

Xenoblade Chronicles 3 is a heavy weight to carry. Though it's caked in the pleasantries of its predecessors, and in constant conversation with them: it is a touch **darker**. Aionios is **tragic**. Life and death hold no meaning in its vision of forever. Its people seek purpose **in the face of** a **harrowing** dystopia. We've still got Nopon, we've got characters spamming their funny voice lines, and we have a gloriously broken set of systems to play around with. This is unmistakably Xenoblade.

Yet, there is a pervasive sense of **pain** orbiting it. Since its release three years ago, it's left me with a wound that I can't help but scratch. The questions it asks are at the heart of anxieties which **freeze my own world in place**. My face haunts the corridors of this digital nightmare, and in writing about it: I must force myself to confront it once more.

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Prison of Eternity

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Could you imagine a world without the freedom to choose? A world ruled by an elite class? A world on the brink of annihilation? A world founded on homogeneity? A world where you must fight for survival? A world where death comes to those who can no longer afford to live? A world held hostage by endless, meaningless work? A world that staunchly refuses to move forward?

Maybe... you don't have to imagine.

Aionios is not a world of life. People draw breath here, but they do not live. They fight, they kill, and they die at the whims of an unknowable elite. Colonies are war camps, labeled as numbers or greek letters. Everyone wears the same uniforms, they eat the same food, and they sleep in the same cots. Men and women bathe together without batting an eye, for they feel no passion for the naked body. There is no sex, no love, and no passion.

Devoid of meaning and fond of repetition, you can walk **all the way around** it and end up right back where you started. It is a world where progress stills. You walk on for eternity. You do not think. You kill. You serve. You **die**. It is an ouroboros, historically symbolic of the eternal cycle of rebirth. It is **also** a Panopticon, with Moebius' home base of Origin sitting in the center of the circle, watching over **everything**. Fitting, then, that the communication network would be called the **Iris**, as the world's make-up resembles an eye.

English philosopher Jeremy Bentham envisioned the Panopticon as a prison system in which prisoners would never know when they are being watched. Though none of these soldiers **know** that Origin exists, their lives are nonetheless **controlled** by unseen forces. The Consuls who lead the Colonies come and go as they please. You never quite know where they are or who they're watching. It is a **perceived** omnipotence weaponized to facilitate **obedience**. If you never know when someone might be watching, you would likely **behave in a manner** in

adherence with what said power believed to be **morally acceptable**. At least, that is what Bentham believed.

Indeed, the Consuls **are** watching pretty closely in Z's theater. Most of them watch for their own amusement. Some of them treat battles like a chess match. Others **abandon** them like broken toys, or **poke and prod** at them like lab rats. When visiting the Prison Camp in chapter 5, you get a glimpse of this in microcosm. Wardens watch prisoners in the main hall from on high, and regard them as **less than human**. They send prisoners out to collect items and fight dangerous beasts, giving **special privileges** to so-called "model prisoners."

Colonies have incentive structures to keep soldiers participating in its systems. Get to gold rank and you'll receive better food and more supplies. Life will be easier the more you win. Of course, that can only get you so far when you're still trapped by these systems. Fly too close to the sun, and you'll be cut down to size, as was Eunie's colony in a past life. Whether you die on the battlefield as a no name soldier, are part of a dirt colony or gold, or reach your homecoming having served dutifully: none of it has any meaning. Everyone lives the same life for the benefit of people **you will never know**.

Should you get **very** lucky, you might become one of the chosen few allowed to **ascend** into Moebius. **Only** a few are ever able to hold this title, as they **feed** on their soldiers to sustain their immortality. Joran and Shania both **think** they'll be better off as Moebius after being dealt a bad hand in life. That maybe, giving into their demands, joining their ranks, will give them the opportunity to **escape** the prison and **shine** like the heroes they look up to.

Curious that the people of Aionios fight to replenish "their flame clocks." Whoever has more of this "energy" can live comfortably. Those **without** disappear or die. Only those **proficient** in killing and lucky enough to survive reap its benefits. Flame clocks are **wealth**. It's why you rise the ranks up to Gold based on performance. On the surface, it's a meritocracy, but it only ever seems to benefit the Consuls in the end. Soldiers collect this essence to survive. They think nothing of it. Unbeknownst to them, this **energy** is what fuels Moebius. It is how they continue to exist. They are **leeches**, feasting on the hard fought work of those they **rule over**. They dress and walk with the **cadence of royalty**, existing **above** the squabbles of their subjects, doing **whatever they want** with them in perpetuity.

Moebius pulls the strings in the war between Keves and Agnus. Colony 0's purpose is to make sure the conflict continues unabated. Artwork and other artifacts of culture are erased. Nobody should be allowed to **question**. Their mechs have invisibility and they operate from the shadows. Their own Moebius describes them like they're the CIA. Ultimately, the lives of the soldiers beneath Moebius are nothing more than lambs to the slaughter. Black and white respectively, Kevesi and Agnian lives have been turned into **pawns** of a chess match, overseen by those who exist to manipulate it **for their own amusement**.

Ethel and Cammuravi are forced to fight Ouroboros midway through their journey. They are placed in Ferronises with flame clocks specially designed to suck the life out of them. No matter

what happens here, whether they kill Ouroboros or die trying: they will perish in the end, entering Aionios' cycle anew. Faced with an impossible choice, they go out **on their own terms**. Dueling each other has been the greatest honor of their lives, so why not fight **for themselves** to the end of their days.

Later, through Y, a self-professed **avatar** of Z, we learn that **this was the expected outcome**. Ethel and Cammuravi would defy Moebius and die on their own terms. Y finds their final act of defiance **invigorating!**

Really, though: there was no **beauty** in their sacrifice. Choice was never an option afforded to them. That fighting to the death was **the only** way for them to **find meaning** in their short and miserable lives is horrific. It speaks to an **ugliness** coursing through the veins of Moebius: an insecure blood. The tragedies they orchestrate are a **distraction** from their deafening emptiness.

People who act like this, people who always need **more**, who **take away** the ability for people to choose, who censor culture to the point of **erasing** entire groups of people, should not be steering civilization in the way they currently do. All of them are selfish losers who have wholly succumbed to their loneliness and narcissism. Existing **outside** the game we all play, they must twist and contort it so that they will **never need to play**.

It is only natural for at least **someone** to want to **fight back** against this apathy. The Lost Numbers have resisted Moebius' world order for generations. They've hidden themselves away in the Mechonis' sword, high above the ground, and have built the only **city** the world has ever known. A city full of people, young and old. People in love. People with children. People who **live**. It is the first **full** answer to what **living** looks like.

