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BioShock nothing new, but all good

gamereview

BioShock

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After so much hype and drippingly sweet reviews, someone needs to say it: *BioShock* is not the best game ever. That said, it's a pretty damn great one, albeit without major innovations.

This review could regurgitate all the inordinate praise that has been heaped upon the new Xbox 360 and PC title, but that would be redundant. If you haven't already bought the game, you're probably planning to once you've finished the slew of titles you didn't complete during the past four months of academic liberation. If you somehow aren't interested in *BioShock*, you're probably waiting for *Halo 3*. In that case, you probably don't care about epic single-player games that make a legitimate case for games being art.

Set in 1958 in a twisted underwater paradise called Rapture, *BioShock* puts you in the shoes of a nameless protagonist whose plane crashes

in the middle of the ocean, with Rapture being the only refuge within a thousand miles. Through the game's 20-some hour campaign, you'll come across numerous memorable characters good, bad, and somewhere in between—in the process of solving the mystery of Rapture: what went wrong?

Where *BioShock* excels is in evoking emotions that few other games are able to hint at. While it doesn't traverse the postmodern political heights of *Metal Gear Solid 2*, *BioShock* is a steady game with a steady story, that, while smattered with twists and turns for gamers to manoeuvre themselves around, doesn't pull too many gratuitous hairpins just for the sake of another plot twist.

The story tugs at heartstrings usually reserved for sappy chick flicks and miracle touchdown throws: watching a Big Daddy—the game's iconic and intimidating foe—knock futilely on walls in hopes of coaxing a Little Sister out of a drainpipe is heart-breaking. A tale of twisted ideals and utopian misdirection, *BioShock* asks some compelling questions about human nature, and some pretty relevant ones at that, alluding to modern-day issues such as stem-cell research.

But games are about one thing first and foremost—how they play—and the developers are well aware of this. *BioShock* is a technically a first person shooter, but it's just as much an adventure game and an RPG as a *Doom*-style shoot-'em-up.

It also just happens to be really, really good at being all three. The enemy AI is balanced to perfection; the weapons are of the run-of-the-mill variety but still manage to feel different from other sets of killing devices in other games, and the level design is imaginative.

What separates *BioShock* from other, more traditional, shooters are its plasmids—essentially, genetic enhancements that allow you to wield powers ranging from the ability to shoot flames from your bare hands to lifting lift objects through mind control. The gameplay possibilities plasmids open up are nearly endless.

BioShock is quite easily one of the best games of this new generation, and a breath of fresh air in the gaming industry, even with the game's claustrophobic atmosphere. Nothing in the game is that innovative—many, if not most, of its elements are borrowed from other games—but few games are this finely-tuned. And just plain fun.

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