

STEAMGIFTS COMMUNITY'S
DIGITAL GAMING MAGAZINE

SCM

RIOT
CIVIL UNREST

CHANCE
TO WIN!

WE HAPPY FEW

NEWS

Fresh News from the
Gaming World

REVIEWS

Dead Cells
Chernobylite
Resident Evil 2
Aliens: Colonial Marines
Deep Rock Galactic
TOEM
and more!

EXTRA

Screenshot of the Month
Upcoming Games
Hot On-Sales

ISSUE #3

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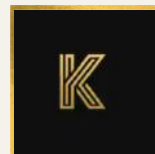
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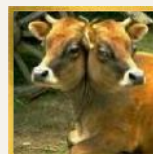
kiir0ichi



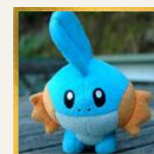
Chris Kutcher



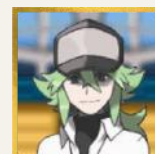
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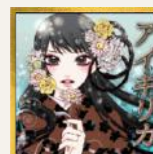
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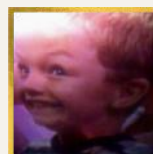
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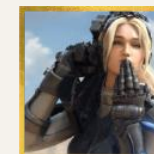
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AiKirika

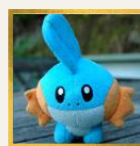


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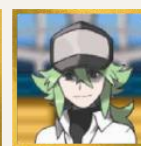


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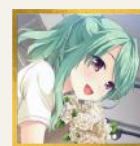
EDITORS



Muddy



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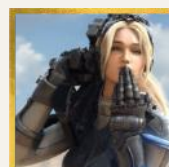


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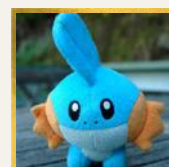
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GRAPHIC DESIGNER



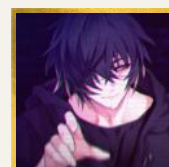
AtomicBlonde

GRAPHIC DESIGNER



Muddy

GRAPHIC ARTIST/DESIGNER



kiir0ichi



SGM WANTS YOU

Do you want free games in exchange for playing and reviewing them? Do you want your opinion to be heard by the world (or at least a few dozen people)? Do you enjoy proofreading and correcting others' writing? Do you have unused keys that you don't want to gather dust in someone's library? Are you a creative person looking to showcase your skills or simply searching for new gaming friends?

If you've answered "YES!" to any of these questions, then SGM WANTS YOU!

The SGM team is currently seeking reviewers, editors, contributors, designers, and anyone interested in participating in any way possible. We do this project solely for fun, so you don't need to be a professional or an expert to join. Even if you're a complete newbie, the team is willing to assist you. You can submit a brief review if you just want to test the waters. Don't worry if you're unsure of your work, our editors will make sure your review looks as good as possible. You can even join the editors team if that's more appealing to you! Or maybe you're the artistic type and want to help design the magazine's pages? Sure! We are willing to experiment with new designers.

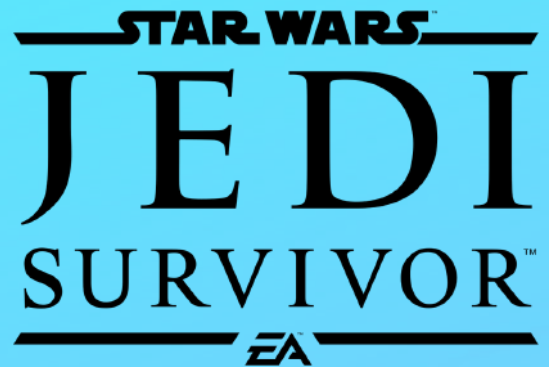
Don't hesitate, leave a comment in any SGM thread (preferably the Central Hub), or join our Discord and share your intentions. We're friendly :)

Thank you for reading and happy gaming!

Star Wars Jedi: Survivor Launches To “Mostly Negative” Steam Reviews

Star Wars Jedi: Survivor is finally out, but for those on PC, you might want to hold off on buying it right now. Already, it has a 'Mostly Negative' score on Steam with 1,023 reviews. Only 29 percent are positive.

The main reason for these negative reviews is performance - some cite CPU issues, inconsistent framerate, infinite loading, and crashes despite using high-end graphics cards and processors. No matter how beefy your rig, Jedi: Survivor is a mess on PC.



This isn't too surprising given that, before Jedi: Survivor even launched, developer Respawn promised "weeks" of fixes, setting off alarm bells immediately. Fans quickly flocked to the quote retweets and comments of the announcement to share their concerns, mostly fearing that the PC port would be in a bad state on launch.

"Game is extremely fun but performs terribly," one Steam user wrote in a 'Not Recommended' review with 1.2 hours on record. "I'm using a 3090 FE and 5700x and getting a consistent 30 fps in some areas. Other areas give me a mostly consistent 45. This is at 1440p. Lowering the settings and using FSR don't make a tiny bit of difference. And it goes up to like 19 GB of VRAM. It's a rad game but definitely wait unless you have 24 GB of VRAM and don't mind playing the game at 30 fps."

Another user simply wrote, "Runs like my ass after taco bell". Poetic.

It doesn't sound like a fun time on PC, but some players on Xbox and PlayStation are sharing similar stories. There are claims of bugs, stuttering, crashes, and other issues similar to the PC port, so regardless of your platform, you might run into problems until the bug fixes roll out.

source: pggamer.com

Redfall has fewer players on Steam than Borderlands 2



The Redfall player count on Steam drops below 1,000 concurrent users just days after launch with PC Game Pass, as the co-op vampire game is beset with problems.

Salvaging Redfall may require a little undead magic from developer Arkane Austin at this point, as the Bethesda-published co-op vampire game sees its player count collapse on Steam just days after launch. Released on May 2, the latest game from the team behind Dishonored and Prey has already dropped to a staggering low amid numerous launch troubles, with the Xbox and PC Game Pass version of Redfall also suffering.

After reaching a peak at launch of just 6,124 concurrent players, the Redfall player count on Steam has continued to diminish, falling below the 1,000 player mark on May 4. For some context, Arkane Austin's previous game Prey peaked at 24,594 concurrent players, while the original Dishonored managed 19,938 at release back in 2012 and sister studio Arkane Lyon hit a respectable 20,094 when Deathloop launched. Even fellow co-op game Borderlands 2, now eleven years old, consistently pulls over 1,500 players.

source: pcgamesn.com

Sony confirms more PC ports are coming

Sony reaffirmed that it will continue to release first-party games on PC, and it's not hard to see why.

The Last of Us Part 1 on PC has not gone well, to put it mildly. Eyebrows Joel was fun for a while but it's been a month now, and Naughty Dog is still struggling to get it right. Sony's overall strategy of putting out more of its first-party games on PC, on the other hand, seems to be going very well indeed.



The sign of Sony's healthy PC strategy emerged from the company's FY2022 financial report, specifically under the "Others" category.

The document defines "Others" as "revenue from peripherals including PlayStationVR and revenue from sales of first-party titles on platforms other than PlayStation consoles." And the numbers over the past two fiscal years are pretty remarkable.

Fiscal year 2021 was fairly flat (all numbers are in millions of yen, and the USD conversions are at today's yen-to-dollar ratio):

- Q1 FY21 - ¥47,161 (\$385.8 million)
- Q2 FY21 - ¥41,356 (\$303.2 million)
- Q3 FY21 - ¥47,351 (\$347.2 million)
- Q4 FY21 - ¥51,702 (\$379.1 million)

2022 was a different story, however, and ended up almost doubling the sales of 2021:

- Q1 FY22 - ¥60,478 (\$443.6 million)
- Q2 FY22 - ¥54,508 (\$399.8 million)
- Q3 FY22 - ¥82,031 (\$601.7 million)
- Q4 FY22 - ¥142,900 (\$1.048 billion)

It's impossible to say exactly how much of the jump can be attributed directly to PC game sales. "Peripherals" covers a lot of ground including devices like controllers, and the PSVR2 released on February 22, right in the middle of Sony's fourth quarter: Whether or not it was a sales success seems to be a matter of some debate, but even at the low end of estimates, it accounted for a hefty chunk of change.

But while we can't extract PC game releases specifically from that category, there's no doubt that it was a very big year for Sony on the PC. Sony's FY2022 releases on Steam include Marvel's Spider-Man Remastered, Sackboy: A Big Adventure, Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales, Returnal, and The Last of Us Part 1. That's a beefy lineup by any measure. (For the record, I have not forgotten God of War — it came to PC in January 2022, making it an FY21 release.)

Riot

-- CIVIL UNREST --

Riot: Civil Unrest is the perfect game for anyone who's ever wanted to be a part of a chaotic mob without actually getting arrested. You can choose to join the protestors or enforce the law. However, some players have complained that playing as the police is more challenging. Let's be honest tho, who wants to play as the police when you can set cars on fire?

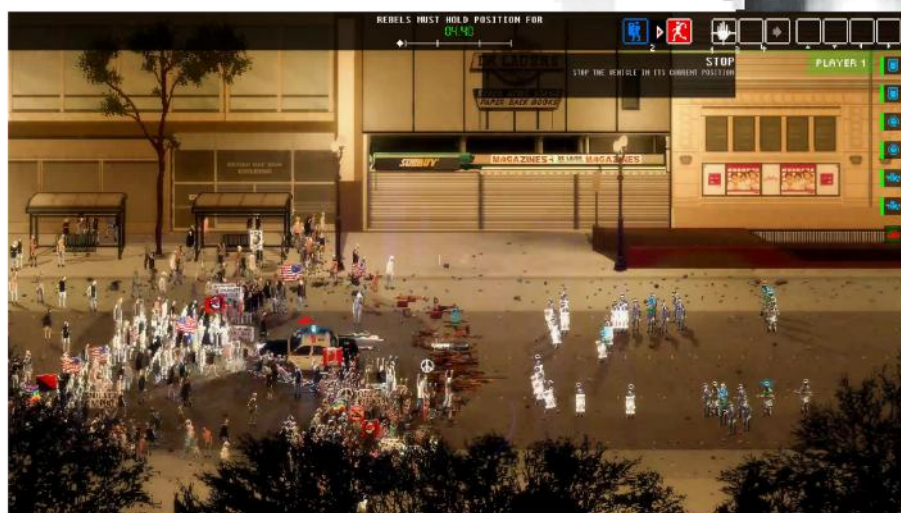
The only downside is that we have only 15 copies of the game to give away. So, if you want to experience the thrill of being a part of a rioting mob, you'll have to be lucky enough to win! Otherwise, you'll be stuck on the sidelines while everyone else is having all the fun.

Overall, if you're looking for a game that lets you unleash your inner rebel and stick it to the man (albeit virtually), Riot: Civil Unrest is definitely worth a try. Just make sure you don't accidentally start a real riot in the process.



9 out of 10 people enjoy a group beating.

AtomicBlondz



Picture from the PS4 launch day.

DEEP ROCK

GALACTIC

DANGER. DARKNESS. DWARVES.

INTRODUCTION

As “Deep Rock Galactic” (further referred to as “DRG”) is a deep game with almost infinite content, in which you can have hundreds or thousands of hours, I want to start the review by informing you that I only have 20 hours played as of the moment of writing this review. Some might say I’ve only scratched the shield surface of the game with my dwarven pickaxe (short kings, assemble!).

Why did I choose to review this game? First of all, I’ve heard it’s the favorite game of one of my favorite content creators, Alok Kanojia, aka Dr. K. (#ad). I immediately thought of that as I saw the giveaway in the SGM group. Then I watched the trailers, where the game was described as an FPS in which you mainly mine minerals and blow up aliens. Minecraft and Counter-Strike hold the top positions in my favorite games list, so I thought it was a match made in heaven.

By the way, when starting DRG via Steam, you have multiple launch options: you can play the current version of the game, the 2018 Legacy Edition, the DirectX 12 or DirectX 11 version, and there’s also a Safe Mode available. It was a pleasant surprise for me, a low-budget PC user, because you can sacrifice the visual improvements

the game has developed over the years for a higher and more stable performance instead. I’m using ancient tech, but for the most part I got the game running at 60 FPS, so be not afraid; it’s very friendly to older machines.

I honestly preferred the Legacy Edition because it had less visual clutter and looked “cleaner,” but I still played the default modern version as that is the version most of our readers will experience.



View from the spaceship

TUTORIAL

How does the game welcome a new player? Gladly, with a tutorial mission! You start the game as a dwarf who's employed by a huge mining corporation, and your job is to risk your life collecting valuable minerals in the darkest caves imaginable on some distant Thirty Third World planet of the Outer Rim, swarming with hostile creatures. You find yourself in a drop capsule, rapidly moving downward until it smashes into the ground and a tech support guy teaches you the ropes: how to use your tools and weapons, gather materials, navigate the landscape, and escape aliens when you're finished with your objectives. Also, you have droids to help you out with your missions: the M.U.L.E., which is a boxy machine that lets you deposit resources into itself and follows you anywhere you go, and Bosco, the drone that will help you mine and shoot aliens. It can also revive you, but Bosco is only available when you play your missions solo; in co-op mode, you'll only have your mule-bot. It felt like real-life job training because it was rushed, easy, and left out many details, making your everyday work miserable later.



A warm welcome

CLASSES

You can also choose your class. There are 4 playable classes in the game: Gunner, Driller, Engineer, and Scout. The differences between classes are mainly in the equipment they can use; for example, as the Gunner, you have a minigun and your job is to gun down waves of monsters, while the Driller has... well... titanium drills, and their job on the team would be to drill through tunnels and obstacles. Very self-explanatory. I tried them all, but in the end I stuck with the Gunner class because I mainly shot space bugs in my playthrough. Now you might be wondering, "Can you change your class on the fly?" Yes, you can! Before every mission, you can choose any class you wish at the special "character selection" terminal. You will have to give up all the advantages you accumulated with the other classes, though, because you can also upgrade your character and equipment between missions, and to do that you will need experience points. Your Gunner level and Driller level are two separate things, so the game rewards you for being proficient in one class as opposed to being a jack of all trades.



Available classes



Bosco, your best friend, when you play alone.

THE SPACE RIG

What else can you do between missions? After you complete a mission, you're sent to your own "bay".

Here you have (from left to right) the "funny messages" terminal, the "claim perk points and upgrade your perks" terminal, the aforementioned "character selection" terminal, and a "TL:DR" terminal (aka the "Miner's manual"). To be honest, it is a very confusing experience after you've just completed your tutorial mission because, after you familiarize yourself with these machines and menus (or not), you enter the main lobby, which has many more screens to explore.



The Bay



I don't know about you, but I felt so lost. I wanted to help you navigate through this whole mess, at least a little bit, so I made this map using in-game visuals and my artistic creativity (the yellow text):



What's next? You go to a mission terminal and choose your first mission, then go to a drop pod, which will transport you to your randomly generated mission site. You'll accomplish your mission's prime objective (for example, collect 100 shiny blue ores), call in an escape pod (it was me, drop pod!), and go back home. Then you'll check if you have resources to upgrade your equipment or if you have cosmetics you can unlock (pickaxe skins, drone skins, dwarf skins, weapon skins, etc.) and choose your next mission. Rinse and repeat. That's it. This is your game plan in a nutshell, straightforward like chess, at least for the first 20 hours, as I haven't played any further.

THE MISSIONS

Most of your in-game time is spent in missions. Thankfully, there are many types of missions to shake things up: mining expeditions, egg hunts, on-site refining, salvage operations, point extraction, escort duty, and elimination.

I managed to experience them all before the review, but there's a possibility there are more types of missions to be unlocked later. Also, the game has DLCs and mods available with even more content to mine. I checked the modding tab, and it's mostly quality of life mods, mods to make the game easier and harder, and mods to make the game funnier

Surprisingly, there were no anime girls or NSFW mods in the "trending" section. Does that mean the community is too cultured or too uncultured? That's for you to decide.

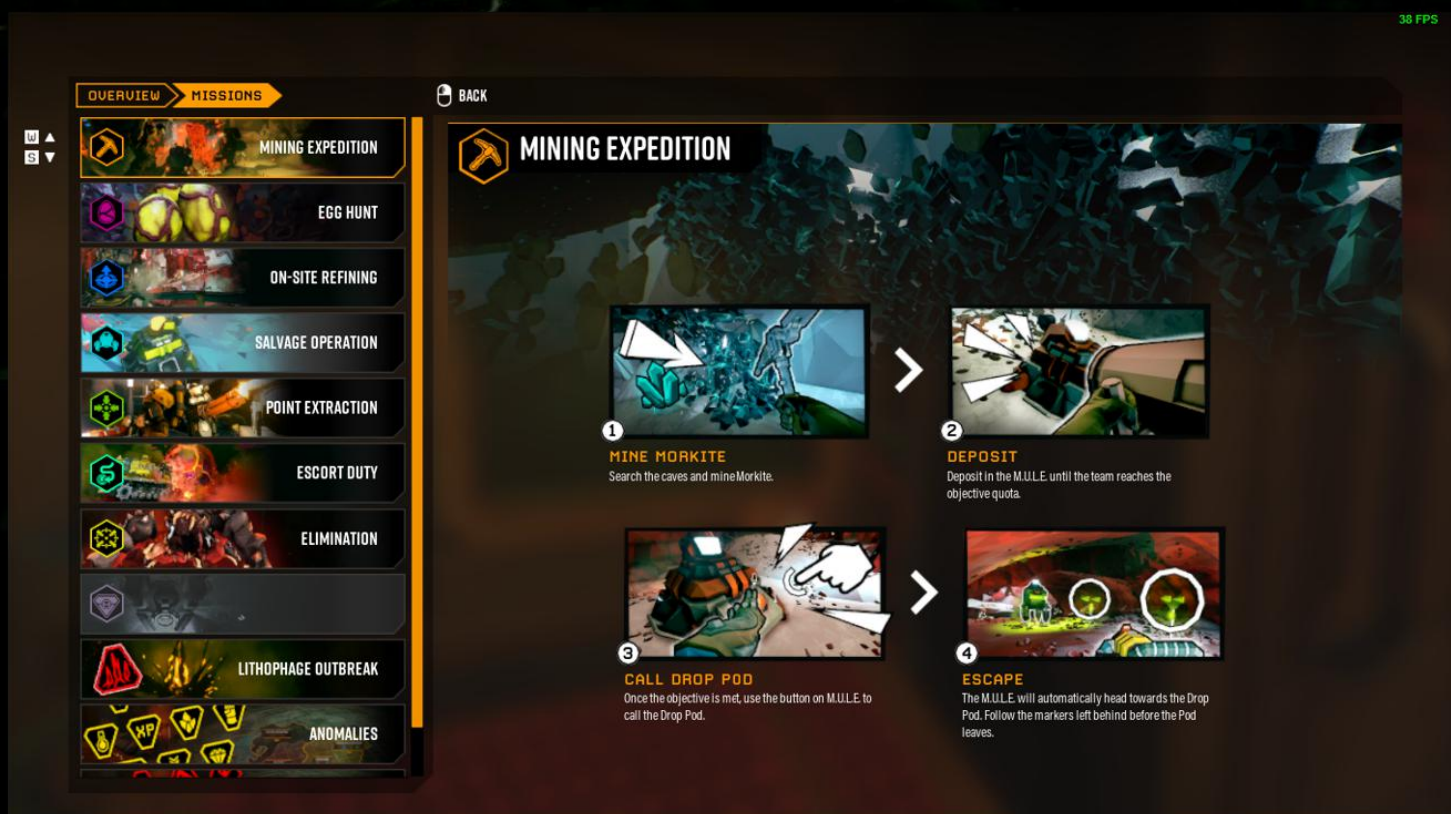
Let's talk about how each type of mission plays out. This section will basically tell you if you have something that suits your playstyle, and I'll try to make it as short as possible (not a dwarf reference).