Traveling Aionios as Ouroboros sees the party help several Colonies, who each hold different philosophies on life. Valdi **sees something** in his creations, a spark of life no Consul could ever understand. Ashera **lives to fight**. There is no other way she knows how to communicate, and seeks a **glorious** death to give her life meaning. Juniper has resigned themselves to their dwindling flame clock, embracing death unflinchingly. All of these perspectives are scattered shots in the dark.

They're malformed philosophies based on **very little** life experience, each grasping at the meaning of life as it falls through their fingers like grains of sand. The City is the first place where those philosophies **can take root**. You get to feel **love** for another person and **explore** what that really means. You get to **bring life** into the world. It is so **foreign** to the "**lives**" of the main cast, who are regularly tripped up by terms such as "ancestors" and "children." The cast have **only ever known destruction**. **Creation is unfathomable**.

The City has the space to **develop a culture**. A shared consciousness can form, ideas can be passed down, books can be written, music can be made. It is an **oasis** in a **desert of war**. Which isn't to say The Lost Numbers don't fight their **own war**. They simply point their guns **at**

Moebius. Even then, the **grip** of Moebius seeps into their hearts. Rebelling against Moebius is **necessary**, but it means that, like Kevesi and Agnian soldiers, **gifted combatants** are worth so much more. A juggler or a painter is seen as a waste of space compared to an Ouroboros candidate.

There's no room in The City for such foolish distractions. None of them have **truly escaped** the prison. Though it defies the order of the world set in place by Moebius, it still exists **within The Endless Now**. In order to live full lives, its citizens have to hunker down inside a giant sword. Nobody can grow **beyond it**, as you risk running into a war zone, or being **slaughtered** by a Consul.

For as noble as this mission is, we are asked to question how Joran and Shania, people who grew up **in completely different worlds**, could both become Moebius for **almost the same reason**. The City is as trapped as any soldier; as trapped as Moebius **itself**. Tenuous is their grip on immortality, as they are unable to **completely** stop the two worlds from merging. It's the one **blind spot** of their directive. Aionios **will** disappear. Moebius does not have the power to stop it indefinitely.

No one does. It cannot be escaped. It cannot be repaired. It cannot be seized.

It can only be **destroyed**.

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Nobody wants eternal life. Not truly. Preservation of art, though? Now we're getting somewhere. It's no secret that Nintendo has been under fire recently for their Game Key Cards inching us closer and closer to the total erasure of physical games and game ownership as a whole. I would not be surprised if we soon live in a world where the concept has been entirely eradicated.

That's why I'm happy that today's sponsor, Lost In Cult, has made the push to create their own physical games initiative. Titled 'Lost In Cult Editions' games like Immortality and Thank Goodness You're Here now have physical editions you can purchase, with many more on the way. Lost In Cult Editions exist in order to curate, preserve, and make available a variety of acclaimed games. They're prestigious editions that'll look really nice on a shelf, with original artwork on the outer slipcase, and a color themed inner slipcase. They also contain an illustration poster, a card of authenticity signed by the developers, as well as essays about the game by various writers, and exclusive interviews with the devs that include never before seen artwork and concepts.

Lost In Cult is **truly passionate** about preserving games into the future. **Every release** is tested to ensure they will work **without** internet connectivity, and include the most up to date version of the game. They absolutely **will not** release a physical edition if it cannot meet this requirement. **Most importantly**, though: if you don't want all the fancy bells and whistles, Lost in Cult have

also released **standard versions** if you just want to have the game in your hands. They plan to release 1 Switch game and 1 PS5 game every month, with Switch 2 coming soon. Goes without saying, but no game key cards.

These Lost In Cult Editions are **love letters**, plain and simple. They are **so good** that they are also limited time only. While the standard editions will always be available: if you're at all interested in the fancy stuff, you're gonna want to get on this as soon as you can. Lost In Cult regularly creates some of the coolest stuff I have seen in this industry, so if you love games, and you love this channel, please consider supporting the initiative and buying some physical games! You can use my code KINGKGAMES at www.lostincult.co.uk or the link in the description to get five percent any Editions game, **or** anything on the site right now.

Thank you to Lost In Cult for making this video possible.

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Dichotomy of Control

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Xenoblade Chronicles 3 explores a Stoic Dichotomy of Control. That might be the most pretentious thing I've ever written, but hey: you can't tell me Takahashi hasn't read Epictetus.

What does it look like to play a deliberate fusion between Xenoblade 1 and 2? Firstly, it requires a reading of 2 as neither a **progression** nor a **regression** from the first. 3 inherits the arts recharge system from both games, requiring you to use **both types** for Fusion Attacks. No longer is there room for players to **prefer** one approach or the other. We are **forced** to adopt this **unholy union**.

You'll need both abilities off cooldown in order to throw out a Fusion Attack, necessary to build up your Ouroboros transformations. Though you do often need to wait **longer** to throw out your attacks, it also lets you exert control over them. If an attack has a long animation, or is an aura that doesn't otherwise do damage, you can pair it with something else. Maybe tack it onto a move that doesn't last as long, or add a healing effect to make using it safer.

Spending more time **out of the fight**, making sure your skills and arts **pair well together** is a big focus. I'd argue it's **even more important** than the armor you wear or the gems you use. You'll have to decide whether you want the first game's Daze combo, or the second game's Launch combo, as they now **both exist**. Daze allows you **full** accuracy, and now has the **Burst** finisher added which will let you get more items and **also** eliminate an enemy's **enrage** status. It is the **safer** approach for dealing with tough bosses.

Of course, if you're a more **aggressive** player, the Launch combo provides a **delicious** 1.5x damage boost, at the cost of the Smash finisher making the Enrage happen **even faster**.

Mostly, it's up to the player's preference and build. You don't even **necessarily** need to utilize the combos for your main arts if you'd rather build up Ouroboros levels and fire off **guaranteed** combos at Level 3, among other useful effects like temporary invincibility or **sharing buffs** with your partner.

Chain attacks remain a powerful tool. This one lets you stack the dominoes and watch them fall like 2's system, using the **framework** of 1's unpredictability. Sometimes, you just **won't** get the orders you want, or you'll fall short of the TP bracket you were aiming for. Certain characters may not reactivate in the order you prefer, so dealing high damage is about **rolling with the punches** and working with what you end up getting. When the stars align, you're able to **chew through** bosses **ten levels above you**. If they don't, success is not **out of your grasp**, but you'll need to have a fallback plan.

It depends on what your party setup looks like. You could focus on the Tank role, which guarantees a reactivation of the character with the highest TP. That is a fairly easy way to make sure a Chain Attack lasts long enough for your Ouroboros Order. Your main party, while having access to every Class, cannot **defy** the amount of TP they start with or the role their orders are assigned to. Taion is always going to have 35 TP, and his order will always give bonuses to Healers and reduce an enemy's physical defense.

Does it make more sense for Taion to have an attacking class, even if he doesn't benefit **as strongly** from it as a character like Sena, just because it means you can send him into an Attacking order and instantly create a high TP attacker who can get a Bravo rating as soon as the second order?

