

Form Info

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Name of the Game

Half-life: Alyx

Date

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Session 2: Solo Playthrough | 45 to 60 minutes

a) Descriptive Notes

- I began playing Half-Life Alyx on July 3rd at 8:59 pm using my friend's Samsung Odyssey headset. The VR area is set up on a carpet to help provide spatial reference to the player
- A concern I immediately have is in focusing the screens in front of my eyes in the headset but fortunately there is adjustability.
- Loading into the SteamVR environment is quite immersive - I can't stop looking around
- The environment is rendered to an incredible detail. I truly feel like I need to be resting my arm on this digital railing as I lean over to view City 17
- The physics interactions in this game are remarkable with objects interacting and colliding with each other smoothly.
- Initial characters are established via small video/audio interactions in-game while also giving a minimal instruction as to progress.
- The instructions leave the progress in this first bit open ended as the player is given time to explore.
- The pacing of this initial part of the game is well thought out as it gives the player lots of time to become comfortable with the new control systems; this must be exercising my neural plasticity to be able to intuitively move via joysticks and jumping as opposed to linear movement with controls.
- Typical Valve hint of colouring important items in red to help guide players along.
- First steps take some getting used to as I try to coordinate my looking around with the headset and turning my body with a joystick.
- I can't stop myself from looking around in game - every time I find a new object or environment I want to fully inspect it in this unbelievably immersive experience.
- Immersion is slightly spoiled as I encounter a scripted in-game cutscene where I can still "interact" with the antagonist military police force yet there is no consequence or real reaction to my actions.
- Game raising the stakes by establishing the primary objective of rescuing my father from the clutches of the evil government (The Combine)
- Game providing hints through Rhys Darby's character and his instructions delivered through audio
- I still can't believe how immersive each section of this game is
- Immersion stretched a bit literally as my friend instructs me in how soft-body objects become locked to each hand controller and therefore can be stretched well beyond proportion
- I've arrived at Rhys Darby's character's (Russell) hideout. Here there is more reaction to

interactions with my character

- It is slightly frustrating to be locked to a single plane in the Y-Axis as, in a regular Half-Life game, I would normally be jumping up on everything I can - understandably (yet frustratingly) movement is far more restrictive in a VR environment.
- Disaster strikes as one of the controllers has malfunctioned and is no longer interacting with the headset/environment.
- This will take a while to solve, finished for now at 9:47pm.

c) Affective Notes

- Intense awe and wonder with the immersive quality of the medium upon first entry into the game - they clearly designed the first few moments to be enjoyed and savoured slowly - there is no sense of urgency or purpose-driven action in the first zone of the game.
- Intense engagement as I begin to play with the physics of the world and the interactions between objects, particularly with the virtual whiteboard markers drawing on the glass windows!
- In the initial first few scenes you witness a hostile militant occupying police force assaulting citizens which certainly hits a bit close to home these days - it is a shame that this trope in story-telling is mostly-truth in real life.
- It is slightly irritating to face hard limits in video games, regardless of the medium or control scheme. I am very upset that I cannot actually slide down the playground slide in this game!
- Intense frustration trying to sort out why my right hand doesn't work in-game and disappointment when we realize there's a larger issue at play with the computer's bluetooth connection.

b) Analytic Notes

Half-life Alyx presents me with problems in the realms of narrative and gameplay mechanics. Narratively the game challenges players with life in a dystopian future where humanity is oppressed by a race known as the Combine and you are a part of the resistance movement against them with a current operation to steal a reactor being planned by your father Eli Vance. It is gratifying to see Valve's familiarity with diversity as you play the role of a young woman of Afro-Asian descent in the game. This game also presents a world in which the majority of humanity has been pushed into a lower class terrorized by an oppressive occupying force that is often portrayed harassing and assaulting the lower class. This portrayal could be triggering for some individuals, especially taking into consideration the current climate and the immersive quality of the VR medium. Reflecting on Bogost I would state that Half-Life Alyx "does" texture unbelievably well. The immersive quality of being able to look and move around with vibration-response through tactile-sensitive controllers opens a new medium for gamers to experience texture.

Fieldnote Summary Session 2

This new system of play is one that must truly be experienced to comprehend as no previous reading or watching in research prepared me for the experience of VR. The most crucial thing for getting a handle on the game is to go slow and focus on making your manipulation of the controllers intuitive as this makes the game easier to enjoy with the added bonus of reducing motion sickness.

Include Images

- [VR.jpg](#)