

The First Berserker: Khazan

Party, block, dodge or DIE



PUBLISHER
Nexon
DEVELOPER
Neople.
SYSTEMS
PlayStation 5, Xbox Series, PC
RATING
M

It's been incredible to see the impact FromSoftware's *Dark Souls* has had on the video game industry over the last decade or so. It's not just their flagship series that has spawned a sub-genre of its own, though. There's also an offshoot of the Soulslike that one could liken more closely to FromSoft's *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*. Outfitted with a faster, more *Bloodborne*-style pacing, *Sekiro* took things a step further and ensured that you really *did* have to "git gud"

or face the consequences. As silly as the community that champions that phrase unironically may be, the spirit of the hardcore parry-centric action game continues to burn brightly in Neople's *The First Berserker: Khazan*.

Khazan may not be a FromSoft game, but it

more Lacrima, which is the game's equivalent to Souls that can be cashed in for leveling purposes. If you zoom out, most areas are actually fairly compact, serving as tight little playgrounds full of enemy packs that love ambushing players who have yet to memorize every nook and cranny of the environment.

It's when those nooks and crannies funnel you toward a truly challenging encounter that *Khazan* really shines. The boss battles are brutal right from the start, forcing players to remain nimble while working to pick up on all the little feints and tells that signal when an attack or combo is coming. The first major boss, a massive yeti-like creature called Yetuga, serves as a great tutorial for what's to come. Its patterns are easy to learn and the parry and dodge window is relatively generous. Once you master it, you'll be slightly more prepared for the increasingly difficult challenges that follow.

And believe me, this one gets *tough*. There are many walls to climb on the way to the end, and thankfully there are plenty of ways to customize



bears many of the hallmarks that have made them an unparalleled success. There's a bonfire-style system for resting, leveling up, and refreshing the enemy population in the surrounding area. There are plenty of sets of armor to pick up with varying benefits; more so even than those provided in the game's inspirations. And, of course, there are a ton of powerful bosses to bash your sword (and your head) against throughout your journey.

That last point is going to be the make-it-or-break-it feature for most. While *Khazan* has an interesting story setup—and some nice-looking areas, the moments between boss battles are fair to middlin' as far as excitement is concerned. They're not fun enough to make you want to replay them over and over outside of grinding away for



your loadout and tinker with your burgeoning build to find out what suits you best. Respec'ing isn't a pain, and you can easily reassign any skill points you've earned to place them in different parts of the branching trees. Out of all the features I'd love to see carry over to similar titles, though, it's the way *Khazan* lets you earn some Lacrima from trying *and failing* against bosses. You'll get experience that varies depending on how much damage you dealt to each boss, ensuring that you won't come up empty handed even in death.

The First Berserker: Khazan is one of those Soul-slikes that really rewards being bold and aggressive. If you're in the mood for that type of challenge, you'll find this one has plenty to give in exchange for your grueling efforts.

—Joseph Luster

