

BAYONETTA 3

For extravagance's sake

The Bayonetta series has always been at its best when you're staring slack-jawed at your TV, repeatedly muttering, "What the hell is happening?" The series is excessive by nature. Bayonetta 3 is no different. From its opening seconds, you're thrown into large-scale fights necessitating you juggle numerous enemies at once while switching weapons, summoning giant monsters, and dodging attacks. To that end, when you're playing as Bayonetta, it's the best the series has ever felt.

This is largely due to changes in the series' formula. Bayonetta 3 no longer relegates Infernal Demons to cutscenes at the end of a boss; they're an entire mechanic. So long as you've filled your magic gauge, you can summon these beasts, called Demon Slaves here, almost whenever you want and control them while you fight. I mainly used mine as finishing moves. Capping off a combo with a massive attack from one of my monsters always felt powerful and went a long way in leveling the odds.

Equal to the massive amount of Demon Slaves are Bayonetta's weapons, each with its own gimmick, strength, and disadvantage. I mainly stuck to the lightning-fast, far-reaching Ignis Araneae Yo-Yo as my primary weapon, with the massive Dead End Express hammer-saw hybrid for slower but heavier attacks. Quickly striking with the former, dodging to trigger Bayonetta's signature Witch Time (which slows everything but you), then slamming enemies with the latter before summoning an Infernal Demon as a finisher was constantly entertaining.

Bayonetta 3's 14 chapters constantly fluctuate between settings, sending you quite literally around the world and then some, and even beyond the reaches of space and time. Every level has a unique visual palette and core conceit, and I loved figuring out where in the world I was going next. More than that, I loved the ending of each chapter, which featured a larger-than-life set piece. These include kaiju battles, a fight where a God-sized being blows bubbles, and a literal battle of operatic proportions.

Bayonetta 3's story is the most comprehensible in the series. Which is to say it's not largely gibberish. Bayonetta is charming throughout, as is most of the cast of returning characters, but the larger narrative is a rote multiverse story. This introduces multiple different Bayonettas, and there's a late-game twist that neatly alters the series' lore. But for the most part, the story is largely forgettable.

The story does, however, introduce the weakest parts of Bayonetta 3: all the levels in which you

don't play as Bayonetta. Early on, the new character Viola is introduced, a young punk who needs Bayonetta's help saving the multiverse. The handful of Viola's levels are mechanically interesting but don't nail the landing. She's a hack 'n' slash-focused character, and her Witch Time is tied to a parry rather than dodge. That parry window is incredibly tight, and my opening hours were frustrating until I finally got the hang of it, at which point it became only slightly more fun.

Viola did nothing for me. Cosmetically, she's an office worker's approximation of a punk rocker, more Spencer's Gifts than 924 Gilman Street. Even then, she's

uninteresting. You spend numerous hours playing as her, and I struggle to think of a single defining characteristic other than her corny mall punk aesthetic. Considering Viola may play a much larger part in potential upcoming games, I'm disappointed she doesn't match the charm of Bayonetta.

But that's a small complaint at the bottom of a mountain of compliments. Bayonetta 3 is an absolute blast. It's bombastic, over-the-top, and extravagant, leaving ruins, literally, in its wake. I may be hesitant about the series' future, but at present, this is the best Bayonetta has ever been.

BY BLAKE HESTER

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