The mining expedition: drop pod => collect X amount of X mineral => drop pod. There's also a secondary objective to collect X amount of X item, but it's not necessary to complete the mission.



The egg hunt: drop pod => collect X amount of alien eggs => drop pod. Plus a secondary mission. You have to use the 3D radar map to find the eggs, which are buried deep in the organic matter. I was very confused about where to find the eggs on my first run, so I had to look it up online.

The on-site refining: Oh, this is my least favorite of them all because I spent too much time on this type of mission, and it was not fun at all. When I first encountered this type of mission, I didn't know what to do. The in-game tips were really verbose and immersive, like "locate liquid morkite" and "connect the pipelines," which makes it puzzling for a first-timer, so I had to look it up online again (x2).



Turns out you need to find 3 blue geysers and press "E" on top of each of them, then build pipelines by pressing "E" on the special gateways you have on your base station. When you're building, you can only make short pieces of pipeline at a time. They also cannot be built on steep surfaces, so depending on the geysers' spawn RNG, you will have to change the whole landscape in order to build. After you've built three pipelines, you need to repair them as they pump the liquid mineral while also fighting the waves of aliens. By the way, you can "ride" the pipelines, which makes it easy to travel between all three. I think the best way to complete this type of mission would be to quickly scout for geysers, and if they're located too far from the base, restart the mission and pray for better random locations. What added to my traumatic experience of having the worst possible geyser locations was that I tried to play in co-op with random people online. When we were finishing up the mission, just before we called for an escape pod at like minute 30, the host disbanded the team and aborted the mission, so the progress was lost. It happened 2/2 times. Yeah, I didn't play any co-op mode from that moment on.

The salvage operation: There are 2-3 broken drones you need to find and repair by finding their missing parts on the map, then you need to refuel the escape pod and go back home. It was pretty straightforward (you can see the drone parts on the 3D map) except for the pod refueling part because, again, I didn't really understand the in-game instructions and had to look it up online (x3 combo).

The point extraction: drop => find and dig out 3 shiny blue stones => escape pod. It was my favorite type of mission. I had some lucky locations, so I didn't have to move for a ridiculously long time, and I

just used my zipline launcher (basically Batman's grappling hook) to quickly travel back to the station while carrying blue stones one at a time (because you have to carry them in your hands, which makes walking super slow).

The escort duty: There's a machine called a drilldozer that you have to accompany. It gets attacked and damaged by space bugs, so you have to protect and repair it. You also need to refuel it by mining a special mineral using the drilldozer's batteries. The drilldozer consists of three parts, and each one has 100% "health" at the start. If a part's "health" drops to 0%, it is beyond repair, and the next part is going to be damaged instead. If all three parts drop to 0%, the mission is failed. You can comfortably sit on top of the machine as it moves by itself,

The elimination: drop => find cocoons and destroy them => cocoons will spawn big bugs that you need to kill => escape pod. This one is pretty basic and easy to understand. The only problem here is the actual killing part. I'd recommend playing it in co-op or on low difficulty because it takes ages to destroy even one of those "Dreadnoughts," which are basically spider bosses. You quickly run out of ammo when trying to take them out, so you have to mine the Nitra ore while fighting to call for extra supplies (you need 80 Nitra to summon the Resupply pod).

You can also choose your own difficulty when selecting a mission type. It will affect the rewards you'll get on completion while granting your enemies bonus resistances and damage, roughly speaking:



but when it runs out of fuel, you'll have to move away, and aliens will try to destroy it. It was incredibly frustrating to watch it break beyond repair while trying to find the minerals needed to refuel. The whole mission was very confusing, and I had to look it up online (x4) to understand how the damage works and how I can refuel the drilldozer.



CONCLUSION

Enough about missions; let's move forward! Oh, wait, there's nothing, really, except the missions? Maybe it's a mistake on my part, but I haven't found any storyline. So back to my experience with the missions... On my first few runs, I tried to 100% farm the whole map by collecting all the minerals available (not just the ones for the primary or secondary objective, but everything that is collectible). It made me spend too much time in the mission, which made many more space spiders spawn, which made me run out of ammo, which made me mine more Nitra (a mineral you can use to request more ammo), which made me spend too much time in the mission, which made many more space spiders spawn. You get the gist of it: the more time you spend on the mission, the more unpleasant and unproductive it can get. Thankfully, if you team up with other people, either your friends or random strangers, it gets quicker and easier to complete the mission.

A team of 4 will most likely complete a mission 4 times faster than you alone (especially if it's a mission about building a whole infrastructure, like the on-site refining one).

In the end, I just went for the primary objective and didn't even fight with aliens if it wasn't necessary, which made playing the game more relaxing, and I even started to enjoy it when I coupled it with listening to music or podcasts in the background. It doesn't really require much brainpower to mine one kind of mineral and run back to the escape pod when you wear out your equipment, especially the zipline launcher.

The mining part of the gameplay feels very satisfying, except when you run out of storage space in your inventory and have to constantly run back to the base or your mule droid.

The shooting part gets boring and repetitive because the harder the mission, the more HP the enemies will have, so you just gotta shoot for longer, aka "HP sponge syndrome" (The Elder Scrolls series players are painfully familiar with it). It's much more fun on lower difficulties when the waves are big and you kill many different bugs as opposed to shooting one chonky bug for a couple minutes.

My favorite part of the game was in the tutorial when I was first introduced to the zipline launcher. After that, I basically didn't see anything exciting and fun.



An overall friendly dwarf.



You deserve a break after all that hard work, Bloodhood.

Overall, the game seemed like a miner shift simulator to me. It was fun on the first day, but then it became a dead-end job. You stress out on your shifts (it becomes easier over time, and you get numb in the face of stress), come back home, have a drink at the bar, and spend your hard-earned gold on cosmetics.

I still haven't received a single promotion yet, by the way. Very immersive, but who would like to live like that when you use gaming to escape reality?

And, of course, the gameplay is very straightforward after your first try on every mission type, and there are many games out there that have repetitive gameplay, such as Dota, League of Legends, and Counter-Strike. They have the same map and objectives every time, but every match has some variety because of your opponents and how you and your team respond to them. In Deep Rock Galactic, your opponent is mainly the map design (you have to travel far from your base to build a pipeline, so it takes ages, and you have to travel far from your drilldozer to refuel it, so it gets destroyed) and the space bugs, who run at you until you kill them.

I've heard it's fun to play with friends, but I don't really have friends to play with. Also, I think anything is more fun with friends, so it's not really this particular game's advantage. So, all of these were the reasons I didn't really like the game and barely survived these 20 hours. I might play it more in the future whenever I miss the feeling of zipline launching.

□ BloodHood

STORY	★☆☆☆☆
GRAPHICS	★★★★☆
GAMEPLAY	★★★★☆
SOUND	★★★★☆
FUN METER	★★☆☆☆



- Replayability - you can spend your whole life mining!
- Zipline launcher and other bat-belt devices!!
- Extremely immersive (you really feel like a minimum wage miner dwarf!!!)

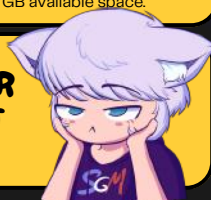


- Repetitive gameplay
- Painful to play solo or with random strangers online
- Extremely immersive (I don't like feeling like a minimum wage miner dwarf...)

V
E
R
D
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T

Genre: First Person Looter, Sci-Fi **System Req:** Intel i5, 6 GB RAM, NVIDIA GeForce GTX 660, 3 GB available space.
Developer: Ghost Ship Games
Release Date: May 13, 2020

THE MINER
LIFE ISN'T
EASY



RESIDENT EVIL 2

Resident Evil 2 is the remake of the survival horror game from 1998 with the same title, made and published by CAPCOM. Unlike the original game, it's fully TPS; there are no fixed camera angles anymore. Even on my oldish computer, the game looks great and runs smoothly. It's a decent remake.

STORY

The game takes place in Raccoon City, where our protagonists find the city overrun by zombies and mutants, and they must fight their way through them to survive. The player can choose between two characters to control: Leon S. Kennedy (literally me), a rookie cop who was about to start working at the Raccoon City Police Department, and Claire Redfield, who was also heading to the police station to visit her brother. The campaigns are fairly similar, but there are key differences.

If you choose to play as me Leon, your main objective will be to find a way out of the police station. On your journey, you'll meet FBI agent superspy Ada Wong and join her to try to stop the Umbrella Corporation and obtain the G virus before it's too late.

Choosing Claire will let you meet Sherry Birkin, a lost little girl who is trying to find her mommy. She will get into trouble, and it will be your job to save her and reunite her with her mother.

GAMEPLAY

The gameplay mostly consists of exploring the map to hunt for items while dodging and killing enemies standing in your way. By the end, you'll feel like a trash man after picking up everything you come across.



Does it hurt here?

You'll find plants that you can craft into healing items and gunpowder that you can make into various types of ammo, but grenades and knives will also be plentiful. While your inventory isn't limitless, you can expand it, which you'll certainly need since every mission item and key takes up an inventory slot, too. Players should try to travel light since if your inventory is full and you have to discard something, you can't recover it anymore, so one should think over what they need the least.

Saving is done by using typewriters scattered around the map. These are usually in safe spots where you can rest after a tiresome run from your enemies. They are accompanied by a storage box where you can hold your (un)wanted items. These boxes share their contents, so you can always access everything from any of them.



Claire Redfield, our heroine

There are several puzzles and mini-games in the game that will reward the player with either a key, some useful items, or even upgrades. These are fairly easy; usually you just have to check your notes for hints and clues.

BABA YAGA

Something players new to this franchise should be aware of is that you're not John Wick. You can't kill everyone. Ammo is limited, even with crafting, and there are just too many enemies to finish them all off. Zombies can take multiple headshots, and sometimes, when you think you have finally killed them, they just get up and come back for more. Worst case, you already walked past them, and they attack from behind when you are busy with something else. Wasting all your ammo can be troublesome; I once completely ran out of ammo and knives right before I got surrounded by a dozen dogs, lol. You can always just stun enemies with a headshot and run past them as a budget option, but narrow corridors can quickly become crowded when you visit the same areas multiple times.

ARSENAL

Players have multiple weapons to choose from, most of which can be upgraded if you find the necessary weapon parts. Both characters come with their own arsenals: Leon starts out with his service pistol, and later it gets accompanied by a shotgun, the Lightning Hawk magnum, and a flamethrower. Claire starts with her trusty revolver (which can later use 2 ammo types) and gets a grenade launcher (also with 2 ammo types), a pistol, an SMG, and a stun gun.



16 | °

Nope.

X GON' GIVE IT TO YA

Just when you become comfortable solving puzzles and running around in the abandoned building, you find a nasty surprise—or rather, the surprise finds you: an unstoppable Tyrant will chase you down the halls of the station so you won't feel so alone anymore. You'll freeze when you hear the distant footsteps getting closer and closer, and you'll just hope this won't happen when you go back for that gunpowder in the linen room, which you couldn't pick up earlier because of the multiple keys you had to hoard, and maybe there won't be a horde of zombies waiting for you on your only way out because you ran out of ammo earlier...



Moments before X Gon' Give It To Ya

ACHIEVEMENTS

Those who are planning on earning every achievement in the game will have to play it through several times. You'll need to finish the campaign with both characters and their alternate stories. There are also achievements for finishing under a certain amount of time and playing on the hardest difficulty. Of course, there are trophies for finding every collectible (and there are a lot), and there is an alternate game mode, but the rest should be easily achieved.

□ freshduke

STORY	★★★★★☆☆
GRAPHICS	★★★★★★★☆☆
GAMEPLAY	★★★★★☆☆☆☆
SOUND	★★★★★★★☆☆
FUN METER	★★★★★☆☆☆☆



- Unlike the original, it's a TPS
- Very stable with good graphics
- Great atmosphere
- Nice cutscenes



- Bullet sponge enemies
- Keys taking up inventory slots
- Achievements need multiple playthroughs

V
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Genre: Action, Horror System Req: Intel® Core™ i5-4460,
Developer: Capcom 8 GB RAM, NVIDIA® GeForce® GTX
Release Date: January 25, 2019 960, 26 GB available space.

MORE THAN
JUST A
REMAKE.
A MUST PLAY
GAME!!



ALIENS

COLONIAL MARINES

AHH, ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES... FROM WHERE SHOULD I START?

Probably from some major difficulties such as a huge failure in the console market of the late 90's/early 2000's, extremely weak ratings of the fresh Sonic The Hedgehog game, and a not well received localization of Yakuza for PS2 by the Western public. Still being a world-famous company, SEGA in December of 2006, acquired the rights to create games under a somewhat stagnant yet not a lesser-known Aliens franchise license. According to the original plan, two games were supposed to come out from under the wings of SEGA - a role playing game by Obsidian Entertainment (Neverwinter Nights, Baldur's Gate, Star Wars: KOTOR2) and the first person shooter by the then up and coming studio, Gearbox Software (Half-Life: Blue Shift, Half-Life: Opposing Force, Brother in Arms).

**WHAT COULD GO WRONG?
WELL, HOW ABOUT
ALMOST EVERYTHING
ENTIRELY?**

For starters, Gearbox, (who was already developing the small original IP called Borderlands) had a contract with Sega, and was pulling people away from one project to work on another. Having learned about this and assessed the risks, SEGA decided to say

goodbye to them as to not spend even more money than was already spent on the licensing deal... and then Borderlands skyrocketed like, well, the goddamn space shuttle. SEGA decided to bring the developers back, but they had already signed up for Borderlands 2. It was then decided to call in a smaller studio (represented by TimeGate Studios), and put the sudden prodigy of the year above them



A familiar close encounter

only so that the inscription "from the creators of Borderlands" looked cool and catchy on the packages with their own game. In other words, spending money could not be avoided. It is worth mentioning 2009 also was again marked a bad year for SEGA with three more financial failures in the form of Sonic and the Black Knight, Planet 51: The Game, The Hardy Boys: The Treasure on the Tracks). Obsidian's Aliens RPG had to be abandoned in order for the Colonial Marines to live.



Just taking a short nap. Do not disturb.

Having accepted the project from Gearbox's hard-working hands, TimeGate Studios suddenly realized that the only things done were a couple of models (still in Borderlands shaders), one and a half levels, and even the script was not finalized (spoiler: and, judging by the state of the game, will not be). In the meantime, Gearbox themselves could not direct their protégés scrupulously enough, 'cause they were busy not only with the Borderlands sequel, but also with attempts to put Duke Nukem Forever on its feet (spoiler: they never will).

The next nail in the coffin was the decision to put a demo version of the game at E3 2012, which did not at all correspond to the real possibilities of either consoles or PCs of that time. However, everyone did and will always do this at exhibitions in order to attract the attention of both players and potential investors. The head of Gearbox, Randy Pitchford, in every interview said that that very demo consisted of real gameplay. In other words, he told outright lies to the public.



He probably just slipped.



Kinder Surprise in space!

In the middle of the same year, Gearbox finally freed themselves from the fetters of Borderlands 2 development and ... began to redo what TimeGate Studios had done in their absence. According to some sources, the available material not only looked bad, but also refused to work on PS3. Despite this, in early February 2013, the game hit the shelves.

IS THIS GONNA BE A STANDUP FIGHT, SIR, OR ANOTHER BUG HUNT?

I ran into some problems right from the start. Even on the lowest settings, my controls was sluggish and stuttered all the time, the mouse sensitivity settings didn't change much, so I tend to suspect some optimization issues or the game's inability to co-exist adequately with a newer operating system i.e. Windows 10. At least, I don't remember such problems when I played Aliens Versus Predator on a weaker PC under Windows 7 back in the days. Some clumsiness in controls quite often led to situations in which I haven't been able to react in time. Sometimes it pissed me off (for example, when my NPC-comrades could not cover my rear while standing a couple of meters behind my back). Sometimes it added to the atmosphere, because even at the NORMAL difficulty level (here it's called "SOLDIER") after half an hour of the game, each signal from the motion tracker gave me not an anticipation of fun, but real anxiety and chills down my spine.



Speaking of sound design, it's amazing. The musical themes are beautiful and close enough in spirit to what James Horner wrote for the 1986 film, which was the main starting point for this project as a whole. The sounds of shooting from a pulse rifle or a smart-gun, the squeak of the motion tracker, or the squeals and growls of aliens (except that the grumbling of facehuggers made me laugh all the time, because I have no idea how they make these sounds). The design of the locations echoes the spirit of the original source, whether it is the cold metal of USS Sephora corridors, the gloomy beauty of the interior of the derelict ship, or the repulsive emptiness of the planetoid's surface.

