

River City Girls 2

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Malala Fund is working for a world where every girl can learn and lead. With more than 130 million girls out of school today, they're breaking down barriers that hold girls back. When we got to work on River City Girls 2, we definitely wanted to add to our roster of playable characters. We needed two more girls to join in the fight. In my head, the only two I could ever imagine were Marian from Double Dragon and Provie from River City Ransom Underground. River City Girls 2 takes place a few months after the end of the first game. The family members of the big bad from River City Girls have attempted a takeover of River City, installing legions of yakuza and several bosses to maintain control. When unlikely high-school heroines Misako and Kyoko head to the mall to get the latest video game, they run straight into the ongoing occupation. After that, they do what they do best: explore the city streets, knock heads, deliver plenty of sarcastic teenage dialogue, and casually attempt to take down a sprawling criminal syndicate. The central narrative in River City Girls 2, like the plot-line from the original, is nothing to write home about. Yet story is clearly not the priority for the developers at WayForward. River City Girls 2 is much more interested in world-building and in creating an absorbing place populated with big personalities and guest characters from old Technōs games. On that front, the game succeeds. River City feels like a melting pot of beloved heroes, villains, and side characters from previous titles in the Technōs canon and elsewhere. You'll buy donuts and strudel from Shadow Billy of Double Dragon II, complete a fetch quest for Skullmageddon of Double Dragon Neon, and recruit Sol Badguy of Guilty Gear fame in the New Game Plus. There's even a brand new neighborhood in the city where you can explore Technōs HQ. It's wonderfully nostalgic. Luckily, WayForward did a commendable job removing or softening some of the inconveniences of the first River City Girls, to prevent the sequel from overstaying its welcome. When you die you no longer immediately lose 50 percent of your wealth; you can opt to respawn at the nearest safe-house to retain your hard-earned loot. In addition, consumable items for sale in the city's boutiques and restaurants are clearly marked and defined. No more blind shopping here. **Tierney:** Yes and no. We approached the first River City Girls not assuming there would be a sequel, putting as much of our effort into the first game as possible. That said, we did decide to hold a few major characters from the brand back (like Sabu, Ken, Ryuji, and Ryuichi) for a potential sequel, so that if we did end up creating an RCG2, it wouldn't feel staffed with just minor characters. And one of the big appeals about doing River City games in general was always that we would get to reuse (and expand on) this massive city with each game. The details of how and why the Yakuza that Kyoko and Misako thought they'd chased out of the city in the previous game are back are shaky, but they and their punchable faces have taken over the school and all the local hangout spots. That's reason enough to start their two-fisted crusade to rid them from the streets, one cracked skull or broken rib at a time. While the story itself is light and easy to ignore, the writing is sharp and funny. I consistently chuckled at the one-liners and the banter between the protagonists and the various enemies and side characters they encountered. I wasn't simply street fighting throughout the entire eight-hour adventure, though. Shortly after embarking on the quest to save the city, I found myself occasionally doing odd jobs like catching ghosts, robbing a Yakuza-owned bank, and training the locals in the lost art of dodgeball. The stranger the distraction, the more I missed it when it was gone. These were much-appreciated meanderings that helped break up the

punch-drunk monotony. Equipping gear bought at stores sprinkled throughout the seven regions of the city helps even the odds in combat. Items that gave me a health shield when I was low or added elemental properties to my heavy attacks were my personal go-tos, but there are also options that alter almost every way you interact with River City Girls 2. Want to move faster? There's an accessory for that. Want to hit just the male (or female) enemies harder for some reason, there's one for that too. Food items, though one-time use consumables, can be stored for when you need them and grant characters a permanent stat buff the first time they eat them. So if you do choose to grind, there will be plenty of places to spend all that hard-earned money. The map of River City is huge in River City Girls 2, much bigger than the previous game's rendition. My first time kicking ass through locations like the vibrant fish markets of Ocean Heights or the sleek offices of the Technos complex were a treat because they're so well drawn and colored. That said, the size of the city means that even with the presence of a fast-travel system I had to spend an awful lot of time backtracking through parts of the city to check boxes to progress the main quest. Also, many screens feature lots of obstacles and architecture that can become challenges for platforming or add a bit more tactical thinking to the fights you pick, but I found that I was just as often slipping off of edges or having my view of the action blocked by something in the foreground. Gameplay wise, the focus here is, of course, lots and lots of 2-D, side-scroll brawling. Gamers can play solo (gamers can ultimately choose among six playable characters) or they can team up with friends (four locally or two online). The hard-fisted heroes make their way through multiple city environments on a large map, frenetically battling scores of respawning thugs, costumed attackers, heavily muscled wrestlers, cheerleaders, punk rockers, zombies and the like. River City Girls 2 begins not long after the original game. After defeating the Yakuza leader Sabuko (and kicking her out a window for good measure), delinquent schoolgirls Misako and Kyoko earned the ire of her father, Sabu, who breaks out of prison to ruin the lives of the duo. Getting expelled from school isn't so bad, but when Sabu's goons start getting in the way of buying the newest video game, it becomes personal. The duo (dragging their boyfriends along for the ride) set out to beat the living hell out of anything that gets between them and enjoying themselves, and woe awaits foolish crime lords who think they can intimidate teenage girls. Once upon a time River City titles were few and far between. Thankfully those days are over and we receive a rather healthy supply of them such as the most recent and brilliant **River City Saga: Three Kingdoms**. Kunio and Riki had their turn earlier this year, but now the girls are back again in the sequel to one of my favorite beat-em-ups of all time, River City Girls 2! River City Girls 2 follows on from the events of River City Girls. Kyoko and Misako have saved the day, found the boys, and are ready to go back to life as the premier Banchos in River City High. Unfortunately, the events of the previous game have caused much embarrassment to the crime lord Sabo and his son Ken who are none too happy about their Yakuza empire being bested by the girls.

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