

*Asura's Wrath*, in many ways, is a backwards game. It's built almost entirely on a system widely hated by gamers, in a genre many people despise, built by a developer whose previous experience includes mostly shovelware. And yet, despite itself, *Asura's Wrath* manages to deliver a unique and refreshing experience unlike anything else you'll play this year.

Distill *Asura's Wrath* down into its individual components, and you'll come out with three games which really shouldn't work together. The first is a mediocre and shallow *God of War*-esque brawler, and the second is a passable lock-on rail shooter akin to *Panzer Dragoon* or *Space Harrier*. If that's all there was to *Asura's Wrath*, it probably would never have made its way to store shelves. But it's the third part that really makes it stand out as something special, and it all revolves around Quick Time Events.

That's right: the most interesting part of a game released in 2012 is its interactive cut scenes. It might sound hard to believe, but a full third of the game or more is spent watching events play out on screen and pressing the right button prompts at the right time... and it's actually pretty awesome.

The real reason why QTEs work in *Asura's Wrath* are the extent to which the game embraces the concept and prepares you for it. Instead of presenting you with a game where you're mostly in direct control and then surprising you with easily-failed button prompts during cut scenes, you'll be trained right from the start to always keep your eyes open and your hands on the controls. But don't worry, the prompts are fairly forgiving, and in most cases you can't fail them, though your score at the end of each "episode" is judged on your button-mashing prowess.

The other real problem with Quick Time Events in games is that they take you out of the action and make you feel resigned to what's happening, but not so in *Asura's Wrath*. The clever timing and required action of the button prompts are supremely satisfying and make you feel like you're harnessing unlimited power. Every punch, kick, and tug-of-war feels right.

Whereas in most games you'll be itching to get through overwrought cut scenes to get into the fray, *Asura's Wrath* puts you in the opposite scenario. The interactive cut scenes are

the star of the show, and I found myself cheesing my way through the weak brawling sequences in order to get to the next plot section.

Tying these three dissonant games together into one unified experience is an anime-inspired epic set against the backdrop of a futuristic world of men and robotic demigods that draws elements from Hinduism and Buddhism. For the bulk of the game you'll be playing as the titular Asura, one of the previously-mentioned demigods, and the avatar of wrath itself. Without giving too much away, something pretty nasty happens to Asura, and the remainder of the game revolves around his --- and your --- revenge against those who perpetrated the act.

If it all sounds a little bit nutty, that's because it is --- but in a really good way. There's not a lot of backstory or explanation of how things in this universe work, but that gives CyberConnect2 license to create some truly ridiculous scenarios that show off Asura's frightening power. You'll go toe-to-toe with planet-sized enemies, destroy countless spaceships, and --- oh, yeah --- you'll grow six arms. Six arms!

There's no shortage of madness to be experienced in *Asura's Wrath*, and the package is delivered nicely with impressive visuals, impactful sound effects, and appropriately mood-setting music. The frame rate can dip from time to time due to the sheer number of objects and effects happening on screen, but it's pretty rare. And aside from looking great in a technical sense, *Asura's Wrath* has an astonishing and immersive visual style that really does make you feel like you're playing an anime, complete with title cards, credits, and commercial bumpers.

*Asura's Wrath* continued to astonish and amaze me from opening title sequence to the very last button prompt. Just when I thought I had seen everything, something else came along and blew my mind, often drawing a smile, and even a laugh or two. If you've ever wished to be in control of the Saturday morning cartoons or bootleg anime tapes you grew up with, *Asura's Wrath* is perhaps the closest thing you'll find today.