

STEAMGIFTS COMMUNITY'S  
DIGITAL GAMING MAGAZINE

SGM  
2.0

# NieR:Automata™



## NEWS

Fresh News from the  
Gaming World

## REVIEWS

NieR:Automata™  
Mafia  
Mortal Kombat 11  
And much more!

## EXTRA

Screenshot of the Month  
Upcoming Games  
Movie Review  
Hot On-Sales

#14



# CONTENTS

## SPECIAL SECTION

03) Happy New Year!

## NEWS SECTION

04) Gaming Related News

## INTERVIEW

09) Best Laid Plans Productions

## REVIEWS

13) Save The Villainess

16) Growing Up

22) Suzerain

26) Mafia: Definitive Edition

33) Minoria

41) My Friendly Neighborhood

48) The Gunk

53) NieR: Automata

61) Ghost Song

71) Mortal Kombat 11 Ultimate

## FREE2PLAY SECTION

79) Doronko Wanko

## LEADERBOARD

80) What are the leaderboards?

81) Current ranking

## SCREENSHOT OF THE MONTH

82) And the Winner is...

83) Honorable Mentions

## HYPE SECTION

84) Latest notable releases

## MEDIA & ENTERTAINMENT

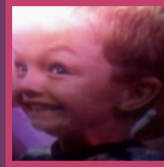
87) Movie Recommendation

89) SGM's Playlist

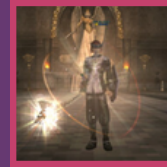
## CREDITS

90) Thank you

## REVIEWERS



sweetcuppincakes



Faloperito



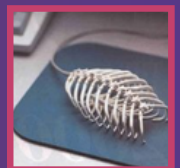
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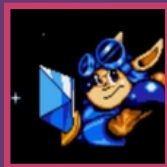
Chocolate Van Candy



Thexder



PsychoApeMan



fernandopa



kiioichi

## EDITORS



Orbs

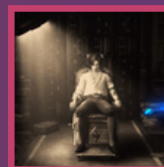


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RayOfLight

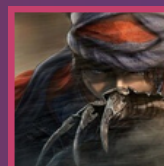
## DESIGNERS



kiioichi



Chocolate Van Candy



La Volpe



VinroylsViral



Hello, everyone! Vin here with another special statement! As we close another exciting year, we would first like to thank everyone who makes this magazine possible. Seriously, this isn't a job for just one person to carry on their backs, and all the support that goes into developing every issue is the core reason why we can still keep releasing things like this! Our reviewers, readers, contributors, designers, editors, interviewers, and more... thank you all so much!

This year, we've worked really hard to elevate our content, keeping you all entertained and engaged with firsthand reviews of the many games we give away in our group! From hidden indie gems to blockbuster titles, we aim to capture the magic of gaming in every release.

As the holiday season is closing, we hope you all had a wonderful time with your loved ones and plenty of time to play some games! Thank you all again for your continued support. Your support fuels our continued creation of issues, and we can't wait to share even more with you in the year ahead.

■ VinroylsViral



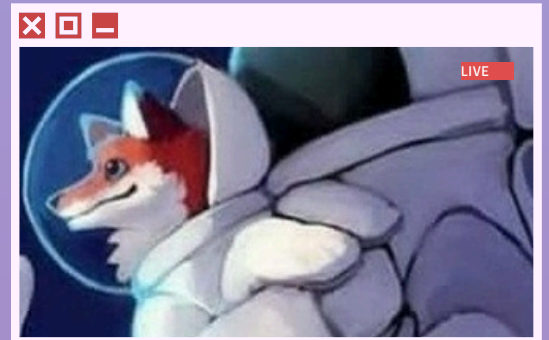


# NEWS TIME!

```
// Connecting to the I.N.T.E.R.NET via jbond_the_spacefox@intergalactic.explorer.extraordinaire...  
// Connection timed out: The entity <jbondguy007> is no longer present on the network.  
// Attempting to reconnect via alternative connection  
jbond_backup_account@temporary.connection.port...
```

```
// CONNECTION ESTABLISHED.
```

H-hello? Is this thing on? Ah, good! We have a connection! I don't have much time to explain, so I'll make this one brief - if you've received my last transmission in what would be two to three months ago in your observable time, you may remember that I was blasting away into the "next system"... well, turns out that my next destination, exoplanetary system GROBUL-38, held a surprise... and not the good kind of surprises! I mean, who would have thought some systems in our galaxy outlaw space-traveling foxes? I sure as hell didn't!



4

Anyways, between evading the strict military police force and gathering intel, I finally have a moment to connect to a secret connection via the Intergalactic Network Tele-Entertainment Radio NETWORK communication system (I.N.T.E.R. NET). I bring the tidbits of news I could gather as I dangerously avoided death by deadly robot lasers (yes, they have those here!)

■ jbondguy007, desperately charging the warp drive to promptly escape this system before he's space toast!

---

## AI GENERATED CATS AT THE GAME AWARDS?

The Game Awards was recently upon us, with its various announcements, reveals, and, more often than not, disappointments. One particular showcase raised a few eyebrows when a game titled "Catly" was announced with a trailer that made many question the legitimacy of the entire project due to the apparent use of generative AI. The controversial announcement trailer sparked conversation about how a potentially "fake" game revealed via AI-generated video had made it past the filters and onto the Game Awards.

Facing severe backlash, a representative for Catly developer SuperAuthenti later made a statement claiming that neither the trailer nor the game uses generative AI, but some remain skeptical. The whole situation raises the question of whether or not generative AI is becoming too accurate to tell from actual human creations... or maybe it's just that people are becoming better at lying about their use of generative AI. I leave it up to you to decide, dear readers!



## UBISOFT SHUTS DOWN XDEFIANT

Remember Concord? I mean, XDefiant? Oh, it doesn't matter. Both are competitive shooters by big-name publishers who were killed before they even had time to live (if they ever lived, that is). Merely three months after its official release, Ubisoft's XDefiant is being shut down, with sales halted in early December and the servers officially shutting down for good in June of 2025. Chalk one up for yet another Ubisoft fail.

Source: dexterto.com



## NINTENDO SWITCH 2 REVEALED

Nintendo has officially revealed the first look at its latest console and successor to the Nintendo Switch, aptly (and plainly) named the Nintendo Switch 2. The reveal shows the new handheld device boasting a larger screen, larger joycons, what appears to be a new way to snap joycons to the console, and promises some level of backwards compatibility with games from the previous Nintendo Switch console. Specifications have apparently been leaked, but an official announcement should be coming from Nintendo shortly to confirm how it will compare to its predecessor.

Source: youtube.com

## UBISOFT QUIETLY RELEASES BLOCKCHAIN GAME

Speaking of Ubisoft fails, the questionably administrated publisher has yet again landed in the spotlight for all the wrong reasons after sneakily releasing a "game" featuring Rayman and... NFTs. (Insert the "how often do we have to teach you this lesson, old man" meme here.) Fans of the Rayman franchise are upset, but not surprised at Ubisoft desperately clawing at the concept of NFTs after the release of another blockchain game, Champions Tactics: Grimoria Chronicles, just months prior.



Source: Eurogamer

## LATEST STEAM CLIENT UPDATE NOT SUPPORTED ON WINDOWS 7/8

It isn't news that Valve officially announced the end of support for users on Windows 7 or Windows 8, however, the client update released in late November made this announcement a reality, as users of these operating systems will not automatically receive the latest client update. Look, I get it - changes are hard to cope with. Why, even though I had a hard time parting with my MU5EDECK-O1 intergalactic radio waves receiver when support ended for version 3.6, I had no choice but to upgrade to that expensive new MU5EDECK-O2.

At least now my ship is rocking a crisp 64 Mbit/s bitrate music and 30 million channels from across the galaxy! Oops, I'm getting sidetracked again...

Source: PC Gamer







# SAVE THE VILLAINESS

*Exclusive!*

Hello, dear readers! I'm Chocolate, local SGM goblin, and I have interviewed Tanya and Emily from Best Laid Plans Productions to talk about *Save the Villainess*, their upcoming game!

What you see here is only an excerpt of the interview - get our supplement to see all the juicy (and very interesting!) deets they've shared with us!

Before we begin, please present yourselves to our wonderful readers!

6



Thanks for inviting us to this interview with SMG magazine. Your in-depth reviews and interviews on Steam games are amazing and we are honored to be here. I'm Tanya Yan, a neurodivergent Desi-American writer, editor, and researcher. I'm a long-time gamer who enjoys a wide range of genres, including RPGs, visual novels, life sims, and hidden object games. I'm also a fan of historical and fantasy stories, including villainess isekai stories like *My Next Life as a Villainess* and historical fantasy series like *My Lady Jane*. Currently, I am our team's co-writer, co-editor, assistant coder, marketer, and community manager.



I'm Emily Woodhouse, a neurodivergent writer, graphic designer, programmer, and jack of all artistic trades. I'm the other half of the two-person creative team developing *Save the Villainess*. While I do write and edit the storyline with Tanya, my major focus is on programming, animation, graphic design, UI/UX, and art and sound direction for the game. However, because we *are* such a small team, both Tanya and I step in to do anything that is required and not being covered by our amazing collaborators. In my case, that means challenges such as creating cloud dioramas, editing sounds to create the most terrifying hungry stomach noise known to man, and providing the singing voice for a Victorian child dying of consumption... as you will find out when you play the *Save the Villainess* demo on Steam!



What made you create *Save the Villainess* – a murder-mystery investigative game about saving a villainess – in the first place?



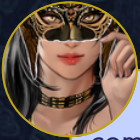
That is a great question! Before we talk more about why we made *Save the Villainess*, it might be useful to talk more about what our game *is*. Essentially, our game is an answer to a very specific question: What would you do if you were trapped as the amnesiac villainess in a romance novel you can no longer remember... and at least one of your possible love interests wants you *dead*?



*Save the Villainess* is also a mystery and horror game about dodging murder, dealing with betrayal, and what it takes to survive a story where anyone and anything may be out to destroy you. It's a game about love and trauma and resilience and healing. However, it is also a murder mystery where you are the intended victim and must dig yourself out of the coffin that everyone has built for you.



When we talk about why we created *Save the Villainess*, we really want to emphasize that it's a game that reflects many topics that are personally important to us. Our game is about women who are made out to be evil, about the trauma of being harassed by others, about the willpower and sense of humor that it takes to survive that harassment... and finally, about how villainesses are created and destroyed.



Ultimately, in *Save the Villainess*, we are creating the interactive comedic and horrific (and optionally romantic) villainess-themed murder-mystery game of our dreams. We hope that our players will find this game to be one from their dreams - or nightmares - as well!

How did you approach designing the game's story?



