that heals everyone (including herself) of status effects. This saves a lot of time and effort as well as programming space. Status effects, on the whole, are handled extremely well in Sweet Home with Akiko's programming and it's a refreshing take I've yet to see done again. I cannot tell you how annoying it is to have several different items just to cure several different status effects in all kinds of Role-Playing Games. This isn't just an issue strictly for early titles such as Dragon Quest or Final Fantasy; even games that have come out nearly 30 years after Sweet Home still suffer from this issue. It's at this point just a common time sink for the genre. As inconvenient as it is, it doesn't bother me nearly as much as one would think. Sure it's annoying, but it's no more tedious than grinding actions like mining or chopping wood in MMORPGs like Guild Wars 2 (in fairness to GW2, you do get resources from those actions so the tedium is mitigated). Akiko cuts down the tedium of status effects by her very nature by being a "one-stop-shop" for every character's healing needs.

Now before you start pounding your keyboards about how broken she is; she isn't. I need to stress that Akiko's magical medical mystery box does not restore character health. She only removes status effects on other players. Additionally, Akiko is the weakest character in the game by far and has the same maximum health pool as two other slightly stronger characters. Akiko is not a character built for combat, she is undoubtedly a character built for support.

Taguchi is probably the least consequential character both narratively and functionally out of the five; his special item is a camera that doesn't serve a secondary function (at least at a first glance) outside of helping to reveal hints and story beats for the player. From this point on, we'll be referring to Taguchi as Taro due to an issue with the English fan translation some years later; long story short, Taguchi was longer than the six-maximum-character inputs and so the translation team shortened it to Taro for the sake of convenience more than anything else. So Taguchi is now Taro because I don't give a shit about his feelings or his name; I kid, I kid. In defense of Taro, his utility as a narrative-driven character might make him forgettable... if not for the fact that Taro is a fucking beast.

I'm not kidding; he is arguably the best combat character in the entire game. His defensive stats are better than anyone else in the game, he's second in sheer combat strength next to Kazuo, and has the second-highest max health pool in the game. He's a tank for the party; while he doesn't hit as hard as and doesn't have as much average health as Kazuo, he makes up for it by taking less damage on the average hit. His camera also has a functional use in combat as it deals special damage to certain types of enemies, like Kazuo's lighter. Taro effectively balances out the party by being a damage-sponge and kind of just awesome in general. I cannot tell you how many times Taro's capabilities kept him from dying in combat just because he has the stubborn tenacity of a Sherman tank.

So following Taro, we have his power partner (at least when I play the game) Asuka. Now, whenever I think of Asuka I'm reminded of... **[Show clips of WWE's Asuka]** ... If only this Asuka was as badass as that one, all the monsters in this game would be scared shitless and we could all go home happy. Sadly I feel like most people just remember Asuka from Neon Genesis Evangelion, and I hate her guts. **(Get to the point!)** Right, right. Asuka is one of the more functionally important characters in the game as her vacuum cleaner (yes, a vacuum cleaner in a horror game, insert Luigi's Mansion joke here) can clear obstacles and obtain certain story beats. It seems simple enough but she's fairly important to the game's progression. She has the same health pool as Akiko and our final character, and she's only stronger than Akiko. Asuka is the second weakest character in the entire game in terms of combat prowess; her usage in both the narrative and progression of the game is the whole crux of her character. That being said, I do like Asuka quite a bit. When it's later in the game and she has the proper equipment, she can be a real badass in her own right, even more of one when paired with Taro.

We finally finish with Emi, the daughter of Kazuo narratively. Her special item is the skeleton key, which opens most of the doors in the game and thus makes her without a doubt the most important in terms of game progression. I'd say she's the character you'd want to prioritize second after Akiko (if only because Akiko's medical bag is more important functionally to the wellbeing of the rest of the party). However, Emi isn't a slouch. She's good in combat as well, the third-best fighter of the group despite having the same maximum health pool as Akiko and Asuka. Emi rounds out the group by being something of a "Master of Unlocking" **[Insert Barry Meme Here]**... C'mon, you knew that was coming, the meme potential was there for the picking. In all seriousness though, Emi is the definition of a "jack-of-all-trades" kind of character aside from the fact her utility is just as important as Akiko's.

