

Platform:

**PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC**

Reviewed on:

**PC**

Genre:

**Action-adventure**

Publisher:

**Electronic Arts**

Developer:

**EA DICE**

Release:

June 7, 2016

You might recall the death-defying stunts of Russia's teen daredevils, who filmed their very own vertigo-inducing videos and self-portraits while perched precariously on the edges of towering buildings, impossibly tall cranes, and various landmarks. With cameras strapped on their heads, you can watch – palms raining with sweat, their every step as they swiftly and skilfully scale these structures while carefully evading the occasional security guards under the guise of night. The thrill of their climb, especially when watching from the comfort and safety of our own home, filled most of us with trepidation and morbid curiosity.

But in *Mirror's Edge Catalyst*, you are that daredevil. Hopping from one rooftop to another, vaulting over metal fences, running against the smooth walls of skyscrapers, and keeping balance on a thin pole miles high above the street are all par for the course for Faith, a Runner with a tremendous appetite for danger – and the athletic prowess to back it up.



## Run faster, jump higher

As the reboot of 2008's *Mirror's Edge*, *Catalyst* is still about exploring the city through parkour, albeit with few differences. The biggest one, of course, is that *Catalyst* features an open world, while the original *Mirror's Edge* was much more linear. In the latter, you were just given a general direction to head and a couple of hints; take too long, however, and enemies would show up in hordes. On the other hand, *Catalyst* gives you the luxury to wander about the rooftops a little, and soak in the beauty of the city's skyline.

Note that I only mentioned rooftops, not the streets; despite the open-world moniker, there is no way to explore every nook and cranny of Glass, the city that *Catalyst* is set in. The streets are still out of bounds for Faith, so there's no such thing as bargaining with a shopkeeper for a funkier facial tattoo or buying a pair of Nike Dunks to improve her agility. This limitation might seem a tad



disappointing initially, especially for those intrigued by the unnaturally pristine city in *Mirror's Edge*, but in retrospect this didn't feel like a poor decision by the developers. What made *Mirror's Edge* a sleeper hit was the high-octane stunts that Faith could perform, and this is what EA DICE had chosen to focus on with *Catalyst*. In other words, making *Catalyst* a truly open world in the vein of *Skyrim* would only diminish its appeal.

And indeed, all that running about is exactly what makes *Catalyst* such a breathtaking experience. Faith's movement is so much more fluid and smooth in *Catalyst*; you can almost feel the wind in your own hair as Faith whizzes through the city at top speed, her feet lightly tapping the ground and her occasional pants for air breaking the silence. Plus, Faith seems to be able to recover from falls much more easily, which makes leaping across seemingly impossible hurdles much less daunting. This doesn't make the game any simpler though; it just means that Faith is much quicker on her feet, and more responsive to the commands I was wildly banging away on my keyboard.



## Hit like a freight train

Combat is another significant departure from *Mirror's Edge* and a surprisingly welcome addition to the game. As promised by Senior Producer Sara Jansson back in EA's E3 press conference last year, Faith was unable to pick up any firearms. In exchange, her unarmed combat capability has increased, granting her heavier punches and harder hitting kicks. Any fears that this would turn Faith into a superhuman fighting machine more fit for the likes of *Street Fighter* or transform the game into another generic action adventure title were quickly allayed; her combat style is still very much rooted in parkour and momentum, while still retaining much of her trademark acrobatics.

In one instance, Faith's task was to fend off a group of security guards, and since they could easily overpower her with their guns and stun batons, fighting them heads-on is a foolhardy solution. Hence, she had to utilise her environment to dodge, disarm, or knock out her enemies. One way

was to take them out individually by way of heading to higher ground, jumping off the ledge, and landing right on top of each of them – and nailing this felt just like scoring a slam-dunk.

## Just forget about the plot

Unfortunately, for all the efforts that EA DICE has sunk into perfecting the way players interact with the game, it seemed to have neglected putting the same amount of care into the story, which is pretty derivative and laughably one-dimensional.

The plot is somewhat as follows: Faith was recently released from jail, and minutes after her release she has already pissed off a whole bunch of people. One of them is an evil, heartless bastard who we know is the leader of a corporation that conducts unethical experiments, because he was overheard warning an employee to keep quiet about these experiments or risk losing her job. He...might have been inspired by Monsanto. Likewise, he is probably the driving force behind a political intrigue that Faith was caught in, which naturally includes tons of shady business and dastardly moustache-twirling.



And... that's about it. There is nothing more I can say about the plot, because there isn't much to begin with. EA DICE's attempts to vaguely weave a story together out of these parts are no more than just a paper-thin excuse to let Faith run loose in the city.

Similarly, the characters that you meet as Faith also have personalities to rival a cardboard cutout: You have your smart-mouth Icarus, a fellow Runner who thinks he's better than you; the grizzled veteran Noah; the comically evil villain, Gabriel Kruger, who probably eats kittens for lunch; and Plastic, a socially awkward but hyper-intelligent geek who befriends Faith. Faith is easily the most likeable and relatable character among the entire cast, but even she suffers from the typical hot-headed protagonist syndrome.

## Courier services

The optional side quests in *Catalyst* can also be a colossal waste of time if you're not a completionist or a fanatic for in-game collectibles.

There is one line that Faith muttered after completing a delivery for a friend, "It felt good, running." It gives me a small comfort to know that Faith really loves running, because in terms of career opportunities, that is all she will ever get to do as a Runner. From delivering a fragile token to an ex-lover to distracting the police patrol while a fellow Runner attempts to sneak into an office building, the side quests that *Catalyst* frantically flings at the player are all about running from one place to another as fast as possible. Perfecting these routes can be incredibly cathartic, but it can also get awfully repetitive after a few tries. This is not to say that these quests are no fun; on the contrary, they are quite enjoyable, but the lack of variety is a noticeable issue.



## Verdict

I have to admit that, even before reviewing the game, I was rather skeptical of *Catalyst*, especially when the first *Mirror's Edge* was already a pretty solid game. Why would EA choose to mess with a much-loved game, turn it into an open-world title, and even throw a fighting system into the mix? Thankfully, my fears were unfounded. Not only did *Catalyst* manage to capture the adrenaline rush that comes with performing parkour and unbelievable athletic stunts, it is able to do while surpassing the original *Mirror's Edge*, which I felt is an enormous feat.

There really is nothing more liberating than sprinting across rooftops or running along the ledge of a building with nary a care in the world. In fact, one of my escapades as Faith brought me to the very top of a construction crane, and looking down from that spot had me trembling from vertigo. But like those Russian daredevils who were able to climb some of the tallest buildings in the world

effortlessly, I became fearless. I took a dive – and was quickly reeled right back to a nearby structure with the help of a grappling hook.

That was pretty exhilarating.

#### REVIEW OVERVIEW



#### SUMMARY

The exhilarating rush of running along walls, leaping across rooftops and hanging to the ledges of buildings are perfectly captured in Mirror's Edge Catalyst. Just don't expect too much from its non-existent plot.

# 7.5



OVERALL SCORE

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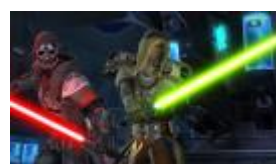
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