There's always a tradeoff you need to make based on a character's natural abilities. Sena and Lanz have low TP, but they are a fierce combo when given attacking roles since their orders enhance attackers. Their Ouroboros order isn't as strong as Noah and Mio's, though, who don't benefit as **immediately** from individual orders.

Is it more important to shoot for a high damage ratio, ignoring the text of the orders altogether to ensure you get enough TP to drive that number as high as possible, using characters like Ashera to guarantee a Bravo rating on the **first order**? Or are you simply looking to use the Chain Attack as a way to prevent damage during a problematic phase of a fight? The fight against M is a perfect example of damage not always being king, since she can turn your own fighters against you. Enemies on the whole are **much more aggressive**, pumping out damage in scary bursts. Figuring out how to **survive** long enough to even start the chain attack is very important, as is **actually finishing the enemy off** whenever you've committed to one.

Decisions like how you balance roles, how you manage aggro, and how resourceful you are with healing are more in your control than ever now that you are able to swap between party members whenever you want. You can rest easy letting a single character carry the healing or tank burdens in exchange for higher damage when you can also more **directly** control the flow of a fight.

You aren't **required** to have any sort of team comp. There is nothing stopping you from loading up your team with attackers, you'll simply have to sacrifice the ability to revive teammates. There is nothing stopping you from stacking the deck with healers, giving them gems and items to speed up the time it takes to revive allies, and letting these **ridiculously high damage dealers** fall a few times. If what you want is to deal **ludicrous damage** in a short amount of time, perhaps the **risk** is worth it for you.

Or maybe you want to turn your brain off. This kind of freedom is not **altogether** comforting. Suddenly having access to everyone in a **real-time** combat system like this means you can't **always** fall back on blaming the questionable AI for bad decisions. You are ultimately on top of when moves go out, or where your allies are before a devastating art comes out. There's an added emphasis on positioning in general, with buff effects being placed on the floor, or in the case of tanks, being applied when you're closer to them. Rather than boil fights down to whether or not you're to an enemy's side or back, you now need to figure out when the best time is to disengage and throw out a back attack. Break away from the tanks and Regen circles at the wrong time, and you might **die**, forcing healers away from the tanks to get you back up, leaving them in more danger.

Ouroboros forms are excellent ways to negate damage altogether when used as defensive tools. Cycling between them is as effective as building them up to Level 3 and unloading as much damage as possible. Everywhere you look, Xenoblade 3 is **about** this **burden of control**. Where can you leverage it? Where must you surrender it? How will you use it to **offer your own answer to the obstacles of life**?

There is a kind of spirit of **fusion** at the heart of your immense power. You cannot unlock **any of it** until your party becomes Ouroboros. 3 soldiers of Keves need to **step into the shoes** of 3 soldiers from Agnus. They adopt each other's **ways of life**; their clothes, their weapons, their fighting styles.

This **acceptance** of differing perspectives is how the party **gains even more power**. They come to know a Hero from each of the colonies, recruiting them to their cause and learning their style of fighting in the process. The more Heroes you adopt, the more classes you obtain, and the more arts you can **combine**. Early on, Unique Monsters will pound you into dust, but the more people you meet, the more you discover about Aionios, the more **versatile** you become.

Field skills open up your explorable world, so much more **accessible** than in the second game. Aionios is built **a lot more** like the first game, with **colossal** environments to roam. You travel along them in **more or less** a straight line, but field skills from 2 offer you a more tangible incentive to **revisit** these areas, rather than cleaning them up and moving on.

The returning Affinity Chart feels like it was **tailor made for 3**. Every Colony has one, and leveling them up will unlock more side quests. While not all of them are staged like **Hero quests**, they all **revolve around** the theme of life in some way. Your heroes won't be able to

achieve their highest level of strength unless you provide assistance to their colonies. This **side content**, then, is positioned to be **just as important** as your main objective. As Ouroboros, you are smashing flame clocks and encouraging people to **question** how Aionios works. Through **helping people**, however mundane the task, you teach them **how to live**. Whether that means helping Colony 9 create a potato farm, or earning the respect of Ashera's Squad by learning and **speaking** their language.

This is what it feels like to do mutual aid: volunteer yourself for manual labor, donate ingredients to **feed the hungry**, and protect those who cannot protect themselves. Rather than **liberating** everyone and promptly **leaving them in the dust**, you **become stronger** by sticking around and making sure that they can take care of themselves. That requires **talking to these people**; making an earnest effort to understand their humanity **even when** you disagree with them.

Ashera seems like she has a few screws loose when you first meet her. It infuriates Eunie since it runs counter to her worldview. Ashera has lived the same kind of life as the rest of the party, though. Ten years to live, forced by Moebius to kill, and so she coped with those truths in the only way she knew how: by turning **the fight** into something **invigorating**. Maybe it's a little barbaric from the outside looking in. Get to know her colony, then. What led them to these truths?

Turns out, Ashera has a lot in common with Eunie. An ache in her neck is a **constant** reminder of her mortality; a holdover from a previous death that she can't seem to shake. It grows more painful the longer she lives, which drives her to seek a glorious death: to end the pain. Maybe it isn't **lunacy** after all.

Maybe these things are more complicated than that. Bothering to **ask**, to **find out why** people are the way they are, is how you figure out what life means. There is an **avalanche** of side content in Xenoblade 3, almost **all of which** has little bits of character building thrown in, or a small exploration of the game's themes. If you don't spend the time to complete Colony 11's various quests, you won't unlock Ashera's ascension quest, which means you will **never find out** why she is the way she is.

In laying this all out, I am not implying that **you did not experience Xenoblade Chronicles 3 if you did not do everything**. What I'm saying is that there is an **intentionality** here that terrifies me. You need to **hunt** for quests by eavesdropping on NPCs, setting up a camp, and having a full blown conversation about it with your mates before deciding to **do something** about it. A lot of these people don't know what to do next, don't know how to ask for help, or flat out don't **want** your help. You might gain power with every hero you obtain, but that power comes with a **mountain** of quests that seem **neverending**. Virtually **none** of them feel superfluous, either. Most of them **might as well** be part of any hero's ascension quest, bridging the various colonies together by encouraging them to share resources, or by mixing their wisdom in the case of Zeon and Juniper. They'll take you in unexpected directions. At the risk of sounding hyperbolic, I never left a quest without at least an interesting line of dialogue to chew on and a sense that I had **effected positive change**.

The answer to the meaning of life is up to you to decipher. Party side stories, hero quests, and **entire areas** could be missed if players want to **beeline** for the end. You could live a life so **disinterested** in everyone and everything that you pass all of it up in favor of **cutting immediately** to the root of the problem.