That's all five main characters. Each one is slightly different from one another in terms of gameplay utility, as well as being unique enough compared to the standard copy & paste characters of Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest. I do have a sliding scale of sorts regarding the gameplay importance and combat strength of each character separately. My intention for these two scales is to hopefully help inform your decisions on how to play the game and how to strategize around each character. Believe me, there's a ton of optimization and strategy involved in the game itself.

In terms of combat strength, my scale goes Taro, Kazuo, Emi, Asuka, Akiko. While it's true that Kazuo has the highest HP and attack damage, I don't place him as the best combat character next to Taro. Yes, Taro has the 2nd highest attack damage and average health pool... but again, he also is the best defensive character in the game, meaning he can take more damage equal to the amount of damage he deals. For the sake of fairness, you can absolutely switch Taro and Kazuo between one another if you really prefer focusing on, in DND terms, your barbarian or your paladin. What is less negotiable are Emi, Asuka, and Akiko, who all have clear lines of demarcation despite sharing the same average health pool. Emi's the best fighter of the women, so her focus should be in combat. That isn't to say Asuka and Akiko can't fight, just that more caution should be thrown their way. The easiest way to make sure Asuka and Akiko can fight effectively is to give them the best weapons you can find...

There are six types of weapons in Sweet Home: knives, spears, axes, swords, clubs, and forks. There are 43 weapons, each of those 6 main types; each weapon deals two separate types of damage depending on the enemy type: physical and spiritual. Funnily enough, there's an extra weapon hidden in the game's coding that was removed sometime during development. It still exists and can be accessed if you hack the game's files, but for some reason, it was simply taken out of the main game for whatever reason.

I have to mention as an aside that there is a really weird pair of weapons that appear in the game that seemingly have odd logic. All characters are able to wield almost every weapon in the game; Kazuo and Taro, though, are able to wield a *specific* type of ax that the ladies cannot; Akiko, Emi, and Asuka have a unique weapon of their own that the boyos cannot wield. Kazuo and Taro can hold the Rune Ax while Akiko, Asuka, and Emi can wield the Rune Spear. Both are early-game items and don't really pop up much, which makes the entire case moot, really. For new players, it can cause a point of confusion as to whether the ladies can wield axes at all, and I totally understand why you'd be confused if you didn't know that. As a matter of fact, all the girls can wield axes, just... not *that* specific type of ax (the very first one that shows up in the game). There's no real explainable reason for this, so allow me to give my own thoughts on this— It is very likely that Tokuro Fujiwara and the developers of Sweet Home initially intended for axes to be Taro and Kazuo exclusive, and for spears to be Emi, Akiko, and Asuka exclusive, but found that it would simply be too difficult on the player for that to be an idea and thus tried to then remove it, forgetting about the Rune weapons in the process. That does bring up a question of quality control and whether it would have been brought up. If anyone could contact Tokuro Fujiwara himself and ask about this, I'd be most appreciative, because this is honestly the biggest mystery of Sweet Home.

The best weapon in the entire game is arguably the pitchfork, of which there are two of them in the entire game; late game, if you slot those two on Akiko and Asuka, they are just as equipped to deal death to any enemy as the other three are. Weapons have this odd balance with regards to what type of damage they deal; I'm not gonna lie, it's both pretty intuitive and back-breakingly obvious. For example, swords will deal more spiritual damage on average than most other weapons, clubs & maces deal minimal to no spiritual damage since they are strictly blunt weapons without any magical properties, and pitchforks are so broken that if put on Kazuo or Taro they become the fucking Doom Slayer. **[Insert DOOM Meme]** Anyways, we were talking about characters, right?

Outside of combat, the scale for character importance pretty much nearly inverts itself. Akiko, Emi, Asuka, Kazuo, Taro. I place Akiko first because her utility is to literally save lives from status effects that occur at such a breakneck pace. I bet there are speed runs to see how fast you can get a status effect in this game, that's how much they can happen. Emi of course opens locked doors in the game and Asuka and Kazuo remove certain types of barriers, making them arguably more important functionally than Taro, who just... takes pictures. Listen, I like Taro, but c'mon; his main function is to take damage and reveal hints and story stuff. He's not utterly integral to the team, so if he dies he dies...

