

PROTOTYPE VERSUS INFAMOUS



**A GAMEPLAY COMPARISON BY CLAUDIO SCOLASTICI
ITALIAN GAME DESIGNER**

INDEX

INTRO.....

RULES FOR COMPARISON.....

COMPARISON CRITERIA.....

WHAT IS NOT TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT.....

PROTOTYPE.....

INFAMOUS.....

CONCLUSIONS.....

INTRO

What follows is a comparison between two titles that share many gameplay aspects: a free roaming environment, a main character with superpowers and a lot of vertical gameplay. The titles are **Prototype** for the Xbox 360 and **Infamous** for the PS3. Let's check together how similar these two games really are.

RULES FOR COMPARISON

1. I tested each title for two hours of actual gameplay, stopping the clock during cut scenes and menu navigation.
2. The first 20 minutes were considered 'cooling time', meaning that I just focused on mastering the game controls and not allowing myself to upgrade any character skills, unless it was required by the ongoing mission.
3. I started a New Campaign and set the difficulty level on Hard for both titles.
4. Since both games are based on a free roaming model and missions are scattered all around the game world, I decided to accept mission in the order I stepped into them, regardless the fact they were main or side missions.
5. To prevent time wasting on a single mission, I decided to stop the clock after three failed attempts on the same mission. The countdown was resumed after the mission was beaten.

COMPARISON CRITERIA

I selected **7 gameplay aspects** to focus on for this comparison:

1. Environment navigation: by which means the player moves around
2. Environment interaction: what kind of interaction the environment offers
3. Combat system: what kind of combat system the game relies on
4. Powers upgrade mechanic: how new powers and upgrades are acquired by the player
5. Enemies: how many different types of enemies the player faces
6. Civilians: what purpose civilians have in the game economy
7. Mission types: how many different types of mission are available for the player

WHAT IS NOT TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

Since I desired to focus my analysis on gameplay, I decided to not consider anything that had to do with:

- Audio
- Graphics
- Controls efficacy
- Game story
- Frustration from difficulty
- Fun in general

PROTOTYPE (XBOX 360)

1. Environment navigation

Roaming in Prototype is achieved by long sequences of jumps, middle air dashes, glides and vertical running on buildings (which is totally different from climbing!). The ability of the character to get from point A to point B is limitless and smells more like flying than running. Moreover, in P the character can take control of enemy vehicles such as tanks and helicopters and move around with them.

2. Environment interaction

In P the character can grab street vehicles and specific pieces of 'street furniture' and throw them at enemies. They are especially good against flying hazards.

Civilians, *infected* and *soldiers* can be grabbed and thrown as well, but they are not much effective against armored stuff.

There are also specific buildings that the player can tear down into pieces to create safe areas against soldiers and infected.

3. Combat style

When speaking about combat system, P offers several options to the player.

The character main fighting style involves melee combat, since Alex's weapons are his own arms, conveniently modified by the virus.

Ranged combat is available also, for the character can grab weapons from soldiers and use them at will. Weapons include assault rifles, grenade and missile launchers.

Moreover, the character can hijack tanks, APCs and helicopters and use their weapons to achieve game objectives. Vehicles are very effective against buildings.

A last note: in P is available a lock-on system that helps the player to focus his attacks on specific targets.

Character's health: in P the character is provided with an 'old school' health bar that depletes with sustained attacks and can be replenished by feeding on enemies and civilians. The character can regenerate his health with time passing, though feeding on large enemies is the fastest way to recover.

4. Powers

As the player completes missions, the system unlocks new powers to improve the character skills and his combat efficacy.

Powers are bought from a list, the currency being *experience points* that the character gains while fighting enemies. At the end of each combat sequence the game grants experience points to the player that he spends to buy powers for the characters.

There is a sort of developing tree that makes some upgrades only available after specific requirements are met.

5. Enemies

During the two hours gameplay with P I faced several types of enemies. There are basically three main enemy factions:

- *Soldiers*. They can be sorted into three types according to the weapon they carry (assault rifles, grenade and missile launchers). Soldiers make use of ground vehicles: tanks and APCs.

- *Strike teams*. These are elite squads that are summoned by common soldiers when things go bad (for them!). At the point of the game I reached, Strike Teams were composed of 2 helicopters.
- *Infected ones*. These are the monsters generated by the virus that is spreading in the game world of P. I met three types of infected during my test that mainly differed by their strength and resistance.

6. Civilians

Civilians that roam around the game environment are more than just urban decoration.

The character can in fact grab people and feed on them to recover small amounts of energy.

Civilians can also be used as projectiles, though their effectiveness is limited against armored targets.

Finally, once in a while the game tags one specific civilian as the carrier of memories that are important for the game story. These memories can be collected by Alex feeding on these people.

7. Game missions

During my two hours gameplay with P I stepped into 2 types of missions:

- *Events*. They consist of specific trials that are requested to the player, such as to eliminate as many enemies as possible in a given time or jump on a specific spot from a distance.
The goal is to get a gold medal (based on player's performance) and the player can retry the same trial as many times as he wants.
- *Story missions*. These are the missions that make the story move on and unlock new powers and locations. During my test I had to:
 - Infiltrate military bases
 - Escort specific characters to a target destination
 - Destroy specific targets, such as vehicles, minor structures and buildings
 - Consume specific persons (both soldiers and civilians) or infected.