Unfortunately, I was not always able to see everything I wanted (for example, I was never able to collect all the dog tags, because even with not very dark settings those are quite difficult to notice), but what I was able to see filled me with delight or at least commanded some respect. Of course, you should not forget that your humble servant played the latest version of the game, so a lot of bugs and glitches fixed by the patch of the first day remained behind the scenes for me. Even the enemies' AI rarely made me laugh, and the only obvious problem was with the AI of my comrades-in-arms instead, as I've mentioned earlier. It is for this reason that I can say the picture and sound in general pleased me rather, or at least they were not a stumbling block, which cannot be said about the gameplay itself.

Loader P-5000 and we are offered to use it to continue the chase. It is quite possible that one of my associates managed to give a more visual hint, but in the game there is no way to make the NPC repeat the line, and the task menu simply said "use the loader to open your way" ... Yeah, you guessed it, your humble servant was hollowing the goddamn door. Behind which the enemy disappeared with a loader for about 5 minutes, looked for the hidden possibilities of this loader itself, and only a little later realized that it was necessary not to break the door, but to raise the gateway gate, located 15-20 meters to the right. This was repeated several times, when I simply did not know - should I just wait for some kind of trigger or have I not yet done what is needed to activate it, and what should I do?



Mission failed: Long hallway. Didn't reach the restroom in time.



Adorable baby xenomorph birth

MAYBE WE GOT 'EM DEMORALIZED

In a nutshell, aiming in the game is quite inconvenient, even with laser guidance, and the shooting itself does not give the entire necessary range of positive sensations (and I had something to compare with, since in parallel I played Left 4 Dead 2 every day). Another purely gameplay problem, I would call its catastrophic non-intuitiveness. For example, in one of the scenes we are chasing the enemy and he locks the door behind him, just the usual metal door. Nearby is a Power

Another thing that upset me quite a lot is the quality of the dialogues. If their essence didn't really bother me (I perfectly understand that a well-developed drama is not required to be present in a space horror action game, I can respect a b-movies vibe), the presentation of actors was a completely different matter. I remember that in one of the interviews, actor Michael Biehn, who returned to play the role of Dwayne Hicks, said "Aliens: Colonial Marines seemed kind of passionless (project)". He may have been right, but after hearing his in-game lines, I don't think he should have criticized people

for what he himself is guilty of. I have not heard such terrible voice acting since the original Resident Evil, and even there it was better. Thanks Barry, I've almost become a Jill-sandwich!..

And so we got to the main problem that no patch can fix, namely the plot of the game. And don't misunderstand me, I will definitely remember for a long time both the fight against the Raven and my attempts to dodge the alien ramming me then shooting him from the back (although in my case it was more like walking with a baby elephant around the zoo, perhaps another glitch, who knows). Then the catacombs filled with blind xenomorphs who only react to the sounds you make - it was all great and eerie. But the closer I got to the end, the more stupid, impulsive, and incomprehensible situations became. The peak of all this was the final boss fight, declared as an entire mission. Seriously guys? A fight with the Alien Queen in which you can't damage her with any weapons? Just need to switch two levers one after another, and then send mommy into free flight without any options? And with all this, she does not kill you with one blow?? Against the background of the boss fights mentioned above, the fight with the Queen is hard to even call a fight, and you can finish it in five minutes or even less, so it could not be singled out as a separate mission. It was all so anticlimactic that I sat for about five minutes and thought, "Are you serious? Is this how you decided to end it all? What's wrong with you?". All this time they tried to feed me the last portion of a very important plotline that they now have all the necessary information for, and after that the credits went. Damn it, how many people there were responsible for quality control, from the publisher company and from both studios ... and they all overlooked what this game ended up being.



You know what I am thinking and I know what you're thinking.
Let's leave it at that.

GAME OVER, MAN. GAME OVER!

Due to the fact that it was a game based on a cult movie franchise and it was released by already established companies, players in 2012 began to peer closely at the final product right off the bat. This not only led to low reviews from critics and gamers alike, but also to a lawsuit against SEGA and Gearbox for false advertisement (remember that E3 demo and Randy Pitchford's statements?) and how Mortal Kombat and DOOM brought a rating system into the video

games world. This case was the reason for the widespread use of lines like "pre-alpha footage" or "game in development, can look different" in all sorts of trailers and demos. Gearbox Software tried to jump off, saying that they had poured millions of their personal money into the development, which SEGA had not returned to them, to which they replied that Gearbox should have been developing one project, not three. In the end, they collectively had to pay just over \$1.2 million in damages after two years of litigation. Just a couple of months after the release of the game, TimeGate Studios ceased to exist (however, it had much more to do with another problematic game they've worked on, called Section 8).

The game was full of a huge number of bugs and glitches, the AI of both enemies and allies completely refused to work adequately (and all because of just ONE typo in the code that was discovered and fixed only five years later, can you imagine?). There were also visual problems but despite all this, and by no means unflattering reviews from both critics and players, it managed to sell 1.31 million copies worldwide, which definitely spurred SEGA's interest in the franchise and helped the guys from Creative Assembly to put a completely different dish on our table called Alien: Isolation, beloved by all fans of the source material and the genre alike.

As for the game itself, now we have just a so-so first-person shooter in a very intriguing wrapper, which, unfortunately, promises disappointment in many aspects. If SEGA had come up with cleverness and alignment back in 2006, we would have had another high-quality shooter in the Alien universe, like Aliens Versus Predator 2 from Monolith Productions and Aliens vs. Predator by Rebellion Developments before it. We have what we have and it indeed has its pros along with its cons, alas I'm not really sure if I'll come back to it somewhere down the line.

□ DANTEFROMHELL

STORY	★★★★☆☆
GRAPHICS	★★★★☆☆
GAMEPLAY	★★★★☆☆
SOUND	★★★★★★
FUN METER	★★★★☆☆

+

- Alien Universe
- Revisiting places from the movies
- The music and sound
- Decent DLCs
- The campaign could be fun with a friend in co-op

-

- Weak storyline
- Basic gameplay
- Buggy mess at launch. Less buggy today, but still buggy.
- There are better games in the Aliens universe to play

VERDICT

Genre: Action, FPS, Horror, Sci-Fi **System Req:** 2 GHz Intel Dual Core
Developer: Gearbox Software **Processor:** 2 GB RAM, ATI Radeon
Release Date: February 12, 2013 **HD** 2600, 20 GB available space.

SO MUCH WASTED POTENTIAL

GARFIELD KART



Garfield Kart is a kart game published by Microïds and developed in 2013 by Artefacts Studio. In it, we accompany Garfield, the mythical cat created by Jim Davis, by means of a kart through numerous races following the path of all his old friends (Nermal, Jon, Odie, Jon...)

When playing, it is inevitable to approach nostalgia and not think about the mythical kart games that were a reference with which it has similarities, such as Mario Kart, Crash Team Racing, and Sonic Racing, among others.

This game is available on Android, iOS, Windows, macOS, and Nintendo 3DS. It also has a remastered version called Furious Racing, in which we can play online with our friends.

The story of this game is practically nil. We can simply control Garfield or his friends and carry out races with the aim of winning championships, unlocking characters, setting records in time trials, and practicing.

There is no storytelling or plot thread. We simply see Garfield in a kart fighting against the rest to win races, there is no purpose or



Go!

explanation for why Garfield does these races, so the story is terrible.

When we win certain races, we unlock new characters with whom we can later control and race, but this system makes no sense when there is no story behind those characters, we don't know them, we don't know why they are better, why they give us the possibility to play with them, etc.

The graphics are extremely simple. They were so simple to the point that they hardly worked. Visually, it's not flashy at all, and all this causes the game to feel very old when it's actually relatively new. The textures do not look worked at all. In fact, in some parts of the environment, we find singularities, and not in others.

The karts are practically identical. Their designs are very little worked on, so we don't notice a visual difference between them, although the characters have well-achieved animations that make the rest of the irregularities go a little more unnoticed.



Harry doesn't play around.

Finally, a serious modeling problem is quite noticeable since the wheels of the car practically do not touch the ground, which

makes it much less realistic, and gravity ceases to exist.

The sound isn't bad, but it can't be good either. It's just okay. The sound is quite repetitive since we listen to the same song several times throughout the game, it doesn't get out of tune, but it manages to be very tiresome. The background melody fails to be unbearable.

In this section, a better performance could have been obtained. It would have been enough to add more songs, with a more varied rhythm depending on the race we're in, thus providing dynamism and an environment-music connection that transports us to that stage. On the contrary, here we feel Garfield in the same way in all the settings, with the same expressions, and with the same music. All they change is just the modeling.



Harry doesn't look happy.

Also, to make this even worse, the sounds emitted by the karts are all the same, the turbo, the objects, the effects... they all sound exactly the same.

There is a section called "Store" where we can buy accessories or advantages to modify our car or be faster than the rival, but they cost so many coins that it is not worth it.

The objects are very similar to those of other games, although I have to say that there are some new objects. The problem with the objects is that their operation is not explained at any time, and many of them create a huge disadvantage compared to others. There is no balance. We find objects that can make us sleep, make us invincible, springs to jump, etc.

But without a doubt, the worst thing about the gameplay is that the learning curve is non-existent since the game becomes repetitive from the first half hour. The scenarios hardly change since they are always the same, and the objects are so scarce that during a game we can take 2 different objects at most.



Garfield, don't text and drive!

The gameplay looks a bit fluid, but honestly, this is because the textures are so poor that it would be impossible to have any problems with them.

Despite the fact that the game is not original in practically any section, I think that you can have a pass to simply entertain yourself and play some races with all the characters.

The races are repetitive, but they are very short, which makes obtaining the achievements quite easy and completing the game shouldn't take more than 4 hours.

□ Hodexii



The prestigious Pizza Cup!

STORY	★☆☆☆☆
GRAPHICS	★☆☆☆☆
GAMEPLAY	★☆☆☆☆
SOUND	★☆☆☆☆
FUN METER	★☆☆☆☆



- Easy to complete
- Perfect game for a 4 year old kid
- It runs



- Too easy to complete
- Mediocre graphics at best
- No kart variety
- Repetitive soundtrack
- Gets boring real fast
- Lack of characters or story

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Genre: Racing, Arcade System Req: Intel Core 2 Duo
Developer: Artefacts Studio 2.0GHz, 1 GB RAM, 256 MB V-RAM,
Release Date: November 7, 2013 250 MB available space.

JUST PLAY
MY GAME
INSTEAD



Potion Craft

Getting started!

Are you into business simulators? Imagine going back historically and imagining medieval surroundings contrasting to the present scenario, where things still work on potion crafting? Sounds interesting! Wanna experience this? This simulation game is for you! In it, you are an alchemist and the owner of a potion crafting shop. The main objective is to grow your business' popularity by fulfilling the customers' demands of the specific potions they are looking for. There is a variety of customers looking for particular potions that you have to brew as per the requests made by them. The more you fulfill their demands, the more popular your business gets.

Crafting and brewing is done in the Laboratory, where you use the ingredients. Whether they be plants,

mushrooms, or minerals, you grind them in a mortar by pestle and then put them into the cauldron. There you mix the ingredients until you get the desired potion you want, followed by pushing the bellows to heat up the potion to create it. The brewing mechanic is well linked to the potion map, where different ingredients lead to different potions. Also depending on the inclination of the brewing potion to that of map one, it can be Tier I (weak), Tier II (standard), or Tier III (strong).



The Laboratory



The ingredients (plants, mushrooms, and minerals) can be obtained from enchanting garden or merchants.



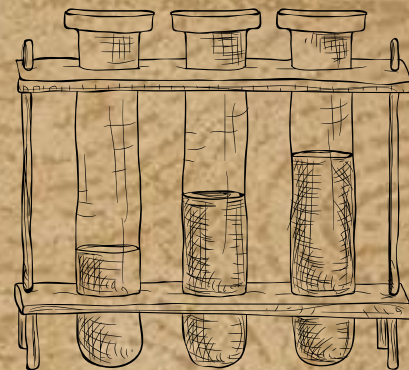
The Garden

Then, at the shop, there is a scaling system and customers are lined up in a queue to buy potions. You can haggle with customers for better prices or sell them at the exact price they are offering. You gain popularity and reputation. If you fulfill requests for evil causes, you get negative reps, and positive reps for vice-versa. However, popularity is gained for fulfilling the demands and deducted for denying them. The currency earned can be used to buy stuff from merchants to increase the efficiency of your business. For example, herbalists and Mushroomers sell unique plants and mushrooms that can help to brew potions more efficiently.

In-game achievements in the form of chapters increase the complexity of customer orders once completed.

There is the Bedroom, where once all customer demands have been fulfilled, you can start a new day. This is important every day since enchanting garden offers new plants free of cost.

There is also the Basement with an alchemist machine that can be used later in the game to craft advanced potions more efficiently.

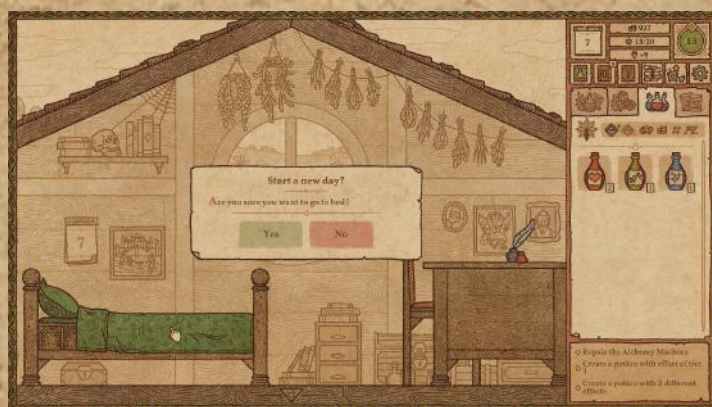


The Basement

In addition, the game has a level system that is built on experience, which unlocks talent points



The Shop



The Bedroom

Pros

Since brewing a potion is a repetitive process, you can save the recipe in the recipe book and create a potion with just a click.

For versatility, you can use a variety of ingredients to create a particular potion. It's not restricted to a single ingredient.

Cons

At the early stage, a lot of ingredients get wasted to achieve/discover a particular potion since there is no hint system for where the potion may lie on the vast map, or where the portal ends up! If you are not focused enough, you may fail to make a strong potion and have to repeat it for achieving it.

Sometimes the game offers a large number of similar types of requests which ends up emptying a particular plant stash. This results in later being unable to fulfill other requests related to that plant.

Graphics & Sound

I love the way the whole game is drawn upon a medieval-style manuscript. It is mesmerizing and matches the experience of the medieval surroundings, which is much needed for the potion brewing.

The sound is soothing to ears, whether it is crushing the mortar and pestle or blowing the bellows. My only complaint is the endless loop of the music played in the background.

Replayability

This game is for those who are into the simulator genre particularly.

Thanks to the grind for achievements, a completionist can easily indulge in 20hr+ of gameplay

❑ R3v3ng3ance

STORY N/A

GRAPHICS ★★★★★☆

GAMEPLAY ★★★★★☆

SOUND ★★★★★☆

FUN METER ★★★★★☆



- The requests for potions and their reasoning for the requests made me laugh quite often
- There is no time limit for making a potion



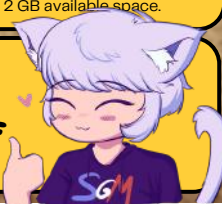
- Starting from Chapter IV objectives the game becomes quite repetitive
- It's hard to understand the particular requests of customers

V
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Genre: Crafting, Simulator
Developer: tinyBuild
Release Date: December 13, 2021

System Req: Intel i3-6100, 8 GB RAM, NVIDIA® GeForce GTX 670, 2 GB available space.

A MUST
HAVE FOR
THE FANS OF
THE GENRE





Heart of The Forest

THE MOON WAS A
Goddess AND she
NOTICED ME . . .

Remember that Vampire: The Masquerade review in issue #2 of the magazine? Well, I'm back with another narrative game from the World of Darkness universe! This time we're diving into the world of Werewolf: The Apocalypse, another series that started off as a tabletop RPG that I never looked into, but that I assume has a similar system to VTM, given they're from the same universe and were released by the same people.

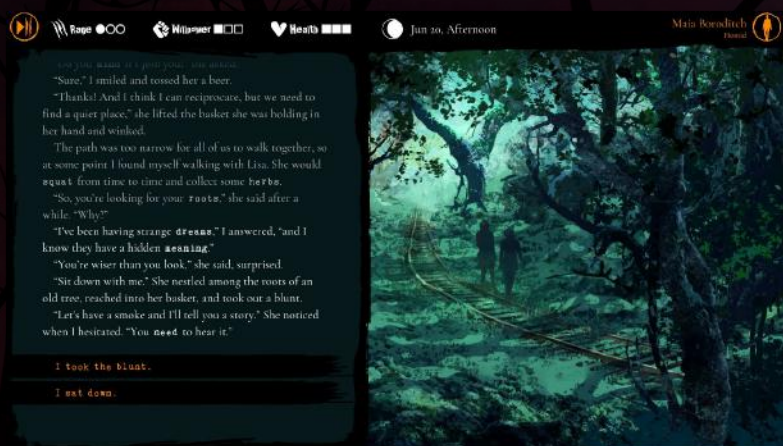
At first, I imagined this game would be more of a visual novel, but I was wrong. It's a narrative adventure, but it's nothing like the visual novels I am so accustomed to. Like I said, the game is based off a TTRPG, and it wants you to have that experience. It fully feels like a solo TTRPG campaign, minus the combat. It is pretty much just dialogues and choosing where to go next.

In Heart of the Forest, we play as Maia Boroditch, a girl that decides to visit Białowieska in order to... Well, see, this is the fun thing about Heart of the Forest. You decide what she does and why she does it. So the reason why Maia visits Białowieska is up to you.

What I can tell you is that she has been having strange dreams about Białowieska National Park (or as the characters call it, The Puszcza). Those dreams have been calling for her to go there and find out what's been happening.. She just knows it has something to do with her roots, with herself and her place in the world. So accompanied by her friend Anya and a multi-colored cast of characters that she'll meet on the way, she's ready to uncover those mysteries.

