



, September 22, 2010 [<http://howtonotsuckatgamedesign.com/?p=1182>] by Anjin Anhut.

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Suspension of disbelief is an essential part of playing video games. The more you are able to accept the incomplete and virtual world presented on screen as complete and real, the more immersion you can experience while playing. I do that all the time, accepting doors I can't open with a rocket launcher and evil foes respawning, when I look the other way.

But sometimes my ability of suspension of disbelief fails me. Especially when AAA design and HD visuals give me little to suspend, some failures of logic, physics and look just blow up in my face. One of those immersion breakers is strangely still present in many 3rd person games. I call it "the human magnet". Items, weapons and gadgets just get attached to the player character model without any holster, hooks, glue or other means to make things stick. Maybe when characters have the power to throw lightnings, lift cars or withstand bullets, maybe then those characters have mutant magnetic powers. I don't think so. It rather strikes me as lazy design.

It is just a small detail. But when you have to look at that detail, something like 80% of your playtime, it can get pretty up front. Many developers get that one right, others just don't seem to care. I care and when you try to get me buying your games by dangling your "realistic lighting", "destructible environments" and "impressive character models" in front of my face, details count.

The Good

It is so simple. Just put some holsters, belts and cords on the model. So whenever the weapons are attached, it is visible how.

One franchise getting this impressively right is the Assassin's Creed series. Every weapon, long sword, dagger, throwing weapons, all have custom made holsters, beautifully crafted and adding to the gear heavy appearance of the western medieval ninja characters.



Red Dead Redemption gives us classic gun holsters for hand guns and rifles. You know, no halloween cowboy costume is complete without it. Even with the idea of quick draw action, the holsters kind of work. Good job.



Viking, on a technical level has not much going in the visual department. Repetitive character models, bland environment, questionable texturing and more. But what it gets right is atmosphere, staging and the player character model. Rise Of The Argonauts, I just played it for 20 minutes, but was happily surprised to see my ridiculous weaponry properly clipped to my avatars back.



The Bad

When developers at least acknowledge that there should be any technical solution for sticking guns to your back, but don't manage to pull it off, they at least care and I can bridge the gap myself, with a little suspension of disbelief.

One example of said consideration by game developers is Resident Evil 5. Check out the clustered hooks and belts strapped to the characters backs. While Chris Redfield's knife is convincingly placed in a holster but guns are just being slapped on his back, as if he is using Velcro. Granted because the characters can just pick up a wide variety of weapons from enemies off the ground, it would be weird to have custom holders for all the weapons in the game.



Other examples include the Gears Of War series and Mass Effect games. Due to the tech heavy armor, which is noisy with screws, hooks, joints and other technical elements, one could easily believe that there is maybe actually a high tech solution for attaching the weapons to the armor.



The Ugly

How is that suppose to work? No honestly. I give WOW some break for already being some years around and having a wide arrangement of weapons available. But Tomb Raider has a limited range of guns going and War from Darksiders just carries that one sword. How can we not have any explanation on how it sticks there? Vigil could at least have added some sort of glow or lightning flash when War is putting the sword on his back, so we get the sense of some magical event holding the sword up.



Okay, weapons are just a gimmick in the Tekken games. So I take badly implemented weapons over no weapons, any day. But when a fighter is able to glue a club or sledge hammer to the skin of his naked back, it borders on the ridiculous. But the again we have russian cyborgs fighting kangaroos, so what do I know.



No, no, no. Tim Schafer is one of my heroes. But among the many questionable game design decisions forming Br,àö-ſtal Legend, was to not have Eddie Riggs sport anything to carry his giant axe and epic guitar around. Seriously, October 2009, just the two weapons, detailed character models, no excuse. This is just lazy. Assassin's creed is from 2007, Viking from 2008, there is no explanation to be found in technical standards or design conventions.



For Handfull Dollar More

Even with all the bashing IO Interactive hast endure due to their unsatisfying Kane & Lynch: Dog Days, on one thing the game did improve. Weapon attachment. In the comparison below, you can clearly see how they had no solution whatsoever in part one (left), but fixed in in Dog Days (right).



It is simple folks. You want us gamers to believe in your games, feel the action, immerse in the worlds you so diligently craft? Get the details right. Especially the details we gamers have in our view almost all the time playing. Thanks.