

ONIMUSHA 3 DEMON SIEGE

EAST MEETS WEST AND THEN MEETS NOW



SAMANOSUKE

Once upon a time, Samanosuke Akechi was just an awesome samurai. In *Onimusha 3*, he's a full-fledged badass.



ENJOY THE MOVIE

Sit back and enjoy the feast for the eyes that opens *Onimusha 3: Demon Siege*. What we have for you here is a subtitled version with all speech in Japanese. In the actual game, it's all dubbed (pretty well, actually) to English.

Onimusha 3: Demon Siege awes you before you even hit Start. The best full-motion-video sequence in PlayStation history kicks things off—it's so good, I'd recommend that people should at least rent the game just to watch these thrilling seven minutes. Not that *you* need to for that reason—the entire thing is right there waiting for you on this month's demo disc. But then again, **the actual game that follows does little to disappoint.**

That is, unless you're aching to hit buttons all the time. *Demon Siege's* story-driven nature means that, especially at the beginning, you'll go for several minutes at a time watching the plot advance. But at least it's an interesting plot. Even though Jubei Yagyu defeated the resurrected lord of the Genma demons in *Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny*, Nobunaga Oda returns (some-how...do we really need an explanation?) with plans to rule over not only feudal Japan, but also modern-day Europe. With the help of the nautilus-headed mad scientist Guildenstern, ol' Noby now has the power to move objects through time. Oblivious to this are *Onimusha: Warlords* hero Samanosuke Akechi and a French soldier from our time named Jacques (modeled directly after actor Jean Reno). They get a better idea of what's happening, though, when Guildenstern's weird science sends Jacques to Samanosuke's time and Sammy to Paris in 2004.

The events that follow don't always necessarily make sense, but they certainly succeed in holding your interest. That's all most of us really ask for in a videogame story, although you might find yourself chuckling at the "touching" slow-motion reunion shots and corny dialogue ("you'll sleep better in hell"). Kudos to Capcom and its storytellers at Flagship for coming up with such a creative concept and executing it in an interesting way. Both time travel itself and the fish-out-of-water situation commonly seen in movies (like *Crocodile Dundee!*) have never really pervaded videogame stories, but I get the feeling *Demon Siege's* influence might inspire such devices in game narratives to come.

Even if the story doesn't do much for you, *Demon Siege's* production values still might win you over. Hollywood talent like Reno isn't necessary, but it certainly doesn't hurt. More impressive are the beautiful graphics—I've never seen fire and snow look as good in a PS2 game. The colors add a lot, too, especially when you see 20 or 30 pink, yellow, and white souls flying around the screen. And even though some weird camera angles might occasionally throw you off, the 3D environments look even better than the pre-rendered 2D backgrounds of the previous two games. To top it off, the music performed by the Warsaw Philharmonic always keeps your blood pumping—as if the hack-n-slash action weren't enough.

And it is. Now with a better combat engine more akin to *Devil May Cry's* than *Resident Evil's* (you can opt for the latter...if you're insane), *Demon Siege* gets further depth by adding its second protagonist. Sammy uses blades, while Jacques prefers

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JACQUES PREFERS WHIPLIKE DEVICES PERFECT FOR "HELL YEAH!" MOMENTS.

JEAN RENO?

Capcom said all along that Jean Reno would provide the French voiceover for *Demon Siege*. And he does. Only thing is, it lasts all of half an hour. By the time he meets the fairy, Ako, who uses her magic translation ability, Jacques is speaking the same tongue as Samanosuke (i.e., English). This is all fine and good if you can get past the fact that the actor taking his place, Paul Mercier, sounds *nothing* like Reno—not even French. And no, hardcore folks, you can't play the whole game in Japanese.



PAUL MERCIER

You might recognize the English-speaking voice of Jacques in *SOCOM II* (Specter) or *.hack* (Bear).



THAT ONE PUZZLE...

Warlords had the sliding-tile puzzle in the water chamber. *Samurai's Destiny* had the gate that you have to open with the analog sticks. The one puzzle that will probably kill you a couple of times in *Demon Siege* features Jacques in a gas chamber

of sorts. In order to get out, he must enter a series of button presses provided in a *Simon*-like manner, each sent telepathically by his son, Henri, who has just figured out the combination hundreds of years in the future. Don't laugh. That's the power of love, man.



WE PLAYED THEM FOR YOU



So what if you didn't play the first two *Onimushas*? Here's all you really need to know: The series debuted with *Onimusha: Warlords* (left), wherein Samanosuke first set out to defeat the newest officer in the Genma demon army, the resurrected Nobunaga Oda. Noby walked away at the end, though, after Sam defeated his big serpentine boss, Fortinbras.

