Why Don't Videogame Characters Ever Eat?

By Ben Sailer

I recently played through the open beta for *Mirror's Edge: Catalyst*, the sequel to 2008's most under-appreciated futurist cyber-crime parkour simulator. The small sample made available temporarily hit all the right beats for the series; fast, flowing running action across city rooftops interspersed with sparse yet fluid hand-to-hand to combat. Its fine-tuned control scheme makes impossible feats of dexterity feel just right while easily traversing a sample area that's maybe a few square miles wide.

I can't run two miles just around my neighborhood without working up an appetite. In the retail release, however, Faith will be expected to keep this up for hours on end, sans sustenance. You'd think she'd maybe need an energy bar or something eventually. Right?

You would if she wasn't in a videogame. Games often want us to believe characters can do the impossible without a shred of nutrition. Even when fighting for survival across hours-long journeys, somehow they get by ignoring this basic survival instinct. There are certainly exceptions (hunting in *Red Dead Redemption*, rations in *Metal Gear Solid*, snack pick-ups in *The Last Of Us*). Given that eating is essential for energy to do absolutely anything, however, shouldn't it be an expectation?

It's something you don't think about, until you can't stop thinking about it.

The ability to suspend disbelief while doing the impossible at the press of a button (or flailing VR hand gesture) is part of gaming's appeal. When you're effortlessly jumping across rooftops hundreds of feet in the air, a lack of culinary options isn't the *most* unbelievable thing on-screen. This medium raised us believing a plumber could save an entire world on nothing but mushrooms and flowers. Real-world rules don't apply.

However, there are times when this missing detail distractingly breaks with reality. In a series like *Battlefield*, your squad somehow never prepares an MRE. The unfortunate souls in *Resident Evil* live on mystery herbs alone. Master Chief spends forever in space and his helmet doesn't even have a hole for a straw.

People make a lot of demands about what they want in games. Here's one that's probably new: show me characters who *know how to eat*. This doesn't need to be taken to the extreme seen in *D4*, where every action drains stamina only food can replace. Just show me more games where my character maybe grabs a sandwich before the credits roll. I hate comparing games to film, but even *The Avengers* went out for shawarma after 2.5 hours on screen.

Games are expensive to make, but maybe #sponsored #content product tie-ins could help. Can you see Nathan Drake snapping into a Slim Jim? Would Lara Croft ever chug a Powerade? Does Red Bull give Sonic wings? I'm not saying these are *good* ideas (anyone remember *Sneak King*?). I'm just halfway surprised this road hasn't been traveled down more often (maybe too many people remember *Sneak King*).

I liked *Sneak King*.
- Editor

Games are art. Art imitates life. Somehow, the number of games giving food it's due remains low. I'm no mathematician, but I know when something doesn't add up. 🔱