

# Review: 'Witcher III' an intimate story in epic trappings

May 19 2015, by Lou Kesten

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Geralt of Rivia may be trapped in medieval times, but he's the epitome of a Renaissance man.

The hero of "The Witcher III: Wild Hunt" (Warner Bros., for the PlayStation 4, Xbox One and PC, \$59.99) is a monster slayer, a ghost hunter, a swordsman and a wielder of vicious fireballs. Yet he's also a detective, an alchemist, a playwright and a shameless Casanova.

As he tells one client, "I solve problems."

Geralt's biggest problem is that his best student, a supremely gifted young woman named Ciri, has disappeared. The search for Ciri takes Geralt on an epic journey across a battle-scarred land known as the Northern Kingdoms. It's a dauntingly vast world, whose three main areas—the swampy No Man's Land, the urban Novigrad and the frigid Skellige Isles—are each larger than the entire landscape of the previous "Witcher" adventure.

"Wild Hunt" is a classic example of telescoping narrative: The main objective is simple—find Ciri—but to get there you have to resolve a series of complicated quests. For example, to find out what the notorious Bloody Baron knows, you have to track down his missing wife and daughter. That mystery stretches into a series of subquests before climaxing with the most disturbing domestic nightmare I've ever seen in a game.

You can also earn cash by taking on Witcher contracts, which typically involve tracking down and killing a monster. And other assorted challenges—boxing matches, horse races, card games—provide some relief from the high drama.

"The Witcher" games were developed by the Warsaw-based CD Projekt Red, inspired by the fantasy novels of Andrzej Sapkowski. "Wild Hunt" draws heavily from European mythology, naturally, with Geralt battling werewolves, vampires, sirens, cyclopes and every other kind of monster that's ever roamed the continent. Yet there are echoes of other recent games, from the frontier exploration of "Red Dead Redemption" to big-game hunting of "Far Cry" to the hand-to-hand combat of "Batman: Arkham Asylum."

"Wild Hunt" sometimes stumbles across its own ambitions. It suffers from some very long loading times, occasional graphic glitches and a messy inventory system. But those are small quibbles in a massive quest that offers dozens of memorable moments. And it's not just the epic battles; I often found myself delighted by the clever, well-acted conversations between Geralt and the sprawling supporting cast.

"Wild Hunt" is less about the fate of the Northern Realms and more about the relationships among Geralt and his companions. Characters like the sarcastic sorceress Yennefer, the charming minstrel Dandelion and the ruthless crime lord Dijkstra are strong enough to carry games of their own.

But in the end, it's all about Ciri, the impetuous, tormented fighter who brings out Geralt's paternal instincts. It's a rare game that can establish such a powerful emotional connection—one I'll remember long after I've forgotten the hundreds of monsters I've slain. Three-and-a-half stars out of four.

**More information:** [thewitcher.com/witcher3](http://thewitcher.com/witcher3)

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