**I**

I went into Yakuza 0 completely fresh, shamefully having ignored the franchise in the PS2 era because bases on just some images I dismissed it as some Japanese GTA imitation. I wasn’t just plain wrong, but it’s a completely different kind of game. A unique kind of game I even dare say. Very strange, but awesome. And it turned out to be one of my favorite games I’ve played on the PS4. Unless you absolutely hate Japanese humor you should play this.

**1**

As soon as the opening theme kicked in and the introductory cutscene ended I was hooked. The character design looks really good and the stage set by the music and art style is super cool. Reminds me of seeing strange Japanese manga books at some else’s house as a kid, not understanding what exactly you’re looking at, but it’s intriguing. But I still didn’t really know what exactly I’d be playing in a moment. Basically, what you can expect when you start playing yakuza 0 is an action RPG in a very engaging Japanese mafia (i.e. Yakuza) story, set in the 80’s. The plot revolves around an organized crime war breaking out over the ownership of an empty space of ground that is the key to a huge government sponsored construction project. It’s well written and brought, and you will be emotionally invested. The game is at the same time also very funny also full of typical absurd Japanese humor. For me the game’s strongest point is the weird mix of sometimes tear-jerking, merciless mafia story and the silly humor which actually made me laughed out loud at times. The design and music are great and there’s definitely some memorable tunes on the OST like Kuze’s theme or Two Dragons. \\n

The combat is all real-time but it’s RPG genre here shows in that the most important part of the combat is unlocking the moves and stat bonuses that fit your style, rather than mastering a fixed set of moves available from the beginning. Both playable characters have three different martial art styles which are unique with each its own strengths and weaknesses. Enemies use different styles as well and it works; as your skills grow you will feel awesome switching around at the right time, using a defensive fast dodge style to evade some attacks early on, switch to the offensive Beast style to deal heavy damage to the nearest enemies and then back to dodge until you are at safe distance. The coolest thing about it are the so called “Heat” attacks, which require usage of a meter and allows for a very wide variety of special attacks which look awesome. The AI is rather dumb which shows especially when fighting groups of enemies as they’ll basically just do their own thing without coordination. While this could be better it’s not too bad for the kind of combat this game offers.

**2**

The flow of the game has you roaming free in the game’s main hub, either the Kamurocho district of Tokyo (based on the real Kabuchiko going-out district), or Osaka based on your progress in the game. It is actually quite small, but to me it didn’t really feel like that until late in the game. Probably because you’ll steadily unlock new venues and scenes. You will be free to roam around, explore and find & do side-quests in between the story missions which are usually marked on the map. Aside from the side-quest there are phone cards to collect, random battles and Mr. Shakedown battles (a buffed guy who will fight you to take your money if you run into him). The side-quest are not only funny, but they grant you worthwhile rewards as well like new hostesses for you club, weapons or upgrades. The story is well written and gets pretty deep with twists and emotional moments. The story advances in chapters and seeing your amount of cash grow, as well as expanding your move set and combat abilities does offer a nice feeling of progression.\\n  
  
There’s tons of mini-games, including karaoke (Kiryu singing Baka Mitai will be in your head for life), arcade games, betting on scantily clad women who are wrestling and especially two more important ones: managing a hostess club and managing a real estate firm. These are more fleshed out, offer more rewards and are integrated in the story. Especially the hostess club one can be strangely addictive. It’s really up to you whether you want to rush through the storyline, or whether you will indeed explore and take on the various challenges: there’s a fishing mini game, an arena, you get rewards for eating all the different foods and so on. While I did enjoy most of these things while playing this game, I honestly did enjoy them slightly less in Yakuza Kiwami when I played it afterwards because they are very similar. So my guess is you will get to the bottom of it for sure in the first one you play, but you might leave some of it when you move to the next one. But the game is anyway great content-wise.

**3**

On a more critical note, the game can feel a bit messy sometimes as it is not always clear when a side-quest will be available somewhere or when doing a story mission will make a side-quest unavailable. Awesome and funny as most the side-quests are, sometimes it feels very out of place to be busy grabbing a kid an adult magazine from a vending machine in between the life-and-death drama of the main story. Most of them are funny and have some battles, but there’s also some uninteresting fetch quests among them. Besides, the character design is great but the world is sometimes a bit rough as especially the inside environments can look kinda bland and unpolished. The graphics of the scenery are so-so at best. \\n

Some people complain about the combat being too simple and basically just charge up and spam your best special attack whenever you can, but I wouldn’t agree. I mean sure I’ve mindlessly Beast-styled my way though many a random street battle, but it’s a player’s choice to finish these battle’s in a stylish way if you’re curious to see all the special attacks. I went out of may way to do this, especially with the contextual ones which use objects (for example an electrical cooking plate) and it is rewarding to finish a battle with maybe some unnecessary effort, but a mad stylish finish. Besides, the boss battles require you to strategize and fight well by altering dodging styles, stun attacks and high damage styles to survive and chip away their health. And especially later in the game the story battles where you’re more outnumbered are also no cake-walk and I found myself gratefully using some of the rarer weapons I grinded for.

**C**

This game is weird, but in a good way. If you’ve never played a Yakuza entry before you will find a very unique and unique gaming experience. If you have, you will find what is probably the best one in 0. I gave it a try with some doubts but I came back a fan of the series and finished Yakuza Kiwami afterwards and I’ll soon start Kiwami 2 and the rest. I just love it’s typical Japanese mix of emotional storytelling with absurd and sometimes pervy humor. All in a really fun game with unique combat and solid action RPG mechanics.\\n

The combat is simple yet interesting due to the different styles you can instantly switch too, and it gets challenging enough in the late game & bosses. It gets better the more you choose to play in a way that you uses stylish moves for entertainment rather than just cheese battles. The RPG elements bring a solid feeling of progression and character growth, and the game has a LOT of optional content. I grinded to unlock all the special moves, hostesses, super rare weapons and just big money with pleasure. \\n

But most of all, the style and general vibe of the game is why you should play it. The storytelling, setting and presentation is really good. The characters are awesome and you will feel heavily invested. Majima, Kuze & Kiryu are some of the most memorable characters of my PS4 time period. If you are able to look past the rough edges and the simple base of the combat you’re in for a gem of a game.

**I.T**