



The visuals within BioShock Infinite can be awe-inspiring.

# BioShock Infinite

## Would you kindly play this game?

**HOW DO YOU** critique a dream? It's the problem we face in reviewing Irrational Games's BioShock Infinite, a game that straddles the gap between an adventure title and a first-person shooter.

That's not a reflection of its overt design—BioShock Infinite is, at its core, a title that will leave those with less-developed keyboard and mouse skills a bit sad. Rather, the flawlessness of the game's storytelling and general structure *compels* a player to want to explore, not shoot.

BioShock Infinite, once you beat it—and kudos to you for making it through the game's final challenge, which is a bit of an unexpected kick in the pants to its difficulty level—just makes *sense*. The game's big reveal helps to write away some of the frustrations you might feel when pushing your way toward the conclusion, ever driven by BioShock Infinite's exceedingly complicated storyline and wonderfully drafted protagonists.

We had hoped for a title that eschews raw gunslinging for role-playing, one that

allows a player more choice and flexibility in gameplay—sadly, this is not it. Instead, BioShock Infinite offers a fairly linear progression that feels like a step back of sorts from the game's predecessors.

BioShock Infinite is the truest journey into the unknown, accentuated by flashbacks and other plot devices that give the story a perfect, full-circle narrative (no spoilers). You'll be confused. You might even be bored at times—thanks to those action elements that, quite frankly, are hardly as compelling as your character's stumbles through a world that doesn't make sense, won't make sense, and makes less sense the more you uncover its secrets. In its third BioShock offering, Irrational has perfected the art of, well, being BioShock, which requires mastering a tricky balance of aloofness, storytelling, and just plain weird that you don't often see quite as brilliantly mixed in other similarly "odd" titles.

We're loathe to discuss the plot of BioShock Infinite to our usual detailed degree

due to the transformative experience that Irrational builds during your trip through the 1912 world of Columbia—truly, a city in the clouds. In many ways, the game's plot is what you make of it; blast your way through with reckless abandon and you'll lose some of the flavorful storytelling elements that require a bit more sleuthing to uncover. And God help you when it comes time to parse the game's overall plot during its big conclusion—you'll get a nosebleed.

What we *can* say is this: You're tasked with tracking down a girl, Elizabeth. This quest pushes you through all the oddities of an Andrew Ryan–like totalitarianism—based on religious zealotry this time around, not capitalism—throws in the age-old plot device of forcing your character, Booker DeWitt, to run the gauntlet between two warring factions, and then just gets plain strange.

The strange parts offer up some of the game's most intellectually stimulating moments, assuming that they don't com-



A giant George Washington robot carrying a huge gun is something we wouldn't want to piss off.



The world of Columbia does tie into historical events... to a certain extent.

pletely turn you away from finishing the title outright. They could. You'll wonder why '70s rock music and other "modern" songs coexist in the same realm where you're shooting up giant robotic Abraham Lincolns and blasting them with wicked powers from your glowing left hand.

We're not huge fans of the game's combat elements, precisely because they aren't really all that difficult, nor do they offer a great deal of variety or interest. Your guns are fun, but relatively standard—pistols, machine guns, burst-fire machine guns, sniper rifles, etc. They're upgradable to a small extent via purchasable elements from the litany of terminals scattered throughout the game, which present a fun challenge in itself: You have limited resources to upgrade. Unless you frequently spend big on ammunition, you'll find yourself frequently switching between whatever guns you happen to be able to pick up. Which is to say, don't bank on always having a favorite at your disposal during an extended firefight.

Your left-hand "Vigor" powers—an icon of the BioShock universe—are a bit more varied. You can zap, firebomb, push, and even turn enemies to your side (they kill themselves when they're finished fighting for you, one of the game's first "oh, wow" moments). These, too, can be upgraded, but at a significantly greater cost than your guns. You can also string your powers together to form some unique and painful combinations, but this is definitely one of BioShock Infinite's less-advertised

bits. (We hope you saved your Salts.)

The game's baddies are decently intelligent, but BioShock Infinite is a bit fonder of throwing legions of pain at you and forcing you to come up with fun ways to kill them without turning to fisticuffs (which, we note, is still fun). You do get some strategic elements to play with around midway through the game, thanks to your travelling companion, Elizabeth—as to how, we won't spoil. However, these bits make some fights almost *too* easy, though we do appreciate being able to summon friendly, chaingun-carrying robots to hang out with us.

And then there's Elizabeth. Irrational has polished the nuances of your travelling companion to such a degree that you might actually find yourself emotionally struck by the various twists and turns you two take throughout your journey(s) in Columbia and beyond. Not since Valve's GLaDOS have we felt that a developer perfectly nailed a character's presentation in such a compelling, captivating fashion.

This is helped in part by the game's mechanics—specifically, its help-you system, which has Elizabeth tossing you items whenever you seem to need them most. Not only does she save your gaming butt, the experience further cements the unique bond that Irrational often evokes between your character and hers. She's not just a combat droid along for the ride; she's humanity in digital form.

If you don't believe us, go hunting around for a guitar within the game; the

single scene of Elizabeth singing Columbia's "theme," as it were, is easily one of the more poignant (albeit subtle) moments we've experienced in a first-person shooter. Heck, she'll even warm her hands on a fireplace when you enter a room that has one—it's subtle, but critical believability.

BioShock Infinite's pacing and "learnability" is ideal; its complexity is vast yet subtle, precisely based on how deep you're willing to try new tactics and features as you play. Its characterization and environments are as beautiful as its dystopian setting is disturbing and, at times, racist. You owe it to yourself to play this game all the way through, if for nothing else than the hours you'll spend debating its merits (if not its ending) with your gamer friends. The world of BioShock doesn't get much better than this. —DAVE MURPHY

**VERDICT**  
**9**  
**KICK ASS!**

**BioShock Infinite**

■ **A MAN CHOOSES** Excellent pacing; wonderful character development; a story you'll spend hours talking about; barbershop quartet.

■ **A SLAVE OBEYS** Combat can feel a bit uninspired if not downright easy (save for the game's final mission); a more linear story progression than previous BioShock titles.

\$60, [www.bioshockinfinite.com](http://www.bioshockinfinite.com), ESRB: M

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