

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt game review

By Gerard Campbell

@gamejunkieNZ

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt isn't the game to pick if you don't have a lot of spare time to put into your gaming at the moment: It's a huge, sprawling game and for me, it's also a game that will capture your every moment, both when you're playing it and when you're not playing it.

In fact, I almost didn't get this blog written in time because ... I was too busy playing The Witcher 3 (I guess if that's not a good endorsement on how good I'm finding the game, I don't know what is?)

Truth be told, I never actually got around to finishing The Witcher 2, despite owning it on both PC and Xbox 360. I got up to a part where Geralt had to defeat some kind of giant tentacled swamp monster that had been terrorising a nearby village but then just gave up. For whatever reason, The Witcher 2 just didn't gel with me like The Witcher 3 has.

I'm playing The Witcher 3 on PC not console, and to my surprise, I am able to play the game with its graphical settings set to High using my ageing nVidia Geforce GTX660Ti graphics card (I plan to upgrade sometime this year to most likely a GTX970). Sure, I've locked the frame rate to 30 frames per second but everything has worked without a hitch so far (touch wood it continues).



Want to see the game in action? Here's some game play I captured using nVidia's Shadowplay software of the game. Looks pretty good, right?

Developer CD Projekt Red has received a bit of stick from online forums because the final visuals of The Witcher 3 aren't up to the impressive game play trailer the company showed in 2013. It's been dubbed "Downgrade-gate" but to me it's all just a moan by many for the sake of it and it's overshadowed what really is one of the best games I've played in a long time.

Perhaps one of the things I like about The Witcher 3 is the improved combat, which I've welcomed, as well as how Geralt's casts magic. It just seems to flow a lot smoother than the previous two games. The narrative is engaging as well, with its events following on from what happened in The Witcher 2: The Assassin of Kings (don't worry, you don't need to have played that game to understand what's happening in the new game), with Geralt having to eliminate an enemy known as the Wild Hunt as well as dealing with the Nilfgaardian invasion into the Northern Kingdoms.



The Witcher 3 is a mix of RPG and action but it's a game that doesn't hold your hand and if you let yourself get surrounded by tougher enemies or face off against much stronger monster too early things will end up badly. Very badly. You'll often stumble across monsters that are several levels above you – like I did while I was exploring a small island accessible only by boat and came across some hissing creature or the time I had to defeat a werewolf that was supremely more powerful than I was – meaning you'll likely end up dead (Here's a tip: if the monster or enemy has a red skull above their head, it's time to hotfoot it out of there).

The game world seems lived in, too, with villagers going about their daily business, children playing in the streets and bigger locations like Novigrad having a thriving eco-system. Often I've just stopped and listened to some of the conversations people have amongst themselves.



The game environments are also quite varied in terms of terrain and an impressive day/night cycle adds to the atmosphere. While I guess you could treat The Witcher 3 as a hack 'n slash where you just work on your sword skills and hope for the best, I don't recommend that strategy. The Witcher 3 has a depth that means you'll have to come to grips with its complex alchemy and levelling up system. You need to work out whether special oils are needed for a particular enemy type or which foes are susceptible to what magical signs (Axi, for example, blasts enemies with fire, while Quen is the ever helpful protective shield).

The game is vast, too. I've sunk 25 hours into it already and I've still only feel as if I've scratched the surface of what is clearly a massive game with a vast world to explore. With a game like The Witcher 3, you can either stick with the story missions or go off the beaten path and explore, which is what I have been doing – and I think it's a far better experience if you do that. There are a lot of surprises to find in villages, in caves and in the game's wooded areas. I'm loving The Witcher 3 despite the fact that I'm still coming to grips with the complex alchemy and levelling up system, and can see myself playing it for a few months to come, with only perhaps a break at some point to play Batman Arkham Knight.

How about you? Have you been seduced by the power of Geralt?

Follow us on Twitter @BigpipeNZ