

Review of *Wild Arms 3*

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1 Introduction

Wild Arms 3 is a role-playing game (RPG) for the Sony Playstation 2. It was designed by Contrail & published by Sony Computer Entertainment America (SCEA). Its release date in North American was 17 October 2002.¹

There was a *Wild Arms 1* & a *Wild Arms 2*, both for Sony Playstation 1. I have not played them. I've never seen them. I didn't even know they existed until I inferred it from the 3 in *Wild Arms 3*.

2 Summary

(I'm writing this after playing the game for only a day. My opinions might change over time.)

If you like RPGs such as the Final Fantasies, Okage, & Legend of Mana, you'll probably like *Wild Arms 3*. It's not the work of genius, but it's good. It's a solid RPG. Also, I give it an "A" for having the balls to experiment with some unusual concepts: the western/fantasy setting & the new features of the combat system.

My complaints (but they probably aren't fervent enough to be true complaints) are that the big-picture of the story seems fairly predictable² & style of the graphics doesn't thrill me. I don't dislike the graphic style; it just doesn't tickle my aesthetics. It's purely a manner of taste, not a technical complaint.

I really like the music. Nice mix of Western, with some modern threads running through it.³

I've seen no technical glitches.

¹I bought it about a week after its release date, but I have only now (26 January 2003) gotten around to playing it. I have a big back-log of games I want to play.

²But maybe I've just played too many RPGs on PS1 & PS2. I've played almost every one I've seen.

³I do not normally like Country & Western music. Or should I say "Country *or* Western"?

3 First Impressions

I played it for about four hours on 26 January 2003, making it a little farther into the game than the prologue. I had a good time with it.

The setting is a mix of the Old West (cowboys) & some fantasy (magic, monsters, orcs, impressively high technology implemented with apparently industrial techniques). The story is about four “drifters” (wandering gun-slingers, basically), one of whom is an 18-year-old girl named Virginia.

This was the first cell-shaded game I’ve played. With all the hoopla about cell-shading, I was mildly curious to see what my reaction would be. My reaction was “This looks like the graphics of *Legend of Mana* or *Saga Frontier 2* but with PS2-quality graphics”. Since *Legend of Mana* was one of my favorite games in its time, that’s a good thing.

The field & dungeon views so strongly resemble those of *Okage: Shadow King* that I’m betting that *Wild Arms 3* uses the same engine. Yes, WA3’s cell-shaded style is hugely different from Okage’s ray-traced polygons, but since both games are 3-D & on the same platform, those differences are more aesthetic than technical. I think WA3 uses the same engine as Okage, but WA3’s programmers re-tooled the combat system.

Which brings me to: The combat system. It’s neat. It has a combat mode that is separate from the field mode, just like Okage did & all the Final Fantasies did. A new feature of WA3’s is that the characters & monsters don’t stand in two rows like two 18th-century armies facing each other across the battlefield. Nope, they run around the field. I don’t think their positions & antics have much to do with the combat itself, but it looks more believable than the two-armies formation from Okage & the Final Fantasies.

Another neat feature of combat is that you can tell individual (or all) of your characters to run on automatic. If you put all the characters on automatic, then when they enter combat, you can let them duke it out while you watch or go get another beer. The AI behind the characters is decently intelligent. I was better at combat than it was after I had played for only an hour, so you might need to intervene for bosses or unusually difficult random encounters, but for most combat, the automatic mode was just fine. Since I’m more interested in the puzzles & the story than in the combat (especially towards the end of the game when I’m trying to level-up the characters & combat gets really, really, agonizingly repetitive), I like this feature. If you are into the combat, you will probably prefer the manual mode, but if you’re like me, or if you are temporarily tired of fighting yet another random encounter, it’s a good new feature.

The plot reminded me of the Final Fantasies because it’s about planetary life forces & it implies that there was a civilization, now forgotten, with true high-tech. Oh, isn’t the planet called Gaia in the Final Fantasies? In WA3, it’s Filgaia, which, I presume, means or implies “small earth”.⁴

⁴Gaia is Earth, obviously. If I remember what little Gaelic I used to know, “fil” means “small”, or maybe it’s part of the word meaning “small”. Oh, & “fils” is French for “son”. Anyway, whenever I see “Filgaia” on the screen, I think “small Earth” & I’m reminded of Final Fantasy.

There is a skills system that reminds me of those from Final Fantasy 7 & 8. I haven't used them enough yet to know them very well.

My favorite character so far is Clive with Virginia & Gallows close second & third, respectively. Jet is okay.

4 Later Impressions

I never finished the game. In June 2003, I was fed-up with it. A couple of the dungeons were pointless & tedious. Like some other reviews had predicted, I found it too difficult, too often, to find the location of the next damned dungeon. I haven't been this frustrated at a game in a long, long time, if ever.

So I gave it to a friend. I no longer recommend *Wild Arms 3*. Technically, it's not crap, but it's too tedious, too pointless. Basically, it's not fun.