-How Sweet Home Differs From Other RPGs-

{Goblin - L'alba Dei Morti Viventi (Alternate)}

Oh yeah, I suppose I should have mentioned that little caveat. What makes Sweet Home so diametrically different from Final Fantasy, Dragon Quest, and even Earthbound Beginnings is a little thing known as permanent death. Characters can die in this game, and once they die, they stay dead. There's no getting back up from being eviscerated or bleeding out on the floor. **[Insert Sweet Home Death Scenes]** This is why it's so important to keep characters like Akiko and Emi alive if you can, because, without them, you lose permanent access to their special item. Now it's not all doom and gloom if those characters die, because as a matter of factly they do have replacement items that the characters pick up. It only costs an inventory space.

C'mon, Resident Evil is a pseudo-remake of Sweet Home, of course, there was gonna be inventory management in this series from the very beginning. Each character works very similarly to how traditional Resident Evil characters work right down to their special item slot. Every character has four slots in their inventory; one slot will always be filled by their special item, another is a unique slot for weapons, and two are for every other item in the game. With five characters, that is five unique item slots, five weapon slots, and a whopping *ten* item slots to juggle your inventory with. Combined with permanent death for your characters, the consequences of death are drastically increased.

Losing a character like Akiko or Emi is not just losing permanent access to their special item, it's literally losing three inventory slots. You lose two of that character's slots permanently (you can still pick up items from their cold dead hands), and you also have to now juggle with their replacement item in someone else's inventory. This is compounded by the fact that the more characters you lose, the more impossible the game becomes late game; there are some parts of the game where if you have only one character left, you are straight-up fucked if you do *anything* wrong. One misstep and the entire game is over for you.

Do you know what makes Sweet Home ultra forgiving though? In Final Fantasy, you saved by either sleeping in a tavern or using a special item that allowed you to save. In Dragon Quest, you have to haunch your ass all the way back to the kingdom and speak to the King just to save your game; Earthbound Beginnings even fell into this trap of having the player call their dad from any payphone just to save the game. Sweet Home was more forward-thinking than its contemporaries and simply allowed the player to save anytime, anywhere. No fuss, no muss. Don't like your experience? Just return it and it's your money back— guaranteed.

Being able to save anytime now gives the player a more tactical decision of whether or not it's worth reversing progress after death, depending on how far they have gone without saving; it also serves as a counterbalance to the innate early difficulty of Sweet Home (and believe me, we'll talk about that when we get into the actual game). It's a safety net for the player to use at his own leisure and I do have to respect Capcom and Tokuro Fujiwara for going against the grain so much with Sweet Home in comparison to other games. It's one of the many things that makes the game so easy to just pick up and play even 32+ years after its release.

In Sweet Home's overworld, your five characters are all able to walk about separate from one another, and while it's certainly *an* option, I seriously do not recommend letting your characters walk about alone. You can team characters up "Fire Emblem: Awakening" style and you can do this with at most three of them. What that entails is at most a sub-party of three characters and another of two characters. This is without a doubt the most recommended tactic to use in the game because characters by themselves will easily get overwhelmed by the monsters in Sweet Home's world. Doubling up, or even tripling up allows your characters more leeway in what they can do at any given time and because your characters can outright fall into traps. Suppose a character is in danger of falling to their death, what another character close by can do is simply help them and rescue them from danger. This becomes far more nuanced late in the game, but nevertheless, this is the kind of information that is pertinent and even outright stated in the game by various notes or spoken dialogue.

Where Sweet Home does fall in line with many of its contemporaries is sadly how it enters combat. There are very few instances where the player will willingly begin combat; rather, a majority of the game's battles will take place at random intervals. It's true, Sweet Home is a victim of "random-battle syndrome". Even then, I have to commend the developers for mitigating what is one of the most divisive subjects in all RPGs. In Sweet Home, when you engage in battle, you will only ever fight one enemy at a time in turn-based combat. There will not be four slimes ready to greet you, but rather one monster who may or may not be evenly matched with your party.

There are five options your characters can use in combat: You can attack, use an item, pray, or in a worst-case scenario, turn tail and just run for it. There's a fifth option, don't worry, I'll wheel around to it when the time is right. Attacking and using items are pretty obvious, and running seems like a good utility, but you have to do it for each character and there's always a chance of straight-up failing to run away. Praying is something you actually can do outside of the game in very specific circumstances, but for the most part is used in combat against enemies who have grabbed a teammate of yours, or for dealing special damage. Each character has what is known as "pray points", and there's only a limited amount that you can use; of course, you attain more as you level up, but there's really only one way to replenish pray points.

