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.

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