We love talking about story design and are very excited to get a chance to discuss this. As we've stated previously, we were strongly influenced by many wonderful villainess isekai novels, manwha, and manga. This made us want to create an interactive villainess isekai game that would allow us to share our stories in ways that would be impossible in a more static novel, manwha, and manga format. When designing *Save the Villainess*, we wanted players to do much more than just watch the story of a villainess unfold. We wanted you, our player, to control the villainess, gather clues, solve mysteries, and defeat enemies. For once, *you* are in charge of saving the villainess and her fate is in your hands!





Ultimately, the complicated branching narrative we wanted to tell in *Save the Villainess* could only be told as a game. The player is an important part of the story being told, as are the choices they make. Making *Save the Villainess* as a game has allowed us to explore the effects of choices and consequences on the larger story we are telling, something that isn't possible in a linear story narrative. After all, if *Save the Villainess* was a novel or a manwha, our readers couldn't see what happens if they fail to solve a deductive puzzle or what happens if they seduce all of the love interests or what happens if they *don't* eat the apple.

To be clear, there are some pieces of the story that players can *only* find by making choices that do not seem to be the way forward. There are also pieces of the story that change should the player revisit certain previous events. Thus, making *Save the Villainess* a game allows us to offer players a *choice* in how the villainess' story unfolds, both in terms of investigation and romance.

What emotions or experiences did you want players to feel as they progress through the game?



There are so many emotions we hope that our players experience as they play *Save the Villainess*. We hope our players feel joy when Jane is saved, horror when they experience the pain that she (or another version of Jane) experiences, relief when they manage to save her from destruction, sadness when they realize how she was betrayed, and sympathy as well as horror as they finally realize what happened to the original Lady Jane... and why.

Ultimately, in this game, we want to explore a theme that lies at the heart of the villainess genre: How can you survive a world that wants to destroy you?

We wanted to explore how someone being different or not fitting into their society could make them be seen as bad or worthy of destruction. We wanted to know: What makes a villainess? How do you decide who is worthy of being saved... and who should be destroyed?



I also want to point out that, although there is a lot of darkness in the game, there is also a lot of black comedy. We firmly believe that people often cope with the worst parts of life through laughter and that is reflected in our characters and their way of handling their situations. Jane, our character, can laugh to ease her pain. We hope our players will do the same. The dark comedy and puns and innuendo in our game are more than just our attempts at making players laugh. The comedy in the game is a release valve for the intense pressure of the story, as well as our characters' way of surviving what would otherwise be unbearable pain.

We also reference the use of innuendo and puns by writers like Jane Austen and Terry Pratchett to provide both humor and a larger sense of the values and personality of the characters. We hope our players will laugh a great deal as they make their way through our story, even as they face the darkness that lies underneath the humor.



What was an unexpected or interesting problem you had while making this game?



One of our biggest problems when we started designing our game is that what we wanted to do to tell our story did *not* have an easy model for us to follow. For instance, our UI actually provides a lot of in-game clues about what is happening. The dialogue and choice boxes in particular will change depending on the time of day, the events occurring, and what kind of choices the characters are making. In order to make this work within the game, we created some modified modules for the Ren'py engine we are using as our base to be able to easily customize for the variety of information we are trying to communicate at different points in the game.



We also spent a lot of time before sharing our story thinking about how to best immerse people in the world and emphasize the tension and disorientation that Jane, our main character, feels in reaction to her situation. Ultimately, we chose to tell our story through dialogue only, so that players would know *exactly* as much as the main character, outside of what they could notice in the background and world around her. There is no narrator or exposition to reassure you about what you are seeing in *Save the Villainess*. You have to make choices with the same amount of information as Jane Neville herself, outside of what you can notice in the surrounding environment. This creates both tension and immediacy which we think helps with the horror and mystery elements of the story.

9

Through the demo, more than 20 secrets are hidden in the background. In our playthrough, we found less than a quarter. Could you give an example of one of those secrets to our readers?



We are thrilled you are interested in delving into the secrets of *Save the Villainess*! On our discord server, one of our amazing players, Cloudy\_Floof, created a document detailing some of the secrets she and others in the community found. We love that document although there are still some secrets that haven't been found.

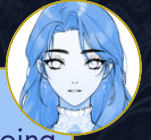


For example, we will provide hints for two secrets! Firstly, at the start of the game, you're asked what your favorite food is. We have dozens of responses you can receive if you put in one of over two hundred different food options. Feel free to experiment and see what our sassy narrator will tell you.

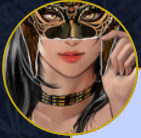
Secondly, we'll tell you to keep an eye on the backgrounds of our game. Whenever there's a long, zooming pan, there may be something lurking in the background, just waiting for you. In general, watching the background will be good for both finding the secrets of this world... and *surviving* those secrets once you find them.



What's an important lesson you've learned during the development of the game that you'll carry forward into future projects?



I think one of the most important lessons I'll personally carry forward into future projects is that all of the planning and careful thought we put into doing outlining and storyboarding and pseudocode all made the actual implementation of the game work so much better. It's not that we still didn't have some hilarious accidents like polterhorse or kaiju!Izel, but our ability to keep the game connected with an arc for clues, both written and animated, wouldn't have been possible without that earlier preparation work.



My personal lesson is that the support of others matters so much when it comes to tackling an ambitious project like *Save the Villainess*. I will always be grateful to my co-developer Emily, family, friends, creative collaborators, and players for giving me emotional and instrumental support for this project. Making creation a community endeavor was vital for me.

How did you settle on the art direction used in the game?



In designing the unsettling art style of our game to highlight our blend of dark humor, romance, and horror, we were influenced by the art of the late Victorian and early Edwardian period. For instance, the style of the horror of our game was influenced by the design of occult and spiritualist obsessions such as Tarot (which shows up in our chapter menu) and by weird horror writing pioneers, including Lovecraftian precursor Robert W. Chambers. (As mentioned earlier, Chambers' story, *The King in Yellow*, provided the name for our fantasy kingdom of Carcosa). That weird horror influence in design is illustrated in our game by the second demo scene where you take tea with the men while a dark void swirls in the background... as well as in our characters' eyes.

Furthermore, our art direction pulls from influences from Victorian stage plays, silent movies, and late-Victorian iconography, often associated with spiritualism and the occult. When we say that you will step into living paintings in the game, we don't say *what kind* of living paintings.



We also are very grateful to our amazing artists who worked period-specific designs into every aspect of the characters and imagery. The clothing and designs of our characters are based specifically on the designs and colors of the late Victorian/early Edwardian time period. This allows us to do some really interesting visual storytelling.

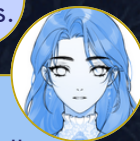
When someone in the game is wearing an outfit that is out of place or the background showcases an object that does *not* seem to be from that time period, that is a clue to the larger story and worth noting. We wanted an art direction where the visuals were meaningful and cohesively tied together by both color and story elements. What you see is not only what you get, but tells almost as much of the story as the words themselves.





Will Jane spend more time with some of the characters than others?

We have tried hard not to play favorites in our game! We love all our characters so, while Jane gets the most screen time, we've tried to balance the amount of time she spends with the rest of our main cast - Edmund, Ben, Izel, Servant, and our mysterious female love interest. They will all get their time to shine, with Servant and the mysterious female character appearing as pivotal roles in multiple routes.



Of course, there will be some side characters, particularly the flashy Raymond Alpin and the charming Roshan, who may steal hearts as well, despite having far less screen time. We can't wait to have them appear on stage in later parts of the game!

Who is your favorite character?



Our main character and villainess, Jane, is our favorite character in the whole story, which is helpful because she's the most important one! The whole point of the story is to *Save the Villainess*... though we also want Jane to save *herself* with guidance from our players!

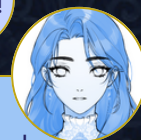
Jane is a very interesting character in that she's a neurodivergent biracial woman of color who finds herself lost in a terrible romance novel where anyone and anything, even furniture, might kill her. She's trapped in an absurd and terrifying situation, surrounded by people she can't trust. Yet she's determined to smile and make bad jokes to lighten her mood and do the best that she can. She's an optimistic character who does her best to survive a world trying to destroy her. We hope our players can come to love Jane in all her quirky glory. Even more, we hope that everyone will want to save her as her tale unravels.

11



Finally, is there anything else you'd like our readers to know?

Thank you for taking the time to read through this interview about our process of developing this game. If this interview interests you, we have a free 3-hour demo of *Save the Villainess* that you can try for yourself. It's available on Steam and Itch.io. We hope you enjoy your definitely-not-murderous stay in Carcosa by Jane's side!



While we do have a number of thirty-second elevator pitches for our game that have been mentioned throughout our interview, I have a slightly different approach to seeing if you want to try our game.

In the game, we have an investigation scene where there is a long joke based on the fact that the statement attributed to Marie Antoinette "Let them eat cake!" was actually "Qu'ils mangent de la brioche" in French. Brioche is actually not cake but a form of bread and our joke plays off that and the cake. If you are reading this and smirking, we highly recommend you check out the demo!

In all seriousness, if you are someone who loves history, how who tells stories shapes the stories being told, and bad puns and innuendo, we hope that you will come try to *Save the Villainess*.

[Read the full interview here!](#)





**WE WANT**  
**YOU!**  
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# SAVE THE VILLAINESS



Save the Villainess is an upcoming visual novel with the demo available right now. It follows a yet unnamed woman who finds herself—reincarnated, perhaps? (Though she doesn't recall dying)—in the ragged dress of Jane Neville, the villainess of what seems to be a somewhat trashy teenage romance story.

13

She knows she has been betrayed by Jane's betrothed but doesn't remember who that is.

She knows someone has rescued Jane from the guillotine but doesn't know who.

She wakes up, amnesic, in a moving carriage taking her somewhere. As you might guess, she doesn't know whose, why, or where she's going.

She's off to a good start.





Since my trusty laptop isn't powerful enough to run this absolute unit of a VN, I played this with a fellow SGM member, another interviewer/reviewer, and a dear friend of mine, Abubis. (Say hi, boo!)

The demo took four hours for one playthrough. During that time, we meet Jane, the unnamed person who got reincarnated as Jane, the three main love interests, the best character in the game, and a very cursed fish, among others.

We also get a feel of the game's mechanics, humor, and plot. There is a lot to go through, so scenes are rather self-contained and could feel a bit rushed at times – I don't think this little problem will still occur in the full game, though.

The sound present in the demo is quite lovely! But where this game actually shines is in the graphic department. The art we've seen is gorgeous, plain and simple. We haven't seen all of it, but man, every asset we've been shown is amazingly detailed and just... so pretty! This obviously includes character sprites, but it also includes the backgrounds and even the UI. To make sure we can enjoy all of this visual goodness, the game is chock full of animations directing our eye flow and adding dynamism. There are even some free perspective sections, in which we can freely decide our focus in order to look around and try to find some of the secrets hidden in the backgrounds (reportedly over 25 in the demo alone! We found around... four? Maybe five? During our playthrough.)