However, her quest isn't going to be easy. The village people seem to not have her family name in very high esteem, there's a logging taking place in the sacred national park and the pertinent protesting movement against it, and her dreams are more aggressive each night, urging her to fulfill her objective as soon as possible.

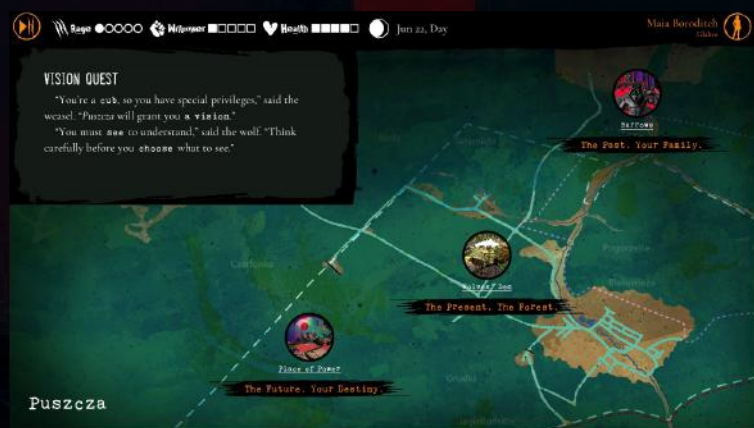
While you can't really choose or make your character in this game, it depends on you to choose what kind of person Maia will be. You don't get to choose her name or her backstory, but through the many, many choices you will encounter, you'll shape her personality, her goals, her relationships, and even what ancient spirit will watch over her and who will be her new family. There's about a choice per paragraph, which avoids the narrative gameplay stalling since the choices usually matter. Some have a cost of Rage, Willpower, or Health, and some will give you one of those three things, which will in turn change the course of the scene. For example, if through your choices you fill out Maia's Rage gauge, her dialogue will be more blunt, and characters will react differently to that. If a certain character is suspicious of her because of your violent approach, maybe an argument will ensue, and so on. This gameplay really makes the game feel like there are endless possibilities, because through many small variants it gives you the feeling that every choice matters, at least a little bit.



The art style of Heart of the Forest is also unique. Instead of having character sprites, the game uses colorful collage-like illustrations to represent the scenes. They aren't exactly necessary or add a lot, but they are a nice visual aid and make the text-based gameplay less intimidating. Plus, some of them are very

pretty. Another detail I liked was that this game smoothly handled universe-specific jargon. In my Shadows of New York review I complained about how having to pause my reading to check the dictionary for a word I didn't understand was annoying. Well, Heart of the Forest also has an in-game dictionary, but it's much better integrated into the game. Instead of it being a separate menu, whenever a Werewolf: The Apocalypse word (a wereword, if you will) appears on screen, it will be highlighted in a different color. Hovering your mouse over it will make a small text box with the definition pop up, so

you can quickly check what a word means without interrupting your reading flow.



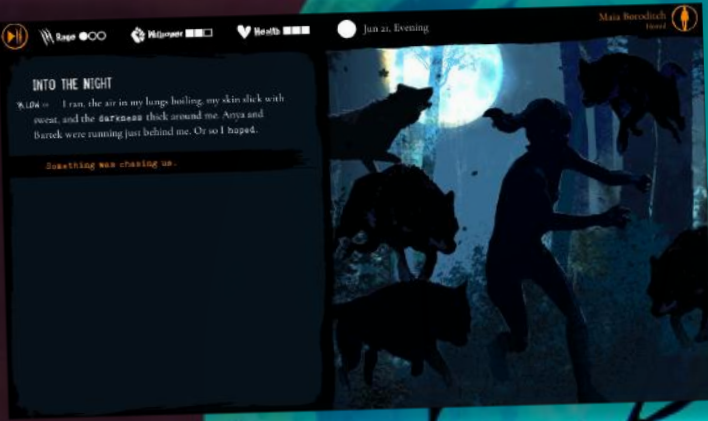
Even when it comes to sound design, Heart of the Forest is strange. It's almost a stretch to say that this game has a soundtrack. Instead, it has... noise. But not in a bad way; quite the opposite, actually. Instead of playing a set piece for every scene, it has a dynamic mixture of sound layers. Some of it is music, some of it is ambient sounds, some of it is sound effects, and some of it is ethereal clouds of noise. I constantly changes, depending on the state of Maia and your choices. This makes the game not have a distinct sound, but in exchange makes it so each run will have a different "soundtrack."

Hold on, each run? Well, while Heart of the Forest isn't very long (a route will probably take you about 6 hours), like I mentioned before, the amount of variables make for

multiple outcomes. To be fair, I haven't replayed it enough to see how many endings there are, but if you want to get the 100%, you'll have to play several times, probably. And this game, much like Shadows of New York, also lacks a saving system that would avoid having to replay the whole thing. But in this case, I don't consider it a flaw. The way the game's choices work, a visual novel saving system wouldn't really fly. There are too many of them, and most of them do matter, so you can't be saving at each one. You start the game choosing, so you might as well just restart the run completely.



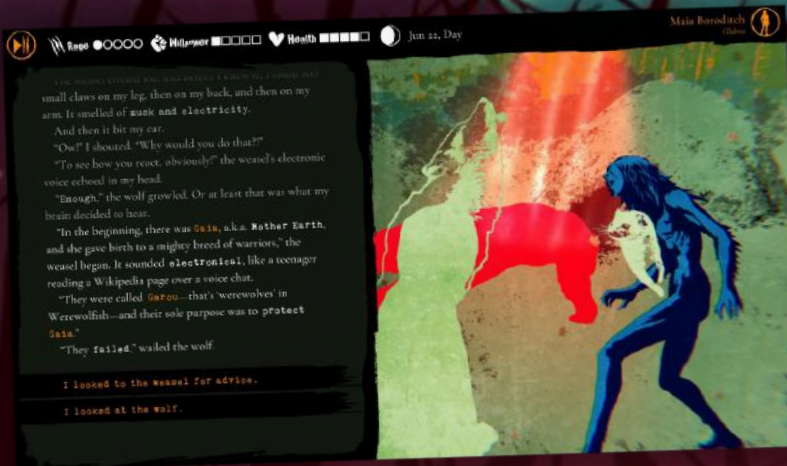
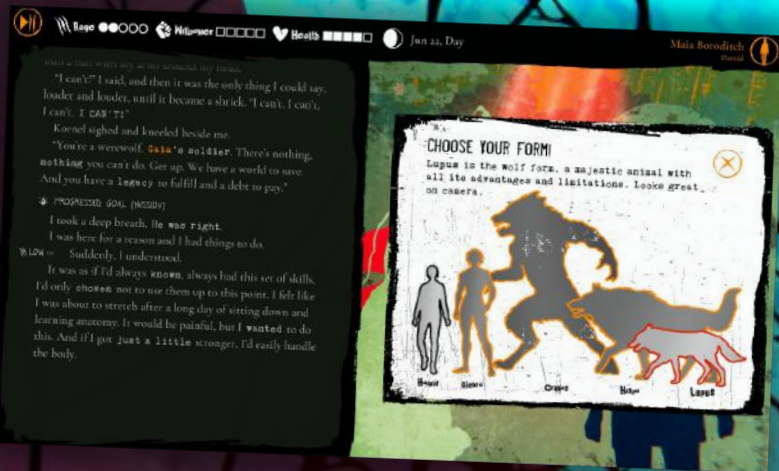
So, do I recommend Heart of the Forest? If narrative games are your thing, yeah. It's a pretty unique experience, and I can't find any terrible flaws save for the fact that it might not be for everyone. This game is very much like reading a book, even more than



your usual VN, so if you don't like reading you're going to get bored. The narration is also kind of tedious, and unnecessary pompous at times, and the story is weird. While I enjoyed my first read a lot, I'm finding it hard to get through other routes, but that might just be because I'm not a native English speaker and translating that style of writing on the go is tiring. I do believe it's worth at least one playthrough, though.

Now then, what kind of werewolf will you be?

□ Kiirouchi



"GET UP", she said.

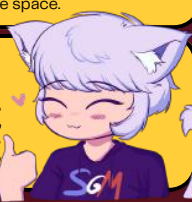
i Go UP

STORY	★★★★☆
GRAPHICS	★★★★★
GAMEPLAY	★★★★★
SOUND	★★★★☆
FUN METER	★★★★☆

+	Unique art style Choices matter Engaging story & gameplay	-	Needs multiple blind runs (or a guide) to 100% Somewhat tedious writing
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Genre: Visual Novel, Fantasy
Developer: Different Tales
Release Date: October 13, 2020
System Req: Dual Core 3 GHz, 4 GB RAM, Intel® HD 4400, 4 GB available space.

A UNIQUE NARRATIVE ADVENTURE



TOEM

A PHOTO ADVENTURE

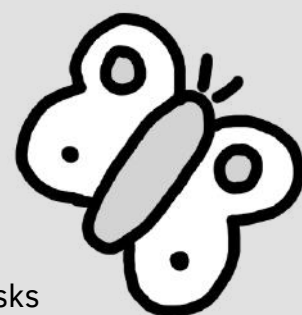
Background

TOEM is a beautiful, cozy, hand-drawn, photography-based puzzle game. In TOEM, you're placed in the shoes of a young photographer, armed with only a camera, on a journey to reach the peak of Kiiruberg Mountain to photograph the visual phenomena called TOEM. Along your journey, you come across inhabitants of the world, some of whom may require assistance, which you can provide with the use of your handy camera.

The story begins with you waking up in your home on your birthday. You are finally old enough to go out and explore

the world on your own. So, you decide to venture out and experience the TOEM. To reach Kiiruberg Mountain, where you can view the TOEM from, you need to travel through a variety of cities, villages, and

locations in the world, all while completing a variety of challenges and tasks to assist others.



Log cabin at a scout camp.

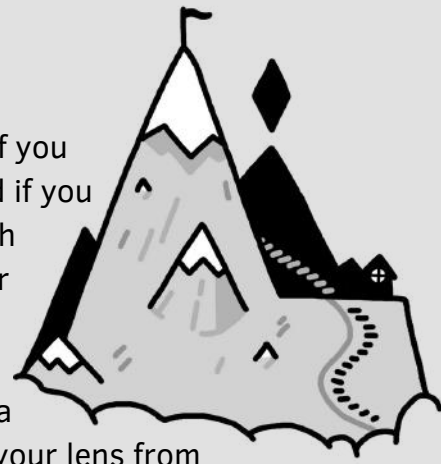
Gameplay

The gameplay in TOEM is very simple, but not in a bad way. You walk around the hand-drawn world, armed with your camera, and assist people with certain tasks or objectives they may require you to do. All of the puzzles revolve around



your camera and taking photographs. For instance, if someone has lost something, you may need to find it, take a photo of it, and bring the photo back to whoever requested your assistance. Successfully completing an objective earns you a bus stamp. To continue on to the next location, you need to collect enough bus stamps from your current locations. However, most of the time I found myself staying behind in locations even after collecting enough stamps so that I could continue with the various quests and objectives that I had in a certain region.

may get water on it if you get splashed, or mud if you decide to run through some. This can either be washed off or removed entirely if you wear an umbrella hat, which prevents your lens from catching any dirt or grime.



As for quests, while they all revolve around the camera, they are still able to feel unique and fresh for the different questlines. It is amazing to see how the developers have been able to create these unique and dynamic mechanics from the one simple action of taking a photo.

As for photos, you can take them whenever and of whatever you want! The game provides you with some collection logs to urge you to find all the different creatures around the world and give you some extra goals to strive for along with the main tasks.



Happy Lighthouse Keeper.

While the gameplay is simple, it still does a great job of evolving over time, with you unlocking various little trinkets, clothing, and equipment for you and your trusty camera. One example is a horn, which lets you interact with the world and the subjects of your photography before getting that perfect shot.

There are also various other effects that may change your ability to take photos. For instance, your camera may

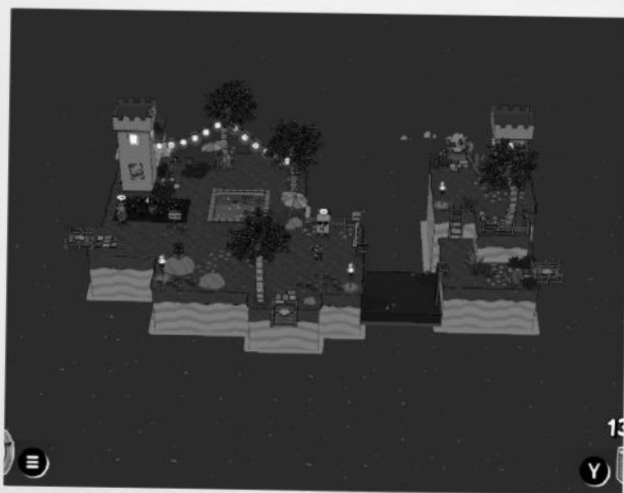


Story

The overarching story in TOEM, much like the gameplay, is quite simple, with the main goal being to reach the peak of Kiiruberg Mountain. TOEM, however, is very much about the journey and not just the destination. A lot of the smaller tasks that you will be completing can span across several locations and can sometimes have some interesting twists and turns in the narrative.



Along with the main campaign, there is also a secondary region that you are able to explore and document with your camera after you have witnessed TOEM. The main story in the game is all very lighthearted and wholesome, so while it's no *Walking Dead* or *Witcher 3*, it really doesn't need to be. Overall, the stories are something I can't describe as anything but cozy. Just nice, warm, happy, and lighthearted. A fantastic breath to step away from the stresses of the real world.

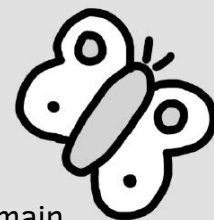


Night time summer village.

World-Building

The world-building is utterly fantastic. World-building is essentially what makes up the majority of the game. It is completely hand-drawn, black-and-white, and very stylized. It does a fantastic job of creating atmosphere through the visuals, the music, and the character interactions. The universe does feel kind of alive, with everyone doing their own thing and seeming to go about their business. The general atmosphere of each area and region is very reflective of the sort of feeling you would expect for that area. For instance, in a more rural area, there is more empty space and the inhabitants are more relaxed, whereas in a busy city, people are rushing about for their daily jobs and responsibilities. The world-building, through the story, interactions, environment, and sound, really comes together well.





Final Thoughts

Overall, TOEM is a fantastic little game. It isn't too long and is a treat even for achievement hunters! I was able to 100% the game in just over 6 hours, and that is considering I did not really focus on the achievements either. You can also always go back to previous locations and complete things you missed earlier.

I loved the feel of TOEM, even though it isn't my usual choice of game genre. But it was fantastic to be able to just relax and enjoy the cozy, wholesome, and generally warm atmosphere and feel of the game. The puzzles were not bad, and sometimes it was very rewarding to come up with a solution.

The innovative photo-based main mechanic was honestly a breath of fresh air, and the art style and sounds were just a great fit for the aesthetic of the game.

I can most definitely recommend you try this game out!

□ Alpha2749



SGM | PAGE 34



STORY ★★★★★
GRAPHICS ★★★★★
GAMEPLAY ★★★★★
SOUND ★★★★★
FUN METER ★★★★★



- Beautiful art style
- Innovative puzzle mechanics
- Cozy and wholesome story
- Achievement hunter friendly
- Calm and relaxing



- It ends (I still want more :P)

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Genre: Visual Novel, Fantasy
Developer: Draw Distance
Release Date: September 10, 2020

System Req: Dual Core 3 GHz,
4 GB RAM, 1 GB VRAM OpenGL
2.1+, 2 GB available space.



A COLORFUL
EXPERIENCE
IN A
BLACK & WHITE
WORLD.



CHERNOBYLITE

Chernobylite is not a STALKER game. I'd like to get that out of the way. It is STALKER-adjacent. It is a cousin to STALKER. It takes place around Chernobyl. There are strange and haunting things happening as a result of the meltdown. There's a heavy military presence and mutants. You have to gather materials and avoid anomalous radiation. There are a number of familiar things for those who have played STALKER. However, Chernobylite is very much its own thing.

The game begins 30 years after the real-life nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl. You play as Igor, a physicist who worked at the power plant and was there during the meltdown. Igor returns to the plant to obtain a sample of chernobylite, a strange material that appeared after the incident. Chernobylite has mysterious properties that he believes can be harnessed for a number of incredible technologies. Primarily, he is interested in using it to find out the truth about what happened to his fiancée, Tatyana. She was also a physicist, and she disappeared just prior to the meltdown. Igor had believed her dead, but recently started having dreams that she was still alive. He and two mercenaries enter the core and succeed in retrieving chernobylite, but are attacked by a mysterious figure. Igor uses the chernobylite to escape by creating a portal that lets him travel outside of space and time.

Igor ends up in an abandoned bunker—his new base of operations. He receives a call on the radio from someone who says they can help him find Tatyana. From there, the game settles into its normal structure. You go on missions into various areas of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. You go on one mission per day. Between missions, you return to your bunker, where you can craft weapons, ammo, armor, and health items. NPCs that you recruit end up here as well and look to you for food and amenities. You can send your recruits out into the Zone to look for supplies as well. Missions vary from continuing Igor's search for answers to doing favors for people in order to recruit them. No one is in the Zone because they are happy. They all have some sort of unfinished business to handle, and they need Igor's help.

There are choices to be made on these missions that will affect Igor's relationships with the NPCs. Often, they are intertwined, so a decision that pleases one will upset another.

If you don't manage these decisions correctly, NPCs might choose to leave. Not to worry, though. If you save up chernobylite, you can spend it to change the past. The significant changes that alter events can be revisited to make a different decision. You can also erase the moment and replay a mission entirely.



Monuments and eulogy belong to the dead.



Depression in one image.

Missions have one main objective broken into multiple steps and a number of optional points of interest to investigate on your map. If you stay too long, the weather begins to change. It grows dark. Strange green lightning strikes threaten you, and eventually the mysterious figure who attacked at the start of the game, known as the Black Stalker, will teleport in and give chase. There are seven maps that you will revisit multiple times, each time with different objectives. The area will be largely unchanged from one mission to the next, but resources and enemy placements will be different. If you have consumed any media about Chernobyl, you will see familiar places. The maps were apparently made from actual 3D scans of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. There are empty apartments, overgrown parks, and rusted vehicles. Everything was abandoned. It's a miserable place, and the game creates a fitting mood. Some Soviet-era artwork survives in stunning opposition to the dilapidated structures. The music is haunting as you wander through forests and abandoned buildings.

