

Long-range combat is a staple of the series, but this game often brings things closer.



THIRD-PERSON TACTICAL SHOOTER

Sniper Elite 5

Rebellion has *Enemy at the Gates* in its sights

PRACTICALLY OUR FIRST SHOT in *Sniper Elite 5* goes through a luckless enemy soldier's testicles. We were aiming for his head, but that doesn't really matter right now. The WWII stealth-action series has long been known for its gory X-ray camera, a 'reward' for a nicely placed shot that shows the bullet smashing its way through skin and bone on its way out the other side. But we didn't expect so many all at once.

They were set up for it, of course. Those soldiers manning the searchlights that night didn't stand a chance, and neither do their compatriots who stand on ledges just asking to be pulled over, or investigate strange whistles coming from tall grass with not a thought for their personal safety. Having taken us around northern Africa and Italy in the past two installments, *Sniper Elite* arrives in France just in time for D-Day.

Every game from *Call of Duty* to *Company of Heroes* has taken us through the Normandy invasion, but *Sniper Elite* returns to the overused setting to wring new perspectives and stories out of it. It's successful in this endeavor, and the game finds a new confidence and inventiveness in levels that should be familiar to us all by now. Fields, the approaches to villages

containing German high command, hedgerows surrounding bunkers and radar installations, they're all here, but something's different.

Possibly, it's because the game no longer prioritizes sniping quite so much. The X-ray camera now triggers when you kill with knives and pistols, and the amount of time your rifle spends slung across your back is increased. A level set on a tiny island, completely dominated by a single town, and reachable only by a narrow causeway is an absolute standout in this regard. All narrow streets and steep gradients, it seems to have been deliberately designed as the worst possible place to infiltrate while carrying loud, long-range weaponry.

Happily, protagonist Fairburne has other skills and there seems to be a handy uptick in the supply of suppressed weaponry, too. Subsonic or even wooden bullets allow for a quieter approach, even a non-lethal one, while the familiar drone of aero engines (or the clatter and bang of a sabotaged generator) supply just enough cover for a shot if you time it right. Miss, and it's cat and mouse among the houses, a mass of automatic weapons against your retreating back, the constant threat of other snipers about to put a hole

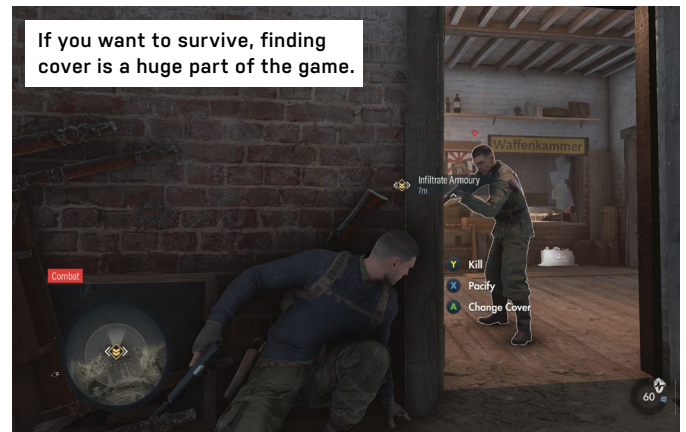
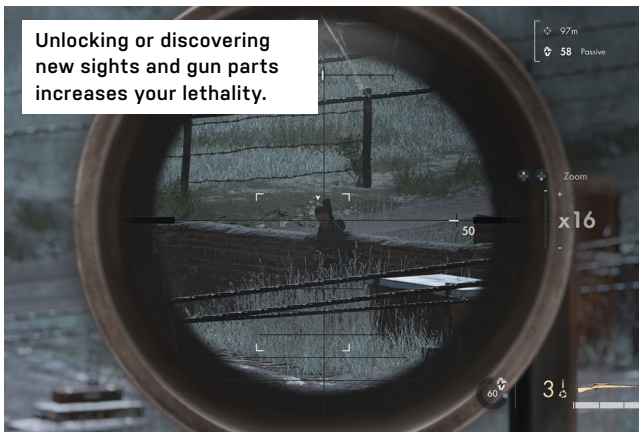
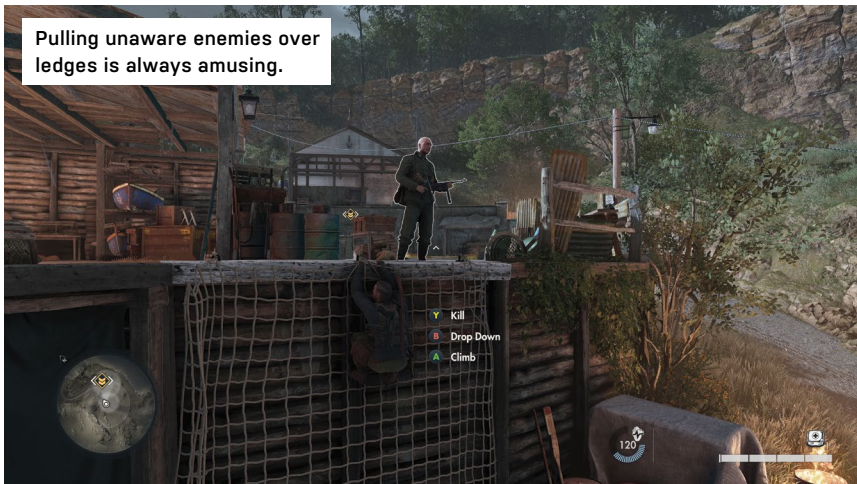
in you from half a mile away weighing on your mind.