{Disasterpiece - Puzzle (FEZ)}

I've mentioned earlier in this long review that Akiko's medical bag of wonders doesn't actually replenish health, but rather status effects. So how are characters supposed to replenish their health? Littered throughout the game world are tonics, which replenish your entire sub-party's health and pray points. I say littered because, in Sweet Home, you do not buy items. Like Resident Evil, you find them lying around and they can be added to your inventory. So if you can't buy tonics, and you can only find them... you know the implication here: There is a limited amount you can find. 21 tonics throughout the entire game can be found. If you're good enough at the game (and RNG is on your side), you won't even need to use half of them though. Even Akiko, Emi, and Asuka's health pools will reach into the 2200s by late game and tonics really are just used as a last resort by then.

So I mentioned there was a fifth option in combat, and this is where tonics don't just become a really useful item but can be passed around like a whiskey bottle at Christmas. Characters can "call" another character in the middle of combat; what this does is so cool, you'll be wanting to do it for most of the major enemies in the game. Calling another character pauses the game mid-combat temporarily, places you in control of the called character, and you can move them around in the overworld to reach your other characters. If done correctly, this can allow *all five* characters to enter the battle at once. After that, if a character uses a tonic, it heals the entire party, not just the two or three you were controlling before the battle.

Are we able to discuss the dreaded status effects yet? Let's talk about Status Effects (**Get to Resident Evil already!**). Sweet Home has six status effects (outside of death, which I *guess* is *a* status), each with a rising scale of impending agony to remove. The first status effect occurs in combat, named stun. During combat, an enemy may choose to grab a character and "stun" them. A character who is stunned has *all* damage redirected onto them; that means damage from the monster and damage from other characters. You'll know if a character is stunned if the screen turns slightly blue. Because monsters always attack last, players will always have a chance to react appropriately and remove the stun ailment. Doing so simply requires praying and enough prayer points. The alternative of course means you could just turn tail and run away— you know, like a coward! Doing that will end combat and leave the character with our next status effect.

{Eric Volpatti - Laboratory Artifact}

Sometimes a character can be frozen by the stone-cold stare of some indiscriminate monster, and functionally, it removes the playability of the player for as long as its status effect remains. It's actually pretty mild for the most part and usually experienced in the early game as a sort of introduction to the player to the mechanics of status effects and what they can do to the party. As long as they remain frozen, characters can't join a sub-party, use items, or move around; now what would happen if Akiko were to become frozen herself? If she can't use items, that means she can't heal herself right? Actually the intuitive solution Capcom came up with was the ability for other characters to use items that are not in their inventory. Just walk up to Akiko and you can use her medical bag— easy peasy! It's the little things that make Sweet Home just so interesting from development and mechanical standpoints.

A step above being frozen is being cursed by dark forces beyond your control. Curses serve as the next step on the ailment scale, in which every step a character takes in the overworld, they will lose 1 prayer point. While at first, it may not seem like much, losing prayer points can be an utterly backbreaking disadvantage in the late game. Curses will occur early on enough that the player will become familiar with them.

Even in this world, enemies delight in poisoning unsuspecting victims. Poison is exactly the same principle as curses, however, they remove health points rather than prayer points. With poison, you'd almost have to be stupid to start walking around when you can tell your character is suffering from a status effect, and the same goes for poison. All you need to do is switch to Akiko if she isn't already in the sub-party, walk up to the afflicted character, use her magical bag of recovery (honestly, at this point, I imagine it's just a bunch of drugs or something), and everybody walks away happy, if not with a little time wasted.

Following up from poison, things get sinister; a little look, a vicious sight... Our heroes may find themselves shaking in fright, full of fear, and with their resolve broken they may be driven to... end it all. Fear is an important part of Sweet Home, despite its relatively bright and colorful Famicom palette. The frightening thing with the "Scared" status effect is that it does not start immediately. Rather, it waits for the player to think they are safe before striking. The Scared ailment sets itself off after the afflicted character takes approximately 10 in-game steps in the overworld.

