

Bujingai: The Forsaken City Review

Gackt, 2003

When you choose to start the game, you are greeted with a very non-descript level of sorts in which robots armed with swords, and appropriate sword fighting skill. After a few moments of fighting, the scene is faded out. Using that small video capture, the opening credits appear with highlights from the video. So goes the opening to *Bujingai*.

After this opening credit, you are introduced to the game. Your character comes hurtling toward the earth while practicing sword techniques on a comet. A detailed look at your character reveals pinkish hair, very similarly colored lips and shoes with slight heels. Just as you start to wonder whether or not this main character, Lau, is a girl or not, you are introduced to a story plot... I think. It is actually very hard in this game to piece together the story at first. You are only given the information that you are going to an island that is ruled by a demon currently. Then you are taken to a flashback where your master trains you in the art of combat. After this flashback, you are taken to an in-game tutorial. This tutorial was very funny and seemed similar in quality to a very old kung-fu movie. The voice was okay, the text left something to be desired and I kept wondering in the middle of the tutorial if they had been watching Kung-Pow for the last few hours previous. Right after this tutorial, the game begins, so let's talk about the other parts of the game.

Graphically speaking, this game looks about average. It's not as bad as FF8 by any means, but it's not spectacular, either. The heads-up-display (aka HUD), could have been styled a little bit better IMO. The colors seem to clash. It isn't too hard to read once you get the hang of it, though, and learning doesn't take too much effort outside of reading the tutorial and paying attention. With that being said, the colors clash and it's very uninteresting to look at while you are doing anything else, yet it is always present on the screen and there's no getting away from it. The background objects in the game aren't very detailed. The flames on wall torches look kind... well, not like flames at all. A lot of things look like low-quality bitmap images. The time and attention for detail seems to have been given to the design of the enemies in the game. These are a little bit more interesting to look at (and fight with). The cinematic scenes are... well... let's just say they aren't movie quality and leave it at that. I know that good games are always the most aesthetically-pleasing ones, but if you are playing an average game, that could make or break things.

Gameplay. Well, that aspect is semi-interesting. You have enemies to fight. As you are engaged in swordplay (known as a *clash* in this game), you have unique moments to attack and counterattack. I applaud Gackt for the way the handle the swordplay in this game. While you are engaged in swordplay, your defense meter (which measures the amount of times you can be attacked or countered before you lose focus and get hit) is steadily depleted until you either go on the offensive or run away. In the earlier levels, enemies don't have this meter, so if you counter, then you win. In the latter levels, however, enemies do have this counterattack capability and in some cases, they have higher defense than you, so the challenge is definitely taken up a notch. Other than your master sword skills, you have magic and other very interesting abilities. The ability to glide, wall jump, wall run, fight in mid-air, counter magic

spells and cast a fireball of near-epic proportions comes right out of the box with your character. You don't level up your character, but you can improve him by spending orbs in order to increase his defense rating, health, magic power, attack rating, and spell casting levels. Playing with the numbers to get a decent character is one of the more interesting aspects of the game. Defeat enemies to get these orbs which come in three colors (red, yellow, and blue) and four denominations (1, 3, 5, and 50 I think). You can edit your character stats at any time by returning to the temple at which you trained and approaching a portal. Again, read the tutorial for details.

As you play the game, you will run into a lot of cutscenes. I mean a lot of them. As you do combos against enemies, if you do them in a particular way (which isn't explained very well in the tutorial, I might add), you instantly strike a pose. At the beginning of every level, there is a panoramic shot of the beginning of the stage. At the end of every level, a portal opens and your character performs some kind of ritual set of movements before entering the portal. The game allows you to opt out of these cutscenes, but *only after you watch each scene at least once*. There is simply no skipping them that first time you watch them. I guess they are afraid of you missing something important that would help you solve the mystery of the storyline (namely, *what the heck is it?*). Who knows? Lastly, as for the game controls themselves, it's not too hard to handle. They are adequately explained and take only the slightest bit of effort to figure out and master.

Speaking of the storyline, it's confusing. You see a comet and you are told about a whirlwind of time from 400 years previous to 3000 years previous. You spend a lot of time playing the game and being nearly clueless for the first three levels. Most of the storyline is explained by flashbacks leading to the present. I am telling you this so that if you should decide to play this game, you won't find yourself completely lost as well. There is a girl that appears in the beginning of the game. Who she is, we don't figure out for a while. I played through half of the game and didn't get a single clue at all. The demon lord you are fighting is seen on level one or two, but you don't figure out what he's all about until maybe level three or four. I can't really be too upset about that. At least I knew he was the bad guy at the beginning so I had something to chew on until I found out more about him. Other than that, there isn't much plot to speak of. You simply hack and slash your way through one enemy after another until you complete the level and finally against the bad guy of the game who, inadvertently, used to be your best friend. Go figure.

Musically speaking, there isn't much about this soundtrack that is worth remembering. In playing this game for five straight hours, I can't remember one single tune in four levels I played. Not memorable at all. It's a shame because I'm sure they took the time to put together a soundtrack that sounded nice and fit well with the game, but when you have a game with as much action as this one has, you have to have a very strong soundtrack in order for it to be remembered. FFX-2 pulled this off well, as so did the .hack//sign series of games, but not this one. Sorry, *Bujingai*.

Overall, an average game that would be well-liked by people who like swordplay, countermoves, strategy and puzzles. It is also a winner for those who don't mind having androgynous main characters. In spite of its slight shortcomings, the actual gameplay balanced that out enough that I didn't want to

give up on it altogether. If they follow this game up with a better-looking sequel or touched this game up a little bit in the cosmetic department, I would probably buy it. Give it a try.