The servant is objectively the best character in the game, but I also liked two of the other romantic interests. In fact, I won't try to describe them – instead, I took the liberty of screenshotting a line from each of them (the one I felt represented them the most!) and used it as their whole description. I'm very proud of this idea.





However, while we are talking about the characters, there is something I must mention. I do not know if it is because we binged the demo, because the characters are being influenced by the original story, or if it's the general tone of the game, but I felt like the way the characters acted and talked was... too much. The feeling wasn't too vexing at the beginning – I suspect that's due to two factors: Jane was still getting on her feet, and she was on her own – but as we continued playing, it got a bit bothersome. Jane insisted she was a cunning, genius investigator/actress at the drop of a hat, only to say the most obvious thing possible; the guys also denied everything in an incredibly specific way, and nothing ever let up. HOWEVER, I feel like this might be on purpose, as a narrative device, and most of my worry is about it getting too much, not stopping even at serious moments. Thus, take this paragraph with a pinch of salt; who knows what the full game will bring?

I also want to mention that while this game isn't horny, it assumes you are – when meeting a new character, the camera will pan over their body seductively, relishing itself on the sensitive areas. I am not a particularly horny person, so when the game rubbed this in Jane's face later on, it felt a bit uncalled for. Thankfully, Jane had no idea what was going on, so the joke didn't stretch for long.

The system requirements are also insane: 8 GB RAM and 10 GB storage. The game has a lot of visual effects and animations, which means that the minimum requirements are higher than what my laptop can run... and this is a visual novel.

I do find the whole demo to be delightfully mysterious: we don't really know what's going on with the house, who is a friend of Jane's and who's trying to get rid of her, why do all of these gorgeous people flock around her, what does the narrator mean, a lot of the time, why does everyone act so exaggeratedly... I have a lot of questions and know the answers won't come soon, but I am extremely excited to see what the full version of Save the Villainess will bring to us.

#### ■ Chocolate VC

##### the good

- Beautiful
- The servant's here
- I'm intrigued

##### the bad

- Insane system requirements
- Got a bit too exaggerated at times

Please save her.





# GROWING UP

Growing Up is a life simulation management game developed and published by Vile Monarch. Released on October 14th, 2021, in this game, you're in charge of a character that you need to lead from childhood to adulthood over the span of 18 years. Over this span of time, you'll make a lot of different connections and gain valuable skills that will decide your fate when reaching adulthood. So, let's get right into the review to talk more in-depth about this game!

16

## Story: Writing Pages in One's Life

As mentioned prior, you play as the child of a loving family, and you'll need to manage various aspects of their life as they, well, grow up.

You'll get to experience their life in various sections. In progressing order, those sections of life are the toddler stage, pre-school stage, elementary school stage, middle school stage, and high school stage. In the earlier stages, the game focuses on your interactions with your parents more; however, this shifts once you reach the elementary school stage. From here on, your interactions with your parents become more like... business interactions, and you'll focus more on the interactions you have with the friends (or potential romance partner) you make in each school stage and a variety of adults in different professions that you can encounter in the many map locations of the game.

This is essentially the core story that the game follows. The path you take and the stories you experience should be different with every run, as I didn't seem to encounter any of the same characters when playing through the same family tree, which is the lineage of characters you create whenever you successfully marry one of the other characters and have (or adopt) a child. The new child will be your new character!

There are a wide cast of non-adult characters that you can encounter throughout your various school stages, and you only get one potentially romanceable option per mainline school stage (depending on your sex). The non-adult characters you meet in your elementary or middle school stages are pretty darn solid. I actually felt like I was growing up with them and developing a long-lasting relationship while helping them through the struggles that come with growing up.





Unfortunately, I feel like in the non-adult character department, the game struggles with making you care for the characters that you are introduced to in the high school stage as much as the ones you meet in the elementary and middle school stages. In this game, each “day” or turn, if you will, is a large chunk of in-game time, and you’re only given a max of one event with a character each turn. With this in mind, you can easily see how the high school relationships would have a disadvantage in making you care for them, as the developers needed to fit an engaging story into such a short time frame, and it just doesn’t really work. To be honest, I didn’t really care for any of the characters I met in high school (excluding Kato). They all felt either boring or just rushed, which was just a shame.

stat types. For instance, the more creative-minded characters tend to be linked with the Charm and Imagination stats (will go over later), while the more logical/practical-minded characters tend to be more linked to the Intelligence and Memory stats (again, will go over later).

While I find this to be a good concept, the devs fumbled the execution in making most of the adults actually engaging or interesting. For instance, the adults in the Charm category tend to be characters with barely any interactions, life lessons, or character development. They just kind of say what they need to say, and you go along with your day. Thankfully, a few characters, such as Mei in the Memory category and Daz in the Empathy category, help add a bit more to the adult interaction side of the game.

And speaking about adult interactions, I have a huge problem with the interactions you have with your parents in the game. Your parents seem to only be a thing to provide expectations and be a contributor to a stat meter called the parents’ satisfaction meter (yet again, I will talk about this later). Your parents pretty much always have an expectation of your character, but even if you’re actively making an obvious effort to meet that certain expectation, they act like they can’t see anything you do on your outside time, even if you’re literally doing that action on a daily basis.



*“Proper nurture from a young age will echo through the ages.”*

And if you’ve noticed, I’ve made an effort to specify the prior characters with the term “non-adult.” That’s because the adult characters are encountered through different means, and most of them are, honestly, rubbish stories.

As mentioned earlier, adults can be encountered at the many locations spread throughout the game’s map that you can access after the school portion of your turns. In these areas, you can do tasks related to the area, such as cooking jobs at the local diner or art jobs at the art museum. The adults you develop “relationships” with are tied to certain





This is likely a product of the developers spending more time on the core gameplay mechanics and storylines, but it just feels really disappointing, especially when you finish a run with a character and your love interest just to see them both become lifeless parent figure cutouts that say the same regurgitated lines in the next run, as the character you last played as becomes the parents of your new character in the next continuous run.

And lastly for this section, I have a more general issue for all social interactions in this game: the choices.

The choices you need to make in your social interactions are the choices that feel very obvious, and you're obviously supposed to act a certain way with certain personalities. There aren't necessarily any hard choices to make, and when there are, they don't really make much sense. I also have an issue with the choices that can be considered as "correct" options. Personally, I have no interest in smoking weed or other things of the sort in social settings or with friends, but this game makes you feel like you need to do so in order to win the approval of the person you're interacting with. It makes sense, but this just felt really icky for me.

One option in particular that really annoyed me was where a character asks if you think the band you just listened to with her in a music café sounded great, and the options are: try to kiss her, gush about the band, or say you hated them. These options are just genuinely

nonsensical to me, and the many moments like this in the game make the social interactions feel like they're just giving you the illusion of choice.



*"A simulation of my IRL experience at this stage of my life."*

## Gameplay: The Game of Life

For gameplay, you have four main categories: the brain map, social interactions, mental health/parents' satisfaction meter management, and skill training.

With the brain map, you're given the ability to select certain stats. This is where the terms I mentioned before come into play, as you can train a total of five stat types, which include Intelligence, Empathy, Imagination, Physique, and Charm. The whole game is essentially centered around raising these stat points, and which stat you focus on is entirely dependent on whatever skills you'd like your character to learn. For instance, focusing on the Intelligence stat is for if you'd like your character to go into math or science, while focusing on the Empathy stat tends to put you more into the health or animal care field.

To gain the stats in the brain map, you'll need to play a node-based minigame where you try your best to optimize your connections of nodes to get the best possible stat bonuses that you can. There are certain quirks that appear depending on whatever life stage you're in, but the minigame is mostly the same throughout all runs.

With social interactions, this was covered in the story section of the review, so you should already know how they function and how I feel about them.







*"At least The Hoffer is honest in his approach!"*

With the mental health and parents' satisfaction meters, they are meters that track their namesakes. You have tasks that influence your mental health meter and tasks that influence your parents' satisfaction meter. Generally, school and career-related skills increase your parents' satisfaction meter, and literally anything else that can be considered as entertainment lowers their satisfaction meter. As for your mental health meter, any non-entertainment activity lowers it, and vice versa.

The system is very simple, but it just feels... jarring. There is basically nothing in the game that can improve both stats at once, so this requires you to do things like spending your time doing leisurely activities rather than always hard focusing on improving stats. I really do like how this relates pretty realistically to how real life works, and how you need mental health breaks and can't constantly be grinding out developing school/career skills all your life.

Unfortunately, this breaks down once you realize you can just work jobs to buy tasty food to improve your mental health, which makes it so you basically never need to do an entertainment-type activity ever again. While I found this nice from a gameplay perspective, it did take away from my immersive experience a bit.

Another thing that sort of tarnished my immersive experience would be how the game treats anything education- or career-related as a negative for your mental health. I get that it is for game balance, but it feels weird to see things like playing sports and cooking tasty food as things that reduce your mental health.

And with the final main category for gameplay, skill training, you're tasked with learning many skills across all portions of your life related to whatever you would like your character to do with their life. In early childhood, you're given basic things such as learning to play hopscotch or how to write, but as you grow older, you start needing to learn things such as how space exploration works or microeconomics.

How you train a skill is very simple. There are two ways to do so: by spending either Energy Points or scheduling skills for the rest of the "day." Energy Points are typically linked to career-based skills, entertainment-based skills, and income-producing skills. At the same time, the scheduling is more catered to studying for educational skills and all other skills.

An endearing aspect of this system is that it is set up in a way that makes it really hard to complete every skill in the game. Just as with real life, it's impossible to do everything you want to in life, and sometimes you need to just select what interests you most and caters to your goals the most.

## Graphics: Rose-Tinted Hues When Looking Into the Past

For the graphics, I think that they suit this game fairly well, and there are a lot of different design options. Your character's features are based on how your parents look, and this results in a fair bit of variety in the look of your





character. You're also given the ability to change your hairstyle, clothes, and the color of your clothes with money or Pride currency given to you when completing tasks from your parents.

However, sometimes you can notice certain graphical hiccups, as I noticed the prosthetic arm of the character I married shifted arm locations depending on the way she was looking. I'm sure this was just a simple oversight, but it was still quite jarring to see.



"Ready to start high school!"

## Audio: Echoes of the Sounds of Youth

In the audio department, I'd like to say that everything was fine, but that would be a lie. This game has well-made lyrical music and a good non-lyrical soundtrack that I enjoyed overall. However, I personally didn't like the lyrical music despite its relatively well-made production. The lyrics and sound of the music just felt like some stock music you can find on some royalty-free website about feel-good vibes related to growing up rather than something catered uniquely to this game. That obviously wasn't the case here, but it just felt that way to me.

I also felt like the timing of the lyrical music wasn't the best, especially in your first playthrough. In your first playthrough, you're given tutorial prompts to learn how to play the game, and it is really distracting and annoying to hear verbal lyrics on repeat in the background while trying to learn entirely new

concepts in a new game. Sure, the vocals eventually shifted to more instrumental background music typical of games like this, but the lyrical music still left a bad impression on me during my first run.