Xenoblade 3 looks you in the eyes and asks you **what you want** out of it. One of your available classes is a **blue mage** analogue called Soul Hacker, where you obtain skills and arts from **every unique monster**, eventually allowing you to create **your ideal class**. As a player who gets a lot of satisfaction from exploring huge areas, and specifically seeking out Unique Monsters to fight, this added reward layer was **tantalizing**. It meant that every Unique Monster transformed into a new skill or art I could tinker with to fight **more** unique monsters.

Soul Hacking stands at the crossroads of a movement in games towards **increased player agency**. I think at least part of the resurgence of the job system in RPGs is thanks to games like Breath of the Wild redefining what player expression looks like. The way you approach completing Xenoblade 3 **says something about who you are**. Would you rather look up guides to brave the challenge mode, or do you want to figure out how to break the game **on your own**? Are you **overwhelmed** by the time you'll have to spend in menus **tinkering** with your loadouts, unlocking tool after tool after tool to get lost in? Or does this **excite you**? Do you care about the world enough to do all the side quests and soak in **every little bit** of Aionios? Or do you simply want to see the main story and be done with it?

There can't really be a **wrong answer**. Near the end of my most recent playthrough, I found out that I could open with Ghondor, then follow up with a busted Aerial Slash/Air Slash fusion art on Noah, and it would complete the order. That meant both Noah and Ghondor would reactivate, letting them go again for the next order. I could lower the enemy's defense with Taion, use Mio to set up a Noah Ouroboros transformation, and then finish out with their fusion. It does take a little bit of luck to set this up perfectly, but I'm able to throw out this Fusion combo every single order regardless, and it gets exponentially more powerful each time. Quick, safe, and easy strat I came up with on my own.

I could make this even better by swapping classes around a little bit, but I wanted to be all poetic and rock up on Origin with my upgraded base classes. It was also a strategy I stumbled upon by myself, rather than whatever is considered optimal. You have **so many of these** paths that any given battle will play out completely differently depending on your approach.

Nothing and everything is **correct**. It's all down to **the choices you make** in a world **without the freedom to choose**.

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The Weight of Legacy

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Xenoblade Chronicles 3 is about the intersection of equal and opposite forces. Annihilation events, interlinking, fusion arts, relationships, locations, and even the concept of Moebius as a Jungian Shadow. It is a game about **confrontation**. Burdened by a messy legacy, it must **find itself** amidst the chaos. We live in a world which is keen to capitalize on recurrence: intellectual property, crossovers, callbacks, reboots, and remakes. In a world dominated by the familiar, what does it mean to hold the title of Xenoblade.

Xenoblade Chronicles 2 was a **reflection** of the first in so many ways. They both had a Unique Monster theme, they both had an **emotional cutscene** theme, they both had a **hype you up** cutscene theme. The details differed, but there was a **memetic quality** to it. This made a certain kind of sense upon realizing that its story occurred **in tandem** with the first: two worlds which sprung from **one man**.

3 has chosen the **much more difficult path of following up** these parallel tales. In choosing to move forward, there are **challenging** questions to consider. Xenoblade 1 and 2 were **loosely** connected. How do we **throw them into the blender**? What comes out of that puree? Which game **is more important**? Which set of characters? Which combat system? Which world?

For as similar as the two are, they exist in separate universes that had **definitive** endings. Dredging them up for another adventure risks **diluting** those conclusions. Having us follow **their children** risks **making the world feel smaller**. The appeal of Xenoblade is that every game stands on its own. Even with 1 and 2 connected by Klaus, you could play the two games **in any order** like a Final Fantasy. I would guess that **more people** were introduced to Xenoblade through 2 than they were through the first.

To have a similar impact, Xenoblade 3 **also needed** to stand on its own, while being **deeply connected**. Aionios exists **at a crossroads of indecision**. Its premise is a necessary contradiction; **another** memetic Xenoblade. We have a unique monster theme, a sad theme, a hype moment theme. But it goes a step further. Those themes carry **motifs** from 1 and 2. Carrying The Weight Of Life incorporates elements of Engage the Enemy and Counterattack. The Unique Monster theme is once again called You Will Know Our Names.

Rather than following an established tradition, Xenoblade 3 is **calling attention** to it. You'll see Machina, Gormotti, High Entia, and the Indoline. Without a life to live, they're visually distinct skins on sacks of meat. Only fans of the series would even recognize their significance. Places they used to call home are here, arbitrarily smashed together. One might rejoice at the synthesis of Morytha and Makna Forest. To Aionios, it is yet another funeral pyre: remnants of a culture **which might once** have existed.

The still corpse of Uraya slumbers in the distance. Rather than an arrestingly beautiful natural wonder, you will find The Ether Mines of Bionis, a pointless callback that has reduced the titan to a hollow rock. The floating reefs that surround Keves Castle resemble Eryth Sea, made out of

the lifeless chunks of Mor Ardain. Alcamoth is all that remains, with a metallic blue hue protected by lifeless robots resembling the Mechon: an irony no one **but fans of Xenoblade** would ever pick up on.

One could imagine the spot where Mor Ardain stood before it was annihilated. Shame that there's not a soul alive to mourn its loss. After all, this is a world with a maximum lifespan of ten years. Those days are spent training and warring until you die. It hardly matters where that final sun shines.

Xenoblade 3 **refuses to celebrate** what should be a momentous crossover. Aionios, this **sarcophagus of nostalgia**, is a distortion we are not meant to **save** like 1 and 2. We are here to **destroy it**. In so doing, it says **something** about our reliance on the past and for our **future** to reflect it; our need for everything to connect into a neat and tidy continuity; our desire to **never let go**.

Online discussion surrounding 3 has a tendency to involve the act of **completing the puzzle**, which has been a source of **consternation** as it is not keen to provide easy answers. The truths of Aionios are doled out at a much **steadier** rate than 1 and 2. There isn't really an **endgame plot twist exposition party** in quite the same way, partly because Aionios is **a fake world**.

We are plagued by puzzle pieces that don't fully connect. How did Shulk and Rex get into Aionios? What is the significance of Lucky Seven? Why is the Pneuma core inside Matthew's gloves, and also probably Noah's blade? Is N's sword Malos?

None of these questions matter to me in the literal sense. All of them are concerned with the **mechanics** of Aionios, but **mechanics** were never quite **the reason** I became enamored with the worlds of 1 and 2. The emotional core of those stories was about cycles of violence and never giving up on a seemingly doomed future. What makes the Bionis and Mechonis one of my favorite fictional settings is **the story that takes place on their backs**; that they symbolize an **eternal battle of vengeance**. I am not so concerned with **how** Klaus managed to create it, as much as I am with the vestiges of his ego; his **vision of the world**.