Now, so far, we've seen characters get Frozen, Cursed, or Poisoned; but Scared combines both the Frozen and Poisoned status effects into a more dangerous ailment. First, it completely freezes your character, and then every few seconds your character will lose health. If Akiko is nowhere near your character, they are just fucked; I remember barely getting to one of my Scared characters just in time... they ended up with only 1 Health Point left. That is the absolute danger of the Scared ailment. Additionally, our final ailment is extremely similar to the Scared status effect. Strong Poison is a rare effect that generally occurs late game, but rather than having the wait-time of 10 steps, it begins immediately. It's definitely more dangerous than the Scared ailment because you literally cannot account for it unless you know specifically which enemies cast that status effect. At least with the Scared effect, if you're paying attention, you can move Akiko to intercept the ailment long before it ever sets off, which is what makes it more manageable for the most part.

-The Style of Sweet Home-

{Mass Effect - Uncharted Worlds}

We've gone on and on about the gameplay, but I've yet to actually discuss another excellent aspect of Sweet Home, and that's its style. Sweet Home, unlike a lot of other RPGs of the time, has a flair and dramatic quality all on its own. The early game is probably the best example of how to make a horror game in a bright atmosphere. To use Castlevania as a comparison, both that and Sweet Home have a distinctly similar palette to one another that complements and makes the scenes pop out from one another. Castlevania utilizes orange and blue for a baseline because they complement one another, and through that, they create more detailed accessories with that main complementary coloration.

Sweet Home begins the game with different shades of green and red to make things pop out. The first room in the game is probably the best example: the central floor and two statues are greenish, while the outer floor is a dark, brownish shade of red. The whites are white-gray and they serve to make the room pop out immediately to the player. Several rooms follow this idea of using complementary colors to make things more distinct and appeal to the eyes. Later on in the game, and even in certain sections of the early game, there are dark rooms that highlight how this isn't a fun place to be. Just because the early overworld is bright, it doesn't equate to "friendly".

{Qwesta - Seaside Combat (World of Horror)}

The combat screen itself serves as a dark contrast to the overworld's otherwise bright tones. First off, the background screen; it's a dark purple corridor, a decadent brown brick pathway, or a secluded spot of some haunted forest depending on where you are when combat begins. It immediately sets the mood that you're alone, and the things you're facing off against want you to join them in the afterlife.

The enemy designs too, while we're at it. They can be as simple as bats, worms, and evil dolls, to horrible pus-ridden fiends, men with half-eaten faces, and ghoulish undead vomiting from beyond the grave. Outside of maybe Splatterhouse a year before, there really weren't gory character designs like this, and there wouldn't be again until DOOM four years later. The thing about these enemies is that they aren't just gruesome; they have a little bit of a narrative sting to them; these aren't just ghouls and ghosts native to the world, these are all restless victims. Victims of what, we'll explain when we get into the story properly.

Visually Sweet Home stands out from its contemporaries, but it also does musically. Sweet Home's music was composed by Junko Tamiya, who I have a tremendous amount of respect for. Her music in the early days of Capcom was a who's who of musical talents. Bionic Commando, Strider, Final Fight, Little Nemo, and of course Sweet Home are her major claims to fame. Capcom in the mid-to-late-1980s had one of the best trios of composers in any video game company at the time and were all women: Manami Matsumae (Mega Man, Shovel Knight w/ Jake Kaufman), Yoko Shimomura (Street Fighter 2, Parasite Eve), and Junko Tamiya. Tamiya's stylistic choices in Sweet Home differ heavily from any project she had done before or afterward. The first thing to note is the distinct lack of percussion in Sweet Home's soundtrack, this was likely a deliberate choice for the sake of atmosphere on the part of Tamiya.

There are 20 songs in total in Sweet Home, but I only need to show five to really get my point across. You've heard one piece split in half already, and that would be the enemy encounter and battle theme. The enemy encounter is a simple set of notes that quickens and rises as the screen fades to black and battle begins, but it does very well in adding that sense of dread. **[Play Enemy Encounter]** The combat theme itself is quick, frantic, and has a very memorable set of three-note arpeggio, underlined by a pulse-pounding bass that actually does so well in being able to mimic "drums" due to its foundational structure. During the battle, it is an apt metaphor for that heightened sense of danger, that quick fear in horror movies during either a chase or action scene. **[Play Battle Theme Snippet]**. Funnily enough, there was an Arranged Album for the video game that came out around the same time, and according to that, the Battle Theme's actual name is "Sadness". I dunno if that's a fitting name for the song, but contextually it makes a lot of sense.

