

A Witcher's Tale

The Witcher, released by CD Projekt Red in 2007, is an action adventure RPG based on the Witcher novels written by Andrzej Sapkowski. While the games are based on the books, they made completely new stories for the main character, Geralt. I played the enhanced edition, which was released eleven months after the initial release of the game. The enhanced edition does exactly as advertised: enhances the experience through more general features such as animations while cutting down drastically on loading times and the amount of bugs in the game.

I first played *The Witcher* back in 2019 and completed the main story without doing too many side quests, and still was blown away by the amount of complexity incorporated within this aging game. It has a fully fleshed out levelling system with unique effects you can buy with "talents" earned by levelling up. These effects are attributable to your weapons, stats, and signs (magical abilities). You are also able to improve on relationships with different NPCs throughout the story by taking certain actions at key moments. Depending on the NPC's allegiances and how you interact with them, those opinions may change from indirect behavior as well. The combat system in this game includes several effects and attributes which can enhance or hinder your abilities. Sometimes you are even hindered or helped by your choice of weapon (usually a steel sword meant for humans and a silver sword mean for monsters) as well as your combat style, which can be changed between a strong and slow style, a fast but weak style, and an all-purpose style meant for crowds. Despite these complexities, this is not at all where *The Witcher's* selling point is.

The story in *The Witcher* is by far the most important aspect when talking about this game. Taken to a castle full of friends after receiving amnesia, Geralt is forced to navigate a world in which he is famous yet he himself knows nothing about it. Still, he holds onto the fact that he is a witcher, professional monster slayer. The first section of the game sets up the plot – an unknown sorcerer has taken witcher secrets and now possesses the formulae needed to create more witchers. Throughout the game, Geralt discovers secrets and conflicts – namely the ongoing civil unrest around the rights of nonhumans (dwarves and elves). You are given the choice between helping the Scoi'atel (the nonhuman freedom fighters), the order of roses (fighting for humans), or remaining neutral multiple times throughout the story. While a witcher is expected to be neutral, Geralt is guided by your actions and is not limited by memories of his past. The choices you make within this struggle affect how different people see you throughout, and the ending of the game, even if the overarching story still remains contained within a certain prevue to maintain coherency for the sequel. Although it should also be mentioned that you may import your save file from the end of the first game into the second and have various changes occur in the world as a result of what ending you reached.

My experience playing *The Witcher* was that of being captivated by the mystery and struggles of the world while also finding myself hooked on various story lines which began to prop up throughout this game. This is to say nothing of the fantastic music and sound design, the realistic-feeling yet flattering art of the game, or the incredible voice acting. Even though today it's overshadowed by the third installment in it's series, *The Witcher* remains an engrossing experience.