Riku is a character with many mysteries. He's seemingly one of the most important entities in this world, working directly with Melia, responsible for Lucky Seven, and just so happens to **always be around** for important events. Everyone **absolutely refuses** to ever outright state **what the hell his deal is**. Many have wondered about it.

Really, the answer is that he's just **a Nopon** working with the Xenoblade 1 cast to oppose Z. That's it. Whether he's in the Riki family line or not **doesn't really matter**. What matters **to me** is that his character is made all the more **interesting** because he plays the part of a fool. It makes his relationship with Manana so much more precious. It also **reframes** his words to Noah as **sage advice** once you realize how long he's lived. He'd been waiting for someone to **break Aionios'** cycle, and he's **the reason** Noah unlocks The Sword of Origin. There's no **backstory** they could have given to Riku that would make me love this little fiend more than I already do.

They never **outright confirm** that Mio is Rex and Nia's child... but come on now. They did everything **but** spell it out. More importantly: the answer to that question **has no bearing on who Mio is**. The character we follow is born of Aionios. She has no **true** connection to these people. That's part of what makes it so dystopian. It's why Shulk and Rex keep **their** children at arm's length, because **they aren't really their children**. Glimmer and Nikol **have no concept of what a parent even is**. It **could** be explained to them, but it wouldn't make a difference. It's what's so **tragic** about it all.

Shulk and Rex **never got to see their children grow up**. Aionios robbed them of that. We follow the story of the people caught up in this oppressive system. Shulk, Rex, Nia, and Melia are here to guide them, but ultimately: Matthew, Noah, Mio, and the rest are the ones who decide that Aionios must end. Bleak as it might be, this **is** their world. For Melia and the rest to end it themselves would disregard the agency of those **born into it**. That's not in their nature. It would betray one of the trilogy's **core themes** of entrusting the future to the young.

Just as Shulk and Rex both got to decide their own futures: Noah and Mio deserve a chance to do the same, without being **bogged down** by who their parents are or what's **expected** of them. That's part of the wisdom Riku was attempting to endow, and it's probably why he was so **hands off**. Noah might have Lucky Seven, and according to the art book **Fiora** is in there, but that also **doesn't matter**. Lucky Seven is a chunk of Origin metal. The Sword of Origin **comes from within**. Once Noah and Mio decide that **everything must end**, they draw the sword during their Interlink. This is the story of **Ouroboros**: a will passed down for **generations**, but a decision made by the children of the present.

In that way, Xenoblade 3 is not about wholly **abandoning the past**. Future Redeemed is an explosion of fanservice, the likes of which **some** may have expected from the base game. Shulk and Rex are main characters, along with their children and nonbinary Alvis. Your home base is Colony 9 from the first game, and you end the adventure fighting **Evil Alvis** at the top of Prison Island, who gets his own remix of Zanza's boss suite.

Shulk has taken after Dunban, having lost an arm, welding his Monado in the other. He uses Blossom Dance. At one point he says he's not really feeling it. Rex is a fusion between Zeke and Vandham, the **spitting image** of his mentors. He wields **two giant swords** he can use to **infinitely damage cancel again**.

Glimmer and Nikol only really exist to show that these two chads slept in warm beds with their wives. A is **just fem Alvis** fit with the ability to see the future. The most prominent side characters are related to Reyn, Sharla, Zeke, and Pandoria. There is an impulse within me to call this Avengers-level junk food; the kind of sequel story you'd see in a fanfiction. Look at all these **things you remember**. Walking into Colony 9 again **sent me back in time**. I am not immune to its charms, and on some level: these are the base emotions it is pandering to.

Still, to call it a bundle of fanservice **with no purpose** wouldn't sit right with me. Consistent with the base game, Colony 9 is back: but it's decrepit. Refugees must live in tents as the buildings are all falling apart. Dunban's house is in a state of disrepair. The anti-air battery is about ready to fall off a cliff. **It is** the Colony 9 I remember, but it also **isn't**. Humans haven't **lived here** for god knows how long. While there is a **warmth** to exploring it again, there is an inescapable chill the longer you stick around.

In being an expansion, it has a **radically** smaller scope and cast. Outside of customizing their equipment and Chain Attack orders: these characters are exactly how they appear. You have no ability to make them anything more, and can only explore a few areas. Colony 9 was the first leg of a colossal adventure in the first game. Now, it is the home base for one of its most **restricted**. There is a **base pleasure** in upgrading Rex to max, unlocking arts canceling, and then letting him beyblade through the whole expansion.

It also meant that I basically never wanted to play as anyone else. Why would I when I can spam Double Spinning Edge? Since every character has the same set of arts and Unity Combos, and the combos have been streamlined to work off of Launch, you can effectively chain combos back to back with very little consequence. Do a few side quests, explore a little, and you unlock the keys to the Ferrari... just be prepared to drive **only this car** on a single highway for the rest of your life.

I mean hey, it **is** a cool fucking car, isn't it?

Alpha and his fogbeasts are an opposite extreme to Z and Moebius. Where Z clings to the past, unable to step into an uncertain future: Alpha has an **extremely narrow** vision of the future which **only** includes the members of The City. He has judged the two worlds, and the hellscape they created through Z, as deserving to be erased. He would ferry those **who resist** Aionios into a world **outside** of it: destroying Aionios and its soldiers in the process. Na'el is the perfect avatar for Alpha, as she **detests** Aionios' endless war and would rather escape it with her family than continue to fight. Curiously, Alpha uses these intense emotions to amplify its own power, similar to Moebius **gorging** on the drama of their soldiers' lives.

In blindly marching towards the future, no one would be able to **learn from the past**. That's why the soldiers of Keves and Agnus don't know any better. They have no history to learn from. No one was able to teach them **how to live**. In her grief, Na'el simply wishes to create **another** Aionios. She takes the party to the world **before** Klaus' experiment. Isn't it beautiful? She can play the piano. There's no war. Only peace and happiness. For those in the know, of course, an irony hangs in the air. We saw how this story ended.

There's a quote from executive director Tetsuya Takahashi that's been on my mind ever since I first read it.

"Carrying the Weight of Life": A track that takes its cues from "Engage the Enemy" in the first "Xenoblade"; There was something about it that didn't sit right with me. I should say

beforehand, the quality of the music itself is very high; I am always impressed by Hiramatsu's passion for writing music. It's undoubtedly one of the best songs. In addition, there's no doubt that this is what users are looking for. And yet, this is what didn't sit well with me...

A game that cannot serve its fans has no future. A game that doesn't take on new challenges also has no future. Striking this balance is very difficult, and I still don't have a clear solution. You just have to do it through trial and error, each time. As a result, "Carrying the Weight of Life" only plays twice in the game. This is because the song was only used when it was fitting for the situation, and when it felt suitable to me, personally. It's a compromise between "service" and "goal," but I think it turned out well, for a compromise. I'm sure some wish it was played a little more often, but considering that one of the themes of "Xenoblade 3" is to "not be afraid of change and walk into the future," I think this is as much as you can do."

