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### Usability Analysis of HITMAN's Gunplay

While *HITMAN*'s disguise system is an incredible feat for the stealth genre, there are other parts of *HITMAN* that aren't so polished. In my opinion, the biggest gripe in *HITMAN* is its gunplay. *HITMAN* may encourage creative and non-ballistic assassinations, but guns still play a key role in the gameplay of *HITMAN*. Gunshots can be used to not only kill targets but be used in more creative assassinations and bullet impacts can act as lures to move NPCs to locations. And while the series has made considerable improvement since its inception, it still feels far behind industry standards.

Before delving into all of the problems with the gunplay, I'd like to briefly discuss the good parts of the gunplay system. First and foremost, it works. You pull the trigger and the bang-bangs go into the man-mans.

Weapons have a variety of stats to help each feel unique and they all function with varying degrees of viability. Secondly, and lastly, the gunplay works better with semi-automatic weapons. Since



Figure 1- an example of a pistol in HITMAN

you tend to have more time to reposition your reticle, my issues with weapon recoil don't apply to the same extent. They still suffer, but its far less of an issue and generally a pleasant experience to use them.

Now onto the problems. As previously stated, the weapons in *HITMAN* suffer from some horrendous recoil. The recoil applied to weapons is largely vertical, although there is some horizontal recoil also applied. The recoil can be very hard to manage. The animations for weapon recoil are also very stiff which makes it extremely jarring to watch. If they were to be a bit more fluid, then perhaps the recoil wouldn't be as big of an issue as it currently is. As I said before, the semi-automatic weapons don't suffer from the recoil as badly as automatic weapons. Automatic weapons, however, can be extremely hard to manage. YouTube channel Hit Content Productions has a good supercut of action gameplay that shows off weapon firing, and by extension, weapon recoil in their video *HITMAN - Action/Gunplay - Compilation*. You can watch their video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOydSICFwZE>. Weapons in real life do have a good amount of kick, but the deadliest assassin in the world would have no problem keeping the recoil minimal. The main reason that the recoil is applied in this way is game balancing. *HITMAN* is a stealth game and so running and gunning would break the game. To disincentivize players from adopting this strategy, they made the weapons hard to handle. I think that this is a subpar solution to this issue. *HITMAN* is all about experimentation, so limiting how players can experiment damages the core of *HITMAN*'s gameplay. If I were to fix the system, I'd replace the weapon animations with more fluid and natural feeling animations and lowering the recoil to amounts more befitting of a world-class assassin. This would help them to not feel so jarring and more enticing to use. To make automatic weapons less viable to constantly use, I'd suggest increasing enemy opposition to provide consequences for running and gunning, but not by making it openly uncomfortable to do.

Another issue regarding gunplay animations are the kill and death animations. Currently *HITMAN* operates on a sort of physics-based animation system, meaning that their physics

engine is what produces the response of a bullet impact. The problem is that it feels jarring in its implementation. Author Chris

Solarski from *Interactive Stories and*

*Video Game Art* calls this a

dissonance in the player and

environment (2017, p. 27). While

dissonances are not inherently bad

for a game, in *HITMAN* they just



Figure 2- A still from a kill animation in *HITMAN*

hurt the immersion the game has built. NPCs react very stiffly, and it doesn't feel natural at all. It feels cheap. The animations feel like something out of an alpha or beta, not a finished project.

And I want to note that this isn't meant to be a knock against the physics present in *HITMAN*.

They are really nice, but they just don't work well for the kill animations. To get a better feel for

the animations, Hit Content Productions' video, *Hitman - Action/Gunplay - Marrakesh -*

*Compilation(Auto-Pistol,Silenced Assault Rifle,C4 Block)*, demonstrates what open combat in

*HITMAN* looks like: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aT-Kr476Mco>. I feel *HITMAN* would

be greatly improved by replacing the physics-based animations with premade ones. *HITMAN*

already implements pre-made animations when using melee weapons and special assassinations,

and these look leagues better than the stiff, rigid gunplay animations. To help from keeping

repetitive, I'd suggest having a variety of animations and linking them to certain parts of the

body, so certain areas will trigger certain animations. This improvement would greatly improve

the overall polish of not only *HITMAN*'s gunplay but of *HITMAN* itself.

