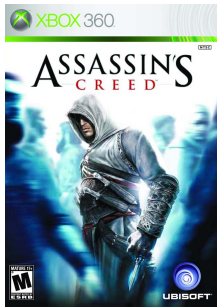


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[Assassin's Creed](#)

Genetic memories of "the flying one"

[Assassin's Creed](#) is surely one of the most commented upon games that surfaced this year, causing controversy and confirming Ubisoft's skills when it comes to original titles that can use the Prince of Persia recipe delivering a totally different experience. This third-person stealth game was developed by Ubisoft Montreal and published by Ubisoft and I had the opportunity of playing it on the Xbox 360, but you should know that the game's also available on the PS3 and its PC version has been delayed till early 2008. We've seen brief gameplay screenshots and videos for the past year, showing us what Assassin's Creed can achieve when it comes to [next-gen graphics](#) and original gameplay. What most of us didn't know though was that the game is not exactly what we thought it would be: a medieval adventure with strong oriental influences. It seems that Altair, the protagonist is much more modern than he seems. Why? You'll find out reading below and be wary, as you'll find some spoilers in the following lines. **Story of the Creed** Altair is the main character of the game and his name means "The Flying One" in Arabic. As you'll notice about 20 minutes in the game, the man sure is a daredevil when it comes to jumping out of tall towers. We all know that Altair is an assassin, killing great historic figures in 1191, during the Third Crusade. What we don't know and what will surprise you right from the get-go is the fact that all the events you'll be living (playing) are 3D representations of the genetic memories embedded in the man's DNA. You're Desmond Miles, a mere bartender (and assassin), who comes from a long line of professional assassins and you unwillingly take part in an experiment that allows you to go back in time and access hidden areas of your genetic memory. The modern-day hitman gets inserted in a sarcophagus of some sort, named Animus, which accesses the hitman's DNA memories and allows him to relive remote events, seen through the eyes of his ancestors. As Altair, one of the character's forefathers, you'll have to find certain hidden artifacts and kill key people in order to stop the Crusades. Of course, the ones who forced you to take part in the experiment are out to get the artifacts and you'll have to find them, or choose death. Altair is part of cult of assassins and his mission is pretty clear: eliminate 9 important men in order to stop the Crusades. In the meantime, Desmond Miles will have to stay synchronized with Altair in order to continue living in the past, at least virtually. Ubisoft delivers quite a fascinating story that I would really love to see featured in a movie, preferably not an animated motion picture, as the atmosphere of the medieval environments explored by the assassin is worth the effort of filming those remote locations. **The concept of genetic sync** Assassin's Creed begins with a tutorial that teaches Desmond Miles how to wield weapons, stay hidden and only perform actions that are socially acceptable. You'll be taught the basics of the control system and use various attacks on dummies, assassinating them or just blending in and passing by unnoticed. Once you're out of the tutorial and into the fascinating world of Altair, you'll see that the entire system relies on your sync bar. This always-present meter shows the level of the modern hitman's synchronization with the past events. It will also be considered your health meter, as you'll lose sync every time you get hit. Once the entire sync meter gets depleted, you'll be restored to the last available event and memory, or better said checkpoint. There's an advantage of filling up the synchronization meter, as it allows Altair to use various abilities, like the Eagle Vision, which, once activated, highlights all the characters in your line of sight. Their colors will show you if they're friendly, enemy soldiers or future targets. This ability is even explained and integrated into the storyline, being mentioned as a sixth sense that comes with time and an assassin's evolution. Altair will visit superb locations and the game's setting and atmosphere greatly resembles the one of

the "Kingdom of Heaven" movie. You'll travel to Jerusalem, Damascus and Acre, as you search for the 9 men you're supposed to kill and try to unlock blocked areas of your genetic memory. The medieval hitman gets to use a horse as the distances between cities are huge and it's not quite safe to walk on foot in the wild. Once you get your character riding a horse, you'll notice that the game features good horse physics, better than the ones we've seen in the famous "Shadow of the Colossus" title. Altair can use weapons or his fists in order to fight various enemies and the lethal assassin is equipped with a short sword, throwing knives plus the extremely useful hidden retractable knife on his left arm. At the beginning of the game, the medieval hitman's arrogant behavior will have him demoted, so the man will lose most of his abilities and weapons, but you'll get them back as you complete more and more missions, killing people and gathering precious information. One of the most important rules of the Creed is "never kill an innocent person" and you'll have to follow it, mostly because such a crime can get you exposed, when you're traveling through a crowded city. Altair is not only supposed to slay people, but also eavesdrop, pickpocket bypassers and interrogate various key characters. All the information that he gathers is used to reveal yet another Templar conspiracy and the next target he'll slay. Average citizens come into play, as they'll be bullied by the Templar soldiers most of the time and if you save them, they'll help you. The medieval assassin uses an original and pretty realistic way of orientation: he climbs the tallest building he can see (under your control) and simply gazes into the horizon setting new landmarks on his map. **The assassin's gameplay** Altair's actions are divided into "do-s" and "don't-s", according to the various social rules you'll have to follow. For example, climbing walls in the middle of a crowded city street is not socially acceptable and every bystander will stop and gaze at you, attracting the attention of the nearby soldiers. You can use the Y button to observe the surrounding environment at any time and this feature comes in handy, especially when you're looking for your next victim or a new landmark. One of the socially acceptable actions is walking slowly through the crowd, blending in by pressing the X button or gently pushing people by pressing B. When you're blending in you'll be pulling down the hood on your face and you'll be walking humbly and slowly, like a priest. Altair is dressed exactly like one of the members of the cult that are always roaming through the cities. You can use them to blend in, because they have the same outfit as you do, so you'll pass unnoticed, even after murdering someone. The hitman's actions fit into two categories: low profile and high profile, the last of them being socially unacceptable. For example, grabbing and throwing a citizen on the ground is a high profile action, that attracts everyone's attention and usually brings the guards on your tail. As an assassin, you'll have to run from the crime scene as fast as you can, while the soldiers are still stunned by the fact that you've killed an important political figure. There's a social status icon to keep your eyes on and it shows if you're "Exposed", "Cool Down", "Vanishing" or "Anonymous". A soldier who knows that you're lurking around will be shown with the aid of a yellow icon, while a guard who's been informed of your presence will be shown by a red icon. When the most important target of the mission, the future victim, is in your sight, you'll have to lock on the man and start a stealth assassination scene. This locking on also applies in the case of pickpocketing and eavesdropping. Of course, after killing a person, you'll be followed by guards and the most important thing to do is break their line of sight, by climbing a building, hiding in a hay stack or behind some curtains. Once things have cooled down and your social status is "Anonymous" again, you'll be able to roam the streets freely. Altair can climb buildings and perform extreme jumps and flips, similar to the ones we've seen in Prince of Persia, if not better. The medieval hitman makes full use of his athletic skills, hanging on ledges and reaching out for any piece of wood or stone he can use to hold on to, while climbing to the top of a huge tower in Damascus. Assassin Creed's protagonist can jump from one piece of environment to the other, be it wooden log or rock and he can also walk on walls, vertically, to reach a certain hanging point. Although this is a stealth third person game, you'll also take part in massive combat sequences, like the siege of a village and a one-versus-four battle situation that usually