{Junko Tamiya - Central Lobby (Sweet Home)}

The next theme is what I like to consider the main theme of Sweet Home; it's probably the music you will hear the most during the game, and it is known as "Central Lobby". It's actually the music you're hearing now. It begins with a descent of notes, a long drone, and then the bass begins to speak. It's those long winding chords in that minor key that give off the feeling of mystery, danger, and obviously, fear. It isn't a very long song, but it sets the tone for the rest of the game so well that it becomes an earworm not too long after you're playing the game. **[Play Central Lobby Snippet]** It isn't even my favorite song on the track, but I think it's probably the best composed for the game. Compared to the rest of the game's music, Central Lobby is the most plodding and atmospheric. In the Arranged Album, Central Lobby's original name was supposed to be "Wandering Visitors". I'm not gonna lie, I actually do like that name and feel it's definitely a more fitting name for the song than Central Lobby.

The "Eastern Garden", though you won't get to hear it for too long, is a welcome change of pace to Central Lobby. In a sort of answer to Central Lobby's bass-driven song, Eastern Garden has a quicker, erratic arpeggio sub-rhythm beneath the bass and "choral" notes. The song also has one hell of a hook to begin it. The crack of what could be described as percussion also fits extremely well since the song plays generally in an outdoor area **[Play Eastern Garden Snippet]**. Its atmosphere is that of instant danger, a place that one should dare not tread for too long. In the Arranged Album, the track is part of a collection of other pieces in what is called "Looking Back on Scenes ~Reminiscence~".

{Junko Tamiya - Upper Floor (Sweet Home)}

The Upper Floor, or if you prefer its Arranged Album name "N. Rorandora", whatever that means. It is likely N. stands for North; Rorandora, if I'm taking it with the idea that it is a mistranslation, could possibly mean Veranda; this currently is my biggest theory, "N. Rorandora" being a bad mistranslation of the Kanji meaning "North Veranda". Regardless, the naming of the song is unimportant, what is important is how it atmospherically complements the Central Lobby theme. **[Play Upper Floor Snippet]** It is another bass-driven theme, this time, implementing Eastern Garden's arpeggio rhythm into the bass line and giving long, harrowing notes to warn the player that they have now entered the mouth of hell. This overworld theme is probably my favorite because that bass line and note progression is out of this world and is truly underrated stuff from the fairly simple sound font that Junko Tamiya chose to work with. The atmosphere is no longer the dire warnings of Central Lobby or the tense erraticism of Eastern Garden, but that of the player finding themselves entering deeper into the abyss of darkness, with no way to turn back. Upper Floor signals to the player that there is no turning back, you must keep going forward if you ever have a hope of leaving.

Our final theme takes a break from the overworld in the form of what is known as the “Fresco Theme”. Imagine in Resident Evil finding yourself a safe room from all the terrors. There’s nice and soft music for you; the same principle really, however, it’s not for a room. It’s for a scene that is the narrative crux of the story. The Fresco Theme is a humble tune based on something akin to woodwind instruments like flutes, piccolos, and possibly bassoons; it’s a simple arrangement but extremely effective as far as somber safety goes. **[Play Fresco Theme Snippet]** The frescoes are not just fun little scenes the player can come across, they do have some utilitarian purpose which will be expounded upon when the time the deep dive begins.

-The Story of Sweet Home-

{Guy & Zab Skornik - Viral Evolution}

Sweet Home stands out among NES & Famicom games as something wholly mature and not just gory, but has an understanding of the kind of tone it’s trying to portray throughout the entire picture. Sure, it falls apart in some aspects later on in the game, but the whole picture is more important than the smaller details sometimes. Everything about Sweet Home is proof that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. For better or worse, the video game stands on its own stylistically compared to so many other games of the era for the boundaries it dared to push at a time when video games were just dipping their toes into horror. Bright and colorful, yet deeply foreboding and anxiety-inducing through the clever use of sound and key color differentiation in the palette. The only thing that could make the whole experience better was a top-notch narrative.

The story of Sweet Home is additionally one of the most unique aspects of the Famicom and NES era because I really don’t think there is any story quite like it. Sure, there have always been tales of walking into a spooky mansion and getting trapped; the trope is such a staple for horror games even going as far back as Ken & Roberta Williams’s 1980 horror game Mystery House. Nothing like this though; a story with this much depth and this much to say about a still young genre was incredible. Sweet Home’s story, despite never releasing internationally, did more to break ground and move the genre forward than any game before it.