To start, you carry only a pistol and not much in the way of ammo or



Such an eastern european view.

healing items. It's best to avoid enemies and gather as many supplies as you can carry. You are equipped with an analyzer that will help you locate crafting materials and alert you to dangerous radiation. It was about midway through my playthrough that I didn't have to worry much about rations, and I skipped some resources in favor of gathering only the ones I needed for a particular base-building goal. Although you can craft weapons and armor, it is often not necessary because you can find or trade for these items in the maps. By the end of the game, I could craft weapons that harnessed the energy of chernobylite. I used them

a few times but kept going back to my trusty and heavily modified AK. All shooting is done by aiming down sights. You can also perform melee attacks and stealth kills. If you are in an enemy's vision, you will see a yellow indicator that grows brighter. If you don't manage to hide, or if you start attacking soldiers outright, they will start attacking. It's a system that is often used in games with stealth.

Although there is a lot to the game, some of it, like the base building, is pretty shallow. Towards the end, I had seen everything there is to the maps

No matter where you place the enemies or what weather you add, locations can only be so different. Resource gathering became unnecessary. I only encountered the green lightning and Black Stalker once because I waited around to experience them. I never needed to stay in a mission long enough for this to happen on its own. I stopped sending people out on missions because I didn't need anything they could bring back. Some of the decisions that affect relationships with Igor's crew are not as developed as others, which annoyed me. For example, at one point, Igor finds a kid locked up in a cell.

He was drugged and kidnapped by some unknown men. One of the crew, Olga, suggests that Igor leave the boy in the cell because it is dangerous out in the Zone. If you free the boy and tell him where to find a shelter full of people who can help him (the same shelter that Olga comes from, in fact), Igor's relationship with Olga will be negatively affected. After the mission, Olga remarks that freeing the boy was probably the right decision. It felt very arbitrary. When

making adjustments for the final mission, I didn't really care what decisions I was changing, just what the relationship outcome would be. There is some room to make hard choices, but the weight of those choices is diminished when it's really about how the crew feels. Maybe it's a commentary on free will versus fate (there's a fair share of philosophical discussion in Chernobylite), but it felt more like an underdeveloped aspect of the game.

Fortunately, the main characters of the game, Igor and Tatyana, are very well developed. I played with the original Russian voice acting and subtitles. Some characters speak with grating, rough voices (think Watto from Star Wars turned up to eleven), but the conversations Igor has with Tatyana in his head are well done. Tatyana speaks with him often. Sometimes as memories of better times that are triggered by something found in the Zone. She sometimes comments on what Igor is doing and the choices he has made. Igor remarks that she is just in his head, but her harsh rebukes still sting. She questions what kind of man looks away from atrocities in order to continue scientific research funded by the USSR.



Starvation, radiation or a bullet. What will it be today?

The fear in her voice is tangible when she wonders if she is one of the bodies in a mass grave. Although the mission plots can be flimsy, the main plot and the conversations with Tatyana are strong. Igor is forced to contemplate himself, both who he was and who he has become. He comes face to face with the result of things he did and could have done. He witnesses the outcome of science used for political purposes and the coldness of his peers and his government. It is a story that is well told, with moments of surprise and fun sci-fi sprinkled throughout.

In the end, with everything in place, you return to Chernobyl for a final mission. You must direct your crew on what parts they should play in this endeavor. The culmination of everything is thrilling and satisfying. The moments I liked most in the game were the quiet ones, though. There's a beautiful stained-glass window that somehow survived in spite of everything. There's a mural celebrating space travel in an otherwise drab building. Somber guitar or synthesizer plays during these moments. Everything fits together beautifully. You sometimes enter a simulated past reconstructed of chernobylite to witness events that you were not present for in the first place.

It's one of the mysterious things chernobylite can do and why you search the Zone for clues. Igor walks through a repeating corridor while people have conversations about him or about how they can use the power of chernobylite to come out on top while the nation crumbles around them. These ghostly green apparitions decide his fate, which has long since passed. Then, around a corner, half of the room is gone.

In its place are green crystals that stretch on further than you can see, creating impossible structures.

I needed to take screenshots for this review. I took a lot of screenshots just because I was impressed with the visuals. There is a screenshot mode too. I had to turn down my video settings because of some significant ghosting, but this didn't take away from the sights of Chernobylite.

In my opinion, the gameplay itself is the weakest part of Chernobylite. This is not to say it is bad. It's just that other aspects are what kept me engaged. The story is intriguing, the characters (mostly) interesting, the sights and sounds stunning and haunting. I was only mildly bothered by the game's shortcomings. There are some

half-finished ideas, but there are some fully realized ideas in Chernobylite that are worth experiencing. It is a game about choices, both the ones you make and the ones that were already made. The concept of the past and what part it plays in our future is wonderfully explored in the way only a video game can.

□ sweetcuppincakes

STORY ★★★★★☆
GRAPHICS ★★★★★☆
GAMEPLAY ★★★★★☆
SOUND ★★★★★☆
FUN METER ★★★★★☆



- Great atmosphere and mood
- Very good music and voice acting
- Variety of play styles possible



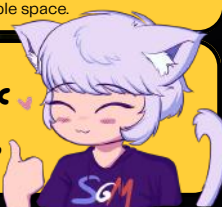
- Repetitive and shallow at times
- Some aspects feel underdeveloped
- Normal difficulty offers few challenges

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Genre: RPG, Post-apocalyptic
Developer: The Farm 51
Release Date: July 28, 2021

System Req: Intel Core i5, 8 GB RAM, Geforce GTX 660, 4- GB available space.

A HIGHLY
ATMOSPHERIC
AND
CAPTIVATING
GAME



BENDY

AND THE INK MACHINE®

Bendy and the Ink Machine is a horror puzzle game set in an old-timey animation studio. You play as a former employee returning to the abandoned studio at the behest of your former employer. It takes place over the course of five chapters, totaling roughly four hours of gameplay—more if you decide to replay chapters.

PRESENTATION

The most striking element of Bendy and the Ink Machine is the visuals. Every environment is depicted with thick black edges and imprecise lines, making the world appear like a cartoon from the 1930s. It's such a unique art style that is executed almost perfectly.

One of the best effects the visuals have is highlighting what doesn't fit into the cartoon world. Globbs of ink drip from the ceiling, and ink creatures roam the floors, contrasting with the studio itself. They don't have the same art style, instead being shown with relatively standard 3D graphics. It's an interesting stylistic decision that works in tandem with the art design to give weight to the horror elements. The world of Bendy feels familiar, but with something sinister beneath the surface.

On the other hand, I felt that the animations could've used some work, especially the player's animations, which looked stiff and uncomfortable. They weren't horrible, but they didn't complement the cartoon aesthetic as well as the lighting or art direction did. Similarly, I found the voice acting passable, but it never stood out as one of the game's strengths.



GAMEPLAY

Within the first thirty minutes, you quickly get a feel for what the whole game will be like. It's horror blended with a walking simulator, puzzles, and light combat mechanics. Depending on the chapter, there will be a different focus, but for the most part, you'll be getting one of these three concepts. I found the walking simulator portions to be the strongest; they build tension very well, don't overstay their welcome, and when they include a jump scare, it feels earned rather than lazy or cheap. You have time to walk around and take in the environment, playing to the game's visual strengths.

Unfortunately, the puzzle and combat portions were tedious, uninteresting, and killed any atmosphere and tension the game had previously.

I generally enjoy puzzles, but most of the ones in *Bendy* consist of a checklist of items you need to collect rather than something you need to think about and actually solve. There are a couple of genuine puzzles, but they are few and far between and certainly not strong enough to be worth the wait.

As for the combat, I felt that it could have been removed from the game without missing much. You only fight the lesser ink creatures, and they are quite easy to defeat. They would feel scarier if you actually had to run from them or sneak past them, but forcing you to kill dozens of them waters down their fear factor. They also exclusively spawn from ink piles, so it's not much of a surprise when they pop up; you can see it coming from a mile away. To make matters worse, the combat mechanics are rudimentary, boiling down to simply clicking on an enemy once to defeat them. It's clunky because of an odd invincibility window when enemies spawn, coupled with the fact that combat clearly wasn't fleshed out or polished in any significant way.

PERFORMANCE

While graphically it looks great, you can easily tell that it's not a AA or AAA game when it comes to polish. There are numerous bugs I encountered during my playtime, although only one was significant: when I got stuck between the game and the pause menu, preventing me from moving or exiting and forcing me to alt-f4. For the rest, they were minor issues like getting stuck on part of the level, an NPC failing to trigger the next part of a level, etc. I also encountered odd frame drops a few times without a clear explanation as to why. I would assume it was during some effects-heavy portion of the game, but it was hard to say exactly what it was, so your mileage may vary.

VERDICT

Bendy was a mixed bag, but I would ultimately recommend it. If you enjoy walking simulator horror with a little bit more interactivity, this could be right up your alley. The art is fantastic, and the horror is usually solid, but it gets let down by some of its more half-baked mechanics. I don't know if I would pick it up at full price, but it's unique enough to be worth checking out the next time it goes on sale.

□ ManlyMeatMan

STORY ★★★★★

GRAPHICS ★★★★★

GAMEPLAY ★★☆☆☆

SOUND ★★★★★

FUN METER ★★★★★



- Fantastic visuals
- Great horror elements
- Pretty unique
- Worth picking up on a good sale



- Too much walking
- Wonky mechanics
- Weak combat

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Genre: Horror, Puzzles

Developer: Joey Drew Studios

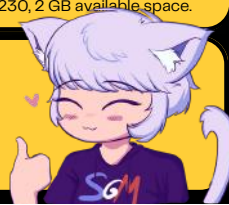
Release Date: February 10, 2017

System Req: Intel Pentium 4

2.00GHz, 4 GB RAM, AMD Radeon

R5 M230, 2 GB available space.

UNIQUE
VISUALS
COMBINED
WITH GOOD
HORROR
ELEMENTS



Spiritfarer®

"Hello Stella, you're the capt... I mean... Spiritfarer now."

But what now? Your old friend Gwen will show you the ropes.
Let's get a boat first. Luckily there is one here just around the corner.
The journey may begin.

Welcome to Spiritfarer, a lighthearted game about life and death and a girl trying to give restless souls their eternal rest. Come and discover a new world and many characters that may teach you about various aspects of life.

In Spiritfarer you play as Stella - and her cat Daffodil - who just got appointed as the new spiritfarer. You've got your own ship now and can explore the seas and islands you find on a big map. Find food and various resources, build and upgrade stuff, and reach new foreign waters. Talk to many different characters. Some may need your help and maybe some will want to come along on your journey.

As the spiritfarer, your main objective is to help those restless souls. To do that you first need to find them. Get ashore an island and explore it. You may find different resources like wood or ores, foods, treasures, or even shops selling you various items like seeds for your garden.



Indeed I will.

Talk to the inhabitants of the island. Some talk about themselves or give you more insight about the world. Some actually need your help and may reward you for doing so.

Occasionally you may find a special soul that you can take with you on your ship. They will give you a quest, then another, and another, and a whole quest line of quests. Some are rather selfish, some want you to make some progress, and some show you how to gather and handle resources or how to cook some delicious meals. The meals are important as you need to feed your new crew. Interact with them to learn more about their lives and their worries. They might teach you some valuable life lessons.

During your travels you may also come across places that you can't seem to reach or things you can't make yet. But do not worry; keep exploring and you may discover new resources, new buildings to process them, or even new abilities for yourself. You can even upgrade your ship. Make it bigger, faster, better, and overcome obstacles hindering your journey.

Or you may just sit back and relax and try to catch some fish.

The story of Spiritfarer isn't straightforward. Instead, you get to discover bits and pieces and put them together. And even though it's talking about death, it's also talking about life.

The story is told in a very lighthearted way so that one might not even think about death most of the time, and a child might not even think about it at all. But every now and then it hits you hard and causes quite a few emotions to well up. It makes you realize once again that life is fleeting. The characters are mostly likable and even relatable. They were all put together with a lot of care and love. They seem like they were once real people.

The Graphics. Just lovely. Everything, from the characters to the backgrounds, looks cute and beautiful and looks like a lot of heart was put into making them.

The drawn 2D style of the game fits perfectly to the lighthearted approach of the game. Everything just looks so nice and makes you want to see even more of this world.

The sound is good and decent. Most are background sounds like whistling wind, pouring rain, and splashing waves. The music is mostly discreet, but enhances the ambiance. The sounds of gathering and processing resources are also nicely done. It's nothing over-the-top, though I do wish some sounds would stand out a little bit more and be noticeable as I occasionally missed a "ding" that told me something was ready to collect.



Upgrading.

Spiritfarer is a rather calm game. Those that are looking for a challenge won't find it here. Rather, I'd say it's a game suitable for all ages. It's for kids, adults, and seniors alike.

A bit of skill is still needed nonetheless, but pretty much all passages or events to collect resources can be repeated or tried out endlessly. There is no punishment and no way to get a game over. Everyone can play it at their own pace. The game is also suitable even for those with little time to play games or with bigger gaps in between their sessions. This is because all of the quests are usually quite well described in the quest menu, so you won't have problems remembering where you left off or where to go next.

The gathering and processing of resources, while being a main part of the game, doesn't feel tedious or grindy (something I personally don't like) but rather engaging and rewarding. It's also fun trying out new combinations while cooking and looking to expand your recipe book, as well as trying to give your crew different meals and finding out what they're into and what they aren't.

The controls are simple and you have the choice to play with keyboard or controller. Additionally, you can even play co-op with the second player controlling the cat, Daffodil. I could imagine it might be quite fun playing together with your child, but mine is still too young for that so I haven't tried it myself. I didn't encounter problems with running the game, except one time where it froze in the loading process and I had to shut it down manually.

I had a lot of fun playing Spiritfarer. The calm atmosphere and general calm nature of the game makes it perfect to relax and calm your mind while still feeling engaged. The game is definitively eligible for the cozy corner of SG. The easy controls and general low skill level of the game makes it suitable for all ages. The theme of the game is delivered in a lighthearted way and doesn't feel heavy or occupying. The game also felt quite rewarding in various aspects - finding new places, reaching others found before, exploring new islands, finding new characters and resources, finding out what can be done with them and trying out new recipes - and didn't feel like a chore.

The game is not suited for gamers looking for a challenge and I'd say it has low replay value due to its nature (unless you didn't explore all aspects of the game during your first playthrough).

□ AiKirika

STORY	★★★★★☆☆
GRAPHICS	★★★★★☆☆
GAMEPLAY	★★★★★☆☆
SOUND	★★★★★☆☆
FUN METER	★★★★★☆☆



- Can be played at your own pace
- Story is told in a light-hearted way
- Calming and relaxing
- Likable and relatable characters
- Beautiful design



- Low replay-value
- No challenge for those who seek some

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Genre: Adventure, Management System Req: Dual Core 3.0 GHz
Developer: Thunder Lotus Games Processor, 4 GB RAM, AMD Radeon
Release Date: August 18, 2020 R5 M230, 7 GB available space.

SMOOTH
SAILING
ON THIS
ONE



You can easily relax while fishing



DOOM

HERE IS AN OLD ONE! DOOM! THE FAMOUS DOOM! YEAH, YOU HEARD ME RIGHT—THE GRANDFATHER OF THE FPS!

TALKING ABOUT THAT, THE GAME WILL CELEBRATE ITS 30TH BIRTHDAY THIS YEAR. ALMOST AS OLD AS ME.

AFTER A SUCCESSFUL FIRST TRY WITH WOLFENSTEIN 3D IN 1992, ID SOFTWARE CAME BACK WITH A WHOLE NEW GAME THAT WOULD KICK ASSES AND BE A HUGE HIT IN THE INDUSTRY, SO MUCH SO THAT WE NOW TALK ABOUT "DOOM-LIKE", AND EVEN NOW, THE STYLE IS STILL A THING WITH THIS BOOMER SHOOTER FASHION!



What a carnage...



Outch... Bet that hurts...

SO... IT IS A BIT HARD TO PUT OURSELVES IN CONTEXT, MOSTLY FOR THE YOUNGER OF US, BUT LET'S TRY TO IMAGINE: WE ARE IN THE BEGINNING OF THE '90S, AT THE TIME WHEN THE CONSOLE WAR WAS A THING. NINTENDO AND SEGA ARE BOTH FIGHTING EACH OTHER. A TIME WHEN THE CONSOLES WERE PRETTY MUCH POPULAR, ARCADE CABINETS STARTED TO SLOWLY FADE, AND COMPUTERS WEREN'T TRULY A THING YET IN THE PEOPLE'S HEADS.

GAMERS THEN NATURALLY GRAVITATE TOWARD THE SEGA MEGADRIVE/GENESIS OR NINTENDO SNES. THEY WERE 16-BIT CONSOLES AND GOT BETWEEN 64 KB AND 128 KB OF RAM. YEAH, THAT SOUNDS RIDICULOUS, RIGHT? THIS WAS A GENERATION BEFORE THE PS1 AND NINTENDO 64 WHICH MADE 3D A THING IN VIDEO GAMES. BEFORE THAT, MOST OF THEM WERE IN 2D, ASIDE FROM A FEW THAT TRIED AND SUCCEEDED MORE OR LESS. THE BEST EXAMPLE WAS "STAR FOX" ON THE SNES, WHICH INTEGRATED A CHIP IN THE CARTRIDGE TO COMPENSATE FOR THE LACK OF POWER OF THE CONSOLE HARDWARE.

AND IT WAS AT THIS MOMENT THAT JOHN CARMARCK AND HIS DEVELOPER TEAM FROM ID SOFTWARE CAME OUT WITH WOLFENSTEIN 3D AS A FIRST ATTEMPT, AND THEN DOOM, BOTH ON PERSONAL COMPUTERS! AN INCREDIBLE AND QUITE REVOLUTIONARY IDEA BECAUSE THEY CAME WITH TWO GAMES THAT LOOK LIKE 3D AND HAVE A FIRST-PERSON PERSPECTIVE ON A PLATFORM THAT WAS NOT THE MOST POPULAR BACK THEN! BOLD IDEA THERE, BUT THAT WORKED!