-Tetsuya Takahashi, OST comments

Tetsuya Takahashi's artistic journey can itself be symbolized by the Ouroboros. I would argue that it's reductive to claim that he and his team have simply been chasing after the shadow of Xenogears for decades... but there is a kernel of truth to it. You can trace back almost all of Xenoblade's ideas to *Perfect Works*, an art book detailing the **grand plan** for Xenogears and its sequels. It was to be a **galactic epic** the likes of which the medium had never attempted.

That never came to be in the form Takahashi envisioned, but that did not deter him from trying again anyway with Xenosaga. *Perfect Works*, then, became a bible: we can bring back many of the same concepts and **try again**. Remake Xenogears. That didn't end up working either. We got three games instead of six; a little closer to *Perfect Works*... but no cigar.

Here we are again. Initially divorced from *Perfect Works*, Xenoblade is **once again** pulling from this now **mythical text**. We find ourselves with another **echo** of Xenogears. Fei and Id, Aveh and Kislev, Grahf and the Wave Existence, the Alpha and the Omega.

How much of the past do we carry with us into the future? A, Shulk, and Rex **sacrifice** themselves at the end of *Future Redeemed* to allow **Ouroboros** to persist into the future. We must leave the past where it is in order to move towards the future, but we need not **forsake it**. Successes and failures are all a piece of humanity's rich tapestry. They are how we learn; our lodestar.

I can't watch my video on the first Xenoblade anymore. If I were to make that video today, it would be **completely different**. In some ways, I don't know if I really did my love for that game justice, but instead of going back and making it again, I would rather move on and write about Xenoblade 3. Put something new into the universe, instead of dwelling on the past.

I have to imagine Takahashi feels a similar way. We're all working with limited time. One day, our ideas will stop flowing. Gotta make the most of that energy while we still have it.

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Mirror of Death

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While everyone in Aionios **must** confront the idea of death, no one's struggles are showcased more clearly than Ouroboros. These six characters **react to life** differently. Sena has always been blind to her own abilities, seeing them as **lesser** than her role model, Mio. She sculpts her life around that idea, losing more and more of herself to a pervasive sense of impostor syndrome. If she could **somehow** grasp that **unattainable brilliance** that Mio exudes, maybe she could be at peace with herself.

Lanz has a similar self-consciousness, but the root of his inferiority complex traces back to his inability to save Joran. In a world of war and loss, the only way to keep his world intact is by becoming someone who can **protect** what's dearest to him. By tying himself **so innately** to this directive, there can **never** be failure without his whole world collapsing. He needs to train for **the rest of his life** to meet the challenges lurking in the darkness, which means **he can never really be enough**.

Taion is trapped in his own mind, carefully pouring over his words before they are spoken. No one can ever **truly** be sure of anything in life. Taion is a brilliant strategist, but he isn't a prophet. He cannot control his enemies no matter how much he tries to understand them. He can't **drive away** the doubt that exists in the back of his mind, dragging him towards indecision. His mind is **a flurry** of thoughts he can never turn off, second guessing **everyone and everything**, including himself.

Eunie puts on a brave front, but inside she is **afraid**. Afraid of Moebius, of fighting, and of **death**. Her role as a medic gives her the power to **fight** death itself, if only **briefly**. She cannot stop **thinking** about the day when it will all be over. She has died once before, so who's to say **it can't happen again**. It drives her to multiple panic attacks, which she **must do everything in her power to hide** so as not to worry anyone.

Mio has **survivor's guilt**. She was much closer to her final term than Miyabi; yet, here she still is. She **needs** to make the most of the time she was given. But how does one do that? What does happiness truly look like? Can it exist within Aionios? Whether she finds the answers or not, the clock will continue ticking as her final day knocks, looming over her like a guillotine.

Noah **hates** conflict. He does not celebrate a battle won. His first priority is to send off the departed. Friend or foe, it does not matter to him. He is **plagued** by the smiles of those he's lost.

He cannot make sense of it all. Of fighting. Of this world. Of life. Something about it is **wrong**, in a way no one but him seems to notice. Why do we fight? Why do we die? What is it all for?

Of everything I have ever struggled with in my life, my fear of death will be here forever. It was, and still is, the easiest way to trigger anxiety attacks. In a world of strife, it feels like I am staring down the barrel no matter where I look, the darkness slowly cutting off all exits.

Most of my anxious thoughts stem from things I have no direct control over. Nuclear war. Natural disasters. Terminal illness. No matter how many times I tell myself that it is irrational to fear that which has not yet arrived at my doorstep, I can't help but worry. People have died by slipping down the stairs, or getting hit by a car that veers onto the sidewalk.

It's hard to get out of the headspace that waking up every day is like rolling a D20, no matter how many statistics I pour over. My brain cannot help but fixate on the end. It has always been that way. Growing up a Catholic, I had an answer to life after death since the beginning. People might die, but if they were good, they'd go to Heaven. It set my heart at ease, and gave me a moral guide map to follow... until it no longer existed. As I learned more and more about the world, how many religions existed, how many arguments against religion existed, and chiefly: how little we actually knew about the world... my safety net was stolen out from under me, and I was left free falling into adulthood.

I suddenly developed phobias. Tornado warnings shook me to my core when they once did not, because now I thought of death as the end. Stepping onto a plane freaked me out, since if we crashed it would be the end. They were thoughts I might have briefly pondered when I was religious, but now: they were like tumors attached to my brain. I could not get rid of them. I would think about the nature of existence every day. I would lose sleep wondering what might happen the next day. I would tell myself that I need to enjoy every second of my mortal life while I still had it, and in the same breath I would lose myself in thought spirals about the various ways it might come to an end.

I could not get over the paradox that I, at once, desired immortal life, yet did not want to live **forever**.

Xenoblade 3 is a **painful mirror**. In all of these characters, I see myself. I am indecisive. I am insecure. I am anxious. I am regretful. I am an impostor. I do find myself wishing time could stop. I find myself wishing that it could last forever. I find myself desiring **more**. One could argue these feelings are what **bring us together**, as was the case with Ouroboros.

Every moment, every quest, and every battle feeds back into at least one member of the party, bringing them closer to life's meaning. So many tender scenes between our unlikely team. Thrust together by fate, it takes a long time for anyone to get along. Eunie and Taion are at each other's throats. Lanz refuses to open up to anyone. Sena basically goes along with whatever Mio wants.

Early game interactions feel surprisingly hostile, before everyone settles in and gets a little more comfortable. Taion wordlessly understands what Eunie's going through during her panic attack, brewing up some tea to help her through the pain. He is an indispensable ally during their fight at Keves Castle. Likewise, Eunie cuts through Taion's indecisive noise, encouraging him to trust his gut and stop dwelling on his regrets. It's a slow burn, this relationship, filled out by side quests and campfire chats.

