

Review: Sony's rascally raccoon Sly Cooper returns

February 20 2013, by Lou Kesten



This video game image released by Sony shows a scene from "Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time." (AP Photo/Sony)

It's been seven years since ring-tailed master thief Sly Cooper has headlined a video game—about three times the lifespan of a typical wild raccoon. The guy's been on Sony's bench since his creators, Sucker Punch Productions, moved on to the "InFamous" series, so you could forgive him if his skills are rusty.

Fortunately, a second studio called Sanzaru Games has rescued the

rascally raccoon from a life of knocking over garbage cans. "Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time" (Sony, for the [PlayStation 3](#), \$39.99; Vita, \$29.99) finds him chilling out in Paris, until he discovers that pages are disappearing from his prized family history, the "Thievius Raccoonus."

The Paris prologue, a strictly [linear sequence](#) that feels like too many other generic platform games that have been released during Sly's hiatus, gets "Thieves in Time" off to a sluggish start. But once Sly and his pals—Bentley, the techie turtle, and Murray, the two-fisted hippo—start traveling back through time, the action gets much livelier.

Each stop in the time machine introduces a series of challenges that borrow elements from, seemingly, the entire history of video games. There are shooting galleries, stealth sequences, mine-cart races, rhythm games—and, of course, the core of the funny-animal genre: running, jumping and climbing across 3D worlds.

That's a lot to cram into one game, and some missions work better than others. I found Murray's slugfests tedious—he moves like, well, a hippo—but enjoyed the two-dimensional shoot-'em-ups that Bentley uses to hack into enemy computers.

But "Thieves in Time" soars when it allows the nimble Sly to do what he does best: skittering up drainpipes, scampering across power lines, bouncing across rooftops. To get the most out of the game, you should take breaks from its main story missions to search for the treasures scattered throughout its well-designed, semi-open worlds.

The journey takes the gang to the Wild West, feudal Japan and beyond, all the way back to the Ice Age. Sly's ancestors, like gunslinger Tennessee Cooper, ninja Rioichi Cooper and the prehistoric "Bob" Cooper, are charming, though a few of the villains veer dangerously close to offensive ethnic stereotypes.

"Thieves in Time" doesn't break new ground, but it does serve as a lively affectionate tribute to a genre that once dominated the video-game world. I hope it isn't the last we've seen of Sly. Two and a half stars out of four.

More information: slycooper.playstation.com/en-us/

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