Hard to believe that the game could fit on floppy disks



Blood bath and reversed cross. Not very catholic.

**"THE ONLY THING
THEY FEAR IS YOU"**



THE GRAPHICS

IT IS PRETTY MUCH DIFFICULT TO JUDGE THE GRAPHICS OF A 1993 GAME WITH THE VISION OF A 2023 PLAYER. IF THERE IS ONE AREA THAT HAS GREATLY EVOLVED SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE INDUSTRY, IT IS GRAPHICS. THAT WAS MOSTLY SPECTACULAR BACK THEN, WHEN EVERY SIX MONTHS WAS A MAJOR EVOLUTION. EVERYTHING CHANGED FAST IN THIS PERIOD.

DOOM GRAPHICS WERE QUITE NICE BACK IN THE DAY. THE DEVELOPER TEAM WORKED HARD ON USING TRICKS TO GIVE THE GAME THE APPEARANCE OF A 3D GAME. IT WORKED WELL. THE SPRITES WERE, HOWEVER, ALL IN 2D.

THE WHOLE AMBIENCE IS DARK AND GORISH, WITH BLOOD AND STUFF. THERE WAS SOME KIND OF LIGHT EFFECT TOO, AND YOU COULD END UP IN SOME DARK ROOMS FROM TIME TO TIME.

I MUST ADMIT, THOUGH, THAT FROM A MODERN PERSPECTIVE, IT ALL LOOKS VERY OUTDATED NOW, AND A GOOD PART OF THE YOUNGEST GAMERS WOULD PROBABLY FIND THIS UGLY.

THE STORY

A STORY? IS THERE ACTUALLY A STORY IN DOOM? AS SOON AS YOU START THE GAME, YOU ARE IMMEDIATELY THROWN INTO THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT WITHOUT A SINGLE SCENARIO LINE. BUT LET'S BE HONEST HERE. WHO PLAYS DOOM FOR ITS STORY?

WELL, IT TURNS OUT THAT AT EVERY CHAPTER'S END, THERE IS SOME KIND OF TEXT TRYING TO JUSTIFY WHAT THE HECK IS HAPPENING AND MAKE THE LINKS BETWEEN THE CHAPTERS, BUT, WELL, NOTHING FANTASTIC, AND MOST OF ALL, COMPLETELY ABSURD. YOU ARE A SPACE MARINE SENT TO

MARS AND ITS MOON TO KICK ASSES AND CHEW BUBBLE GUM. YEP, BECAUSE WHY NOT?

I STILL TRIED TO LOOK UP FOR THE GAME MANUAL, JUST TO SEE IF THE STORY WAS MORE DEVELOPED HERE, LIKE THEY USED TO DO BACK IN THE DAY. BUT NO, THERE IS NOTHING THERE EITHER. NOT EVEN SOME LORE. CLEARLY, THIS IS NOT THE STRONGEST PART OF THE GAME.



They don't know it yet, but they are already dead

THE GAMEPLAY

THE GAMEPLAY IS SIMPLE BUT EFFICIENT. MOST OF THE PORTS, INCLUDING THE STEAM VERSION, EVEN MODERNIZED IT, NOTABLY WITH THE ADDITION OF MOUSE SUPPORT. IT MAYSOUND WEIRD, BUT ONCE UPON A TIME, THAT WAS NOT THE CASE.

FOR THOSE WHO DARE, THERE IS THE ORIGINAL VERSION THAT WORKS EMULATED WITH THE HELP OF DOSBOX. YOU WILL BE ABLE TO PLAY AND COMPARE THE ORIGINAL CONTROLS.



WHEN YOU START, YOU SPAWN ON THE MAP WITH A SIMPLE GUN AVAILABLE, AND YOUR GOAL IS TO FIND KEYS LOST ALL AROUND TO OPEN DOORS WHILE AT THE SAME TIME KILLING EVERYTHING ALIVE. YOU WILL FIND A GOOD BUNCH OF WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION AS WELL.

YOU HAVE A WHOLE ARSENAL JUST FOR YOU, FROM THE MOST BASIC GUN TO A BAZOOKA AND A PLASMA GUN. IF YOU ARE SHORT ON AMMO OR FEEL PARTICULARLY COURAGEOUS, YOU CAN DECIDE TO SIMPLY PUT YOUR FIST IN THEIR FACE. WITH A BIT OF LUCK, YOU WILL EVENTUALLY FIND A CHAINSAW AND BE REALLY DANGEROUS IN CLOSE COMBAT! AND TERRIBLY FUN TO PLAY!

THERE ARE A FEW OTHER ITEMS TO FIND TOO: HEALTH PACKS, ARMOR, ETC.

THE GAME IS FAST AND BRUTAL. THERE IS NO REAL NEED TO THINK; JUST GO AND SHOOT! AT THE END OF EACH LEVEL, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO SEE HOW WELL YOU DID WITH SOME KIND OF SCOREBOARD AND THE PAR TIME THAT WOULD BE USEFUL FOR THE SPEEDRUNNERS. GOTTA GO FAST!

REGARDING THE DIFFICULTY, YOU WILL HAVE THE CHOICE BETWEEN 5 LEVELS, FROM "I'M TOO YOUNG TO DIE" FOR THE MOST CASUAL PLAYERS TO "NIGHTMARE!" FOR THE MOST HARDCORES. NOBODY IS LEFT BEHIND.

EACH MAP HAS ITS OWN LOAD OF SECRETS TO FIND, WHICH USUALLY LET YOU FIND A PACKAGE OF SUPPLEMENTARY ITEMS. A GOOD WAY TO KEEP GOING BACK AND KEEP PLAYING UNTIL YOU DO FIND EVERYTHING!

FURTHERMORE, LET'S NOT FORGET THE MULTIPLAYER PART! PROBABLY THE MOST APPRECIATED ONE BY THE PLAYERS, I AM MORE OF A SOLO PLAYER MYSELF, BUT I MUST ADMIT THAT IS WHAT MADE THE GAME SO POPULAR BACK THEN.

YOU CAN PLAY EITHER COOP OR DEATHMATCH. THE STEAM VERSION ONLY OFFERS TO PLAY IN LAN. HOWEVER, YOU CAN FIND OTHER PORTS THAT ARE ONLINE-ORIENTED AND FIND MUCH MORE PEOPLE TO PLAY WITH. HOPEFULLY, THE STEAM VERSION HAS REMOTE PLAY TOGETHER AVAILABLE, SO THAT IS STILL A WAY TO PLAY ONLINE WITH YOUR FRIENDS.

THE AUDIO

A BIT LIKE THE GRAPHICS, THE AUDIO MAY SEEM OUTDATED FROM A MODERN PERSPECTIVE, BUT AT THE TIME, IT WAS REALLY GOOD. KILLING DEMONS ON METAL RIFFS WAS CLEARLY SOMETHING, AND IT DID FIT WELL WITH THE AMBIENCE OF THE GAME.

STILL TODAY, SOME OF THOSE ARE RECOGNIZABLE AND BEING COVERED ON YOUTUBE OR EVER REMASTERED, LIKE THE 2016 REBOOT DID (MAINLY THINKING ABOUT E1M1/AT DOOM'S GATE!).

THE SOUND EFFECTS ARE MOSTLY CORRECT, ASIDE FROM MAYBE BEING A BIT REPETITIVE. YOU WILL HEAR HERE ALL SORTS OF GUN SOUNDS, MONSTER GRUNTS, AND YOUR OWN CHARACTER VOICE BUMPING INTO WALLS.



Why the long face?

OTHERS

IF WOLFENSTEIN 3D WAS NOT NECESSARY MEANT TO BE MODDED, ID SOFTWARE MADE THE TASK EASIER HERE. AND THAT BECAME A REASON WHY THE GAME BECAME SO POPULAR, AND EVEN NOW, YOU CAN STILL FIND A DEDICATED COMMUNITY OF FANS STILL WORKING ON MODS AND MAPS.

IT IS A SHAME THAT THE STEAM PORT REQUIRES YOU TO CREATE AN ACCOUNT AND LOGIN TO BETHESDA TO GET ADDONS. THAT IS SOMETHING THAT I PERSONALLY AVOIDED.

HOPEFULLY, THERE ARE SOME WELL-KNOWN ALTERNATIVE PORTS! THE MOST WELL-KNOWN IS GZDOOM. IT WORKS WELL ON MODERN SETUPS, GIVES AN UPDATE TO THE OLD GRAPHICS, AND MODERNIZES THE GAMEPLAY AS WELL. OF COURSE, IT IS PERFECTLY SUITABLE FOR THE ADDITION OF MODS WITHOUT REQUIRING AN ACCOUNT AT BETHESDA, RIGHT?

IF YOU ARE MORE INTO ONLINE MULTIPLAYER, I WOULD ADVISE YOU TO TAKE A LOOK AT ZANDRONUM, AND IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR A MORE VANILLA EXPERIENCE, YOU MIGHT GET THEIR EQUIVALENTS, CHOCOLATE DOOM AND ZDAEMON.

ABOUT GRAPHICS ENHANCEMENTS (SOME OF THEM ARE INCREDIBLY WELL DONE) OR, ON THE CONTRARY, JUST FOCUS ON GAMEPLAY ADDITIONS.



Is it still Doom Engine at this point? (Total Chaos mod)

THERE IS, OF COURSE, WAY MORE TO TALK ABOUT, BUT THIS WOULD BE WAY TOO LONG, AND I WOULD TURN THIS REVIEW INTO A MOD GUIDE. YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK THEM OUT ON THE INTERNET.

I WILL JUST CONCLUDE THEN BY SAYING THAT, DESPITE ITS AGE, DOOM IS TRULY A CLASSIC AND STILL REALLY FUN TO PLAY!

□ MUDDY



Because fuck you, that's why! (Brutal Doom mod)

ABOUT MODS, THE MOST FAMOUS ONE IS BRUTAL DOOM. IT COMES WITH SOME GRAPHICAL ADDITIONS (MOSTLY BLOODY ONES!) AND A NICE, BRUTAL GAMEPLAY CHANGE. TERRIBLY FUN TO PLAY! THERE ARE, OF COURSE, SOME MODS THAT ONLY CARE



STORY	★☆☆☆☆
GRAPHICS	★★★★☆
GAMEPLAY	★★★★☆
SOUND	★★★★☆
FUN METER	★★★★★



- It's Fucking Doom
- Metal as fuck
- Dynamique
- Still really fun to play
- Lots of mods and maps from the fans



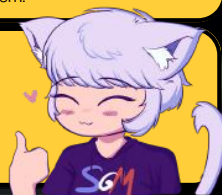
- Where are my bubble gums?!
- Fuck you Bethesda
- I don't want to create an account just to access addons

VERDICT

Genre: Action, FPS
Developer: ID Software
Release Date: December 10, 1993

System Req: A 100% Windows XP/Vista-compatible computer system.

THE
ORIGINAL
BOOMER
SHOOTER



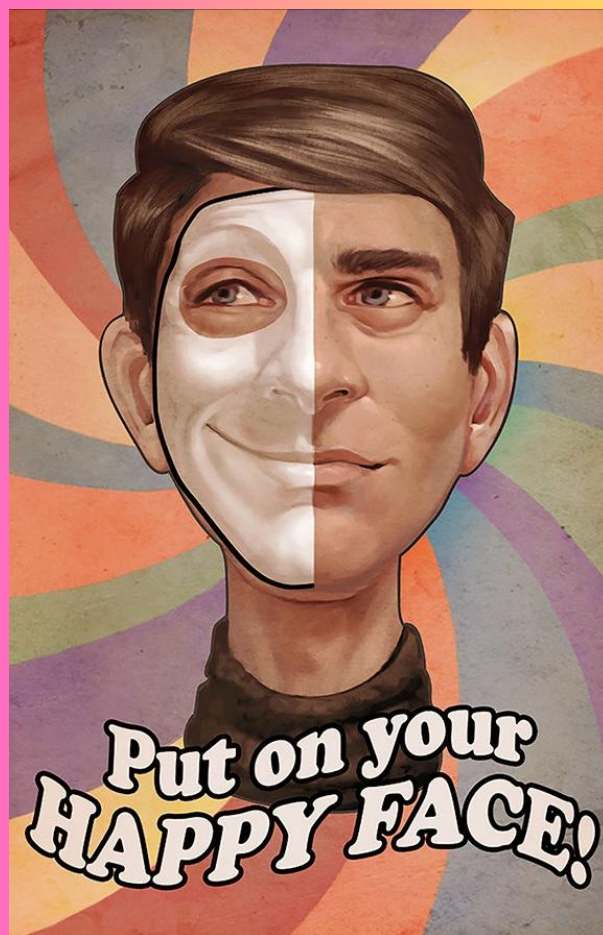
WE HAPPY FEW



"Happy is the country that has no history."



Ever since reading 1984, I've found dystopian settings to be fascinating. They offer intriguing insight into the human psyche, and at times, they come uncomfortably close to predicting the course our world is taking. As such, it's no surprise that I would take interest in We Happy Few. From masks that force permanent smiles to drugs that thrust happiness on civilians, the setting of this game is a deep dive into the horrors of false euphoria. The world alone hooked me. But what of the rest of the game? Would I enjoy We Happy Few enough to recommend it as a game rather than just a set piece?



That's what this review is for. It's to examine We Happy Few (WHF) as a first-person open-world survival game that's being sold for \$60 USD. When it first came out, WHF was in early access. I never played that version. This is a look at the complete package WHF is today and whether it's worth its steep asking price.

"Can't shake the feeling that I'm just a character in someone's story. And someone's already decided how it's all going to end."

WHF takes place in Wellington Wells, a fictional city in England. The time period is the 1960s, though it is an alternate timeline to our reality. The story focuses on three characters: Arthur Hastings, Sally Boyle, and Ollie Starkey. The player has to finish Arthur's tale to begin Sally's and then finish Sally's to access Ollie's. The three characters know of each other, but Arthur only meets Sally and Ollie a few times, while Sally and Ollie never make contact. Their stories take place in the same time period, and the results of their actions are seen in all three. I liked seeing their chapters cross over, and I wish it had happened more often.

Arthur's goal is to escape Wellington Wells. His memories were suppressed by a mandatory drug called Joy. That false happiness is broken when he sees a newspaper article mentioning his lost brother, Percy. To find Percy, Arthur has to journey through all of Wellington Wells, from the treacherous outskirts to the supposedly blissful civilizations. As he travels, he learns about the truths that everyone has so desperately tried to forget and is forced to face his own checkered past. Since Sally and Ollie's stories can't be played until Arthur's is done, I won't be discussing the plots for them. Arthur's story has twists that would drastically spoil Sally and Ollie's stories, so it's best to simply say they have their own desires.

What I can expand on is how the setting is enriched by these characters. Arthur's travels give an overview of the entire society. Sally's tale is more concentrated on the upper-class citizens, while Ollie's gives a better look at the outcasts of the city.

Through their stories, the player learns how the population of Wellington Wells was complicit in something so horrendous that they chose to erase their past. The city is now full of people who rely on Joy to carry on, and the outskirts have people who are barely able to function from lacking Joy. The only sense of direction citizens have comes from the leadership of Uncle Jack, a jovial man who cheerfully reminds everyone via TV and radio to take their Joy. This flawed society is analyzed in all three stories and warns of the dangers that exist in willfully forgetting our history.



Be sure to listen to Uncle Jack. He always knows best!

If you're looking for fleshed-out characters, a grim portrayal of what our world could have been, and a fascinating look into the lengths humans would go to banish their guilt, I can't recommend WHF enough. The game has a lot of flaws that I'll be covering below, but as someone who values story and characterization above most else, WHF made a heck of an impact on me. The introduction sequence for Arthur is one of the best I've ever seen for showcasing a setting, and I was hooked from then all the way to the well-crafted conclusions of each story. I have a feeling most players would feel the same, at least if they have the patience to get through some of the problematic gameplay elements.



"No admittance unless you're gorgeous!"



One of the game's highlights is its art style. There is a sharp contrast between the bustling middle-class villages and the desolate outskirts. The areas inhabited by Joy users have rainbow-painted streets, flower-filled gardens, and prancing crowds of well-dressed folks gleefully greeting their neighbors. The run-down wastelands have worn dirt roads, wild greenery encroaching on wrecked buildings, and outcasts in rags stumbling about while mumbling of past woes. I loved how they used bright and eye-catching colors for the supposedly 'happy' parts of the city, while the dullness of the areas without Joy showcased stark reality.



Arthur on Joy.

I found the character models to be effective. They have a charming and cartoonish vibe. Faces are often exaggerated to be longer or plumper than usual, and body sizes range from comically short old ladies to intimidatingly towering bobbies.

Most of the citizens look as friendly as they act, which makes it all the more startling when you upset them. They can flip from welcoming to murderous in the blink of an eye, and the character models are much more effective for that than realistic ones would be.



"Lovely day for it!"



I have to give major props to the voice actors of the main characters. They're great at emoting, which helped me get invested in the story. This also goes for other important characters, especially Uncle Jack. His friendly tone is perfect for coming across as a lovable figurehead, and when he occasionally drops sinister lines with his jolly voice, it feels appropriately jarring. Even the NPCs have well-voiced lines, showing far more emotions than I expected from the 'extras.'

There are a handful of vocal tracks in WHF, and I found them catchy and fitting. The atmospheric music is appropriately used, though not all that noteworthy.

I like that you can turn off the TVs and radios, as the music and Uncle Jack's dialogue can make it difficult to hear noise cues. It'll also help people who are about to go crazy from the repetitive 'off air' music that plays all the bloody time.

My only complaint about the sound design is that sometimes I had trouble telling where noises were coming from. I would try to find an NPC based on their vocal cues or the sounds of their footsteps, only to be unsure if they were near me or on a different floor

altogether. Even though I was using headphones, this issue came up several times.

"The truth shall set you free. But it will make you miserable."