surfaces when you're trying to rescue a citizen. Altair can take on 4 and even 5 persons single-handedly, making good use of his hidden blade and sword in order to dispose of the guards. Using a move that's similar to the ones present in God of War titles, you'll hit enemies and throw them to the ground or stab them by pressing the sword-strike button at the exact time when your weapon hits the enemy. However, this is a stealth game, so you'll much rather kill people from behind, trying to avoid being seen, than take them on for a loud combat. I have to say that I'm very pleased with the game's map and "GPS"-style system, which tracks Altair perfectly and tells you how many meters are left till the next objective also showing it on your radar. The map you'll use shows all of the main objectives and the landmarks you've spotted from those huge towers, also revealing tons of other important locations or sidequests. There are even a number of flags and other such items to collect during the game, which grant you different achievements. Having a look at the Assassin Creed's AI I was pleased to notice that we can't speak about the guards' intelligence, as we're more focused on a group AI or a so-called "social interaction engine" that can be used to your favor or can stall you from accomplishing your mission. That's why you'll become paranoid, always trying to stay in the shadows and not look suspicious, while you're approaching the next victim.

Eye of the assassin The best part of the game is the sequence that shows Altair taking a dive from a tall tower straight into a haystack that's many meters away from the man's leaping point. Of course, Assassin's Creed features all the visual goodies you were expecting, confirming the fact that next-gen consoles have yet to reveal their true hidden potential. Realistic settings and superbly designed crowds will give you the feeling that you're strolling through a medieval Jerusalem and the city's busy and crowded with all sorts of people. Mother Nature deserves a standing ovation for the way "She's" been rendered and you'll surely be amazed by the beautiful graphics of your surroundings while riding a horse and heading towards Damascus. The cutscenes have all it takes to rival any Square-Enix animation, sometimes even surpassing the quality of the famous Final Fantasy FMVs. Each assassination you take part in is a spectacular event that will get your adrenaline pumping and your hands shaking as you try to escape the guards and break the line of sight. Of course, since this is a console, there are a couple of graphical glitches to complain about, but they're not important enough to spoil the fun of playing Assassin's Creed. One of the things that puzzled me the most was the fact that I could move Altair while he was speaking during those in-game cutscenes. That's probably implemented to chase away the boredom of some of the less interesting talks featured in the game.

Sound of murder Visiting Jerusalem and Damascus leaves not only a pleasant visual memory but also an audio one and the music you'll hear complements the atmosphere created with the aid of next-gen graphics. Oriental music and some of the best French accents I've heard help create a neat package that will surely please you, even if you're not a fan of in-game dialogs. Listening to all of the chit-chat in the featured cities is more useful than you think, as you can find out valuable info and use it for your own devious purposes. Of course, Mother Nature makes another appearance, in the audio segment, this time, so you'll hear birds singing, water dripping and the sound of 4 horseshoes galloping in a dusty desert.

End of the Creed Assassin's Creed is exactly what I expected, both visually and as a gameplay experience, but still it manages to surprise me with its spontaneous events, well-done cutscenes and that huge social AI. Prince of Persia was a great game, but Ubisoft have managed to move on, while preserving the successful recipe that made the Prince a star and calling in a replacement, Altair, a far more athletic man, perhaps more cunning and surely stronger. The lack of time-reversing abilities and superhuman powers shouldn't trouble you, especially if you're a fan of medieval culture and history and you've read tons of books telling the Templars' tales. This is not a perfect game, since it has its own gameplay and graphical glitches and bugs, but it's perfect for the people who had high expectations and usually want a game to be more challenging than your average hack/slash/shoot title.