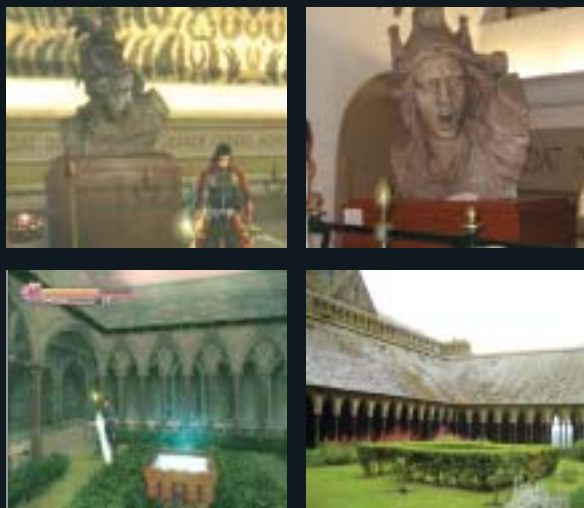
Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny (right) featured a new historical Japanese dude named Jubei Yagyu who actually did defeat Nobunaga—but not without some help. The way Jubei treated four other warriors he met determined who would help him out as playable characters. The story also branched in many directions, depending on your actions.



A.I. characters such as Jacques' fiancée Michelle here often fight beside you. You even control Michelle herself for about an hour or so during the course of the game.

REAL PLACES

You may have never been to France, but some of *Demon Siege's* settings offer the next best thing. Below, compare the game versions of the inner Arc de Triomphe (top) and the interior of Mont-Saint-Michel (bottom) to actual photographs.



KATANA: THE SOUL CONTROLLER

Just by looking at this 38-inch controller shaped like a sword, you might not understand how it works. Well, I've used the thing and I still don't get it. It was supposedly designed for *Onimusha 3*, but you'll never know it—just try using the Soul Controller to get past the first sword-tough guy. You can't. The awkward button placement (including shoulder buttons right where you grip it—you can't help but press them most of the time) makes this nothing more than a handsome, super-expensive expression of ultimate gamer geekiness. Which, granted, it does quite well.

Manufacturer: IUP MSRP: \$149.99

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more whiplike devices (perfect for “hell yeah!” moments like grabbing a Genma and slinging him hard to the ground). Both have elemental magic available, depending on the equipped weapon, which adds some excellent variety to the constant hack-n-slash.

Things slow down a bit when you need to solve a puzzle—though few will actually puzzle you. Most are a matter of “find a dead end, go a different route, find the key, then advance”—very basic adventure-game fare. That doesn't mean the occasional interesting obstacle fails to present itself. I particularly enjoyed the challenging chest-opening puzzles that return for a third time and the tile-stepping puzzle that reminds me of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*.

The game even uses time travel as a puzzle element. With the help of an annoying time-walking fairy named Ako (she's pretty much the Jar Jar Binks of *Onimusha*), Jacques and Sam can pass items through the ages to help each other overcome obstacles. It only happens in a couple of locations, and, frankly, it grows a bit tedious. However, the occasional clever, if a bit hard to believe, puzzle does present itself. My favorite: Sam needs a way to climb down a huge wall at Mont-Saint-Michel, so Jacques plants some vegetation in the past. Centuries later, a full-grown plant appears as the perfect makeshift ladder. (Apparently, generations of gardeners have failed to notice the 200-foot weed growing up the side of one of France's most beautiful landmarks.)

If one thing bugs me about *Demon Siege*, it's the hours of gameplay added by the repetitive gauntlet of enemies *Onimusha* veterans know well as the Dark Realm. And it's not just the repetition that grows tiring—it's using Ako's ability to heal you (one of her several helpful powers, keeping me from totally hating her) between dungeon levels. It's great—and essential—that you take advantage of this, but the process takes *forever*. Of the 16-plus hours I spent playing through this game, four or so were spent Dark Realm-ing it. What a pace killer.

That said, the rest of *Demon Siege* moves along well for the most part, providing a solid balance of Jacques and Sam. Although not quite as deep as the last game, this newest *Onimusha* compensates with its more user-friendly control scheme and all-out production values. It's pretty damn fun, too. If you play only one *Onimusha* game in your lifetime, make it this one. « *Chris Baker*

PlayStation RATING

REVIEW HAIKU
Travel through time in the best *Onimusha* yet. Kick-ass intro, too!

Pub. Capcom Dev. Capcom ESRB Mature MSRP \$49.99

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