The second largest problem with the gunplay system is weapon feedback. The key to successful gunplay in any game is a sense of satisfaction. Typically, this comes in the form of

weightiness. This is something that *HITMAN* lacks. The guns feel weightless. This may seem obscure, but the best analogy I can think of is that they feel like the imaginary finger guns you played with your friends with as a child. You didn't know what guns were like so you would just try to make it look like what you thought they would function like. Obviously, it looked wrong. While this was acceptable for childhood play, it's not ok for a mainstream stealth game to have the same inaccuracy. *HITMAN* features both realistic physics and visuals, so to lack accuracy in weapon feedback retroactively taints the entire package. How damage is represented in the game

is also lacking in

adequate feedback.

When the player is shot,

they don't even flinch.

This is a horrible

handling of damage, as it

makes it extremely

difficult to determine



Figure 3- *HITMAN*'s HUD

how close one is to death. *HITMAN* has no health bars and the only indication of being damaged is the screen becoming black and white, which can happen quite fast if engaging in open combat.

It would not go amiss to allow players to see how much health they have at a given moment so they could plan around self-preservation. I have 2 possible solutions to the health feedback issue.

Number one would be to create a health bar that would be displayed on screen. Since *HITMAN* tries to keep HUD elements to a minimum, I'd suggest making the health bar only visible when accessing the inventory wheel. That way it allows players to see how close they are to dying but wouldn't be a constant presence in the game world. In connection to the health problem I believe

that adding more flinch to the character when they are shot would help to balance open combat. It would make it a much larger risk vs reward element because my other suggestions would make gun use more appealing to use but this change would also counteract it by providing a greater consequence for getting shot. As for the gun feedback, I feel like my recommendations for the recoil issue could extend to this as well, as making the recoil more believable and organic would help them feel weightier as well as more functional.

*HITMAN* also has a problem with weapon storage that was introduced in season 2, this being the introduction of

briefcases. Briefcases can hold one item of player choice, their primary use being to store large weapons that the player can't



Figure 4- An example of gun sizes in comparison to the briefcase (courtesy of badeaguard)

otherwise conceal. While this allows for players to have more available firearms, it also can make the guns a bit broken. When retrieving items from a briefcase they are instantly added to your inventory, so within seconds players can go from unarmed to fully automatic. This action is shorter than guard detection times so by the time a guard has detected the player as armed they will likely have been killed by the player. Then the player can drop the weapon back into the case instantly and carry on as if nothing had ever happened. Hitman forum user badeaguard has brought up an immersive visual issue with the implementation of the briefcase. It's problematic in that the guns being stored in the briefcases can be more than double their size. This pulls players out of the experience because Agent 47 is supposed to be an assassin, not a magician.

Previous Hitman games have had briefcases before but had handled them much better. The last game to feature a briefcase was *Hitman: Blood Money* (2006). The way that it was different, however, was in the fact that there were animations for retrieving and placing



Figure 5- *Hitman: Blood Money's* briefcase animation

weapons. The only weapons that could be placed in the standard briefcase was a disassembled sniper rifle. When players retrieved the rifle, they had to sit through an animation to assemble the weapon and another to disassemble it to put it away. This created a balancing where you had to think when to retrieve your weapon. This also allowed large weapons to be stored in a small briefcase. You couldn't just pop it in and out like magic, otherwise you'd be killed instantly. I feel the solution to this problem in *HITMAN* is within the developers reach. I'd suggest that they reintroduce the animations. In fact, people have been begging for the animations to return. Reddit user jesusperkele recommends a similar solution to that of myself, although he offers some other solutions that I'm not particularly fond of. His whole thread can be found here: [https://www.reddit.com/r/HiTMAN/comments/9bqm3l/hitman\\_2\\_looks\\_great\\_but\\_taking\\_a\\_sniper\\_out\\_of/](https://www.reddit.com/r/HiTMAN/comments/9bqm3l/hitman_2_looks_great_but_taking_a_sniper_out_of/). This solution would force players to time out when they draw their weapons and keep automatic weapons, and larger guns in general, as more supplementary tools than main features of the player's arsenal. On the flipside it would allow players to choose and use the weapons they want without artificial restrictions.

As shown above, *HITMAN's* gunplay is not in a great state. From the ground up it needs to be reworked. As it stands, the gunplay is not only not fun, but openly hostile for players to

use. As a result, so many weapons go unused as nobody wants to deal with the broken system, which is a real shame. And while the gunplay in *HITMAN* is deeply flawed, I don't find it irredeemable. It definitely serves a purpose in *HITMAN*, and I feel with the changes suggested above, *HITMAN*'s gunplay could become a much more viable option for normal play.

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