



EDITOR'S  
AWARD  
PLAY

# Shin Megami Tensei V: Vengeance

A delightfully devilish refresh



INFO

**FORMAT** PS5  
(reviewed) PS4  
**PRICE** £54.99  
**ETA** Out now  
**PUB** Sega  
**DEV** Atlus  
**PLAYERS** 1  
**LENGTH** 50-60 hrs  
per playthrough  
**ACCESSIBILITY**  
Subtitles; auto-  
battle; casual/  
safety difficulties;  
numerous quality  
of life options; can  
save anywhere



**B**eginning in the back of a Tokyo school classroom, you meet your classmates before heading home to your dorm, navigating an overworld of urban streets as a revolving cursor pointer. It's comfortable bread-and-butter for the series, if wheat were Persona and milk old-school SMT. It's a cheeky setup that positions things just right for a picnic blanket rug-pull, sending that sandwich flying and opening up those slices to a whole new realm: SMT goes open world. And it's really good.

Everything breaks bad when a detour home under an old bridge hurls you through the veil barely holding your reality together. You come outside into an unfamiliar Tokyo, with ruined skyscrapers, sand dunes rolling over the streets, and demons frolicking amid the destruction. The only way you'll survive is by joining hands with a strange being that takes the form of a handsome older man, Aogami, to fuse into one being: a Nahobino.

### THRONING UP

The setup remains the same in both of the stories here, the Canon Of Creation (the original storyline, first released on Switch), and the Canon Of Vengeance. Either way, while your allies, enemies, and even the maps you explore change, they all revolve around your mere existence. The Nahobino is an ancient symbol of divinity, one who simply by existing has the right to sit on the throne – empty after an off-screen, apocalyptic assassination – and reshape the world. It's up to you to navigate the battle to claim it, as pantheons clash.

As is often the case in SMT, you ally with demons as much as you smush them into next week, fusing them together and levelling them up to reach new devilish heights. Usually you'd also be doing abstract overworld exploration and grindy, corridor-heavy dungeon crawling – but not in SMT V, which reinvents exploration, enlarging its scope.



Pantheons clash for control. Odin here is head of the Norse one, and a rival of Zeus.





Simply by existing as the Nahobino, you have the right to sit on the throne.



**1** As you'd probably expect, Loki is a master magician, making for a tough fight. Get him on side, however, and he's invaluable for striking weaknesses to gain you extra turns.  
**2** You miss 100% of the hands you don't take – divinity might be a connection away.  
**3** The Vengeance storyline adds more character interactions, and a newcomer, Yoko. But how will her angst pot-stirring affect the rest of the team?

» Dungeoneering is so minimised here that there are only three dungeons in the game (two per route), plus they're all rather breezy. Unravelling Tokyo's open world districts (five in total, four per route) is the bulk of the experience. You see almost every demon encounter coming, with many fiends wandering the map. Sometimes figuring out how to proceed is part of the challenge, as you worm across broken highways and poke around caverns. High-level, hulking foes sometimes stomp around a chosen patch of home turf.

It's wonderfully refreshing; discovering hidden Miman demons and unearthing shortcut grind rails back to checkpoints feels as rewarding as winning a boss battle. Even though each district is split into smaller sections connected by corridors (a hallmark of the game's origins on Switch, no doubt), picking them apart is moreish as you stuff experience points and relics (like manga and oden) into the pockets of your ethereal blue bodysuit.

### FIEND LIST

Side-quests, often centring on demons' quirky personalities, keep things interesting on the road.

While bosses can ruin your day with debuffs and ailments, you too can employ those strategies.

They offer genuinely tangible rewards, like new demon party members (often very powerful for when you find them). They can also teach you a bit about myth and religion – one standout being a series of requests to aid in the familial dispute between African deities Onyankopon and Anansi.

