With a comparable super-powered free-roaming game in *Infamous* debuting a few weeks prior, *Prototype* distinguishes itself with a wider range of abilities, gigantic-scale action, and little regard for life in any shape or form. But bigger isn't always better.

Players slip into the shoes of Alex Mercer, a man who wakes up in a morgue with no memories. Upon his escape, the army attempts to gun him down when he discovers he now possesses superhuman strength and speed, shape-shifting abilities that turn him into a walking weapon of mass destruction, and a terrifying ability to consume his enemies, absorbing their knowledge. After a few absorptions, he learns that the city has been the victim of a virus crafted by the government, while the army attempts to stop the infected citizens and super-mutants created from the disaster. Fueled by a desire for revenge, Alex begins a rampage to find out why he's the only one with these powers and why the government wants him dead.

Developed by the team responsible for the smashing action in *Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction* , *Prototype* has a similar design to the Green Goliath's 2005 game. Play is like a roller coaster: There are times where it's a huge thrill, but there are also painful bumps.

Prototype is most fun when things are constantly moving. Sprinting up the sides of buildings and gliding through the air is tremendous, and the parkour style (moving with cat-like smoothness) is an impressive touch, with fluid leaps and flips over obstacles. A big chunk of the time I spent playing revolved around exploration, just because the style was so enjoyable.

Alex has a range of shape-shifting abilities, from razor-sharp claws to hammer fists to an external shell of armor, and he can take on the appearance of absorbed victims for stealthier actions. Each power has its own benefits and disadvantages against enemies, but once you figure out which power you like using best, you can stick with it without having to branch out too often. I'm guessing that the designers didn't want players to focus on a single power, but it works best because switching on the fly is tougher than it should be with a clunky selection wheel. Outside of his standard powers, Alex can gain massive "devastator" attacks that annihilate anything close to him. Visual flourishes make these look more visceral; everything moves in slow motion as giant tendrils launch from Alex's body and ravage everything in sight.

Combat works well in situations with standard enemies, and can be really fun when you're hijacking military vehicles for your own destructive purposes. The engine running the game can handle hundreds of citizens running around at a time, making tank-based missions an absolute blast, as you attempt to run down the infected monsters.

But when it comes to fighting the boss enemies, the balance goes straight down the toilet. Each boss is like a walking tank - no matter how big or small the opponent is - with successful combat reduced to running away and throwing stuff at the enemy to buy some time.

The story plays out a few different ways. The standard progression (by completing missions) revolves around a generic government conspiracy and doesn't reveal much in the way of plot.

The story's saving grace comes from the act of consuming people with real knowledge of what happened to Alex Mercer, forcing them to fuse into your body. As you find more people within the "Web of Intrigue," the conspiracy unfolds bit by bit, with some quick dialogue and images flashing by.

But tracking down everybody in the Web of Intrigue - especially before they're caught in some crossfire - becomes tedious. While they'll continually reappear until they've been absorbed, and while it's gratifying when the pieces come together, the hunt is frustrating.

Alex's appearance and movements radiate coolness. The parkour style adds a definite flair to even the standard movements, making running by or on cars look stunning. But if the camera gets a little too much to take in from a rooftop view, the graphics lose their detail, and buildings will suddenly appear as you move. The voice work is passable during missions, but more often than not characters will sound bored. Once again, the Web of Intrigue saves the day with better voice work.

It's a tough race between a pair of games revolving around superpowers and a wide city to roam. If you crave an accessible and gripping plot, *Infamous* is the better route. If you're looking to casually tear up some bad guys,
Prototype
will be the one for you. My preference was
Infamous
because of the story, but either way, you can't make a bad choice between these titles.

Prototype is available on Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 for $59.95. For this review, the author played the Xbox 360 version and completed the main story mode.

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