

Review of Assassin's Creed

The first installment in a series of games, Assassin's Creed is an interesting beginning. The story of a modern-day assassin being kidnapped by a modern-day Templar and forced to relive his Crusades-era ancestor's memories is a pretty novel concept. The machine allowing the player-character to revisit ancestral memories is the perfect device for laying the foundation of future games. As far as concept is concerned, Ubisoft created a good one.

The real draw for Assassin's Creed is the open-world which allows the player to interact with almost everything in the gameworld. Any building with a realistic climbing structure is climbable. NPC's can be walked into and pushed out of the way. Benches can be sat on, hay bales can be hiding spots, but water is death. The only unplayable part of the world is really just the water. For some reason Ubisoft decided to make Altair either a terrible swimmer or allergic to water. Other than that, a player can run from one end of the world to the other and climb every building they see.

This open-world concept only really became possible with the newest consoles. The ability to render hundreds of objects at once is only possible with a decent processor and a lot of available memory. In Assassin's Creed, the open world which the player can explore is an entire city or a large area of countryside. The console needed to be able to render just about every object needed whenever the player entered one of the open-world spaces. And this doesn't just mean buildings. They are hundreds of NPC's moving around the streets of the cities. Some are just normal citizens, but others are guards or Templars with which the player can interact via fighting. It is definitely obvious that Ubisoft used the new capabilities of the console to create a very enjoyable playing environment.

Another good part of the game is the combat. Altair has various weapons including a hidden blade, a sword, a short sword, and throwing knives. These allow the player to decide how they want to assassinate a target or deal with guards. A stealth kill can be accomplished with the hidden blade. A more ostentatious kill can be made with either of the swords. A distance kill can be done with the throwing knives. For the sword play, the combos and ability to counter kill are well done. Though it has to be said that the majority of players will mostly resort to the counter kill, when it becomes available, since it is the safest way to take down normal enemies. However, as the player gains mastery over combat, the game introduces enemies which are harder to take down and will resist moves like counter kill. The Templars are the prime example of this. A full armoured Templar will deliver stronger blows and be able to throw off the counter kill. This makes either a stealth kill or finding a high rooftop from which to knock the Templar off of a priority. All in all, the combat system and enemy strength are well balanced and make for some enjoyable fight sequences.

Now onto the not so great aspects of the game. The story is not bad. In fact, the parts outside of the Animus (ancestor memory machine) with Desmond are informative and somewhat interesting. With Altair however, things start to get repetitive. The underlying story is interesting and definitely lends itself to sequels, but the gameplay dictated by the story leaves much to be desired. It can almost be said that Assassin's Creed is a prototype for what the franchise will be able to offer. Each "level" consists of three enemies to be assassinated in three different cities. The first time out, the player is required to

traverse the countryside to each city. This time is spent watching the backside of a horse swaying as the player plods along to escape notice from the ever present enemy guards. Once in the cities, the player must seek out the local Assassin's hideout and learn more about the mission. After this they go out into the city and perform a few information gathering missions. There are only a few types: eavesdropping, beat-ups, help a fellow assassin, and pickpocket. This gets really tedious really quickly. Also, the player needs to rescue citizens in order to set up strategic roving bands of scholars or vigilantes who aid the player during the assassination. The assassinations themselves all differ in style and difficulty, but the lead up is boring. Repetitive gameplay will frustrate hardcore gamers and casual gamers will just lose interest and stop playing.

The art and style of Assassin's Creed along with the open-world and combat system are what make this game. The story is unique, but the gameplay that moves it along is not fun and not interesting. Unfortunately, gameplay is what keeps players coming back. It may look good, but if it's boring, there is not much that can be done for the game. It is a good first attempt, but definitely needed a lot more playtesting.