The dying franchise comes back to life

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Assassin's Creed: Origins
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Publisher: Ubisoft
Engine: AnvilNext 2.0
Platforms: PC, PS4, XB1
Release Date: October 27, 2017

The franchise Assassin's Creed, with its then-fresh premise, revolutionary gameplay and intriguing storyline, had found its place in gamers' hearts (and hoodies, backpacks, and just about any merchandise imaginable!). However, things took a downturn when Ubisoft started releasing the games on an annual basis and the entries progressively started becoming more and more bland. Thankfully, after the release of Syndicate in 2015, Ubisoft Montreal decided to take a break for one year and return in 2017 with Origins.

Assassin's Creed Origins is set in Ancient Egypt and follows the story of Bayek, a Medjay (member of a paramilitary force) whose son was killed by an order known as The Snake. The rest of the story deals with Bayek and his wife Aya avenging the death of their son.

In recent years, Assassin's Creed has been doing pretty well strictly from a visual perspective but Origins is just truly something else. Even though the map of the game is mostly a desert, the developers managed to make the atmosphere feel alive. Everything starting from the architecture to the NPCs has been crafted with extreme attention to detail. Origins probably has one of the most diverse fauna I have ever seen in a video game, if not the most. The water bodies are filled with crocodiles, hippopotamuses and cranes while the land is filled with camels, horses, donkeys, hyenas, leopards, lions and cats.

For many years, the gameplay of Assassin's Creed has been stuck at a dead end. However, Origins finally manages to break the cycle. The most major change is that Assassin's Creed is an RPG now. The main quests are few in number but they have a suggested level attached to them. The player can achieve those levels by completing side quests and discovering new areas.

I am usually not quite fond of RPGs and the immense workload that come with them. However, Origins has been an exception for me mainly because the side quests are fun and the map is vivid enough to be explored enjoyably. The "Eagle Vision" feature from the previous games has been replaced with a literal eagle called Senu.

Combat is no longer heavily dependent on parrying and counter-attacks. The player must continuously move around and dodge attacks and strike only when it is opportune. Fighting against enemies of the same level as you does not pose much of a challenge but survival becomes near impossible when fighting against enemies of higher levels. Origins also introduces the first present-day protagonist since Desmond in the form of an Egyptian woman named Layla Hassan.

Origins, sadly, is plagued with some technical issues. On the PS4 version of the game, there are severe texture loading and draw distance issues. The other issue I had with the game is its storytelling. The few main quests are very scattered and separated by lots of side quests which make it very difficult to focus on the plot. While the PC version of the game looks amazing with its diverse suite of graphics options, it also suffers from random stutters in graphically-modest places. This might be attributed to the heavy DRM running in the game.

If Origins came out a few years earlier, it probably could have saved the franchise from its gloomy days. However, what's more important is that the game successfully performs the daunting task of bringing the franchise back on track.

Nony Khondaker is an introvert who complements his non-existent social life with video games, Netflix and a whole lot of ice-cream. Send him memes and cat videos to cheer him up at fb.com/NonyKhondaker

GAME REVIEW

A game about hacking and punching

WASIQUE HASAN

Gunpoint is one of those titles indie gaming fans live for. It's a short stealth-puzzler that oozes charm. Made single-handedly by Tom Francis, this 2D side-scroller came out in 2013 but most people don't keep up with indie releases so it fell through the cracks. Today, we check out this underrated masterpiece and discuss why it is a must-play for any stealth aficionado.

In Gunpoint you step into the shoes of Richard Conway: a fedora-wearing, trenchcoat-sporting freelance spy. You follow his story as he is falsely accused of murder and sets out on a quest to clear his name. Along the way, he learns about a bigger plot that builds up to a pretty satisfying climax with multiple endings based on your choices. One of the best things about the story is the writing. In the mission briefings you get to talk with the different characters, and it is in these dialogue choices that the wit and humor in the writing really shine. The characters have distinct personalities, and the interactions will almost always draw out a chuckle. The story itself is a light-hearted take on generic noir tales and while not revolutionary, it doesn't fail to entertain through the runtime. The art style is pretty neat for a 2D game, featuring dark, gloomy backgrounds and contrasting bright, detailed environments inside the buildings. The soundtrack also fits nicely with beautiful jazz pieces to match the noir setting.

In the game levels your goal is usually to enter some secure building, access a terminal to retrieve sensitive information, and get out, all while avoiding guards, cameras and traps. The twist is in how you go about doing it. Conway has special spy clothing with which he leaps great distances, climbs walls and ceilings and suffers no fall damage. Besides this, he can also tackle guards down and either knock them unconscious with a single punch or bludgeon them to death with his fists.

The most important game mechanic is the Crosslink — this device allows you to manipulate the electrical and security features of a building for your own benefit. Using it you could connect a light switch to a locked door, thus unlocking new parts of the building with the flick of a switch. Or you could rewire things so that when a guard walks through a metal detector a trapdoor activates and sends someone plummeting to their death while simultaneously another guard tries to shoot you with his gun only to end up turning off the lights and calling up an electronically secured elevator leading to the server rooms in the basement.

The puzzles in the game are only moderately difficult, and don't hold up the gameplay too much so the progression through the levels is very smooth.

With such a diverse set of tools (including many unlockable gadgets) there are always entertaining ways of completing a level, and you have the option to play it how you want- sneaking through a level unseen and unheard, or going serial killer and leaving a bloody trail of security guard corpses in your wake.

Once you start playing it's easy to get hooked and soon you'll keep passing level after level without realizing it, trying to get to the end of the story. And you will, all too soon. That is the main problem with the game. Clocking in at around 4 hours, it ends much sooner than you would want. But maybe it's for the best: the game doesn't overstay its welcome, and during the whole playthrough none of the features get repetitive.

Gunpoint is an entertaining burst of originality in an often-stagnant genre, so do yourself a big favor and buy it right now.

Wasique Hasan is at war with his evil twin, Hasique Wasan. Tell him to stop making up fictional siblings at facebook.com/hasique.wasan