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# PlayStation 2



## Dead Or Alive 2: Hardcore

Review by [Frank Provo](#)

- ➔ **Publisher:** Tecmo
- ➔ **Developer:** Tecmo
- ➔ **Players:** 1 - 4
- ➔ **Genre:** Fighting
- ➔ **Net Support:** No
- ➔ **List Price:** \$49.99
- ➔ **Release Date:** October 23, 2000



Graphics:

Sound:

Gameplay:

Replay:

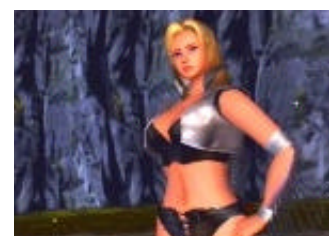
Overall: 4



“Bounce. Bounce. Bounce. Ooh, panties.”

Apart from a painful bout of button mashing, that’s the synopsis first timers tend to take away from Tecmo’s *Dead or Alive 2*. On a **superficial level**, it certainly seems as if the game’s gratuitous party-shots and tap-happy gameplay gear it toward an element of society other than that of fighting game aficionados or casual game players. **Even the game’s title, *Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore*, suggests something besides butt kicking. However,** once you get past its sexy veneer and attempts to spoof the genre, you’ll discover that *Dead or Alive 2* also has a ton of depth crammed into its... uh... costumes.

Part jaw-dropping visual demo and part Bolshoi Ballet, *Dead or Alive 2* tries to be a fighting game for people sick of fighting games. **Instead of the staid backgrounds of Namco’s *Tekken* series, *Dead or Alive 2* regales the player with gorgeous, multi-tiered environments that are as lethal as they**



are beautiful. Unlike the bland array of punches, kicks, and throws made standard by Sega's *Virtua Fighter* series, *Dead or Alive 2* does its damage mainly via combinations, counter movies, and reversals. If you're a dyed in the wool subscriber of genre mainstays, the above sounds like a recipe for disaster. However, if you're not already married to a particular series, *Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore* brings a lot to the table.

**Graphics:** ■■■■■

*Dead or Alive 2* got its start on Sega's Dreamcast console, and has received minor updates with every subsequent release. The fifth entry into the series, *Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore* incorporates all of the visual goodies from each of the four previous iterations. More to the point, it's also the best looking fighting game ever made.

*Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore's* stages are, in a word: breathtaking. Where most fighting games are content to deliver non-interactive enclosed arenas, *Dead or Alive 2* makes its stages direct participants in the game. The game has 20 arenas, each of which has some sort of trademarked structural trait that ultimately comes into play during the fight itself. Beams of sunlight glow through a huge stained glass window, which you can throw your opponent through and onto the pews below. There's a Hong Kong rooftop stage, which, despite a beautiful view of the harbor in the distance, eventually brings the fight to the rainy streets below. Even the game's "plain" stages, a selection of circular arenas, contain electrified walls and shattering surfaces with which to bludgeon your opponents.

Since it's a fighting game, *Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore* isn't just about gorgeous environments. The game also includes 12 of the most beautiful archetypes ever to grace a videogame screen. However, instead of just portraying the Chinese girl in the dress, the brooding Japanese teenager, or the sadistic Thai boxer character, *Dead or Alive 2* brings them to life. Kasumi, the brooding female Ninja, has a destiny to fulfill, but she does so with soulful eyes and revealing attire. Tina Armstrong wants to prove that she is as good a wrestler as any male opponent, but her leather jumpsuit precludes any suggestion that she's anything but feminine. Every character has multiple costumes to choose from, the selection of which increases as you play and replay the game.

You can take 12 visually pleasing characters and wrap them in 20 gorgeous environments, but if the action doesn't flow well, you'll end up with a graphical mess. The first *Dead or Alive* on Playstation was such a mess. This one is not. Each battle in *Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore*, be it one-on-one or a four-player tag battle, is a high resolution, 60 frames per second ballet of punch and counterpunch. Clothing blows in the wind, dust flutters about, glass shatters, and fences break - this is exactly the kind of detail fighting game fans have been aching for all these years. Between 20 detailed levels, more than 30 unique cut-scenes, and thousands of frames of animation, it's easy to see how Tecmo put the storage capacity of the DVD

medium to good use.

**Sound:** ■■■□□

If *Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore* has a weak point, it's the game's audio. Poorly dubbed voices and forgettable rock music don't make for an enjoyable soundtrack. The game has 34 individual pieces of music, ranging from new wave oriental to fake American rock, all of which lack any sense of permanence. No one could call *DOA2: Hardcore*'s music poor, but you'd be hard pressed to find anybody who'd be able to hum a few bars either.

The game's dubbed voices only do a so-so job of bringing out the characters, while listening to the "cinematic" confrontations between stages is a chore unto itself. If Tecmo meant to lampoon the entire martial arts genre as a whole, then *DOA2: Hardcore*'s voice acting plays its role exceptionally well. For puritsts, there's an option to switch the game's speech back to Japanese in the options menu. Regardless, it's a good thing that *DOA2: Hardcore* is a fighting game, because the majority of voice and music issues are entirely forgettable in light of what matters most: sound effects.