Unlike in the bunkers, where pulling your submachine gun from your back and using doorways for cover, occasionally pelting your enemies with their own grenades, is a worthwhile tactic, you don't get very far in the open streets unless you take a more circumspect approach. The way the game now requires you to adapt your tactics based on circumstances and location, yet still gives you ample opportunity to silently kill with the huge amount of equipment Fairburne carries around, is to its eternal credit.

A different, more open, level gives you the opportunity to go nuts with a rocket launcher, a one-man tank-killing machine, while the enemy guards must rank among the genre's most artificially stupid, investigating noises alone and taking no notice of colleagues who suddenly disappear unless they find an actual body. Lingering your sights over a bad guy gives you a little information about his life and hobbies, as well as usefully tagging him, and makes even this phase of the conflict more interesting.

There's an upgrade system at work throughout the game, opening up new skills and increasing things such as





your health bar as you gain experience through kills. The perks mean it's a little easier to move through the world without fundamentally changing it, making the new focus on close combat more palatable in a game about sniping. Long-range encounters are still breathtaking, however, allowing for wind and bullet drop to remove the skull of a high-ranking enemy before slipping away.

We're not sure what the *Sniper Elite* devs have been playing to give them such inspiration for the positive changes, but we want some of it, too. Actually, one thing they have been playing is *Elden Ring*, or possibly *Deathloop*, as it's now possible for your game to be invaded by a hostile sniper, a Jager, controlled by another player. It's a great fit for the formula, adding tense

games of cat and mouse to an already tense game of cat and many mice, but location updates mean you know roughly where the other one is all the time, so any attempt to camp and lie in wait is just as likely to be greeted with a grenade skipping over a low wall toward you as it is a counter-sniper bullet through cover.

The rest of the game melts away as you stalk your human prey, with the ability to return to your most recent save once it's over and carry on with your campaign mission from wherever you happen to be or even go for a rematch with the same Jager—just one of the intelligent ways Rebellion has approached the matter of multiplayer in a single-player genre (there are, of course, other standard multiplayer modes, but none is so interesting as the invasions). You can turn the whole Jager experience off, should you prefer to keep cracking AI heads unmolested instead.

It's not a perfect game—there are some dull levels, the plot is hokum, and it can be frustrating to be chased to your death for the fifth time by a bunch of goons who should have been at your mercy—but what stands out about *Sniper Elite 5* is how it continues the upward trajectory from the previous installment in the series, and even from 2012, when

Sniper Elite V2 introduced the X-ray cam. Environments are detailed and so full of extra routes and shortcuts that you'd be forgiven for thinking they were designed by Arkane. You can play the whole thing, including defending against Jager invasions, in co-op. Or you can become the Jager, suddenly finding the whole of a level's AI machinery on your side, rather than something to be destroyed.

Sniper Elite is now a more rounded game than ever, but this can take away from the fact it's meant to be a game about sniping. However, being a one-man army in the face of the German occupation of Europe is a videogame staple, and if you're going to attack one of those in 2022, this is surely the way to do it. —IAN EVENDEN



VERDICT
8

Sniper Elite 5

SNIPING A grisly but exciting journey across Europe—and through plenty of Europeans.

SLIPPING No longer so much about sniping; still contains some dud levels.

RECOMMENDED SPECS Core i5-8400 or equivalent; 16GB RAM; DirectX 12-capable GPU with 6GB VRAM.

\$50, <https://sniperelite.com>, Rated: M

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