Thankfully, not all the lyrical music made me feel this way, as I liked the lyrical music that played during the high school section and the song a certain character played for me. As for the sound effects, they were pretty standard – nothing to write home about, but nothing bad either.

## Enjoyment: Variable Joy Throughout the Ages

Just to preface this section, if you've read any of my reviews before, you'd know I'm an achievement hunter, and how painful it is to complete all achievements is something I take into account.

In this game, you are only given the ability to have three non-adult friends for every school stage in your character's life. Each time, the game seems to lock off the ability to meet the same characters from your past "lineage" save.

This means that to have a relationship or interaction with every non-adult character in the game, you'll need to play the game a total of four times just for this alone, and this isn't even including accessing the routes of adult characters that may or may not be entirely locked for you in a run due to not seeing the respective non-adult character that unlocks that area.





This wouldn't be an issue if the gameplay loop were varied enough between each run, but this is where the issues I had with gameplay come into play again.

Everything beyond the 1st playthrough just feels like you're living the same life but with different people. You do well in school, you manage your parents' expectations, you build relationships, and you try to become a successful adult. The only thing that really significantly changes would be the non-adult characters you meet, and possibly, the adult characters you're able to interact with (not that it's saying much).



*"Don't insult teachers if you don't want to be stuck with dissecting a fetal pig instead of a frog..."*

I've done around five full runs to get all achievements. This could've been done in four full runs, but due to telling off a non-adult character about how much of an asshole and a poor excuse of a human he was, I was punished by needing to make another character and pray to the RNG gods that I would get him in the RNG lottery again in the high school stage. This was just brutal.

However, despite my issues, I genuinely enjoyed all portions of my first run and most of the non-adult relationships I encountered on my subsequent runs. The game lacks in enjoyable gameplay beyond the first run, but I more or less enjoyed all the elementary/middle school stage non-adults and a few adults (Mei and Daz).

I'd like to make this section less negative by explaining why I liked the things I liked, but that leans more into spoiler territory, so just know that I didn't entirely hate the game despite replaying through it being quite grindy and tedious.

## Conclusion: Closing Out Childhood and Entering Adulthood

Overall, I think Growing Up is an enjoyable game for a full run or two. It has great potential that shines in its initial stages but leaves you wanting more depth and variety in a multitude of aspects in subsequent runs. It's worth giving it a try if you don't care about seeing all character routes and just want to experience the feeling of raising a character one or two times, but I think there are better games out there with a similar concept that aren't as repetitive and monotonous. Even if there are better options than this game, I'd give it a cautious recommendation.

VinroylsViral

21

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

### the good

- Wonderful vibe
- Some pretty engaging and interesting characters
- Lots of little graphics and skill categories that put a smile on my face

### the bad

- Gameplay is very lacking and monotonous after your first run
- Most adult characters, including your parents, have pretty horrible dialogue
- There is an illusion of choice in many social interactions

Growing up isn't all  
it's cracked up to be





# SUZERAIN

noun [ C ]

POLITICS specialized

UK /'su:.zər.eɪn/

US /'su:.zə..ɪn/

A country that partly controls another country, or the ruler of such a country.

22

When I entered giveaways for Suzerain, I misunderstood what the game was like. I thought it might be a simulation in which you direct units, like 911 Operator, or that it had more visual novel content. I didn't know it was an extensive, detailed, branching political narrative, nor did I know I would hate it.

I'm Chocolate, your local SGM goblin. I hate politics and am completely ignorant when it comes to them, and this is my review of Suzerain, the political simulator in which you become president of Sordland.





In the beginning, playing Suzerain was straight-up painful. I kid you not – I could leak my own DMs showing myself crying about the game, whimpering about how it was hard to get into, how I wasn't having fun. But I don't think that would say much. It's just... there was a LOT to keep track of; I did not know what my aim even WAS; my family was almost shot in the inauguration ball, and I just felt too lost.

I suppose this is on purpose: Anton Rayne, our friendly neighborhood president, is probably feeling the same. But at least he knows who all of these people are and what all of these concepts mean without having to open up the glossary every 5 seconds... and speaking of the glossary: I believe fans of the genre will love how detailed, intricate, and verbose it is. But, for me, I groaned each time I opened an entry, only to see another wall of text.

As I mentioned earlier, the game was way less of a VN than expected. The introduction and the epilogue are straight up choose your own adventure kind of narratives, and then, most of the situations you take care of as Mr. President are... reading a lot and deciding how to react. The prose is dry and objective, without any fanfare, which is probably good given the setting... but, frankly, not to my taste. It felt like a slug to read through; sometimes, I had to go back to make sure I didn't misunderstand details, and I was terrified I was messing up every step of the road.

At this point, I actually considered messing up on purpose just to end my own suffering.

But that wouldn't have been professional of me, and as much as these reviews are just... volunteer work, I guess? I wanted to make them as good as possible. So, I decided to stop fretting as much, to be a bit more careless, to look at a guide if necessary to see what the consequences of my actions would be. And I forced myself to continue playing, treating it a bit like a job.

ESTORD  
Young Sords Member Found  
Decapitated

23

The Estord Police Department has found a decapitated body in a house where the victim was later identified as a member of the Young Sords. The body was discovered in the basement of the house. The victim was cut off at the neck. The police are currently investigating the case.



Surprisingly, my experience improved. Don't get me wrong, the game was still not fun, but it was now bearable. I slowly stopped feeling like I desperately wanted to stop playing. And so, I finished my 4-year term and left Sordland to live in a little country cottage with my family.

There's something I need to stress now, though:

The game is good.

For all my gripes and complaints, I can clearly see a lot of thought and hard work has been applied to Suzerain. The narrative is incredibly detailed, most actions have consequences, and I'm pretty sure that if you like and/or understand politics, the game will look much more approachable to you than it did to me.

24

...ing what future awaited me  
...d daughter, **Franc** and **Deana**  
...er eyes were glimmering with  
...people who made it all possible.  
...promised an important position  
...former president, **Ewald Alphonso**,  
...rquin **Soll** was also invited, but as  
...island retreat.  
...d away, the reality of the situation  
...r, the Chief Justice of the **Supreme**  
...s come."

Codex

Monica Rayne



Monica Rayne is the current First Lady of Sordland. She was born in **Lachaven** to parents with Agnor-Sordish background. She has a degree in sociology and has worked as a social worker and later, as the partnerships manager in **Magnus Cartus** and campaign assistant of the **Sordish League of Women** before her marriage to Anton Rayne.

Page 2

Anton Rayne



In Office: 1954-1958  
Preceded By: Ewald Alphonso  
Succeeded By: Kesaro Kibener  
Vice President: Petr Vectern  
Born: 1908, Holsord  
Alma Mater: 1930, Deyr University of Culture, History  
Spouse: Monica Rayne  
Children: Franc Rayne, Deana Rayne

History will remember you as...  
Centrist



The campaign might have some beats that will happen every time, but a lot of others are completely dependent on your actions and the kind of president you've been.

The map is pretty, even if the portraits feel quite samey after a while, and the music was never a bother to me. Navigation throughout the map was a bit janky at times, but nothing terrible.



Be warned, if you get into Suzerain, you'll read a lot! And what you read won't be a specially engaging prose but a more matter-of-fact read. You also can't save manually during your first playthrough, so you're stuck with whatever mistakes you make during your tenure.

But if you are a fan of these kinds of simulators, then I wholeheartedly believe Suzerain might be the best of its kind – with so many ramifications, the chance to be more of a Reformist or a Sollist (traditionalist), spark a war, or even become a dictator...

I chose retirement as my end since I was tired of the game and couldn't imagine Rayne being happy doing what I did for 11 hours for four years.

But you can aim for reelections or face a military coup. There are several possible endings to your political career, so go out there and make a start!

A Morgna Wes Core.  
Vectern Sis Da!

ChocolateVC

25

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

#### the good

- Extremely detailed
- A lot of ramifications
- Politics seem to be very aptly simulated

#### the bad

- Dry prose
- I hated it due to a very bad matchup between me and the game

Let's not get political about this take!





The background of the page is the cover art for Mafia: Definitive Edition. It features a man in a blue suit and a fedora hat, looking down with a serious expression. The background is a warm, orange and red cityscape, likely representing the game's setting of Lost Heaven. The title 'MAFIA' is written in large, white, bold letters, and 'DEFINITIVE EDITION' is written in smaller, white, bold letters below it.

# MAFIA

## DEFINITIVE EDITION

**"I'm going to make him an offer he can't refuse." - Vito Corleone**

So, in conclusion, the game is very good. Recommended, with my **Seal of Recommendation.**

Wait, have I just given away the conclusion of the whole review at its beginning?

Yep, and that's like the narrative structure of this game, where the conclusion is known early on, so the journey is the experience that is truly captivating. At the start of this journey, I installed the game and suffered from the 2K launcher, a needless hurdle whose only use was to force me to double the effort of starting the game in two different launchers and trying to promote the ill-fated Mafia III, both of which were not appreciated at all. Afterward, the game started with a stunning, uninterrupted shot of the city of Lost Heaven, which is basically a meticulous recreation of 1930s Chicago during the Prohibition era.

This impressive opening set the tone for an engaging setting, which is one of the best-selling points of the game.

After the long shot that reminded me of The Godfather's uninterrupted original shot, we get to FBI agent Detective Norman, who is walking in 1938 to a meeting in a restaurant with the person who called him: the wise guy mafia member, Tommy Angelo. Tommy is clearly on the run. He hasn't shaved in a while, he is nervous, he confesses that he is penniless, and his main worry is about his family. He offers a deal: information about the Salieri crime family. But Norman wants to know



everything before making a deal. Tommy starts talking, and so it begins. With this, the game will now have to convince me to keep playing, knowing that Tommy will have a fallout with the Salieri family sooner or later, the same way I have to convince you to keep reading, knowing that I already recommend this game.

