

Review: New 'Hitman' game a well-executed thriller

November 21 2012, by John Kosik



This video game image released by Square Enix shows a scene from "Hitman: Absolution." (AP Photo/Square Enix)

We always knew Agent 47 had ice in his veins. Apparently, the guy's got a heart, too.

In "Hitman: Absolution" (Square Enix, for [PlayStation 3](#), [Xbox 360](#), \$59.99; PC, \$49.99), 47 is entrusted with the safety of a young girl named Victoria, and the cloned assassin's icy exterior melts a bit when he realizes she may have been subjected to genetic experimentation in

the same way he was. This leads 47 to do what he does best: eliminate targets. Only this time it's not about money. Agent 47 wants answers—and he'll even cut the bar code off the back of his head to get them.

Despite 47's affection for Victoria, "Absolution" isn't exactly heartwarming. Of course, it's violent, and it's laced with M-rated black comedy, like an already notorious nuns-with-guns set piece. And contract killing remains a cold-blooded business.

After a tight 20-minute tutorial, you can approach your contracts in several ways. To get to your first target—your former handler at the Agency, Diana Burnwood—you can shoot your way through a mansion on the shore of Lake Michigan or you can sneak inside without hurting a fly.

Taking out targets is all about choice, making the stealth elements the real meat of the game. Sure, it's fun to blast away at a group of hired thugs, but satisfaction in the "Hitman" series is all about taking out the target without alerting anyone except the target.

There are several helpful tools. You can knock out a citizen or a cop, take his clothes and hide in plain sight. You can use the environment to stay hidden or cause distractions. Your "Instinct" meter is also a nice touch, helping you identify targets, blend in with the crowd or trigger the pinpoint shooting mechanic, which slows time just enough for you to mark several targets and take them all out with the push of a button.

The only noticeable issue with the gameplay is the goofy [artificial intelligence](#) of some enemies, who can be easily fooled and act out in strange ways. A cop might stand and continue shooting at the last place he saw you despite the fact you're not there anymore, or an enemy could repeatedly bump into you while yelling, "Show yourself!"

Still, these are small gripes amid the generally excellent stealth gameplay, which is on par with the same elements in the "Assassin's Creed" series.

Several difficulty settings greatly affect the experience. On the lower settings, for example, you refill the Instinct meter gradually over time, while on the hardest setting you don't even have one. Veterans of the series may find the lower settings a bit too easy, but the higher difficulties will definitely keep you on your toes and offer rich rewards.

Once a mission is completed you can choose to play through it again and take a different approach. Completing all the challenges is not easy, making for a very high replay value.

The exploits of a lone assassin don't lend themselves to the typical multiplayer experience, but "Absolution" has a clever online mode. You can either accept or design contracts online to earn money that can be spent on gear, and completing various tasks—where and how you make a kill or what disguises you use—earns you experience points that can unlock techniques such as smoother aiming with sniper rifles.

It has been six years since Danish studio IO Interactive delivered the previous "Hitman," but it has been worth the wait. "Hitman: Absolution" is a nicely executed treat. Three stars out of four.

More information: hitman.com/

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