

VR

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Initial Experiences with VR

VR is... good?

So far it's a little disorienting at times. My body expects to be moving when my character does, and at first that gave a sort of motion sickness that I wasn't expecting. Teleportation movement types prevented that at times, but felt less immersive.

The strangest sensation is actually coming out of VR, where everything feels floaty and somewhat unreal for some time after. This feeling of wrongness, that I've decided to dub "reality sickness" has taken several days to get over, and I still find myself surprised to see my hands or to be stopped by a wall.

Half-Life: Alyx

HLA is an amazing tech demo used to deliver a somewhat mediocre game.

Don't get me wrong, I'm having a lot of fun with the game, and it's an experience I feel anyone who plays video games should try.

A little disclaimer: HLA is pretty much my first VR game. It's the one I'm using to adjust to VR, and it feels like a good example.

The Opening

I was blown away by the starting of HLA. The view of the rooftops, the vehicles flying by. The random pidgeon sat on your railing. It was all extremely well done. I didn't even move for a few moments as I took in the scene, looked over the railing, tried to catch aforementioned pidgeon.

Some pros

Gunplay feels natural and solid. All the weapons being one handed may be a blessing. I'm not sure how well two handed firearms will translate to VR.

The level of interactiveness in the environment is also astounding. Being able to throw pool balls and raise antennas on radios.

The Negatives

Unfortunately, there are plenty.

Difficulty is achieved through a combination of scarce ammunition and enemies being bullet sponges. Expect to use 3-6 bullets of a 10 round clip taking down even the most basic of enemies even when performing headshots. Later enemies will use your entire surplus of ammo.

This leaves a requirement to scour each and every environment to collect as much ammunition as possible, leading to a second layer of difficulty: this one through tedium. Did you not explore the previous level well enough? Too bad, here's 46 enemies and 4 shotgun shells.

The complete lack of melee compounds this problem. If you run out of ammo, you have no choices. You're either running through the enemies, or you're dead.

Weapon selection is also odd. This is my first VR game but... wouldn't being able to holster a pistol make sense? Having a button-press menu was an odd choice.

Outside of combat, the game is extremely linear. After being teased a city at the start of the game, I was treated to hours of corridors, tunnels, dingy rooms and alien environments. The time spent outside on streets was limited. I understand this is a gameplay choice, but it could have opened things up a little more.

Conclusion

It's still worth it. I'm looking forward to some of the community built parts of it.

It feels like valve made an incredibly powerful VR engine and a great tech demo of a game to show it off. If they handed this to someone else, they might be able to make a definitive VR experience.

Exercise through VR - Part 1

I've recently started a VR-based exercise regimen because, like many of us, I don't get enough exercise in my daily routine. I've found that combining fitness with gaming is a great motivator for me, especially after having success with the boxing rhythm game on the Switch. The immersive nature of VR seems like the perfect way to make working out both fun and effective, so I've been diving into a few different titles to see what works best for me.

So far, I have tried:

Groove Gunner

Groove Gunner has quickly become one of my favorite VR experiences. It combines the fast-paced action of a shooter with the rhythm-based mechanics that keep me engaged and coming back for more. In the game, you're tasked with shooting targets in time with the music while simultaneously using shields attached to your forearms to block incoming projectiles. The concept is simple, but the execution is superb, offering an intense workout that doesn't feel like a chore.

The one downside is the somewhat limited song selection, but the developers have mitigated this by offering a range of difficulty levels. This means that even if you're playing the same songs over and over, the varying levels of challenge provide enough variety to keep the game interesting. The higher difficulties really push you to improve your timing and accuracy, making it a great way to both hone your skills and get a good sweat going.

ShadowBoxr

ShadowBoxr is another VR title I've been exploring, and while it's still in early access, it shows a lot of promise as a boxing trainer. The game is designed to help you improve your boxing technique through rhythm-based exercises, but it's clear that it's still a work in progress. The graphics and mechanics aren't quite polished, and there are moments when the punches feel out of sync with the beat. This can be frustrating, especially when you're trying to maintain a rhythm, but I'm hopeful that these issues will be ironed out as development continues.

Despite these rough edges, ShadowBoxr isn't a bad option if you're looking for a boxing workout in VR. The core mechanics are there, and the potential for a solid training tool is evident. If the developers continue to refine the game, it could become a great way to incorporate boxing into your fitness routine, especially for those who prefer a more structured, trainer-like experience.

PowerBeats VR

PowerBeats VR is another strong contender in the VR fitness space. It's a solid game that focuses heavily on boxing training, offering a series of workouts designed to improve your agility, reflexes,

and overall fitness. The gameplay involves dodging, punching, and moving to the beat, which keeps you engaged and physically active throughout your session. It's a game that really gets your heart pumping, making it an excellent choice for cardio-focused workouts.

However, there's a bit of a catch. While the boxing mode is fully accessible from the start, other game modes are locked behind a leveling system. This means you'll need to put in some time to unlock all the features, which could be seen as a downside if you're eager to try everything right away. On the flip side, this progression system might be motivating for some players, providing an incentive to keep coming back and working on their fitness goals. Overall, PowerBeats VR offers a comprehensive and engaging workout, but it does require a bit of patience to access all of its content.

VRChat 001 - First Impressions

WIP

VRChat 002 - Custom Avatar?

VRChat 003 - Escape Room (Pop Escape)

I just finished my first escape room in VR. It was... an experience.

The concept is questionable. A great deal of the joy of an escape room is taking a video-game-like puzzles and implementing them in meat space. The success or failure of an escape room depends heavily on these matters.

So the idea of taking video-game-like puzzles in meat space and re-inserting them into a video game is an odd one. But it worked. The puzzles felt like escape room puzzles. They relied on mechanical locks and puzzle pieces slotting together, so it felt like an escape room.

After consulting the hints twice (though only once help, the first time we discovered the valuable piece of information while browsing the hints,) we completed the *lengthy* puzzle in just under three hours. This is another advantage of the game being taken back into the digital realm: The game instance can be launched at will, and runs for as long as the players want it to run for. There's no other group waiting to come in, and no strict time limit.

The much wider scope of the system in VR is also advantageous. Instead of being confined to 1-4 small rooms with extremely high concentration of puzzles, these experiences can be ranging and expansive. The one in particular ranged across maybe 20 or more rooms, and in doing so gave us variety and a full and complete story.

With the average solve time being 2-4 hours, it might have been a little bit on the long side, particularly for a person like me who almost exclusively plays VR while stood.

Otherwise, I have no complaints. The experience was smooth and well made, no critical bugs or issues. And the sense of doing something "with" friends was still there. We talked through puzzles, made attempts to solve things, discussed ideas. And even took a selfie at the end.

I enjoyed it more than some of the escape rooms I've done with actual people. But that's mostly due to the people in question being dumb.