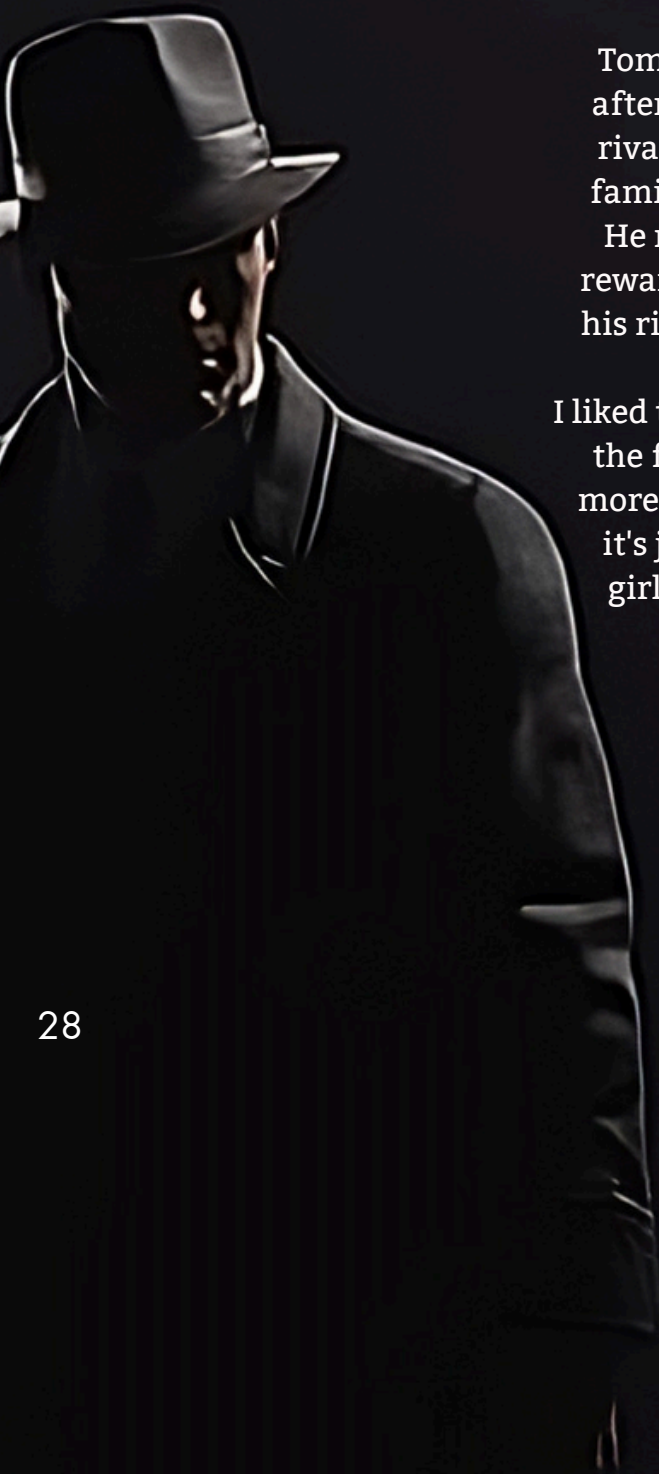
This game is a 2020 remake of the 2002 original game by Czech developer Illusion Softworks. The remake was done by Hangar 13, which had many of the original developers. However, for full disclosure, I never played the original game. Apparently, it was one of the first games ever to go for the cinematic open-world approach. I usually like to play the original game before playing remakes, but this time I will pass.



**"It's not personal, it's strictly business."  
- Michael Corleone**

The game starts in 1931, with Tommy working as a taxi driver in Chicago, sorry, Lost Heaven. The pay is meager, he has to work the night shift to make ends meet, but at least he has a job in the middle of the Depression. Prohibition is still in full swing, and criminal enterprises are getting rich selling booze. During a smoke break, two men, Sam and Paulie, appear and hold him at gunpoint. They force him to drive his taxi to escape pursuit by rival mobsters that chase them. He drives well enough to escape and gets a huge reward compared to what he is used to getting. This also brings him the attention of Don Ennio Salieri, the boss of a crime family in Little Italy.





Tommy doesn't want anything to do with mobsters. But after trying to resume his life and being attacked by the rival Morello family, he is forced to escape to the Salieri family. There he is offered a loan, but he wants revenge.

He manages to torch the Morello family's cars, and as a reward, he is accepted into the Salieri family, and we see his rise within the family over the course of a few years.

I liked the evolution of Tommy. He starts as just a driver to the family, reluctant to act aggressively and driving the more experienced Sam and Paulie. And at the beginning, it's just extorting protection money, but after helping a girl he starts having to kill people. At first, it's just mob members. But then, when the police go after him, he starts killing policemen too. Eventually, he becomes one of the Salieri family's top hitmen, killing without any remorse. This evolution is gradual and believable, which is proof of the evolution of the game. We get it because we are watching it.



There is also a good deal of development with the rest of the cast. They are all fleshed out with distinct personalities and arcs, adding depth to the story. Paulie, while not the smartest of the bunch, is very emotional, letting feelings get the best of him, but he still has big dreams. Sam, while smart and stoic, apparently still has a soft side for the people he cares about. Finally, one of the best character arcs comes from Don Salieri. At first, he seems like the gentle, old-fashioned Godfather Vito Corleone-like, worrying about the honest people in his city and his family, boasting about his ability to stay cool under pressure, and promising never to deal with drugs.



He changes during the game, becoming more and more ruthless, and ends up dealing drugs in secret to his own men. There are many games where I have to make an effort to remember the names of the NPCs because of how little I care for them. This game manages to make me remember them. The evolution of the characters and their eventual fate is both tragic and fascinating.

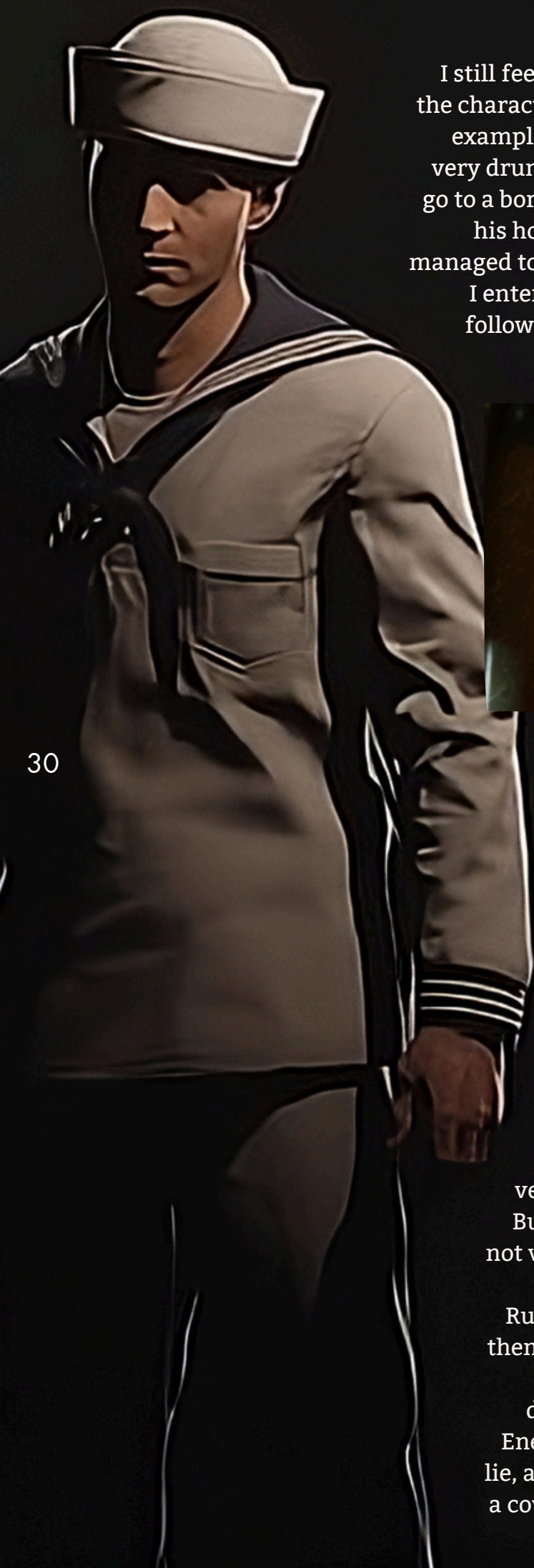


**"Don't ever take sides with anyone against the family again. Ever." - Michael Corleone**

The game, while it happens in the whole city of Chicago, sorry, Lost Heaven, is definitely not open world. It's divided into twenty tightly scripted sequences with very detailed cutscenes in multiple scenarios, from an abandoned prison occupied by squatters to a farm in the middle of a storm. However, they are kind of... too scripted. There was one mission I was following a car, and instead of exactly following it, I decided to take another route to try to follow it in parallel, and the game bugged. In another mission, I was shooting my way out of a prison, and there was this shiny car in front of it, but it was also surrounded by police that would immediately shoot at me and then follow with better cars. I decided to do it another way, and I went to the sewers and then tried to get out of prison through another entry. The game was definitely confused about what was going on, and they stopped the search. Thankfully, despite this, the high-quality cutscenes offer a cinematic quality that's rare in games even today.







I still feel more secondary missions just for expanding the characters or the setting would have been better. For example, there was this mission where I had to take a very drunk Paulie to his home while he was pleading to go to a bordello, and the game marker clearly pointed at his house. I decided to follow his instructions, and I managed to get to the bordello, and Paulie thanked me as I entered. And... that was it. I would have liked some follow-up. A few attempts to go off the rails, like the Yakuza series has always done.



**"Mr. Corleone never asks for a second favor once he's refused the first. Understood?" - Tom Hagen**

The gameplay basically consists of two things: driving around the city and shooting. Both of them are competently done but not exceptional. The shooting is realistic in a third-person perspective. There aren't too many enemies, but it's a little hard to kill them since they also shoot back, and the guns in the 30s are simply not that good. I am used to being able to shoot very accurately at far distances in other games. But the Thompson, a staple of this era, is simply not very good at accomplishing this feat. The hard difficulty is definitely not a walk in the park. Rushing through scenarios, both for you and for them, is a recipe for disaster. So I end up carefully turtling and insulting those cowards that are doing exactly the same. The AI is good enough. Enemies don't rush, and they know how to flank, lie, and support each other with cover fire. Still, as a cover shooter, it's definitely nothing too special.



There are many set pieces that are the highlights of the gameplay, like trying to shoot down a plane that is trying to escape or being dressed as a sailor getting into a ship to murder a politician. However, it's not Hitman. The game wants to do the murder in a certain way, and it will happen in that certain way. The game's linear approach can sometimes feel restrictive. The best way is to simply enjoy the different places where you will be having a shootout. I particularly enjoyed the last shootout in an art museum.



The driving mechanics are also nothing too special. You can choose between standard and simulation driving models. The first one is more arcade-like. The second one is more difficult but also more fun, as you need to push the brake sooner, and the cars slide better. Yet the layer of realism enhances the experience. There is even a race you have to participate in. Still, you are not playing for the car chases.

Okay, so if the driving mechanics are good but not great, and the shooting is also fine but nothing special, what's so great about the game? For starters, even if the driving mechanics are not that amazing, simply driving is a joy. The game's recreation of period cars and its immersive radio broadcasts

make driving through Chic... Lost Heaven a pleasure in itself. Between the docks, Little Italy, Chinatown, Works Quarter, North Park, Central Island, etc, it's a joy to travel. Each part has different architecture, and you can guess where you are just by watching it. Again, this is proof of the great work of the developers.