Every pair, however unlikely, gets at least one major scene dedicated to them. Heart to hearts no longer exist, but their presence is felt everywhere. While sitting at campfires, the party is able to discuss random topics, some of which lead to quests, and some of which lead to nothing in particular. My heart warms with each new interaction. We go from a group hell bent on killing each other into one of the strongest family units I have ever seen. Each of them are the answer to each other's woes. You get the sense that, through their bond, they have each found a reason to die. Maybe there's something worth protecting in this world after all.

The closer they all get, though: the more they have to lose. Mio's homecoming is fueled by how torn up everyone is. It eats away at my soul watching Noah bloody his knuckles trying to escape their prison. It tears me up that they start to bicker again, questioning what it was all for. Eventually, all of them can't help but join in Noah's rebellion, throwing themselves at the bars in a futile attempt to change an ironclad fate.

Rather than an Egil, a Jin, a Malos: the chief obstacle in Noah's path... is himself. Noah's inability to cope with the loss of Mio drives him to perpetuate the system he once thought to end. He objectifies her in this instance, overriding her own desires in order to spend eternity with her.

It's cathartic to watch him break down after the tables have turned; the facade he built for himself crumbling to dust. But that's... Noah, right? I can't bring myself to hate N. Would you not give anything to see someone you loved again? Presented with an identical choice... would you not succumb?

It's easy to hate Moebius when you first learn about them. Part of their inspiration is the billionaire class currently dead set on destroying our planet and running the United States into the ground. There is no question in my mind that they should not hold the reigns of power. Ousting them from Origin was a no-brainer, but there's another aspect of Moebius that we are asked to accept.

Moebius is not an external force hell bent on ruining people's lives, per say. They are born from humanity's collective fear of the unknown, and their desire to remain **in control**. When I look at N, I cannot help but see part of myself, just as Noah sees a part of himself. My own N would do anything to live. It is an intensely selfish side of me that I constantly battle with. Someone who wants to run from what's happening to the world; someone who would be okay with whatever happens as long as I get to live a full life.

I hate that this is a part of me. I am ashamed that I have these impulses. But he will always be there. I will never be rid of him. I simply have to ignore those impulses. I have to remind myself that, by making those kinds of selfish choices, I will not truly be living.

Xenoblade Chronicles 3 asks you to accept that this fear is natural. You **must** let yourself **feel it**. These two worlds, rent asunder by a man who thought himself above life, yearned to be whole again, wiping each other out in the process. Though the smartest minds of both worlds were able to create Origin, to hopefully save everyone: there was no guarantee that this would work.

No matter how small, that doubt birthed Aionios; sent these two worlds down a horrifying path where no one could choose. Fear is a prison. It can take over our lives in an instant. Acting on that fear is destructive. It drags everyone down into the mud with you, where you can do nothing but writhe in agony.

Spend your days locked in eternal worry, and before you know it: tomorrow becomes yesterday. The spark flickers and fades.

It's over.

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Elegy of Life

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Music has always been an emotional communicator for Xenoblade. You Will Know Our Names engenders an intense panic or excitement depending on who you ask. That has always been its power: become the driving force for entire scenes, capture the essence of every location, and instill a sense of perseverance through the toughest of scraps.

Yet, even in a series where sound is so important, Xenoblade 3 manages to narrow this focus. Our two main characters are musicians. Their music is a constant in a sea of fog. When someone dies, or you discover a pile of corpses, the Off-Seer tune is sure to follow. You hear Noah and Mio's music a lot, echoed across the soundtrack as its most prominent leitmotif.

Noah initially bears his Off-Seer cross alone. There's something missing from his Off-Seer song; an indescribable emptiness dances on the wind. Where Eunie, Lanz, and the rest celebrate another battle won: Noah stands apart. He fought to survive. He's even pretty good at it. But he takes no joy in it. He does not see off the departed because it's his job. He does it because he feels that it is right.

An Off-Seer is an artist. They have been ordered to see off the dead, but as we see through Crys' mentorship: Noah's song is his own. The flute is the medium through which he communicates feelings even he doesn't completely understand. It's how he makes sense of the

bleak world in front of him. He's so in tune with this calling that he recognizes the Agnian Off-Seer melody through the way Mio carries herself in battle. Music is the shared language bridging their feelings.

Noah and Mio's Off-Seer tunes evolve after they play together. Becoming Ouroboros is more than physical strength. Their disparate melodies in concert is soothing. It's uplifting. It's inspiring. Their union creates A Life Sent On. You can hear this fusion in The Exhausted Victorious, The Speechless Defeated. It's a slower, incomplete rendition, underscoring the void of meaning present after the first battle.

Carrying the Weight of Life's crescendo chooses to highlight the flute as its most prominent instrument. Mio's flute is part of the M variation on the Moebius battle theme to show that our M is in there. She may be able to lie with her words, but she cannot hide behind her music. Noah and N has Noah's Off-Seer Tune, all by its lonesome as N sinks further into his role as Moebius.

Xenoblade 3's commitment to its musical storytelling is fierce. They built replicas of Noah and Mio's flutes to use in the songs, each crafted with their different pitches in mind so you would be able to identify who's playing in any given song.

Yzana Plains has a ticking clock, accompanied by strings that cut in and out, the sound of the wind, and ominous chanting. It's foreboding, laying bare the true nature of this world of stopped time. Alfeto Valley begins building a little bit. It introduces the flute, with a much more sweeping set of strings. It's still a rather depressing mood, but this is also the birthplace of Ouroboros: the bridge between our party's stunted understanding of the world, and an explosion of freedom.

3 really takes its time to build to its Gaur Plain moment. It waits until after the party is well and truly on their own, free to make a real choice. Aionios might still be a dystopian nightmare, but Ouroboros is committed to changing that, even if they don't recognize it themselves yet. Music has a knack for speaking to our true feelings, often before our minds catch up. Millick Meadows stands as the only truly epic area theme this time. Eagus Wilderness and Dannagh Desert lack the pulse of life present in previous games.

They're softer melodies, unafraid to embrace a more naturalistic sound, blending into their environments like the wind. In any other world, Erythia Sea would be a place I would never want to leave. It is gargantuan, with so much to explore. The treasure of the seven can be found here, you get pirate themed battle music, and a whole ship with which to simply roam. You take to the high seas, romance in your heart; yet, the music sounds like it's mourning something. It's sad. Lifeless. Empty.

Every minute spent in Aionios is akin to a funeral march. Day themes are subdued; night themes might as well be background noise. There is a stillness to this world frozen in place. Battle serves as a disruption; a sudden jolt reminding you of your mortality. Tactical Action is heavy. You hear it during the game's tutorial battle against Agnus. Noah's squad are putting their lives on the line. It's kill or be killed in this world. One wrong move and it's over. At the end of it

all, there are truly no victors. This theme has a reprise within Origin, as you fight Moebius, coursing through the metal that surrounds you. It's a triumphant rendition, now that your party understands fully why they need to fight.

