

**Playing around with Virtual Reality:** We spent our second day at the Game Developers Conference (GDC) queued for hours waiting to try high-end VR gaming platforms. More accurately, we wanted to see the content available for Oculus, PlayStation VR, and HTC Vive since we know their head-mounted devices (HMD) are now consumer-ready and ready to begin shipping in the coming weeks and months. Unfortunately, we couldn't book an appointment with Valve to probe the platform; however, we have one today, and we'll report our findings on Monday.

**Biting the bullet with Oculus:** After waiting in line for 75 minutes at the Oculus booth, we got to play a much hyped game called *Bullet Train*. We can only describe *Bullet Train* as INSANE! By far, this game was the best virtual reality experience we've ever had. Created by Epic Games, *Bullet Train* involves shooting resistance forces infiltrating a subway station. Between lobbing grenades, blasting shotguns, and catching bullets and rockets to fling back at the enemy. Oculus' graphics were pristine; the Touch controllers were light and intuitive; everything worked perfectly and gets our vote for Best in Show so far. But...

**Skepticism exists surrounding Oculus' demo:** We talked to two VR game coders. Both had tried *Bullet Train* and came away as impressed as we did. However, when we asked whether or not the recommended Oculus computer would support *Bullet Train*, both coders thought that it wouldn't. They believed Oculus HMD would need far more horsepower. For our demo, the Oculus box was out of sight, so we have no way to confirm what powered our *Bullet Train* experience.

**Multiplayer Oculus gameplay:** We returned to a second lineup at the Oculus booth and waited 45 minutes to play *EVE: Valkyrie*, a space dogfight shooter game by CCP Games. We played it at E3 last year, but not in multiplayer mode where we fought alongside seven other players to defeat the enemy. We found the experience underwhelming. Not because of the graphics, audio, or synching, but because it didn't feel like we were playing as a team. Still, it was fun, but having the ability to communicate and coordinate attacks with our teammates would have made a far better virtual reality experience.

**PlayStation VR has the best physical design:** After *EVE: Valkyrie*, we strolled over to the Sony booth and waited an hour to try PlayStation VR, formerly known as Project Morpheus. Slipping on HMD made us appreciate the thought that went into its design. Unlike Oculus' Velcro straps, PlayStation VR had elastics that allow one to easily and comfortably affix the HMD to our head. A dial at the back tightened the elastics, and a button at the front adjusted the fit on our face (very elegant indeed). Then, we had a chance to interact with the motion controllers. We cycled through five orbs, each constructed from a different material. We could bounce the orbs off our head, slap them around with our hands, and even stick our head in a watery orb and exhale bubbles (we can't figure out how Sony does that!). We had five games to select from, and we returned to *London Heist*, a title we've played before. Unfortunately, the gameplay wasn't smooth; for some reason, the gun would randomly drop, requiring us to search the van while thugs on motorcycles fired bullets at us. If you have never experienced VR, *London Heist* gives you a great overview of the emotional intensity that VR imparts. However, this assumes that you didn't play *Bullet Train* on Oculus first.

**Experiencing Vive without HTC and Valve:** Today, we will visit Valve to ask questions and experience Valve games. Yesterday, we wrote about how we tried Vive at Ossio, a 3D audio company. We also got to try a vertigo inducing, horrifying VR experience called *The Walk*, which involves walking a tightrope between New York City's Twin Towers. Complete with a thick cable on the floor to simulate the rope, you start *The Walk* standing at the edge of the South Tower, looking straight down into the concrete abyss. Our knees literally knocked, and walking the cable stuck intense fear and sweaty palms. It demonstrated why VR is the next stage in gaming – because it can be so real that it invokes intense emotions.

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