The game did an amazing job with the radio stations, where you can listen to historical speeches on the radio, audio created specifically for the game, or you can simply listen to the music tracks and ride along, watching the well-realized city around you, especially the cars. They are very well made, with a lot of attention put to the details. There is an option to skip non-essential drives. I never used it. I simply enjoyed driving too much. While I was a taxi driver, I even got a surprise when I was speeding too much when the police stopped me to give me a ticket.





As I said, there are two main strengths of the game: first, the extremely gripping story of Tommy's rise and inevitable fall. Second is the setting: Hangar 13 did a remarkable job with all the little details of the period: the clothes, the cars, and the architecture of the whole city. I really felt I was playing in Chicago in the decade of the 1930s.

The performances are well done and enhance the story between Don Salieri's prepotence, while he explains the facts of life to Tommy, to Paulie's always-excited voice. I particularly enjoyed the tense conversation between Detective Norman and Tommy Angelo. Both of them distrust the other, but both of them need the conversation to continue. That nuanced talk really improved the performances.

The audio is top-notch. From the sound of the Thompsons while they cut down the life of an owner of an Italian restaurant, to the cars preparing to speed, to the horns of the other cars. The music is also well done, even if it's more discreet.

**"Leave the gun, take the cannoli."**  
- Peter Clemenza

In conclusion, Mafia: Definitive Edition shines in its narrative and setting. Despite a few gameplay limitations, the story of Tommy Angelo and the world of Chicago... sorry, last time, Lost Heaven, are compelling enough to keep players engaged. The detailed recreation of a 1930s Prohibition-era city, combined with strong performances and a cinema-like gangster storyline, makes Mafia: Definitive edition an obligatory stop for fans of story-driven experiences.

■ Quijote3000

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

the good

- Great Story
- Poignant ending
- Great attention to detail
- Fantastic Audio
- The setting is very well done

the bad

- More secondary missions would have been better.
- Shooting could simply be better
- Beautiful city, but in the end, not many things to do there.

And that's how mafia works!





Isn't it beautiful, Amelia? The forest of Minoria.  
There's nothing else like it.



33

Minoria is a short-ish Metroidvania (Action-platformer? Is that a different genre?) about cute girls, religious fanaticism, and fighting for the wrong cause. As Sister Semilla and accompanied by novice Sister Anna Fran, we set out to save Ramezia from the witches and the taint of heresy before it's too late.

## Story

As I was saying, the story of Minoria is about cute girls, religious fanaticism, and fighting for the wrong cause. And the latter two aren't really a subtext thing, as the game is very upfront about its themes from the beginning. A bit too much, I'd argue, but let's not get ahead of ourselves.

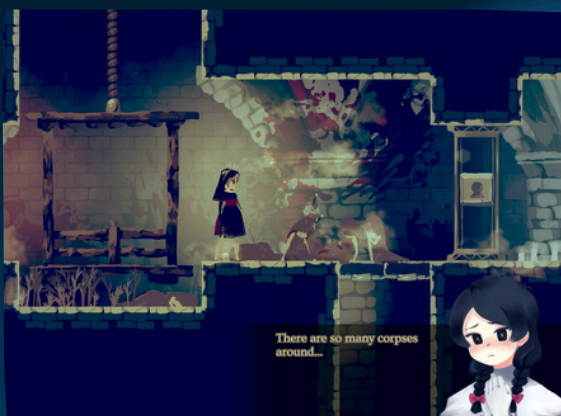
Despite its length and simple story, Minoria has a good amount of background lore that we can piece together from notes, diaries, bosses, and item descriptions, in good old FromSoft fashion. From this, we know that Ramezia, where Minoria takes place, is dominated by two opposing forces: the Sacred Office and the heretic Witches. The Sacred Office is the organization our main characters serve, a totalitarian religious institution that doesn't allow for any kind of contradiction. If anyone would dare go against the Sacred Office, then they would be deemed heretics and possibly be turned into witches.

In this socio-political landscape, the Witches launch an attack to conduct a mysterious ceremony, and the



Office sends all the nuns (who are warriors in this universe) to deal with them, Anna Fran and Semilla included. However, a blizzard separates our protagonists from the main group, and they arrive days later to a catastrophic scene. All the nuns are dead, and the princesses Amelia and Poeme have disappeared. Determined to fulfill her duty as a nun, Semilla rescues Princess Amelia from the claws of a Witch and learns that Princess Poeme is a heretic and is leading the unholy ceremony in question. It is, therefore, Semilla and Anna Fran's holy mission to stop her.

And this is more or less the set-up of the story in Minoria. From here on, the story will be presented to us as we explore areas and defeat bosses, and we'll find tidbits of lore here and there. We'll find diaries of Saints or other higher-ranked members of the Office as they confess sympathies for the heretics, collect archives with worldbuilding descriptions, and traverse places that will unfold the truth about the Sacred Office.



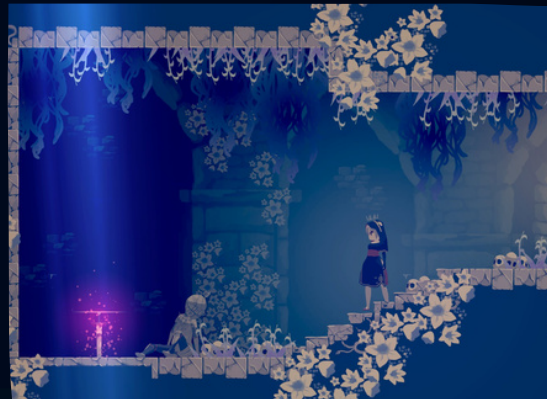
And it's because Minoria tells a good portion of its lore through environmental storytelling. A terribly desolated prison right under the Cathedral, in which faceless prisoners beg you to kill them. Beautiful gardens and forests all around the domain of the Witches. It's not a big reveal or something you slowly start to suspect as you progress the game; it's a





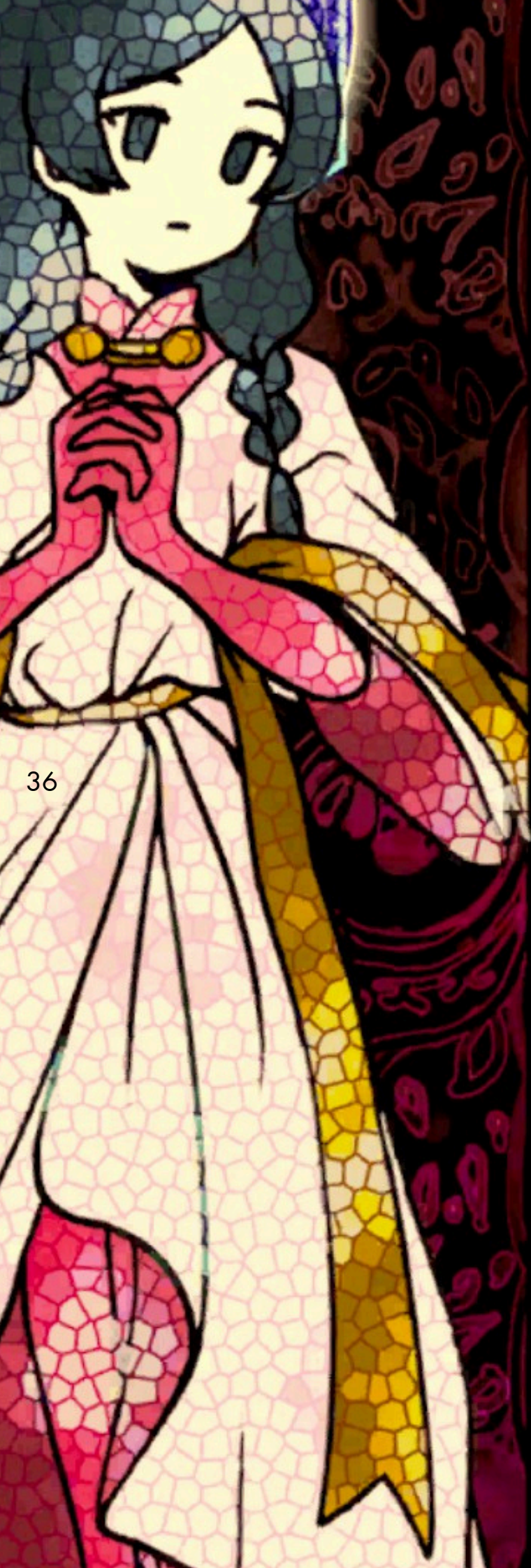


fact the game is very upfront about: The Sacred Office, the institution you serve with a sword in one hand and cross in the other, are the bad guys. You can also read in Semilla and Anna Fran's backstories in the archive menu that they have even been forced into servitude due to circumstances outside their control.



This is something that I don't mind as a plot point. It's always nice to shake things around a little and have you be the bad guy. But Minoria's take on it is... excessive? There's no nuance in the Office's "evilness," and there's no reason why the townsfolk would accept all this injustice. It does look like more and more people are choosing the side of the Witches, including nuns and even Saints and Princesses, but I struggle to understand the narrative that the Office has been pushing to at least look good. Because despite the central theme of the game being religion (and drawing its inspiration from Catholicism specifically), there's never any mention of a "God" that could judge and punish people like the Christian God, or mentions of a holy book like the Bible, or any kind of virtues to follow or an eternal punishment like Hell. Meanwhile, the Witches are said to just want freedom, and they're willing to massacre the Office to accomplish so. So why not just let them go or possibly even exile them? This is the only part of the worldbuilding that failed for me (well, aside from there being a single male in the entire game, enemies included, I don't know how that works out logistically, but there are practically only women in this world), as it feels like the writer/s wanted a very specific vibe, but ultimately failed in justifying it fully.





36

The game has two endings, obtainable through one single final choice that determines the final boss. Personally, I'm not a fan of this system, but it did make knowing how to get the other ending on replay much easier, I suppose. None of the endings felt quite satisfying, though I guess the game's tone isn't happy or hopeful.

## Gameplay

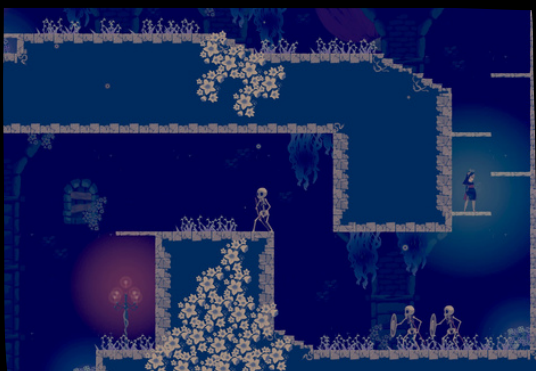
Like most Metroidvanias, Minoria features agile combat and a maze-y map divided into zones with different enemies and levels of difficulty. Unlike other Metroidvanias I've played, though, it doesn't have a cyclical map or a central hub, but it is structured with backtracking in mind. So, certain zones will need a key or an ability like a double jump that you won't find until later to access them. The game also brings you back to the starting zone at one specific point but changes the map slightly, so you have to take a new path.