Cynicism aside, *Dead or Alive 2*'s audio redeems itself with an excellent array of environmental and combatant sound effects. Whether you're flaunting Lei-Fang's cuteness or busting out the can of Whoopass™ with Ein, the game literally sounds like a Chinese martial arts film. Lower the music volume and increase the sound effects volume settings from the options screen and you should be just fine.

**Gameplay:** ■■■■□□

As hinted above, *Dead or Alive 2* isn't your average fighting game. The usual battle lines apply, but in the case of *DOA2*, they're much more pronounced. For some, it's the worst fighting game ever made, breaking a whole host of acceptable standards incepted by the previous decade of *Street Fighter* and *Virtua Fighter* clones. For another huge subset of the population, *Dead or Alive 2* represents the second coming of all that is good about videogames. What is it about *DOA2* that brings about such a schism?

*Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore* has nine game modes, two of which are unique to the PlayStation 2 release. The story, time attack, survival, and sparring



modes are mainly for single-player matches involving one human participant against many CPU-controlled opponents. For multiple players, the game has versus, tag battle, and team battle options, all of which let between two and four players go at it in any manner of ways. The game also has a watch mode for observing CPU versus CPU match-ups, a battle record mode for playing and replaying previously recorded matches, and a CG gallery for maintaining a constantly increasing cache of unlockable glamour shots. There's a lot to choose from on the game's main menu, but nothing ultimately scandalous. Where then, does the controversy come from?

Lingerie and a lack of balance - that's what nay Sayers suggest are *Dead or Alive 2*'s main traits. Industry spoof and counterattacking - that's what proponents espouse as the game's virtues. Which group is right? Both of them, actually.

On the one hand, it's hard to deny that each of the game's female characters is dressed in a manner barely suited to the task at hand. Skimpy skirts, tight chest-gear, and French cut panties are hardly the uniform of professional martial artists. On the other hand, it's pretty clear that Tecmo meant for the game's characters to call attention to themselves, both to appeal to the male-dominated population of videogame players and to provide a subtle commentary on the sexualizing of fighting games in general. Is that good or bad? It's up to you to decide. One thing is for sure, however, if you're worried about titillating any 14-year old relatives, *Dead or Alive 2* may not be the game for you.

As far as actual fist fighting goes, the feeling is just as subjective. Punch, kick, throw, and a mysterious "free" button yield the lion's share of the games moves. Spread the five or six basic moves across the two main mid and low stances and what you end up with is truly ten to twelve attacks per character. To make matters worse, there isn't much recovery time between punches and kicks, meaning that rapid button mashing yields just as much progress as an intelligent advance. Other than the obligatory delay between the third or fourth move of any combination, there just isn't much room to maneuver against the onslaught of an oncoming opponent. In fact, if you never delve into the game's counter system and reversals, *Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore* is unimpressive and unbalanced.

If you actually practice and dig deeper into what *DOA2* has to offer, though, you'll find that the game's counter system is where the real game lies. If you attack the moment after your opponent lunges for you, you'll counter their attack and leave them open for a vicious combo. If they try to throw you, you can counter throw instead, and unleash a spectacularly devastating grapple move. The possibilities are endless. In learning the game's system of counters and reversals, the formerly useless "free" button becomes your best friend. Instead of countering a move before it hits, the "free" button allows you to reverse or interrupt a move during its execution. Using the "free" button, you can even escape multi-part throws or tag-mode combos. Other dastardly details, such as wall-aided attacks, corner thrashing, and

side-stepping round out *Dead or Alive 2*'s advanced strategies.

Part of *Dead or Alive 2*'s charm is the role its environments play in each fight. Instead of the bland platforms from the original *Dead or Alive*, Tecmo has created a diverse selection of multi-floored interactive stages for its combatants to battle within. You can actually toss your opponent through the glass windows of The Demon's Church, kick them onto the three levels of pavement at Dragon Hills, or just slam them repeatedly into the electrified walls of The D Octagon stage. Some stages even have stairs or inclines that can either impede or aid your plight.

Taken as a whole, *Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore* is a fun and engaging game, with a few undeniable caveats. The game's basic gameplay is unbalanced, meaning that you'll have to practice learning a few reversals and counters in order to even things out. Furthermore, CPU AI is downright cheap at times, requiring almost saint-like patience in order to endure the game's single player options. However, if you've got a few friends, or don't mind learning how to beat the game at its own clairvoyance, *Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore* isn't such a bad undertaking. It's not as refined as Namco's *Tekken Tag Tournament*, but it takes a few worthwhile risks.

**Replay:** ■■■■■□

Gorgeous visuals, plenty of hidden costumes, four-player tag matches, and inviting gameplay - there's no doubt that *Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore* is a game with plenty of replay value. Fans of long-time stalwarts, such as the *Street Fighter* or *Tekken* series of games, may wish to try before they buy, but those who've not made any allegiances yet should find *DOA2* quite enjoyable.

Tecmo has created something unique with *Dead or Alive 2* - a game that you'll either really love or really hate. Either way, it's a gorgeous ride.

**Screenshots courtesy of:** Frank Provo





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