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■ Game review

Engrossing storyline sure to make game a killer cult classic

"Killer7's" plot centers on a mission to assassinate a terrorist group Heaven Smile, who threaten the peace

BY ANDREW MCCOLLUM
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It seems that every week another generic shooter is released into a market that is already clogged with boring and derivative games. In early screenshots and previews "Killer7" had all the makings of another standard shooter-survival horror game. The fact that the game was being produced by Capcom, the makers of the hit-or-miss "Resident Evil" series, didn't help raise expectations. Then Capcom released the incredible genre-redefining "Resident Evil 4" and "Killer7" suddenly looked a little more promising. As it turns out, "Killer7" isn't a survival horror game, or a shooter, but a bizarre genre-bending adventure game that is destined to be a cult classic.

"Killer7" is the most interesting game that has been released in years. It is a surreal, stylistic adventure through a troubled world. "Killer7" finds the Earth in a state of peace; all Earth's nations have agreed to destroy their intercontinental weaponry and the world seems to be on its way to greatness. Then the terrorist group Heaven Smile reveals itself. Heaven Smile is made up of monstrous suicide bombers who seem to be bent on destroying the peace that the world has worked so hard to create. The game's plot takes off from there,

touching on topics that have rarely been seen in video games. "Killer7's" engrossing story is probably its greatest success; the strange twists and turns will keep players tied to the game until the end.

The game's title is the name of a group of assassins who are sent to destroy Heaven Smile. Players control the Killer7, seven assassins all led by Harmon Smith, who uses a wheelchair. But the assassins may not be real people at all; they may be Harmon's split personalities. Players are able to switch personalities at virtually any time in the game, and each personality has different abilities and talents that help players make progress through the game. One personality can pick locks, another can turn invisible, another has a scope on her pistol and can summon a spirit by letting loose a shower of blood from her wrist. Sound weird? It is.

Lending to the bizarre storyline and premise is "Killer7's" amazing presentation. The game uses a cell-shaded graphical style that looks like a cartoon, but certainly isn't childish. Initially the game's gritty graphical style is somewhat jarring, but as players grow accustomed to the game they will appreciate the bold decisions the developer made. The game's sound completes the immersive experience; from the crackling

fires in a burning building to the rusty hinges of a gate being closed the game's audio experience is some of the best heard in any game today.

While "Killer7" succeeds in presentation and storytelling, it all but fails when it comes to gameplay. Movement in "Killer7" is confined to preset pathways, one button makes the character run forward, the other turns the character around. When a character reaches a junction, a flick of the joystick sends the character down the chosen path. Combat consists of shooting the various Heaven Smile members that amble toward the character. Most enemies have an easy-to-hit weak spot; hitting these spots means an instant kill. Boss battles are generally simple, and there are a few that seem almost impossible to lose. The game's puzzles are fairly obvious, and there are always characters that will offer hints. "Killer7" is far from challenging. In fact, it seems the developers didn't want "Killer7's" gameplay to get in the way of its story.

Players will know whether they like "Killer7" within the first 15 minutes of gameplay. Some will be put off by the game's odd art style and confining controls. Others will see the game as a refreshing break from the run-of-the-mill games that the industry has been putting out recently. Those who stick with "Killer7" are in for an interesting and unique experience that is unlike any other video game.



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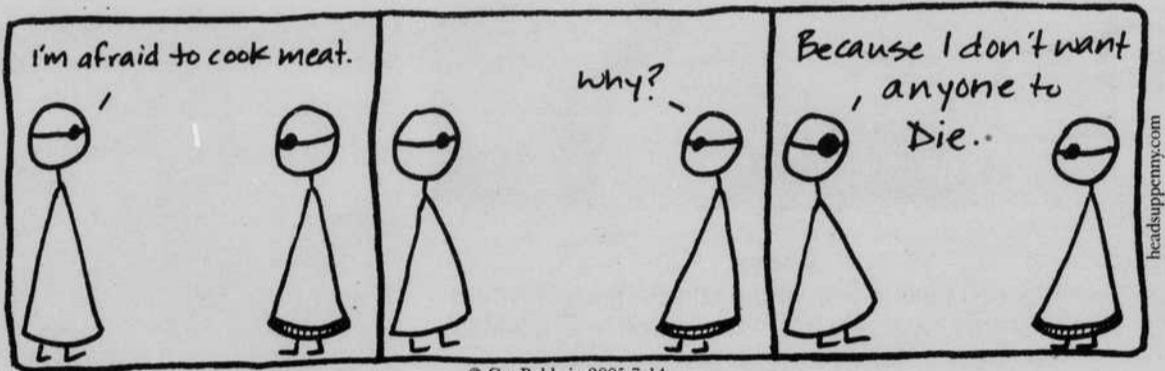



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