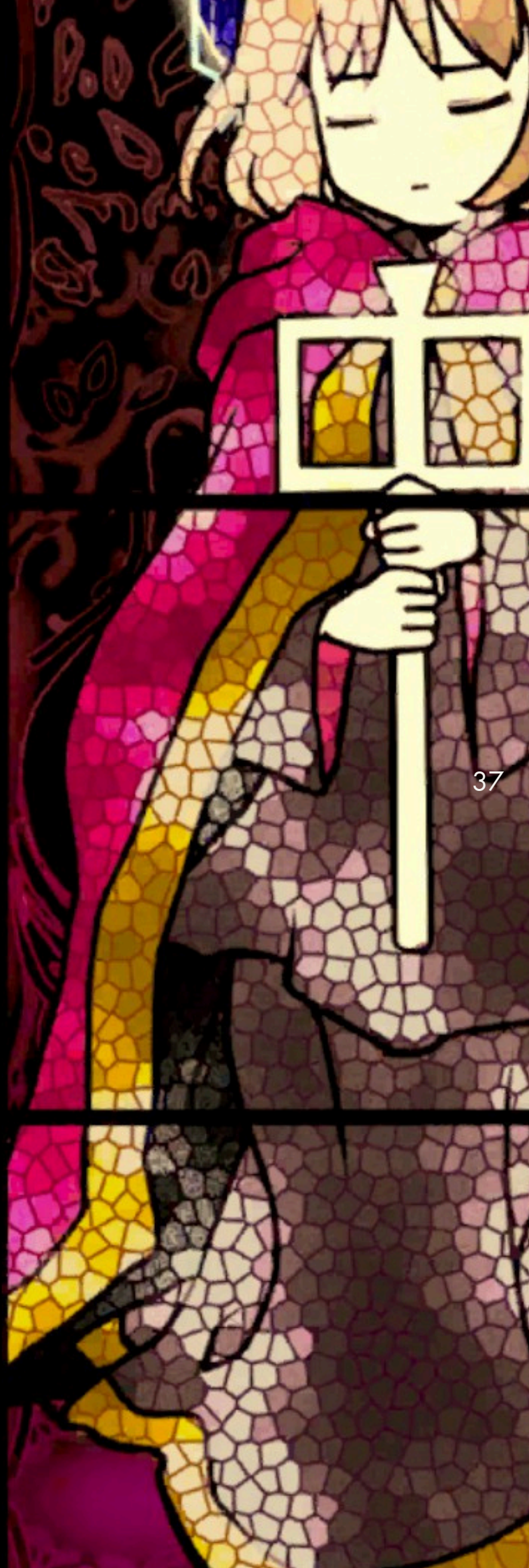
It's hard to describe my impressions of Minoria's gameplay concisely. I want to say it's fine, but then I remember the lack of enemy variety and the lack of tutorials that made it so I only discovered that there's a button to quickly view the map when I was like five hours in (I had been going to a menu to view it until then...). So, let's try to break this down.



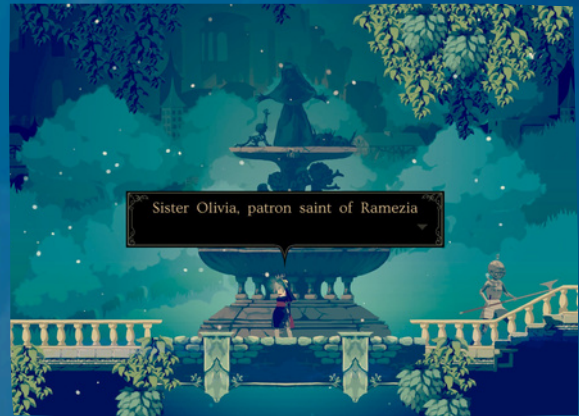
In basic Metroidvania fashion, you press X to attack (I played on a controller), A to jump, and B to block/parry. But here is where the problems start. B is also the roll button, which gives you invincibility frames, so it's great to dodge and dance around more dangerous enemies. So, pressing B while moving will make you roll in that direction, but doing so standing in place will have you block (the block only lasts a moment, but it's spammable). This doesn't sound like a problem, but there's a detail that makes confusing the two actions extremely easy: attacking will move you ever so slightly in the direction you're attacking. So after every three-attack sequence, you need to take a small step back, then face the other direction again. If you happen to block at any time during this process, you'll roll instead, which will mess with your positioning. Not to mention, the rolling distance is not intuitive at all, especially with respect to your attack range, and will often land you right where the enemy you're fighting is and make you eat unnecessary damage. This combo of small issues was a problem all throughout my 12 hours of gameplay.



That's not my only gripe with the gameplay, although it's definitely the biggest one. Earlier, I mentioned a lack of enemy variety, and this doesn't apply only to the enemies themselves but also to what enemies in general do, which is not much. They only have one attack, and they're all quite simple. You will learn how to deal with an enemy the first time you







38

encounter it, and the rest of the time, combat will consist of repeating what you learned then. There are some (seemingly quite random) encounters where you will be locked within a portion of the corridor you're in, a piece of very tense music will kick off, and you'll have to fight a few waves to be able to proceed. These, and a few one-time enemies and bosses, will probably be the only times where target priority and using your head will matter during combat.

Now, clearly, Minoria isn't trying to be a very ambitious or difficult game. It's here to tell its story, not make you wreck your head with bosses or builds. The progression system is a very basic leveling system, where you get experience as you kill enemies, and the higher your level, the higher your stats are without you having to do anything. There are a variety of swords to find and equip, but the differences between one and the other are negligible, only maybe consisting of a slightly different attack pattern and, in one case, a 1.25x damage multiplier on a special drop sword. And lastly, you have many incense types to equip that you can adjust to your playstyle. You can equip three active ones that will all have limited charges, as well as two passive ones. And they have all kinds of effects: extra damage, damage reduction, more healing power, special magic attacks, and finding secrets more easily. So, at the very least, you can customize your build a little bit.





## Graphics/Art

There are a lot of secrets and collectibles in Minoria, but they're generally not a pain to get ahold of. While the map isn't very helpful as it doesn't have icons whatsoever except for saving spots, it's not very big. The lack of fast travel until I was done with the final boss was a bit annoying, but I managed. There's also an NG+ system, which was quite an enjoyable way to find the collectibles I was missing. I also got some special drops for taking bosses down with no damage taken. There's no achievement for this (or any indication of it whatsoever, as I found this out by looking through the Steam guides), and yet I still found myself wanting to get all that the game had to offer. I 100%'ed the game without even really focusing on it, which was quite rewarding.

When I said this game is about cute girls, I really meant it. Minoria knows what it likes and it's not afraid of telling us. And that is, of course, cute badass girls, which is very respectable.

The designs themselves... they're not bad, honestly. Most characters I could easily recognize outside of the source material. Especially Semilla, who has a number of unique elements without being overdesigned. The chosen art style is low-poly 3D, with low-res textures that give everything a retro vibe. It is enjoyable overall, but it took me a while to get used to the (also very retro inspired) big-eyed anime faces of the girls. I fully understand that it's an artistic choice, but given the grim tone of the game and the serious-looking rest of the graphics, the cute faces definitely stood out. It does



give personality to the art style, though, so I don't complain. The visual effects were quite simple in most cases, but given they were going for a retro look, it didn't stand out as a bad thing.

The sound design is as simple and retro-inspired as the rest of the game. Most enemies have a characteristic sound effect that'll help you identify them instantly. But I do have to point out how... unique the sound design is. Most sound effects are, simply put, strange. Most enemies have highly synthesized sounds that get stuck in your head quickly, and the death sound is almost comical - a cut-off high-pitched scream with reverb that I kept imitating as I played the game live on stream.

Regarding the OST... it's pretty good, honestly. Nothing too complex, nothing too deep, but the tracks felt adequate, and some boss themes rocked. They're memorable enough to be able to actively recall them but not to hum them.

## Conclusion

Minoria is a small, simple Metroidvania that isn't trying to be the best in anything, just to tell its story. It's easy to pick up, finish and complete. It's friendly to those who aren't good at "hard" games and also to small-time completionists like myself since it requires the right amount of extra effort to complete it to be rewarding without being tedious. While at first I had many negatives about it, it slowly grew on me, and now I can say that despite it not being perfect, it was a perfectly enjoyable experience.

■ kiirouchi

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

### the good

- Short and easy to complete
- Charming art style and characters

### the bad

- Gameplay needs some polishing and balancing
- Story is a little cliché

Cute girls and religious totalitarianism, what's not to love?







is for



secrets of



esame



street

41

It is well known that Sesame Street is the “most widely viewed children’s television show in the world”<sup>1</sup>. What is a bit less known is that its characters are – sorry to shock you with this – quite fictional. For example, there is photographic evidence that Elmo is, in fact, a spreadsheet designer, nicknamed ExcelElmo, who does rows of cocaine in his spare time<sup>2</sup>. A Canadian friend of mine also told me that a Canadian friend of his had lots of sex with Big Bird, which directly contradicts the characterization of Big Bird in the show (and of Canadians at large).<sup>3</sup>

So, My Friendly Neighborhood (MFN from now on) fixes that misconception, showing us what the Sesame Street characters are like in real life. And, according to the game, right now this means “banging-their-heads-on-the-walls” deranged. It is your mission to stop them.

[1] [Wikipedia](#), it never lies.

[2] [Reddit](#), it never lies either.

[3] [Me](#).



More precisely, the story is that this bright sunny happy shiny TV show for children called MFN has been long shut down, so instead we get talk shows about death and depression on TV. But somehow the old MFN show starts to pop up on TVs over the normal programming; your task is to go to the old MFN studios and shut down the antenna which is responsible for this broadcast.



That's the way, uh huh, uh huh we like it.



is for

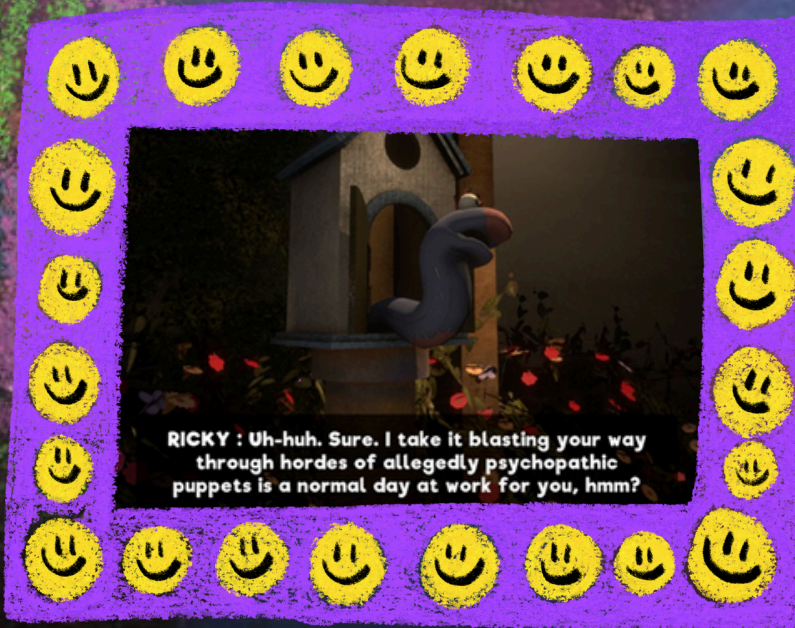


ameplay

If you are curious about how MFN plays, go check its [Steam trailers](#). Take your time, I will wait here.