It begins with a simple synopsis. 30 years ago, famed painter Ichirou Mamiya disappeared permanently from public life and secluded himself in his estate in the middle of a Japanese forest after an incident of unknown nature. Ichirou’s frescoes were known to be beautiful and sophisticated, truly the last of their kind. Over time, however, the less the public saw of Ichirou, the more he was presumed dead. A documentary crew gained access to the mansion from local authorities to find and preserve Ichirou’s lost frescoes, hidden within the estate itself. Though the manor for some time had been presumed well-preserved by the Ichirou Estate over the last few years, soon after entering the manor, the vengeful ghost of Lady Mamiya trapped the documentary team inside the manor, ominously threatening that all who trespass will die.

{Masahiro Andoh - Horizon (Gran Turismo 4)}

Of course, there's more to the story. It isn't just that simple, but that's the basics of both the movie and the game. If I have any intention of going through the entire plot, I'm going to have to be honest. There will be spoilers; everything I have told you, the viewer, up until this point, has been relatively spoiler-free. I have covered most of the basics of the game and I have been very straightforward regarding how the game is played or can be played. From here on out, we're officially entering the danger zone, and I must warn you that I will not hold back on spoilers or expounded thoughts. While it must be a shame that for those who have not played the game, we must depart... for those that have played and finished the game (or if you really don't care about spoilers in an already in-depth discussion of Sweet Home), I welcome you and implore you to stay with me on this journey, for there may be some things you might learn or even appreciate with an outsider's perspective on things.

Sweet Home at first appears to be a simple game, even despite its mechanics, which I've talked about ad nauseam. Underneath the simplistic gleam is actually a sadistically complex and subtle game filled with lessons to teach the player, either the easy way... or the hard way. Its tricks and traps delight in fooling the player and teaching them that to survive they must be smart. The story of Sweet Home is very similar, though seemingly simple, it becomes sinister and morbidly dark. Right from the jump though, there are lessons to be learned, and a story to be told. So without further ado, let the true dive into horror begin.

-The Tutorial Area-

{Junko Tamiya - Shadow (Opening)}

Our game begins of course with the opening cutscene in which our entrepreneurial investigative team enters the Mamiya Manor and discovers that not everything is just fine and dandy. The door closes, the ceiling collapses on itself, and Lady Mamiya herself appears and laughs at those who threaten to defile her home. It's also directly stated that the mansion is haunted, which apparently nobody bats an eye at or thinks twice about in this group. Damn the consequences, we gotta get those paintings! There's actually the ability to change the names of the protagonists with a six-letter option, and I tend to use it a lot in these videos, but you'll be able to always tell who is who, since the character list always goes Kazuo, Akiko, Taro, Asuka, and Emi. Our intrepid protagonists now find themselves stuck between fighting the undead or dying to the elements, and I think we all know which they'd prefer.

Right away, the sub-party layout I personally recommend is Kazuo & Akiko together, and then Taro, Asuka, and Emi as two separate groups. Kazuo serves as a great counterbalance to Akiko's weak combat capabilities, while Taro, Asuka, and Emi are functionally best grouped together since most frescos and story beats are behind broken glass and locked doors. Taro's high defense also evens him out between Emi's average combat strength and Asuka's slightly weaker capabilities. So Asuka sweeps up some of that glass in the first room and you're off into the Mamiya Manor, where God knows what waits for you. You'll pretty much be hand-held by the game in this first area, but I think it's a great location for learning some of the lessons you'll need to know by the late game because it's this first sub-area that Sweet Home throws its weakest enemies, its first obstacles, and teaches the player about frescoes, weapons, and even item usage.

Entering the first room on the left, you're given a fair few options to choose from. The first things you'll notice are the fresco, a note, and some items sitting there to be picked up. Reading the note reveals that Ichirou Mamiya is not only alive (possibly) but actively trying to save the lives of those who have found themselves trapped inside the manor. The note tells the player to use the frescoes as clues to help them in their quest to progress through the game. Walking up to the fresco and looking at it reveals a dream-like painting, a mother caressing their child (that's totally not foreshadowing or anything). This is where Taro's camera comes into play. Using it reveals secret lettering that gives the hint that... "My three frescoes will solve a puzzle". What does that mean exactly? Well, it serves as a sort of early hint to the player that frescoes will be grouped by date, three per month. A story beat will be revealed with the first fresco of that month, while the other two will actually serve to lead the player towards where they should be going next. It's entirely possible to find them out of order though, so there is that.

