



Hitman: Absolution

Equal parts frustration and fun

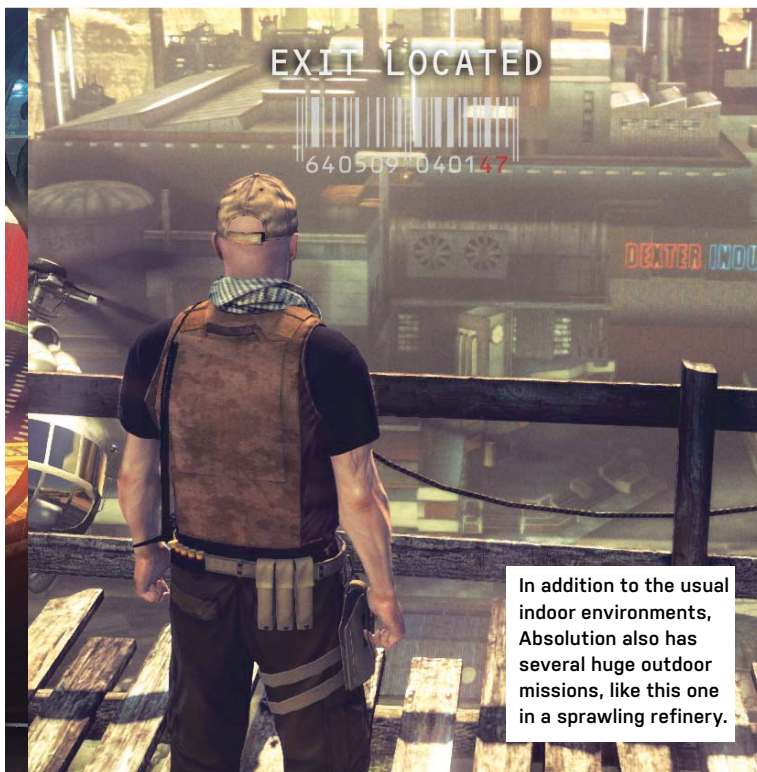
IT'S BEEN A WHILE since we've heard anything from IO Interactive's popular stealth hero, Agent 47 (no pun intended). The star of the popular Hitman franchise is back for a fifth installment, and it's about time, as the last game—*Blood Money*—was released way back in 2006. This time around, the agency employing Agent 47 is tired of paying for his benefits package, so they decide to assassinate *him*. This sets Agent 47 on a mission to dispose of his would-be disposers, taking him, and you, through 20 wide-ranging missions in an effort to stay alive while simultaneously sending the folks who are conspiring against him to the morgue. The premise is great, but we found the game's execution—again, no pun intended—to be a mixture of awesome and awful.

Like the previous titles, the game consists of missions that require you to assassinate predetermined targets. To help you accomplish your objectives, you're given a range of weaponry, intel, and abili-

ties, and it's up to you to put all three to good use. The most useful is a powerful stealth skill called Instinct, which helps you blend into your surroundings, see through walls, and sneak past guards. At the beginning of each mission, you're given a small amount of this ability—your supply can be monitored on the HUD—which depletes as you use it, but is replenished by incapacitating foes and reaching checkpoints. Instinct's X-ray vision comes in handy when planning assassinations, allowing you to gaze through a wall at a potential target from relative safety. It's a really fun skill to use, especially when it lets you slow down time and kill multiple enemies quickly. We were disappointed, however, with how quickly it was depleted—the quick drain forced us to stray from our mission priorities and kill people randomly just to replenish our stores.

In addition to Instinct, there's an array

of weaponry lying around the levels that you can use to your advantage, ranging from a simple kitchen knife to a 50-caliber sniper rifle (both the kitchen knife and sniper rifle provide one-hit kills, whether up close or from a distance. Good times.). Our favorite killing tool was Agent 47's signature weapon, the Fiber Wire, which we used to garrote scumbags and then quickly drag them out of sight in order to remain undetected. We also enjoyed his *other* signature weapon, the Silenced Silver Baller. Its rapid fire-rate combined with the Instinct ability let us take down multiple targets quickly and with plenty of panache. While we preferred the game's stealth weapons, they aren't the only options by a long shot. Attention-getting weapons such as a shotgun or 45-caliber handgun are also available. Be warned, however, that using any of these loud hand cannons will almost always result in the arrival of a ridiculous amount of enemy



In addition to the usual indoor environments, Absolution also has several huge outdoor missions, like this one in a sprawling refinery.



In Absolution, you often have to use large crowds to conceal yourself.

backup—which we consider a flaw in the game’s design. In addition to the weapons provided, you can also use random objects lying around the environment, including a rusty screwdriver, a kitchen knife, and a doctor’s scalpel, to name just a few. We favored the knives because they are silent and reusable from one kill to the next.

Easily our biggest complaint about Absolution is that it’s not just difficult, it seems unfairly difficult. We were frustrated by the sense that we were playing missions over and over—in what is billed as an “open environment”—just to get through the missions the way the developers apparently felt we should. There’s a tutorial, but it’s of little use once the game drops you into a “real” mission, where you have no idea where enemies or objectives are located. We found that it took almost six hours to really get the hang of the gameplay and the assassination moves necessary to be successful, and getting to that point was a mostly trial-and-error exercise that was simply monotonous. We had to play one of the game’s early missions around 20 times to make it to one of the checkpoints, and almost rage-quit the game many times because it was so aggravating.

The game’s main campaign took us nearly 14 hours to complete, and once we had, there was little reason to return

to it, unlike in Dishonored, where there are many ways to progress through the levels, as well as totally different endings according to our playing style. Hitman tries to add replayability by giving you a ranking at the end of each level based on how many people you killed and how many people spotted you, and it automatically uploads your score to a global leader board. This peer-pressure tactic could compel some people to redo levels to get a better score, but we had so much trouble finishing the levels the first time that we had zero desire to try them again. The game also climaxes early, which made the last half of the game drag on way too long.


Aside from the main campaign, there is also a Contracts mode that lets you play missions that you or other players create using the built-in mission editor. This mode is always available, and lets you participate in ranked assassination attempts, but in order to unlock all the necessary weaponry and gadgets, you’ll need to progress through the main campaign first. All in all, it’s an excellent addition to the game, as there are thousands of user-created missions available through the game’s online lobby, which lists them with descriptions and popularity rankings.

The graphics in Hitman are impressive, with sharp textures and a variety of well-made environments, ranging from a dirty

inner city to the dusty deserts of the Deep South. The game also played very well on our overclocked Intel Sandy Bridge system with an Nvidia GTX 660 Ti video card, averaging 88fps with all settings maxed-out at 1080p.

In the end, Hitman: Absolution is a challenging stealth action game with impressive visuals, but it’s marred by a steep learning curve, too much trial and error, and a campaign that drags on too long. We liked the open-ended nature of the missions and the variety of options and weapons available to us, but ultimately found ourselves so frustrated we just wanted to finish the game and never play it again. We appreciate the added Contracts missions, but found the overall experience of this game to be underwhelming.

—CHRIS ZELE

VERDICT  **Hitman: Absolution**

GOOGLE SEARCH Fantastic visuals; great stealth assassinations; user-created missions.

BING SEARCH Early climax; frustratingly steep learning curve.

\$60, www.hitman.com

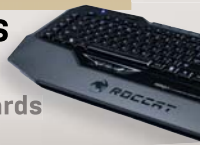
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