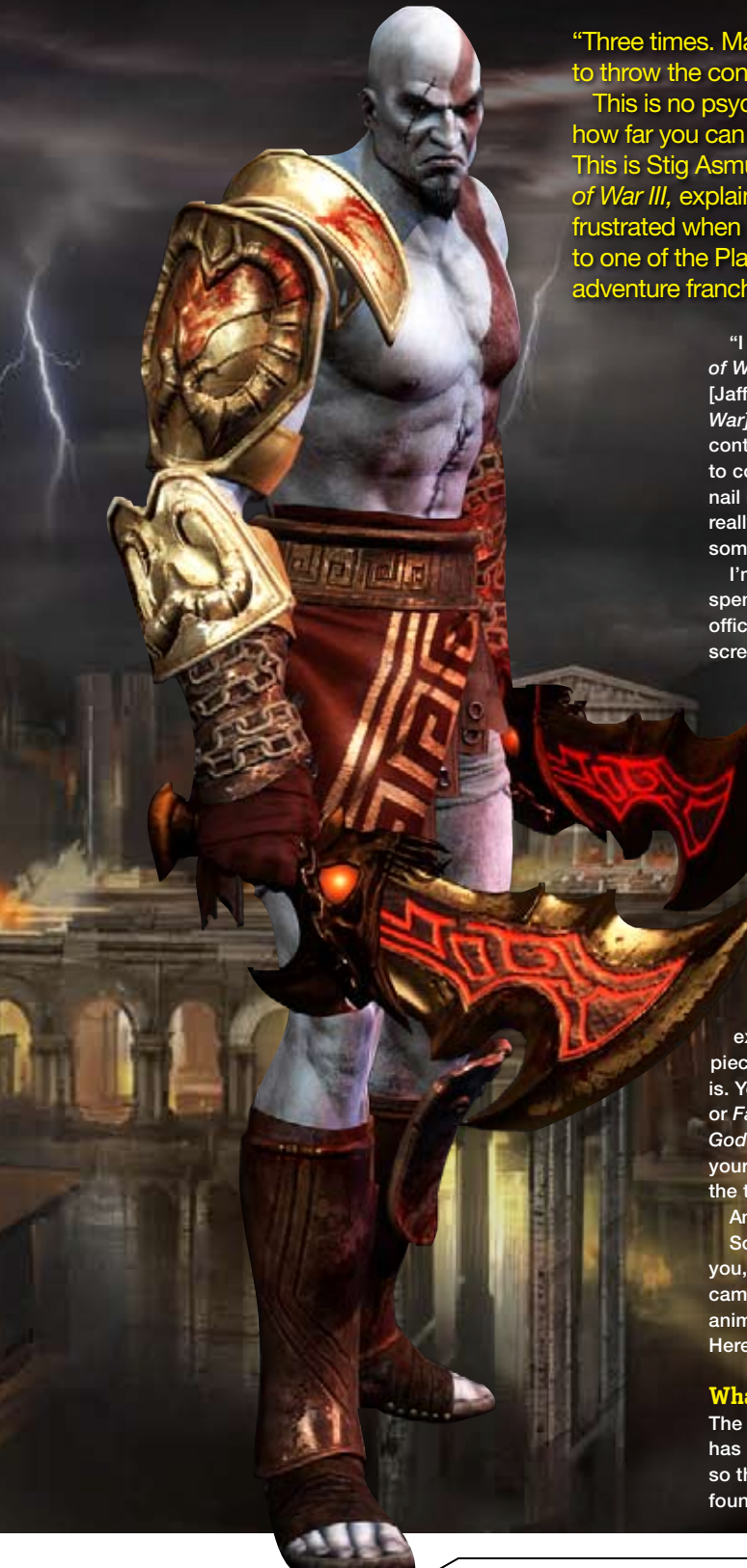


PS3 | Available: TBD | Genre: Action Adventure | Publisher: SCEA | Developer: Sony Santa Monica

Acts of War

How one of the PlayStation's **greatest franchises** is taking an evolved step forward

By Teresa Dun



"Three times. Maybe three times I want the player to throw the controller down out of frustration."

This is no psychology experiment testing to see how far you can push a gamer before he cracks. This is Stig Asmussen, Game Director of *God of War III*, explaining that he wants players to be frustrated when they play the epic conclusion to one of the PlayStation's most lauded action-adventure franchises.

"I remember when I was working on *God of War* one," Asmussen continues. "Dave [Jaffe, lead designer of the first *God of War*] said 'I want people to throw down the controller on this puzzle, but I want them to come back the next day, pick it up, and nail it.' And I agree. *That's* when a player really feels like they've accomplished something."