The items you'll find in the first room include a wax candle, a fruit knife, and a tonic. As we've discussed, tonics are kind of important, especially in the early game, and a wax candle serves a utilitarian purpose in a moment, but the fruit knife is a relatively weak early weapon, and one I would not give to any of Taro, Asuka, or Emi. Give that crap to Akiko first and foremost. Weapons slide on down to each character's last inventory slot and you can freely switch them out with any other weapons you find.

The door on the right-hand side is locked, which is where Emi's key comes into play. Open that up and you're introduced to a hallway that contains the spirits. Spirits are tricky little bastards, they can grab onto a character and zip them off into another corner of the mansion. Luckily, spirits never take them too far away, but because it separates them from the party, the late game can be scary with these. Spirits come in three versions: small, large, and followers. I don't really need to go into detail for each one. The enemies you'll also find here are pretty weak: evil dolls and wisps that both like to get early status effects on your character, the Frozen and Cursed effects.

{Masami Ueda - Left Alone (Resident Evil 2)}

There's another obstacle in the way, and this time, Kazuo's lighter comes in handy to break through this rope wall. A few more items and notes can be found here (a note from some other survivors and a bloody message written on a wall), the most important of which are wooden blocks. This right here is one of the most subtle things that Sweet Home teaches. There are two types of woodblocks that the player can find: Flimsy Wood, and Blue Wood. What's the difference between the two? Well, both are used to cross chasms in the mansion, and both break after some time... Where can the player learn this? In the next room of course.

The room at the end of the hall is swallowed in darkness, which is where the wax candle comes in. There's another note which is a thinly veiled hint that characters who find themselves in a trap can be rescued if due diligence is done. Place down one wood plank and cross the chasm to grab that neat-looking spear, and walk ba– Oh no! The wooden plank has collapsed! Because you read the note, you'll know that this character needs rescuing quickly. Simply have another character "team up" with them, and they'll be safe. There is a time limit for falling characters though because they really can die from this.

Now comes the issue of your sub-party being split up. Better bring more wood. After all, the lesson that the player learns is that you have to ration your wood usage so you don't end up wasting it all... but remember that blue wood you picked up? If you're smart, that thing can last you almost the entire game. Blue Wood, unlike flimsy wood, doesn't break after only five steps. It breaks after approximately 100 steps... the lesson the player should learn is not that they should ration their wood usage, although they absolutely should. The lesson should be that, sometimes, the game will try to trick the player with multiples of the same item. Return to the main foyer and cross the threshold into the expanse of the game... you have now entered into the pit of despair.

-The First Floor-

{Ahoy - Audacious}

After crossing the pit into the next major area, the game really starts to open up to the player; though it's for sure a linear game, it does very well not to railroad the player into one direction and encourages exploration as a tenet of solving the game's puzzles. If you look around the very first thing you'll likely run into is the sprite of a vivisected person reaching for nothing but air. This is an indication to the player that you can interact with people. This area is full of subtle things that will become a mark of importance later on in the game. There is a doll that will speak to you upon inspection, and a little further along the way, the dreaded Rune Ax that has been the bane of my existence for making me confused as to how this shit works. Of course, there's also another safe room and another fresco here, that will give a wonderful hint of: "One needs a mallet to remove a boulder". What this means is that later in the game, the player will need to collect a mallet that is hiding around in this hub area and use it to destroy some blockades keeping you from further exploration.

Next up is crossing to the other side, and the easiest way forward is simply to use the Westernmost door (which is where the Rune spear will be), but you can also opt to use a wooden plank and lighter to burn your way across. Another way across happens to be the mysterious shadows that block the path. As of now, the player doesn't have any items that will remove them from play, but it's not too far away before you actually get the item needed for it. On the other side, you'll likely find yourself facing off against Worms, which happen to be weak against fire, so Kazuo's lighter and a wax candle should be your main weapons (at least until you pass the level event horizon and can destroy them all in one turn).

The area opens up a bit more for the player now, including several doors that are locked at the moment or are able to be entered. With this in mind, the game does give the mirage of open-ended exploration; as I've explained earlier, this isn't exactly true, because there's always going to be key items to find to move the game forward. One of the rooms that you will enter will have the ceiling collapse on you, barring you from being able to access any of the extra items on the other side (for reference, a majority of those items are replacement items in case one of your characters die, so do be careful about that).