Unfortunately, we have come to the worst part of the game, which is the actual gameplay. What's most frustrating is that WHF has so many neat concepts that could have been far better than they were. That, along with several minor bugs and glitches that have gone unfixed to this day, drags down what could have been a stellar experience.

I'll be discussing combat, survival, Joy, randomization elements, and glitches in the following parts. I wish I could go into detail about other mechanics, but WHF has an absolute bucket-load of them, so I can only touch on the most important ones.



This would be interesting if I hadn't seen the same asset several times already.

Two quick notes. Firstly, I played on Normal mode. While Easy and Hard modes exist, I have no experience with them. Secondly, I used mouse-and-keyboard. There is controller support, but I never used one.

"It occurs to me that the locals may not be all that welcoming. Oh dear. Let's try not to get killed, shall we?"

Combat is not the main focus of WHF, and it shows. If you upset an NPC or catch the attention of someone infected by plague, prepare to be attacked by everyone in your vicinity. You will be quickly outnumbered and are better off trying to hide until your assailants forget you exist. Yet there are story parts that require combat, and those can be frustrating.

Plenty of objects are usable as weapons, but they'll eventually break. It's not hard to get multiple weapons, especially since you can craft them. You can also craft healing items, and this was a godsend for me. It doesn't matter if you're terrible at fighting as long as you can spam enough medicine to stay healthy. The problem is that it isn't much fun. I'd rather have a good combat system instead of relying on cheesing it with healing.



This is why all good citizens should already be in bed.



To clarify: this isn't supposed to happen.

Combat involves hitting enemies and blocking their attacks. The weapons feel clunky to use, and while blocking helps, it's not as productive as I'd have liked. You can shove people to get an advantage, though I didn't find it that useful. The main limiting factor in combat is that you have stamina, so you can't keep swinging nonstop. What especially annoyed me was that there were times when I would block a hit, only to get spun around immediately. I'm not sure if that was supposed to happen or if it was physics being wonky. Either way, it sucked.

There are skill trees that give you combat abilities when playing as Arthur and Ollie. Arthur is a jack of all trades while Ollie focuses on combat. Sally doesn't have these abilities, but she and Arthur have stealth skills that they can use to silently disable foes. Stealth works far better than fighting. As long as you're careful, you can get behind patrolling enemies and knock them out in seconds. I had fun doing quiet takedowns, and I didn't find fighting fun, so take a wild guess at which option I chose whenever possible.

It's also worth mentioning the utterly pointless distinction between lethal and non-lethal methods of subduing enemies. If you use a stealth takedown or a non-lethal weapon, enemies are knocked out. If you use any other weapon, they are killed. Why does this matter? Because there are two achievements linked to that mechanic. That's it. There are no morality mechanics, knocked-out enemies never wake up, and NPCs that stumble on bodies always react as if they are dead. The developers could have done something with this, but they didn't, and it bothers me.



And to think that a moment ago, they were trying to save that woman.

"Getting a bit thirsty. I better find something to drink. Where's a pub when you need one?"

WHF bills itself as a survival game. It's true that it has mechanics that survival games are known for, such as hunger, thirst, and sleeping. However, you can go through the entire story without needing to worry about those factors. Rather than dying from lack of food, drink, or rest, your stamina is adversely affected. If you don't want to deal with that slap on the wrist, you can eat one of the hundreds of food items you'll trip over, and water is similarly easy to come by. There are plenty of places to sleep, and even an hour of sleep will keep you going for ages. All three characters can also get a skill that takes away the negative effects from neglecting eating, drinking, and sleeping.

So, what's the point? The survival mechanics are small irritations that story-driven players probably won't care about. Eating and drinking give bonuses, which I don't mind. The weird part is how these supposedly important aspects aren't mechanically important at all. If they were, the consequences of ignoring them would be more severe. It's also bizarre to have a skill that makes the system useless.

There are two modes in WHF: Story Mode and Survival Mode. Survival Mode makes it so you die if you don't eat, drink, or sleep. That's fine as a side mode for people who like that genre, but it also doesn't have any story. Since the story and characters are the strongest points of WHF, that's the mode most people would prioritize. I feel the survival mechanics weren't necessary for Story Mode, instead being a small distraction that adds almost nothing to the experience.

"Happiness is a choice!"

Joy is a medicine that causes people to feel happiness at the price of losing memories. It plays a huge role in the story, but what about in gameplay? As a mechanic, it had interesting ideas behind it, only to fall short on executing them.

Joy can be looted in several places or consumed at static locations. When your character is on Joy, they see the world as a beautiful place with a double rainbow and flower petals in the sky, butterflies bursting out around you, and a change in vocals to make people sound friendlier. As lovely as that is, it takes a turn for the horrifying when your Joy runs out. You undergo temporary withdrawal symptoms, which include darkened visuals, grotesque moths, and vocals being distorted into sounding demonic.



Take your Joy!

In addition, there is a 'Memory Loss' gauge that fills up as you use Joy. When it is completely full, you have a breakdown. Withdrawal makes it difficult to fight and causes NPCs to become aggressive, while a breakdown lasts longer and leaves you nearly helpless. This would be problematic if you didn't have a gauge to keep track of it. With only a bit of management, you can easily find a place to hide before your breakdown occurs, thus making the consequences hardly worth worrying about.

Joy's purpose mechanically is to get past machines that detect if you haven't taken it (which causes damage and aggroes NPCs) and to avoid having Doctors attack you (with them being powerful enemies). There could have been serious repercussions to using Joy so that players would have to decide whether it was worth using to make traveling safer. Instead, you can take enough Joy to waltz through the dangerous areas, hide in a garbage can until your withdrawal passes, and repeat as much as you like.



Many doses of Joy a day keeps the Doctors away!

Similar to how there's no morality involved with killing or leaving people alive, there's nothing keeping track of how much Joy you take beyond the temporary withdrawal episodes. You'd think your character would lose memories as a result of overdosing on Joy, but no, it's just flavor text. It gives the illusion of consequence without actually punishing the player, which is disappointing.



"I feel sort of bad robbing the hero of Ramsgate, but he might have good stuff in his footlocker."

I like it when games take advantage of randomly generated aspects. What I don't care for is it being shoehorned into games that don't need it. WHF dabbles in randomization mechanics, and it definitely doesn't need them.

One of the main uses of randomization is for the world map. Areas of extreme importance remain in the same place, but the locations of hatches for fast travel, houses that you can break into, trees where you can get honey, and other places of interest are randomized. It doesn't add anything to the game. All it does is ensure that when you play different character stories, some of these places aren't going to be where they were in previous stories. There's no logical reason for this since the characters share a timeline and, thus, should have the same locations. It also doesn't encourage replaying the game. Like, wowee, the place to extract materials from that dud bomb is now on the other side of the map, what an exciting reason to try a new playthrough!

Loot is also randomized. Crafting requires a bunch of materials, and there's no guarantee that you'll find what you need when searching through garbage piles or stealing from houses (most with randomized interiors). Randomizing items in garbage piles makes sense because they are replenished, but there's no reason to make chest and safe contents random.

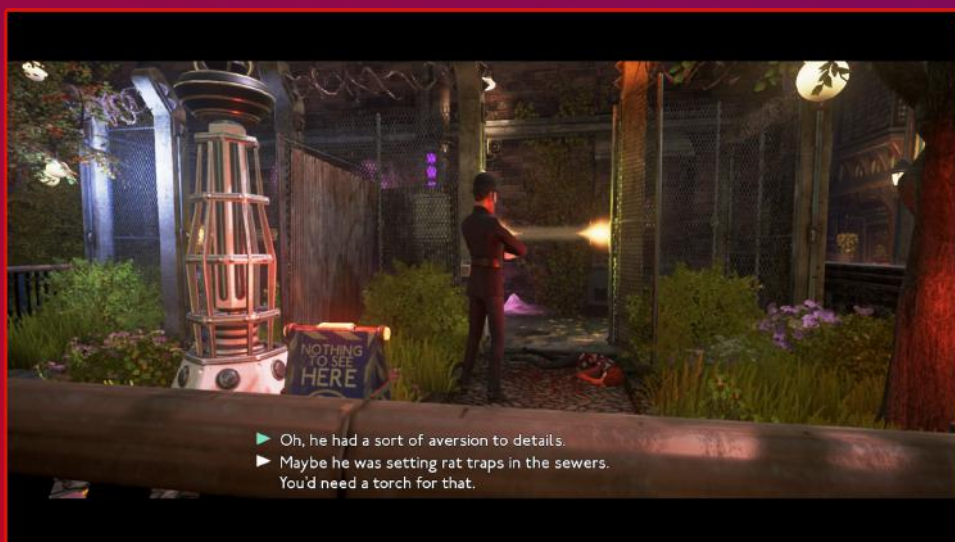
It's annoying to search for specific items you need for crafting, only to get unlucky if they don't spawn. I'd rather have set locations for less common items to ensure everything could be crafted.

Finally, potentially distinct areas lost their appeal because I kept seeing randomized assets being reused. That lack of individuality took away some of the enjoyment of exploring. I'd have rather the developers made more unique story-based locations because that's where their talents shined.

"Oh, for heaven's sake. Doesn't anything work around here?"

If a game is advertising itself as being worth \$60 USD, I like to think most of the glitches have been ironed out. This has been less and less common as of late, and WHF is no exception. None of the glitches I ran into were game-breaking, but that doesn't excuse how sloppy the final product is.

Some of the glitches were harmless and comical. NPCs levitating over buildings, clipping through people sitting on the same bench, hovering cups and bottles, civilians sitting on air, and character models suddenly appearing in occupied beds are some examples of the silliness I ran into. My favorite glitch was when I saw a cutscene of a bobby that was supposed to be talking to another bobby. I heard two different voices chatting, and it took me several seconds to realize there should be a second person, only for his model not to have appeared.



Last time I checked, this chap wasn't supposed to have an imaginary friend.

Other glitches were much more annoying. Many NPCs will accidentally deviate from their routines and get stuck in places, repeating their dialogue endlessly until you're kind enough to put them out of their artificial misery. It doesn't help that the subtitles sometimes bug out and linger onscreen longer than they should or appear when you're not close to where the noise location is. The most irritating issue I had was when a house had its Joy-detecting machines activate for no apparent reason. That meant there was a constantly wailing alarm as NPCs inside the house got electrocuted again and again. I had to go inside, disable the traps, and knock out the people solely to shut up everything involved.

The most game-affecting glitch I had was when a sidequest wouldn't let me interact with a certain NPC. Resetting the game and handling the fight beforehand differently fixed that, but it was concerning. Keep in mind that WHF was officially released in August 2018. Over four years later, the game is still in this state. That's pretty disgraceful.

"Well, I'm afraid we've come to the end of our time."

WHF is a game I recommend without hesitation to story/character/setting-based enthusiasts. For people who value gameplay over all else, it's less likely to satisfy. Because of all the glitches, I recommend not buying this at full price. It'd be more reasonable at around \$30 USD. That being said, I loved my time with WHF, and it's now a personal favorite of mine.

□ Celtic7Guardian



You look smashing!



SGM | PAGE 57

STORY	★★★★★★
GRAPHICS	★★★★☆
GAMEPLAY	★★★★☆
SOUND	★★★★☆
FUN METER	★★★★☆

- Setting is engrossing
- The three characters are set apart by personality and play style
- Graphics and art style are colorful and appealing
- Voice acting is excellent
- Stealth gameplay is satisfying

- Randomization is unnecessary
- Joy mechanics could have been far more interesting
- AI is often borked
- Tons of minor bugs and glitches
- Combat is shaky

VERDICT

Genre: Adventure, Open World

System Req: Triple-core Intel or AMD,

Developer: Compulsion Games

2.0 GHz, 8 GB RAM, NVIDIA GeForce

Release Date: August 10, 2018

460 GTX, 6 GB available space.

TAKE YOUR JOY PILLS AND PLAY THIS ASAP!

DEAD & CELLS

INTRO

Dead Cells is an action-packed indie game developed and published by Motion Twin. It is a very unique blend of roguelike and metroidvania elements, which makes for one of the best games of its genre. Within this review, I will cover the game's mechanics, graphics, and storyline while also highlighting some of the various, and I do mean various, indie game references found throughout the game, which reminded me of movies such as Ready Player One with just the sheer amount of them. It is a game that has its main focus on exploration, combat, and progression. All of the levels are randomly generated, which means that every playthrough will be slightly different, adding to the game's replayability. The game is split into biomes, each with its own unique challenges, enemies, and bosses. To progress, the player must defeat each biome's boss, and usually a standard playthrough has three bosses.



REFERENCE HEAVEN

Throughout the game, players will come across many references, small and large, to other games. It almost feels like a love letter to gaming in general, and fans of indie games will especially appreciate the nods to some of their favorite titles. You can see it most often in the form of a weapon or a skin you can find, whether it be the nail from Hollow Knight or a baseball bat from Hotline Miami, or just a deck of cards from Slay the Spire. It is quite an ingenious way of doing it, and you could probably just do a whole page filled with all the little nods to games, new and old alike.

THE LOOPY GAMEPLAY

Dead Cells hinges on being played over and over, and for that, it rewards you with new difficulties as well as permanent unlocks, from getting just an extra health potion all the way to new items and powers that you will have the chance of finding in subsequent playthroughs.

The combat is where the game shines, and it's easy to see why it has been compared to games like Dark Souls and Castlevania.

It's both very fast-paced and slow-paced depending on the build you end up with, or just the preferred playstyle. You have access to a variety of weapons, from swords, whips, and bows to grenades and traps. Each weapon class has its unique set of strengths and weaknesses defined by their main attribute, which always remains the same, and minor ones, which you can change, but it is worth mentioning that it is random, so you do have a chance of ending up with a worse weapon overall. You can also equip a shield, which will enable the parry system, allowing you to deflect attacks and counter-attack, adding an extra layer of depth to the combat if one so chooses.

GRAPHICS & SOUND

In terms of graphics, Dead Cells is a visual masterpiece. The game's 2D pixel art style is stunning, with vibrant colors and detailed backgrounds that create a sense of depth and immersion. The game's animations are smooth and fluid, which adds to the game's overall polish. I found the game's sound design to also be excellent, with an atmospheric soundtrack that perfectly complements whatever biome you are currently in.



STORY

The game's storyline is minimalistic, with it being a roguelike and the focus being on the gameplay rather than the plot. However, the game does have small bits of lore that are slowly revealed as the player progresses through the game. You can also discover notes and journals left by previous characters that add to the game's world-building. Overall, the story is just good enough for a roguelike.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In conclusion, Dead Cells is an excellent roguelike game that combines the best elements of roguelikes and metroidvanias. The combat is addictive, and it's definitely a "just one more run" type of game. The game's graphics are great, and just encountering the diverse number of indie game references and trying to figure out where you know them from makes it more enticing. The story is serviceable to the gameplay, and if you're a fan of indie games or looking for a challenging and addictive action game, then Dead Cells is definitely worth playing.

□ Naycon



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STORY	★★★★☆
GRAPHICS	★★★★★
GAMEPLAY	★★★★★
SOUND	★★★★☆
FUN METER	★★★★★



- Can be played in short bursts
- All about the gameplay
- Beautiful graphics



- A little grindy with all the unlocks

V
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T

Genre: Adventure, Roguelike
Developer: Motion Twin
Release Date: August 7, 2018

System Req: Intel i5+, 2 GB RAM,
NVIDIA 450 GTS, 500 MB
available space.

**DON'T
SLEEP ON
THIS ONE!**



The background of the page is a stylized illustration. In the upper left, a dark, multi-towered castle with orange lights in its windows sits atop a rocky hill. A large, pale, cratered moon hangs in the dark sky behind it. In the lower left, a green, scaly dragon-like creature with a large yellow beak and sharp teeth is shown in profile, looking towards the right. In the foreground, a mummy-wrapped duck with a large yellow beak and sharp teeth is shown in profile, looking towards the right. The duck's eyes are red. The overall style is reminiscent of the original DuckTales game's art.

Disney DuckTales

-REMASTERED-

Ducktales is a reimagining of a classic 1989 DuckTales game on NES. It's a classic platformer where you have to jump, duck, run and evade bad guys. But this time in high-definition graphics.

It's already been 10 years around since it came out, but despite that, I hadn't managed to get my hands on this one. To be perfectly honest, I hadn't really noticed that it even existed. But that can be partly blamed on me being born several years after the original came out. So I kind of missed the NES era and even GameBoy, which the original DuckTales was ported to a year after release.

In a similar fashion, after coming out on PS, Xbox, and PC, the Remastered was also ported to smartphones. Although I don't think it ever came back to Android and iOS storefronts after being delisted in 2019 due to a license agreement ending with Disney.

If anyone still doesn't know what DuckTales is - it's a game that was based on a cartoon series with the same name and Uncle Scrooge comic books, which was a spin-off from Donald Duck comics. And this is where my nostalgic love for this comes from - my childhood went by reading Donald Duck comics. And while my real gaming years started around the time GTA: SA came out, I still have some memories and nostalgic feelings playing ROM cartridge games (I'm not even sure on which platforms). But the enjoyment and pleasant feeling from playing something with 8-bit graphics is still there.

So imagine my excitement seeing a remaster for a classic from DuckVerse. And the game did not let me down.

The story follows Scrooge McDuck, who races around the world to collect treasure to become even more richer than he is now. Along the way, Huey, Dewey, and Louie (Donald's nephews and Scrooge's grand-nephews) get into trouble trying to help Scrooge in getting the treasure while looking for adventure. As always, the Beagle Boys are here on their endless quest to clean out Scrooge's vault. Along the way, you meet notable characters from the comics, such as Scrooge's rival Glomgold, alongside Magica De Spell. Try repeating that 3 times - quite a mouthful of words. But the universe and its characters are quite intricate and, in my opinion, are worthy of checking out in detail.



The story itself is quite short and feels like it should be a chapter in a bigger game, but since it's a remaster, it was probably way more difficult and time-consuming in the original. The story involves different characters, as I already noted, and seamlessly blends together different types of levels and environments. You get different types of enemies as well, depending on location. And while short, it definitely is an interesting journey throughout the game.