I'm talking with Asmussen after a day spent touring the Sony Santa Monica offices. After peeking at a dozen computer screens and chatting with folks from different parts of the team, I realize something no one's explicitly said: The secret behind *God of War's* success is control. The team hacks away at every tiny element—from how the light hits Kratos' bulging muscles to the textures of a marble column, from the animation of a Cyclops' jiggling belly to the way a pack of rabid dogs move—until it's perfect. They call it "polish" but really, it's control.

GoW III is crafted to be a cinematic experience. Expertly and lovingly pieced together. "Directed" the way a film is. You won't find any *Grand Theft Auto* or *Fallout 3*-style open-world elements in *God of War III*, because the fun you find on your own *might* not be as great as the fun the team can make for you.

And they're not willing to take that risk.

So they're building the experience for you, piece by piece, angle by painstaking camera angle, death animation by death animation, puzzle by frustrating puzzle. Here's what they've done so far...

What does "evolved" combat mean?

The combo-based combat in *God of War* has always been scrumptiously satisfying, so the goal in *GoW III* is to build upon that foundation to take battles to a whole new

level. In the new game, when you grab an enemy (using the Circle button), you have four branches to pick from. You can punch him (press Circle again... and again... and again), rip him apart with your bare hands (Triangle), use him as a shield (Square), or chuck him at a group of enemies (X button). Already, that's impressive...but consider these juicy facts: you can seamlessly switch between branches, you can run, and you can interact with walls and cliffs.

So picture this: You've got an enemy squeezed between your hands. You can pin him to a wall (just run up to one) and repeatedly bang his face in until he's dead. Or, you can punch him a few times, aim him toward a crowd of oncoming skeletons, and throw him (the impact perhaps bouncing a few enemies off a wall, which causes damage, or even send them flying off a cliff edge). Or, you can just use him as a shield, and when you've got no more use for him, punch him a few times (because you *can*) before tearing him in half. Your choice.

The one thing you can't do while holding an enemy is jump, but that brings me to the next move: the combat grapple. Here's what Lead Combat Designer Adam Puhl has to say about it. "At any point, if there's an enemy on the ground, in the air, wherever, Kratos can throw his blades at them, pull himself into that enemy [or pull the enemy over, or toss the enemy left or right], and perform a shoulder ram. When it hits, the game slows down, so you get this impactful attack, and you can continue to combo after that."

So what will that look like in motion? "You can beat on a guy," Puhl continues, "throw him into the air, grapple up to him, juggle him a bit up there, and then kill the guy off. Then, you can throw your blades down to an enemy on the ground, and shoulder ram into him. The combat grapple is a linker for the entire combat system."

Now, imagine both the new grab mechanic and the combat grapple blending seamlessly into each other, and that's a taste of what to expect in *GoW III*. Asmussen explains the philosophy. "We wanted to make sure when you have a bunch of enemies on screen, you had options. That's one of the cool things about our grunts: later on, you start to use them as ammunition against the big guys."

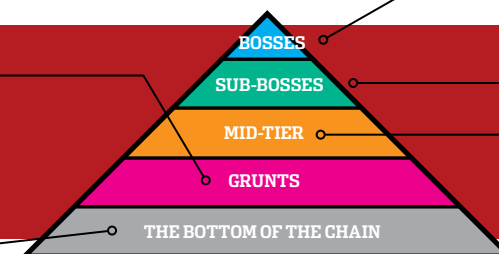
THIS IS HADES. HE'S A BOSS.

WHO ARE YOU FIGHTING?

The enemies in *God of War III* are split into classes, and even the lower-tiered ones are important. (Think about it: you see grunts more often than you see bosses.) The goal is to make *every* enemy stand out, so each enemy type will have its own unique silhouette, personal look, and trademark moves.

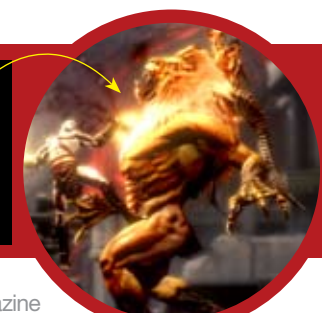
THE BOTTOM OF THE CHAIN These lowest tiered enemies are critters, like rabid dogs, and only take a few hits to take out. They attack in packs, so it's about strategically dealing with them in groups while avoiding their dog pile attacks.

GRUNTS These guys are the most versatile characters in the game. They're skeletons, archers, and other grunt-like humanoids. They often come in large numbers and they allow you to practice your combo attacks for the harder battles.



MID-TIER These are the Minotaurs and Medusas from past games. You'll need to apply more logic and strategy to defeat them.

SUB-BOSSES Like the giant Cyclops and the Centaur in the trailer, these tougher enemies really draw your attention. This is where the team focuses much of their new gore technology, and the kill sequences are bound to be impressive.



BOSSES You know who these guys are! Well, no, you don't. The developers remain defiantly tight-lipped about who Kratos will encounter, but you can expect boss fights to be lengthy, difficult, multi-phased, and oh-so-sweetly satisfying.