INFAMOUS (PS3)

1. Environment navigation

The navigation in I could be describes as 'very professional *parkour*'. Cole can in fact climb any vertical surface available in the game world with considerable agility. Once a reasonable height is reached, he can then jump roof to roof, grapple almost anywhere or glide with some limitations. The fastest way to move around is by grinding rails and electric cables, once the related power is unlocked.

2. Environment interaction

With the exception of buildings and other main city structures, the world of I is stuffed with assets than can be destroyed and blown up by the character. Especially useful for combat reasons is the possibility to blow up cars and tanks to create deadly traps for enemies.

On the other hand, the main character cannot grab stuff and use it to attack his enemies.

He can also recharge his powers and health by sucking electricity up from almost any electric device that is scattered around the game world of I.

3. Combat stile

I mainly relies on ranged combat when dealing with enemies, since the main character fires bolts of electricity at considerable distance. He can also throw grenades at his foes, or hit them with a force field.

There are melee attacks, but they are seldom used, and it looked to me a better battle tactic to keep enemies at distance.

No weapons are available for the main character of I.

Character's health: As in other modern shooters, the main character automatically recovers from damage as long as the player avoids continuous damage. Once in cover, the character slowly recovers until he's back to normal. This process can be quickened by the player, sucking electricity around.

4. Powers

In I the powers are granted to the character as the player accomplishes specific missions. Once a power is unlocked, the player has the possibility to upgrade it, spending experience points earned for completing missions and performing game actions such as healing sick people or restraining villains to the ground.

Specific powers upgrade are available depending on the morale attitude of the player, which can shift from good to evil along the game.

5. Enemies

Enemies in I belong to a single faction: the Reapers. During my two hours test I faced the following types of enemies:

- Villains armed with rifles and grenades
- Villains armed with shotguns
- Explosive kamikaze
- Machine gun turrets
- Warping villains that can attack the character with a sort of *long ranged player seeking attack*.

6. Civilians

My opinion is that civilians have a very important role in I. Their behavior reflects the actions of the player during the game: play as the good guy and they praise Cole, or act as the villain and they will curse him. Though they have no real influence on gameplay, they succeed in making the player feel like responsible for what he does during the game.

Civilians are also a mean for the player to get some extra experience points by healing sick people around.

7. Game missions

With regard with missions selection, I has much to offer. There are two main categories of missions: *main quests* and *side quests*.

Side quests can be divided into three groups:

- *Neutral missions*, with no influence on the character's morale attitude
- *Good missions*, that make the character *FAMOUS*
- *Evil missions*, that make Cole *inFAMOUS*

Mission types vary very much, ranging from escorting people, disabling security systems on buildings, collecting encrypted messages, defending positions, restoring electricity in an area and so on. There is a lot to do and everything the player does has an influence on the civilians perception of the main character.

CONCLUSIONS

At the end of this comparison, I would like to add my personal conclusions on the data I collected.

First of all, though both games are based on a free roaming model, the way roaming is achieved is totally different in the two titles.

In Prototype the character can vertically run on buildings and is almost capable of flying. Moving from one point to another is just a question of choosing a direction and then following it.

In Infamous the character is pretty agile and can climb on anything, but still the player needs to think about the path to reach point B starting from point A.

The combat style is totally different, too.

Prototype mainly relies on melee fighting and the player has many weapons at his disposal, both of his own and stolen from the enemies. Ranged combat is available, but Alex passes most of his time in the middle of the battleground.

Infamous plays more like a third person shooter, the best fighting tactic being to keep enemies at bay from a distance. Though melee attacks are available, they are not as effective as the bolts or the grenades.

The way new powers are acquired in the two titles is different, too. Both games make use of experience points as a currency to buy upgrades, but while in Prototype the player has complete freedom to unlock and upgrade the powers he prefers, choosing from a rich list of items, in Infamous powers are granted to the player as he goes on with the campaign, and he can just upgrade what the game gave him. On the other hand, the morale system in Infamous rewards the player with offensive options that differ according to his attitude, so to keep things interesting as the game goes on.

Finally, but very very important in my opinion, is the difference in the way the two games manage the perception that the player has of the game character.

Alex, from Prototype, is a 'one man against all'. His focus is on understanding what happened to him and how to take revenge on those who did that. Everyone on his path is a mean to get closer to his answers, nothing more.

Cole is a superhero in a city where people are suffering, and with the player he can make a difference. Civilians in Infamous are just not there: they blame the villain or cheer the champion, thus making the player feel responsible for what happens to them.

In the end, my suggestion is to play both titles, if possible.

I like to describe Prototype as '*God of War meets DevilMan*', a game designed around a character with almost unlimited powers with a city at his disposal. No enemy (or group of enemies) is too strong, no building too resilient, no destination too far.

Strategy is involved despite the powers of the main character, since the player can choose among several options when the time to go to battle comes.

Infamous on the other hand delivers a more subtle experience. Cole's powers are not limitless (he needs to plan navigation) and his list of skills is not developed as that of the character of P. Cole is still a person after all, even if gifted with powers. He is concerned with how the people perceive him and often questions himself whether he wants to be the hero or the villain. On the other hand, people in Infamous is not just a mean to recover health or memories.