Soundtrack-wise, they haven't missed a beat as well. While nothing was exceptionally remarkable or memorable, the music is quality work and sets a mood for having a swim in nostalgic feelings. Voice acting is top quality and a cookie for devs for being able to set it up with the original surviving voice actors from the DuckTales cartoon series.

With it being a platformer, you would have to really try to mess up the gameplay. It's a classic run, duck, jump type of game with a cherry on top - you get a pogo stick with which to jump around and neutralize enemies. So far, everything is fun and balanced.

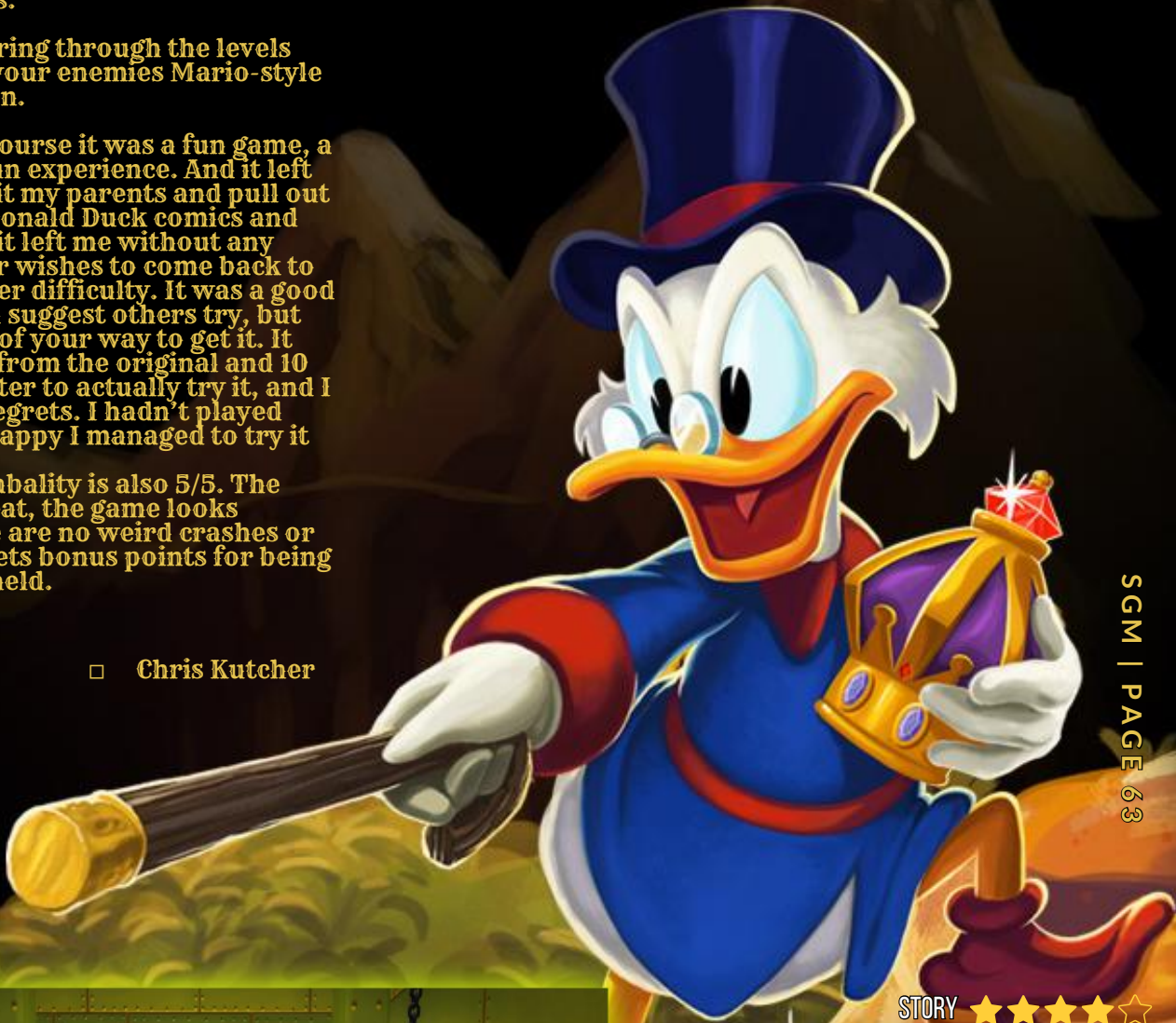


For me, the difficulty of the game was a bit of a mood killer. Not that I don't enjoy a difficult game, but in this case it was quite unbalanced. Some levels were more difficult than boss fights, some boss fights were tormentingly long, and the final challenge was a pain in the ass due to a bit of clumsy controls.

Overall, maneuvering through the levels and neutralizing your enemies Mario-style is seamless and fun.

Fun, fun, fun. Of course it was a fun game, a fun story, and a fun experience. And it left me wanting to visit my parents and pull out my collection of Donald Duck comics and reread them. But it left me without any longing feelings or wishes to come back to finish it on a harder difficulty. It was a good game that I would suggest others try, but no need to go out of your way to get it. It took me 34 years from the original and 10 years from remaster to actually try it, and I do not have any regrets. I hadn't played before, but I am happy I managed to try it now. SteamDeck compatibility is also 5/5. The controls work great, the game looks perfect, and there are no weird crashes or glitches. Plus, it gets bonus points for being played on a handheld.

□ Chris Kutcher



SGM | PAGE 63



STORY	★★★★★☆☆
GRAPHICS	★★★★☆☆☆☆
GAMEPLAY	★★★★☆☆☆☆
SOUND	★★★★★☆☆
FUN METER	★★★★☆☆☆☆

+

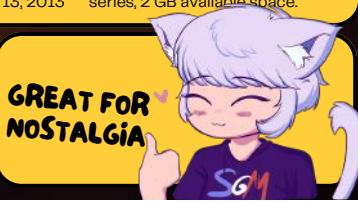
- Great visuals
- Good soundtrack
- Diverse bunch of enemies
- Many memorable Duckverse characters

VERDICT

-

- Difficulty is a tad unbalanced
- It's quite short
- Little to no replayability
- Messy controls
- A bit pricey for what it has to offer

Genre: Adventure, Platformer
Developer: WayForward
Release Date: August 13, 2013
System Req: Intel™ Core 2 Duo, 2 GB RAM, NVIDIA GeForce™ 200 series, 2 GB available space.



Let's address the elephant in the room: this game heavily focuses on queer themes. For some, this may be a blessing — a game that addresses something that is dear and close to them, and that is typically ignored by popular media — while others may find it off-putting. If you fall into the latter group, stop reading now and never install this game.

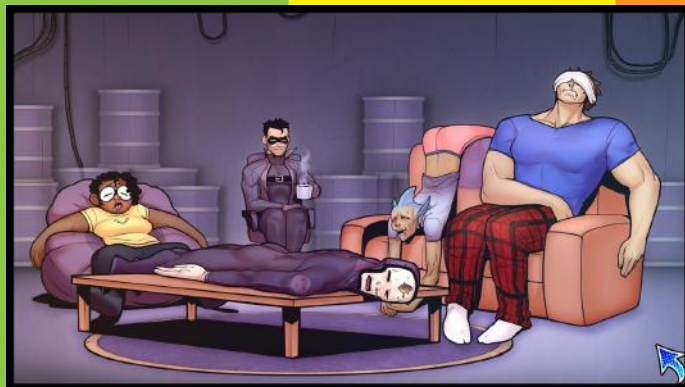
Ok, now that this is out of the way - "Mission: It's Complicated" is your average visual novel in terms of gameplay and presentation. It is also the first visual novel that I have ever played, so I don't have a lot of references to compare it against. My guess is that the best visual novels have a great combination of plot, characters, and visuals, so let me talk about each one of those separately:

Plot: The intro to the plot is extremely short and feels rushed. You're tasked with assembling a group of superheroes to stop a being eating all the universes in the multiverse. The game's premise revolves around making them fall in love and interact with each other. However, the main gameplay loop is a combination of sending your heroes on dates and missions requiring two heroes. Your choices during encounters determine your heroes' growth and unlock additional scenes, powers, and interactions.

Characters: this is probably the strongest part of the game. Each of the five superheroes has its own personality and is, for the most part, enjoyable, interesting, and unique. They all are queer, but it feels quite natural and organic in the

MISSION: IT'S COMPLICATED

context of the interactions. You need to know their quirks, likes, and dislikes if you want to make successful pairings and react appropriately in each situation. I assume this is the reason why most people play visual novels, and this was my favorite part of the game.



Visuals: they are lacking, as most of the events and interactions are dominated by text, with only small thumbnails on the screen providing any indication of who is speaking. There's a lack of context, and even during missions, such as saving a group of teenagers from a psychic monster in an observatory, there are no accompanying visuals of the surroundings or characters. While the game's complexity adds some depth to the visuals through different combinations of events, days of the week, and hero pairs, it falls short of graphical expectations.

In summary, "Mission: It's Complicated" is a great recommendation for anyone that likes Visual Novels and/or queer topics, but if you are not into any of those things, this will probably won't fulfill your gaming cravings. That said, it's free, short, low-spec, and accessible, so why not give it a try?

□ fernadopa



			#	TOTALS
The "SGM Leaderboard" counts every single vote from the "Best Review" vote poll on the SteamGifts platform.			1	 30
			2	23
			3	17
			4	14
			5	9
The scores will be updated with each new issue released. Once a new issue is released, the points from the previous vote poll will stop being counted.			6	8
			7	6
			8	6
			9	6
			10	5
Top 5 will enter 5 separate giveaways for: • Life is Strange: True Colors • Hogwarts Legacy • God of War • Cuphead • Sifu			11	4
			12	4
			13	4
			14	4
			15	4
In case of multiple wins, the winner will have to chose a game and re-roll the rest. 1st place will have priority over the rest. 2nd will have priority over 3rd, 4th and 5th. And so on...			16	3
			17	3
			18	3
			19	3
			20	2
6th to 30th will enter a special invite-only "Wave" of giveaways made by our Contributors. In which the same "pick one and drop the rest" rule will apply, but without ranking priority!			21	1
			22	1
The Event ends on 25th of December 2023! Or in the final issue if we don't make it that far :)				

UPCOMING RELEASES IN MAY



Rule a fantasy realm of your own design! Explore new magical realms in Age of Wonders' signature blend of 4X strategy and turn-based tactical combat. Control a faction that grows and changes as you expand your empire with each turn!

Release Date: May 2, 2023



Darkest Dungeon II is a roguelike road trip of the damned. Form a party, equip your stagecoach, and set off across the decaying landscape on a last gasp quest to avert the apocalypse. The greatest dangers you face, however, may come from within...

Release Date: May 8, 2023



Welcome to Bricklandia, home of a massive open-world LEGO® driving adventure. Race anywhere, play with anyone, build your dream rides, and defeat a cast of wild racing rivals for the coveted Sky Trophy!

Release Date: May 19, 2023



Amnesia: The Bunker is a first-person horror game set in a desolate WW1 Bunker. Face the oppressing terrors stalking the dark corridors. Search for and use the tools and weapons at your disposal, while keeping the lights on at all costs. Overcome fear, persevere, and make your way out alive.

Release Date: May 23, 2023



Load up your Boltgun and unleash the awesome Space Marine arsenal to blast your way through an explosion of sprites, pixels and blood in a perfect blend of Warhammer 40,000, frenetic gameplay and the stylish visuals of 90's retro shooters.

Release Date: May 23, 2023



Don the coat of a clever entrepreneur, take over a small railway company in the early 1800s and turn your steam engines into the workhorses of the economy. Grow your company into the largest railway company of the continent and outsmart your competitors.

Release Date: May 25, 2023



Play as Gollum on his quest to retrieve his Precious. You will need to climb the mountains of Mordor, sneak around Mirkwood and make difficult choices. Who will gain the upper hand: the cunning Gollum or the innocent Smeagol?

Release Date: May 25, 2023

Assassin's Creed (2016)



Oh wow! We have a winner! This is the third video game related movie I'm reviewing and things aren't looking good in this particular case. I thought it would take a while to replace the worst movie we had, but Assassin's Creed goes out of its way to make sure it scores a lower rating than Doom. Yikes. Where should I even start? Actually, you know what? I don't know where to start, because neither does the movie. I'll just blabber about random stuff and hope something sticks. I guess that was the thought process behind the making of this movie as well.

The franchise the movie is based on is known for its thrilling action sequences, engaging storylines, and well-developed characters. It is basically one of the biggest gaming franchises to ever exist. And what we get instead is THIS. I can't wrap my head around it. How can a movie fail so badly when the producers had the freedom of choosing a historical setting, had a very solid cast of actors to work with, and a reported budget of around 150 million \$ to make it? Who in their right mind wouldn't bet that it's going to be a proper blockbuster, right? I mean, surely it has to! Well... nope. It flopped. It flopped harder than a cloaked man jumping from a high building aiming for the haystack but missing it by quite a few dozen meters would flop. It was a disaster.

I could barely follow the convoluted plot, which in theory should be pretty easy to run along (it's not Memento or Primer, after all), but in this case, it was so poorly executed that I had to rewind some scenes just to make sure I didn't miss something. To my surprise, I never did. The characters bored me to hell. Watching Michael Fassbender's character, Callum Lynch, which the story is centered around, a man who is forced to relive the memories of his assassin ancestor, Aguilar de Nerha, during the Spanish Inquisition, feels like watching a man battle dementia. He doesn't know who he is, what he wants, or what he is supposed to do, but somehow by the time the movie ends, he managed to figure everything out and make friends along the way (yay!). I honestly felt bad for him. I don't blame Fassbender though. He is a fantastic actor, and I am sure that he did his best with what he was given to work with. Cotillard's character was also underdeveloped, and her motivations were unclear.

The movie's storyline was overly complex and confusing. The writers tried to incorporate too many elements from the video games, making the story difficult to understand for those unfamiliar with the idea. The action scenes didn't help either. They were poorly choreographed, and the dizzy camera work made it difficult to see what was happening. I honestly don't think there is anything good to speak about, besides the stacked cast of high-profile actors who sadly had poor material to work with. Assassin's Creed is a disappointing movie, for both the gamer fans of the franchise and for the casual movie-goers as well, who probably expected more from it. Heavy alcohol use recommended before watching or just go watch paint dry instead.

Personal Score: 45%

AtomicBlonde



Michael Fassbender



Marion Cotillard



Jeremy Irons



Charlotte Rampling



Michael Kenneth Williams



ABBA Ed Sheeran DUA LIPA SNOOP DOGG CARDI B METALLICA 1D ONE DIRECTION

ED ZEPPELIN AVICII

SGM's Playlist

DAFT PUNK SHAKIRA DYSTIA

LINKIN PARK RAMMSTEIN

DMX

THE PRODIGY

ARCTIC MONKEYS

NIRVANA

KISS

PUSSYCAT DOLLS

AC/DC

BACKSTREET BOYS

SLIPKNOT

BLACK SABBATH

J BALVIN

PANJABI MC

BEYONCÉ

BON JOVI

GUNS N' ROSES

MODERN TALKING

LANA DEL REY

DEPCH MODE

SKRILLEX

GORILLAZ

KANE WEST

RIHANNA

Tenacious D - Beelzebass (abubis)

El Canto del Loco - Zapatillas (küiroichi)

Siah - Forever (Celtic7Guardian)

BACKXWASH - Black Sailor Moon (ManlyMeatMan)

Flora Cash - You're Somebody Else (BloodHood)

bbno\$ & Rich Brian - edamame (jbonidguy007)

Kiltro - The Drunk (Garlboh)

Graham Todd - A Touch of Class (VinroyIsViral)

DyE - Fantasy (AtomicBlonde)

DEATHLOOP OST (PsychoApeMan)

SCREENSHOT

of the Month



By AiKirika
(Spiritfarer)

Honorable Mentions



By Thexder
(Arise: A Simple Story)



By Kiirouchi
(Slow Damage)



By abubis
(Monster Hunter Rise)

**HOT
SALES**

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(Sale ends 23rd of May)



Sales as HOT as me!

GET THEM
WHILE YOU
CAN!



✦ CREDITS AND THANKS! ✦

Hello Guys and Gals,

AtomicBlonde here speaking to you again!

We're on the third issue already, and while we still had a delay (a pretty long one), I believe the Magazine is heading in the right direction! Our team expanded and the number of pages increased. Yup, that's how it works! Awesome, isn't it?

Let's hope June's issue will grow bigger, and our team even stronger! Thank you all for reading and supporting the Magazine.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to everyone who helped us directly. Without their assistance, this issue would not have been possible.

Now, let's get into the specifics! We want to extend our thanks to:

OUR CONTRIBUTORS, because without them we wouldn't have games to review in the first place

- WallyKazam**, for giving us Werewolf: The Apocalypse - Heart of the Forest
- Garlboh**, for giving us Dead Cells, Garfield Kart & Bendy and the Ink Machine
- Kiiroichi**, for giving us Deep Rock Galactic, TOEM & Doom (1993)
- Celtic7Guardian**, for giving us Spiritfarer
- Muddy**, for giving us Potion Craft: Alchemist Simulator
- abubis**, for giving us Resident Evil 2
- wigglenose**, for giving us DuckTales Remastered

OUR EDITORS, who made the magazine easier to read for all of us

- Muddy**, for editing Doom (1993)
- RayOfLight**, for editing TOEM, Deep Rock Galactic, Bendy and the Ink Machine, Chenobylite, We Happy Few, Dead Cells & Resident Evil 2
- Fleart**, for editing Aliens: Colonial Marines
- VinroyIsViral**, for editing Garfield Kart, DuckTales Remastered & We Happy Few (additional editing)
- Celtic7Guardian**, for editing Werewolf: The Apocalypse - Heart of the Forest, Potion Craft: Alchemist Simulator & Spiritfarer

OUR ARTIST AND OUR DESIGNERS, because what's a magazine but a gargantuan artistic effort?

- Kiiroichi**, for drawing, writing & designing the Special Section page and designing the pages for Werewolf: The Apocalypse - Heart of the Forest and TOEM
- Muddy**, for writing & designing the pages for Doom (1993)

Join Us.

Reviewer. Contributor. Editor. Reader.

What's Your Role?

SGM