

# DANTE'S INFERNO

**GENRE(S):** Action-adventure, Hack and slash

**AVAILABLE ON:** PlayStation 3, PSP, Xbox 360

**DEVELOPED BY:** Visceral Games

**PUBLISHED BY:** EA

**RELEASED:** February 4, 2010 (PlayStation 3, Xbox 360)

All the way from the cliffhanger ending of *God of War II* in 2007 to the release of *God of War III* in March of 2010, the latter was one of the most anticipated action games around at that time. Many games were to follow *God of War III* in its wake, that much was certain even before the game hit the market. EA aimed to strike first by publishing a game called *Dante's Inferno* almost an exact month before the scheduled release of *God of War III*, delivering their very own brutal hack and slash adventure that was described as a "God of War-inspired epic". Well, that's an understatement, 'cause *Dante's Inferno* basically IS *God of War* – only much, much worse, and the only thing epic about it is the concept, I'll give it that much.

A guilt-ridden Templar Knight named Dante returns home from the Third Crusade, to find both his father Alighiero and wife Beatrice brutally murdered. Beatrice's still lingering soul is dragged to Hell by Lucifer himself right before Dante's eyes. Ready to sacrifice his own life to give his wife another shot at hers, Dante bravely enters the Gates of Hell, wielding a scythe he stole from Death himself. Yeah, we have another one of those guys here; those guys that leisurely go around punching immortal entities in the face before ripping their guts out and stealing their shit. Kratos did it much better, though.

The *God of War* vibes are there from the first two seconds into gameplay, and they never go away. Sure, there's a little bit of vintage *Assassin's Creed* as well, with the Templars and Assassins going at it, with the game's story taking place during the same era and the same general location as the very first game in the series. The story is actually quite good; it's an original story based on Dante Alighieri's epic poem *The Divine Comedy* – more specifically its first part – which has been adapted to several unique storyboards

across several types of media before. I really like its base concept of a mortal soul's journey through Hell, always have. So, here I just name-dropped two of the greatest video game franchises of the last two decades, and complimented the story. What could be so wrong with *Dante's Inferno*?

Let's start with general presentation. Yeah, the story is good – but by God, the characters are dull. Dante's backstory is told exactly by the same types of flashbacks as Kratos' back in the time of the very first *God of War*. Just like Kratos', Dante's "heroism" is questionable to say the least, but the main difference between the two characters is that there is nothing loveable about Dante. He is a boring, irredeemable asshole, to phrase it short. As the story develops to the point where the player is supposed to start sympathizing with and rooting for Dante (once again, like in the original *God of War*), nothing of the sort happens. On the contrary, actually – at that point, he's not only an asshole, he's a stupid one. After a few huge and quite impressive boss fights against demons of Hell, even the bosses scale down to human size, resembling members of the same family, having similar moves, similar banter, and similar motives. Who is that? Why is that? Why is this? ...I don't really care. I just wanna get to the end. Wouldn't mind if Beatrice showed off her bare chest one more time, though... ah, there it is.

The level design is just as boring as the cast of characters; I mean, even Lucifer is a bore. Drawing comparisons to *God of War* again, this is like a collection of unused drafts from the light-textured *Chains of Olympus*, repeated on an endless spiral. It's way too dark, all the time, as in the kind of darkness that really makes playing and especially enjoying the game very hard. The puzzles are very vague – you will have trouble figuring out what the fuck you're supposed to do and more specifically, WHY, to what end, all of the damn time. You will probably die lots and lots of times just trying to figure out a simple, but vague solution, all the while you've got a horde of annoying enemies on your ass. Which brings us to one of the biggest flaws of the game.

For all his variety of attacks – light attack, heavy attack, a cross-shaped projectile – Dante is weak as fuck. Without the help of well-hidden relics associated with physical strength, there is absolutely no way to

increase Dante's attack power to the recommended level. You can't get around this fact by collecting new abilities. Magic spells help a lot, or at least they would, if every spell available didn't take such a huge bite out of your mana meter even with a condensing relic equipped. Every fight, be it just a regular assault, a three-wave showdown, or a boss fight, takes fucking forever, and some of the enemy designs were created solely to annoy – and it's these particular enemy types that are usually there whenever you're trying to simply figure out a way forward. If it's not them, then it's something in the environment. Getting past a tough environmental hazard doesn't necessarily mean you ever figured out what was happening; it might really just be good luck at work there.

Distracting you from your higher mission is a bunch of those relics, hidden around all planes of Hell, but also lost souls in need of judgement. Here's where your "karma meter" comes in. You can play the game as a holy saviour, or unholy bringer of damnation, it really doesn't matter since both sides get similar, namely just as weak, ability upgrades. Besides, if you really want to make it through the later parts of the game, you'll have to play both sides so that you can reach all available health and mana tiers. All in all this one has one of the most shallow development systems I've ever seen as long as these features have existed.

It's a funny thing: when I started writing this review, that's when I actually remembered that this game was ported directly to the PSP, and when I think of it, with just a few improvements – to Dante's physical power in particular – *Dante's Inferno* would be an OK handheld title, but as ugly, boring and drawn out as it is, it really doesn't work as a major console title. I don't get how anyone could go wrong with such a blatant, all-over carbon copy of *God of War*, especially a studio of such high merits, but I guess these things happen.

## 5.7