



Wild Hearts

A monster hunter by any other name

Spare a thought for Wild Hearts, which had been shaping up to be a natural rival and successor to Monster Hunter: World while also building on Omega Force's relatively successful monster hunting Toukiden games. But after a surprise port from Capcom (evidently wanting to remind us who's boss), it's difficult not to compare this latest EA Original with Monster Hunter Rise.

To begin with, each has a Japan-inspired setting. Wild Hearts' Azuma is more explicitly based on the country; its characters use Japanese phrases in the English audio, and its monsters and crafting mechanic go by Japanese names: kemono and karakuri. As a current-gen exclusive, its world is far more detailed than Rise's. There are traditional temple and pagoda structures in both the hub, Minato, and the hunting maps themselves, which have more of 'land ravaged by nature' vibe than a generic volcano or ice theme.

There's even a concerted effort to tell a story as your hunter discovers they have a gift that could help the outpost of Minato survive in the face of increasing danger from kemono, and we see those stakes manifest in meaningful ways. Yet when it comes to the fundamentals, the actual hunting, Wild Hearts becomes a trickier proposition.

Granted, it doesn't have a long lineage, so there aren't as many weapon types or beasts, though the



INFO

FORMAT PS5
PRICE £64.99
ETA Out now
PUB EA
DEV Omega Force
PLAYERS 1-3
LENGTH 30+ hrs
ACCESSIBILITY
 Screen reader; text to audio; subtitle speaker names; text size options; colour vision deficiency support



kemono designs manage to feel distinct – less wyvern-like, more giant mutant hedgehogs, boars, and cockerels. But while we enjoy the novelty of fighting with a deadly umbrella, the combat lacks Rise's weighty impact. It doesn't help that some beasts are too big and the camera is too close most of the time, and making the environments transparent or turning our figure into a bright silhouette is far from an elegant solution to this.

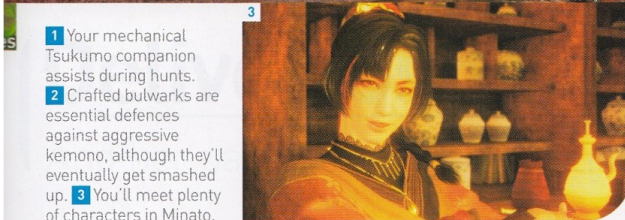
CRATE EXPECTATIONS

The karakuri, devices crafted and dropped on the map Fortnite-style to help you when fighting kemono, have more depth. Hold down **LB** then a corresponding face button and

you'll craft a basic karakuri, like a crate you can jump off for a powerful aerial attack or use to reach a higher platform. Sounds simple? It's more annoyingly restrictive than you might think: the same aerial attack doesn't activate in other situations, with the fiddliness of scaling walls (owing to annoyingly low player stamina) only making the process of trying to gain the high ground clunkier.

More elaborate karakuri are introduced in a neat way, via flashes of inspiration during specific hunts. They teach you to craft combinations of karakuri – for example, one combo turns into a firework that stuns flying kemono, while two stacked columns of crates become a bulwark that knocks back a

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- 1 Your mechanical Tsukumo companion assists during hunts.
- 2 Crafted bulwarks are essential defences against aggressive kemono, although they'll eventually get smashed up.
- 3 You'll meet plenty of characters in Minato.

charging Kingtusk in satisfying style. It feels especially good using these new tools on earlier kemono that were giving you a hard time. They do, however, cost karakuri thread to craft, so your dependence on them means you're almost always scrambling to acquire more resources, pulling out of the hunt to carry out busywork. In the thick of a hunt we also find it's all too easy to mess up combinations, which again wastes resources.

CROSSED WIRES

Non-combat-related 'dragon karakuri', such as tents, forges, hunting towers, and traversible zip lines, sound liberating given that you can craft them anywhere on the map (though how much you can make will be

limited by the resources you've gained from awakening and upgrading Dragon Pits on the map). But while these might have been an improvement on the sort of action you'd get in MH: World, given MH Rise has streamlined so much of the hunt while letting you get around more quickly with cooldown-based Wirebugs, Wild Hearts' gimmicks feel a step behind.

It's not a bad foundation to build on, though, with crossplay ensuring there should be plenty of hunters to help you conquer Azuma's threats, and a buddy or two definitely makes the mighty variants of the latter half of the game more bearable. If Omega Force and EA continue to support the game post-release, it may just claw its way further up the food chain.



The hunts may feel derivative, and the crafting more of a cumbersome crutch, but there's still a fascinating world for hunters looking for their next challenge. **Alan Wen**

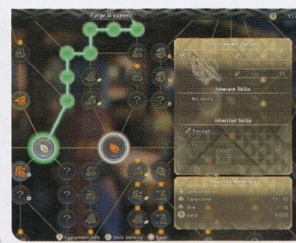


THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: WILD HEARTS



HOW TO... UPGRADE YOUR WEAPONS



While you craft various kinds of armour, you have just one weapon, which gets upgraded along an upgrade tree. As you upgrade (or even downgrade), a limited number of existing perks can be carried over as inherited skills, while the latest upgrade might also include inherent skills.

LOVING/HATING



VILLAGE LIFE
Minato's a lively place to wander around, with some detailed animations of NPCs working, training, and even singing.



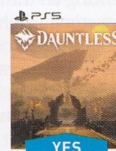
PAWS OFF
We can really do without getting caught by a kemono's nasty grab. Adding insult to injury, we're always displayed as a silhouette.

MULTIPLAYER



Up to three hunters can join up to hunt kemono either in free roam or on specific hunts by creating lobbies via a campfire (story progress carries forward if you're at the same point). You can also request one-off assistance from random players, which creates portals on the map.

IS IT BETTER THAN?



Dauntless has more stylised, less detailed presentation, plus you have to contend with the FTP grind.



With its rideable Palatmutes and Wirebug tricks, Rise is simply a more fun and faster hunting time.



Anime-flavoured, hack-and-slashy Monster Hunter clone God Eater was already starting to feel dated.

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