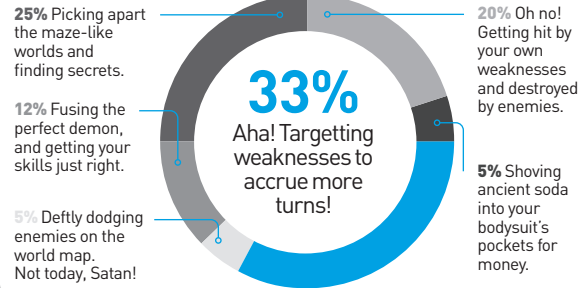
The Nahobino is a bit of a blank slate story- and stats-wise, though the new Essence system helps out with the latter. Essence can be collected from any demon, or the corpses of versions of Aogami that didn't survive the netherworld, and can be used to apply skills to yourself or any demon (elemental resistances can only be applied to yourself) – as long as it's not a skill particular to that specific demon (of which there are many, all boasting cool animations). Every party member is essentially a canvas for you to turn into your weapon of choice, though you'll want to save your rarer Essences for special occasions, naturally.

Persona fans may be surprised to see plus and minus marks next to skills and affinities. These indicate how well-attuned demons are to certain types of skill, boosting power and efficiency. Each can only have so many skills, so it's important to make the most of them. Tough boss battles can be real headaches, but as much as they can ruin your day with debuffs and ailments, you too can employ those strategies. Yes: it's time to paralyse demon kings with your charms.

With lots of stock to supplement your four on-field party members (each of whom can be switched out at will), you'll have assembled a crack team of the best of the best by the time you near the throne. As many boss demons can also be summoned once you've bested them, it's satisfying to bring them on side and build up those relationships, which in turn offer opportunities to learn even more skills and boost stats. This all comes together in the Demon

THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: SMT V: VENGEANCE



FRIENDS & ENEMIES



**YOKO HIROMINE**  
Why was she sealed away, and to what degree does she shape Vengeance?



**GUSTAVE**  
Craves human relics, and will sell you handy items in return for vending machine runs.



**MIYAZU ATSUTA**  
Has caught the interest of the Egyptian pantheon – but to what end?

HOW TO... PICK YOUR ROUTE



You decide at the very beginning of the game which route you want to play – and a tooltip makes it extra clear. Most of Creation's endings can be picked towards the end of the game; Vengeance's are based on your responses in conversation throughout the game.

SECOND OPINION STEALING THIS LOOK



Canon Of Vengeance escapes Creation's first-draft-feeling by offering a whisper more characterisation, plus a new cast member. Story remains a light touch, but what keeps me coming back is something I never thought I'd see in SMT: open world exploration. Moving through this netherworld is surprisingly slick. And then there's Vengeance's banging soundtrack, and sense of style... **Jess Kinghorn**

IS IT BETTER THAN?



Truly close, but with more demons and skills, plus a more open world, SMT V: V beats SMT III: R.



P5 Royal's lengthy story trumps SMT V: V's two. Slick level design makes it tighter than an open world.



Soul Hackers 2 has some neat twists of its own, but it's built on a much safer, blander foundation.



**4** Dodge demons to tackle abscesses directly and earn big upgrades.  
**5** The Jacks' special attacks debuff as well as deal damage. **6** Each Qadištu is a tricky boss with unique mechanics that'll flatten you if you don't watch for them.



Haunt where you can chat with them in quiet moments, slathered in personality, with uniquely off-the-wall dialogue for each demon. Who knew Girimekhala was so funny and down-to-earth? And that Aitvaras would be so outspoken about omelettes?

CREATE OR DESTROY

Even with a unique map and dungeon, each route isn't quite different enough to make a fresh playthrough absolutely essential (though you can carry a lot across through two types of New Game+). Creation is story-light even for an SMT game, though it does allow you the widest choice of endings, and features our fave map: the war-torn Chiyoda.

In comparison Vengeance's new map, Shinagawa, is too sprawling for its own good, and

the new dungeon's gimmick doesn't add much (but they're not warps, at least – finally, an SMT with *no* warp dungeons!). However, new character Yoko is a great addition to the cast as an angsty moraliser, and the way human allies can join you in battle throughout Vengeance gives you some optional tactical training wheels, making for an easier on-ramp (especially for those put off by how much crunchier SMT is than Persona). Vengeance's compelling villains are the stars, though, especially witchy coven Qadištu; these four black magic women are not just strong designs visually, but mechanically too, making mastering them once you're done just as compelling. We can't dispel the urge to get back in the lab and fuse more demons: SMT... it's alive!



Still not as slick as Persona, SMT V revels in crunchtastic strategy with unparalleled customisation. A shift to open world is a genuine fresh hook. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**