Moebius' battle theme is a chaotic maelstrom of noise. You hear a disorganized choir of different Moebius, no doubt watching your struggle, eager to consume your life force. Loud drum beats accentuate the terror, as if you're squaring up against the world itself. As we later learn, you are.

The more Moebius you fight, the more it serves to contrast the regular battle themes. Over time, you realize that fighting is not inherently bad. Felling Monsters can be good if you are protecting colonies or saving lives. It can even be thrilling when a fight gets meaty enough for Lanz. This is what living is all about, a drive Moebius is built to oppose. I do not think it's a coincidence that the regular battle themes incorporate Noah and Mio's flutes. The battles they fight as Ouroboros mean something. Their answer to the meaning of life is yet another song they create with their found family.

To embrace the happiness of life, of course, is also to encounter sorrow. The Kevesi Homecoming theme is presented as triumphant. We don't yet understand the sorrow behind Crys' melody, so all we see is the divine act of a soldier having served dutifully, returning to their queen. The track has a sense of honor and dignity to it on first blush: it's an aspiration every soldier holds. Perhaps it forms the foundation for what little meaning they can hold in their tiny hands.

As we learn more and more about Aionios, these aspirations float away. The queens are a sham, so where do these people go? Nowhere. After being shown the beauty and fragility of life within the City; after finally realizing how much more there can be to a life well lived... Mio's homecoming fast approaches. We get... a very different mood for the Agnian Homecoming.

It's a slow build. Torturous, even. Our party is bound, forced to watch someone they love perish.

And then the flutes kick in. This time, they're Agnian. The song Mio used to send off others... is now present for her final moments.

It's hopeless to resist. Our party was soundly defeated by N.

We must sit and watch as Mio's motes fly into the sky.

A life sent on...

Having played the game, I know that this isn't our Mio. But I'll also never be able to go through this without wailing. When I hear those flutes, I remember feeling like we were losing Mio. I thought I was going through my own Aerith moment, except instead of a sudden departure, it was an agonizingly slow execution.

I remember those feelings. I remember those tears. I will never forget them. I can't listen to this song without my heart aching. It's hard to even listen to A Life Sent On without remembering it, and that plays almost all the time. Death is simply inescapable.

Xenoblade 3 positions **art** as humanity's greatest weapon against tyranny. While playing this game is not **direct action**: it can **inspire change**. There's a reason Nazi's burned books. There's a reason you can't buy adult video games anymore. Fascists, or other authoritarian entities, **recognize the power of self-expression**. Art is the medium through which we explore the deepest parts of ourselves. With every game played, movie watched, book read, or song listened to: I have come out of them a more empathetic human being. I have come out of them a **fuller individual**. In a world founded upon **destruction**, creation ends up being the most powerful form of rebellion.

Create something. Doesn't matter what it is. Doesn't matter who it's for. Create something that is yours. Share it or don't. But right now: we need more people willing to create, rather than destroy. And I do mean **people**. Behind the best game you've ever played, or the worst: there are human beings **trying to communicate with you**. No matter how hard companies continue to chase capitalism's promise of endless profit: AI cannot steal this power from us. **They cannot steal this power from us.**

I suppose that's what makes Z such a brilliant villain for this story. An entity who spends **the whole game** watching **our struggles** on the main stage. Our lives are the art that sustains them, and they would have that entertainment **last forever** with no care paid to the **people suffering to fill that screen**.

Z is **pitiful**. They make **faustian deals** to fill out Moebius' ranks, believing that it is **within human nature** to betray one's purported principles. Why not create a world in which **no one has to carry the burden of choice? Where no one has to struggle or die? Where no one is burdened to create?** There is a way to view their actions as **benevolent**. They are simply here to **take away your pain**. They would **fill the void of existence** with the promise of forever.

Z does not **exist** in the traditional sense. They are not a **person** with desires or motivations. They are **the world's uncertainty given form**. Just as N is Noah, Z is **an impulse that resides within every soul**. Z is as ugly as the **darkest parts of your heart**. Their death throes are childish and incoherent. Their stated **motivation** of everything "amusing them" is a front to distract from the fact that **they have no purpose**.

They are **afraid**; afraid of losing control; afraid of what might come next; afraid of what people might create; afraid of **the end**. They cannot acknowledge that fear or the facade would crumble. **Embracing** fear is the final step towards conquering it.

It is **hard**. Z's boss theme **overpowers everything**. It plays over **the chain attack music**. They want you to know that **they will not let go**, no matter **what**. As Ouroboros, you flatten this

notion over and over and over again. Your powers are sealed, you're separated from your friends, but at every turn: you cut through the fog until Melia and Nia come in for the final assist.

Through all the noise, the fatalistic voice lines, and Z's **absolute refusal to give up** in Xenoblade's **longest and grandest final boss battle**: you respond in the only way you know how. Like every tough battle before it, you hover your thumb over that plus button, lock it into place, and hear that **familiar tune**.

This is your anthem. Every tough battle **ends with this**. You drown out the whining. You tell it to **get fucked**. It can't own you anymore. It's your story now.

Life's scary? Too bad. It's here.

Not sure what will happen tomorrow? Oh well: tomorrow knocks.

Wish that time would simply stop? It will not. The Earth spins.

You **must live**. It isn't fair. But **it is life**. Get the hell out of your fantasy land **and truly live for the present**, hand in hand **with the people who give it meaning**.

Sing your song of life. Pour all of yourself into it. Let it ring out for the whole world to hear, and in defiance of all that would see you **dead and buried**. Stare into the face of stagnation and **dare to move forward**.

That is what it means **to carry the weight of life**.

Xenoblade Chronicles 3 is a heavy weight to carry. Though it's caked in the pleasantries of its predecessors, and in constant conversation with them: it is a touch **darker**. Aionios is **tragic**. Life and death hold no meaning in its vision of forever. Its people seek purpose **in the face of a harrowing** dystopia. We've still got Nopon, we've got characters spamming their funny voice lines, and we have a gloriously broken set of systems to play around with. This is unmistakably Xenoblade.

Yet, there is a pervasive sense of **pain** orbiting it. Since its release three years ago, it's left me with a wound that I can't help but scratch. The questions it asks are at the heart of anxieties which **freeze my own world in place**. My face haunts the corridors of this digital nightmare, and in writing about it: I must force myself to confront it once more.

This is an exploration of philosophy, of music, of pain, of meaning, of death, and of life. It is the end and the beginning. The Alpha and the Omega.

Above all: it is Xenoblade Chronicles 3, a game that is **etched into my soul**.