

With a new episodic model, 'Hitman' game aims for everyone

March 9 2016, by Derrick J. Lang



This video game image released by Square Enix shows a scene from "Hitman."
(Square Enix via AP)

The creators of "Hitman" are pulling the trigger on an unorthodox way of releasing their espionage saga that could reshape how the interactive industry approaches video game launches.

"Hitman" publisher Square Enix and developer IO Interactive are unloading the latest installment of their assassination simulator episodically instead of all at once. It's a bold departure from past Agent

47 undertakings and other triple-A titles.

Nowadays, most games are released in their entirety online or on a disc for about \$60, and later supplemented with updates and other downloadable content after launch. However, IO Interactive is treating the latest "Hitman" more like a TV show than a game.

"When we're making games, why should we force the people who want to be with us on this journey to wait until the end?" said IO Interactive studio head Hannes Seifert in true Agent 47 fashion: sitting in a dark corner at a hotel bar during the recent D.I.C.E. Summit in Las Vegas.

For the past 15 years, the "Hitman" series has depicted the clandestine, globe-trotting missions of assassin-for-hire Agent 47 in 7 games, a pair of films and a mobile title. The first episode of the latest game—simply titled "Hitman"—will be released Friday.



This video game image released by Square Enix shows a scene from "Hitman."
(Square Enix via AP)

The revelation last year that "Hitman" would be dispersed throughout 2016 in episodes set in such locales as Italy, Morocco, Thailand and Japan didn't initially hit the mark with many fans conditioned to play a "Hitman" game in full.

"It's a series that's been around for over 15 years, so players have huge expectations," said Seifert. "We have to manage that. Looking back at the last eight months, we could have done a better job of communication. I know many people were confused by what we're doing with 'Hitman,' and now we've found the right language to talk about it."

Seifert said the move to releasing "Hitman" in seven chapters means gamers won't be forced to pay \$60 upfront for "Hitman." Instead, they can opt to pay \$10 per episode. For those who want everything, they can buy all of "Hitman" ahead of time or wait until it will be released in full at the end of 2016 on a disc.

However, to entice players to sign up for the full experience now, the developers are deploying new content in the game throughout 2016, such as unique assassination targets that will appear for a limited time.

While it's a novel method of releasing a game, it's a business model that's not dissimilar to the way some mobile games operate or the season-pass structure of franchises like "Call of Duty" and "Fallout."

"It's a risk," said Seifert. "It's a risk worth taking because I think we're opening ourselves up to people who may not have heard of 'Hitman' or been intimidated by it in the past."

More information: www.hitman.com

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