You're back? Ok: that's not the game I played. The trailers (which are excellent, especially the music) point to a shooter with tons of action. But MFN is absolutely not that - you spend a lot more time exploring the

environment and solving puzzles than shooting. This is a first person Resident Evil/Silent Hill, not Doom/Serious Sam. There is a ton of resource management, since the ammo is limited but the enemies are unlimited (more on that later).



Not hordes, just a few of them...

That's not necessarily a bad thing. I had a good time with survival-horror games in the past, and the puzzles here are mostly ok (though many of them just require collecting stuff all over the map or searching for keys).



The movement and shooting are pretty smooth (though the lack of a default reticle really made me miss many shots - turn it on in the game options if you want it), and the geography of the studios is very interesting and cohesive, with many shortcuts to be discovered as the game goes on. All in all, I must say I mostly had a good time with MFN.



Recognize the Silent Hill map?

In particular, one aspect of the game which is superbly done is the mapping. For each level, you must find a map, usually at some room's wall near the start of said level.

Once you have, it clearly displays room colors according to their status: unvisited (white), visited but not completed (red), or completed (green). Doors are also clearly marked as you try them; if they are locked by a key, a symbol marks what key you need to open them; if they are otherwise blocked, you get a red color. Again, this is a watermark of many good survival horror games and helps you figure out what rooms still have resources to be collected. Lovely.

Another clever detail: your first ranged weapon is "The Stenographer," whose 26-sized magazine quite literally (literally!) shoots the alphabet. You can actually see the letters lying around after you shoot them, A-Z on the floor. Other guns are similarly themed.



Shooting the alphabet at Big B..., I mean, Pearl.

The game also has an interesting take on enemy respawns: in principle, every time you change rooms, enemies respawn, so you need to control your shots carefully. But you do find a few rolls of duct tape scattered around; if you tape an enemy after shooting it down, it will stay taped and harmless for the rest of the game. This adds a new layer of strategy: if there is an enemy that is hard to run past, and you think you will revisit its room many times (there is so much backtracking!), then you might as well spend a precious roll of duct tape in order to save ammo later on.





Recognize the Resident Evil suitcase?

But not everything is shiny and happy with MFN's gameplay. First, I disliked the inventory management aspect. Many of the items you carry around are huge key items (like the masks and the reel on this screenshot); darn, even the keys themselves occupy a lot of room. If you want the

player to strategize inventory, please at least make the key items occupy a separate space. Or provide us with, I don't know, a key ring? Yes, you can stash away items in boxes near savepoints, but these aren't too common, and even with them, you might run out of room if you are stingy with your items.

Another thing I disliked is the fact that some puzzles are optional, leading to a big final puzzle, which requires you to watch YouTube videos in order to unlock a final "reward" outside the game. I mean, I do not mind games that contain "community puzzles" to be solved in the real world... but they should be clearly marked as optional somehow; as it is, I advanced on this puzzle quite a lot until I got to that "impossible step" which I could only solve by reading the game forums, only to realize then it was just some sort of ARG (Alternate Reality Game) Easter Egg. "ARG" indeed.

Now, to defend the action-filled trailers, the game does have an alternate "horde" mode, in which it becomes a timed wave shooter. I played it a bit and found it serviceable, but I never felt compelled to keep advancing on it, so I have no further impressions on it.



Horde mode can get very... busy.



And finally, let us talk about the Save Situation. Rant starts in 3... 2... 1...



is for the



ave



situation

Unlike a few decades ago, I imagine these days most people have a mother-in-law like me? She is a sweet lady, more than 90 years old, and sometimes she comes to spend a day at my home. So, when she rings my door bell, I feel obliged to drop whatever I am doing to go answer it, and maybe give her a bit of attention, you know?

So, developers, please, please, PLEASE provide me with a *friendly* save anytime for such occasions. I mean, am I supposed to make my mother-in-law wait? Or do I pause the game, answer the door, and then explain to her that "I will be back in 10 minutes. Let me just find a save room... ?" Or, even worse, just quit the game and lose all my recent progress?

MFN is actually WORSE than this: in normal and above difficulty, not only do you have to find a save room, but you also have to spend a token every time you want to save the game. Look, I understand this is a throwback to the old typewriter ribbons in Resident Evil games, and it is there to increase the tension of resource management, but... you know, throwbacks are "things from back then which you threw away?" Yes, at the end of the game, I had tons of tokens, so I realized THEN it was not a real issue... but, again, if you are going to provide lots of them, why have this mechanic at all?

45

But all in all, I can forgive the above; it is just a choice in game design. But there is even more, and this one is unforgivable...

Like many other games, MFN has a few decisions at the very end - a couple of things you can do, and the very last thing is a huge YES/NO decision, which is presented to you with a huge YES/NO screen. Well, once you make your decision, the game locks you out of that saved game forever. That's right. You cannot go back to the last time you spent a *friendly* token to *friendly* save your game because the *friendly* game decided to *friend* you. If you want to see the other ending, you have to *friendly* play the whole *friendly* thing all over again.





Trying to load my game - *friend* you too, buddy!

If there is a saving (!) grace to this, during the game, you can find many items that give you access to cheat codes. So I did a second run of the game with "No Clipping" on, and I could sidestep almost everything and get to the ending again in about 15 minutes or so.

Still, I really do not understand why the developers hate me so much; had I not found that particular cheat code, I would join the legions of wall-headbanging Muppets all over the world...

46



is for



technical:

Graphics and Sound



*Pearl in a Pearl Earring*

The Save Situation is a real bummer because the technical aspects of the game are really well done. The Unity graphics are excellent for such a small team. The Office section, for example, reminded me of the art-deco style of the Bioshock games, with tons of nice shiny objects and "classic" Muppet art.



The sound is good. Most enemies keep blabbering about the alphabet and the usefulness of the mail service; it is very repetitive, but it fits with the general idea that these Muppets are out of their minds. And the sound helps you to quickly figure out how many (and where) enemies are in each new room (pity the game does not seem to have 5.1 sound; it could be even better). The shooting sounds like an old typing machine, which is just right for the guns you carry.

I found no bugs or crashes in the normal game I played. That said, once I turned on the "No Clipping" cheat for my second run, the game did crash a few times, probably because I was doing things in an unexpected order. And I was amazed at how many things the developers have out-of-bounds for the noclipers to see.



## is for Final Thoughts

A couple of things I should add before I finish the review: the game reveals at some point what made the puppets go awry, and I thought it was clever, so bonus points for

the simple story. Second, the game is actually reverse subversive in a few ways.

For example, the gameplay screams survival horror, so you, of course, bring the horror to the game yourself, but the game actually has a vein of sweetness if you look at it from the right angle. See, there is no blood; enemies just ragdoll away when when

you disable them... were it not for the disturbing ramblings the enemies spout out repeatedly, it could even be a game for children.

See, maybe.

May-be-see.

■ Thexder



47



*Norman above the Sea and Fog*

*Raphael's Puppets*

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

the good

- Nice graphics and art for a small team.
- Smooth movement and shooting.
- Creative world with disturbing puppets

the bad

- Inventory system needs work.
- Save system is abominable.

Friendly game (despite some unfriendly features)!





# THE GUNK

48

I am going to cut to the chase on this review. I am writing about The Gunk a week after finishing the game, and I have not thought about it once since and would probably never have thought about it again except for the fact that I have to write this review for SGM. In the days since I finished playing, Thunderful Games, who are the developers and publishers of The Gunk and are best known for the SteamWorld series of games, announced layoffs and cancelled projects. Having played SteamWorld Dig, SteamWorld Heist, and now The Gunk (Image & Form Games' only non-SteamWorld game), I can honestly see why. I think a lot of the issues I had while playing The Gunk extend to the other games I have played from this studio.

The Gunk is a sci-fi adventure game that imagines that maybe it's not so bad living under the oppressive control of a megacorp like Weyland-Yutani from the Alien franchise. Life in this game is an unbearable and hazardous struggle, but the game chooses not to dwell on that. It deals with some heavy topics but stays very close to the surface. It's described as chill or casual and intended for younger audiences.

After playing, these seem like excuses for a low-effort game. I've played some interesting walking simulators that sacrifice gameplay for a compelling story; I've played games with great mechanics and little to no story. This game has the low gameplay payoff of a walking simulator, and also the low story payoff of a game that focuses on the mechanics.



Rani and Becks dream of a better life while their robot cooks dinner.





In *The Gunk*, you play as Rani, a young spacefaring scavenger who lost her hand in the mines and had it replaced with a robotic hand. Rani is one half of the crew of the Dust Bunny. Along with her best friend, Becks, Rani takes to the stars doing odd jobs. The two dream of getting rich and realistically hope to pay their mortgage.



A colorful fungal forest.

The Dust Bunny detects an odd energy signature on a nearby planet, and they decide to check if they can find anything their company will deem valuable. No doubt that if that were to happen, the company would swoop in and strip-mine the planet. Before you even take control of Rani, she reveals that her power glove (she calls it Pumpkin) is acting up again, and she has no materials besides Superglue for repairs. Becks talks about their overall dwindling food and supplies, how they have barely any fuel left, and that their insurance will likely not cover any accidents incurred by storms on the alien planet. Rani cheerily responds with, "Alright, here we go!" and descends to the planet's surface. Soon, Rani finds a strange, organic material that interferes with the Dust Bunny's scanning equipment. She calls the undulating blob "gunk". It looks like bubbling strawberry jam. Pumpkin acts as a vacuum for some reason, so Rani sucks up the gunk. Doing so restores fungal life to the area and reveals a small pool of glowing liquid with the same energy signature they detected from orbit. Becks believes that this liquid could be very valuable if they can find enough of it. Rani sets off to explore.



For the first hour or so, the game shows potential. Rani and Becks look somewhat like carved models from a stop-motion film, which contrasts nicely with the strange fungal life of the planet. The music conveys the majesty and awe of an undiscovered world. Rani follows a deer-like creature far away from their landing zone and discovers the remains of an alien civilization. I was interested to see where things went.

In terms of gameplay, Rani goes about doing some minor platforming, minor puzzle solving, minor combat, and material gathering. For most of the game, there is little difficulty in these actions.

There is usually only one way to go. Any deviations from the main path are merely short detours to more crafting materials. Puzzles are less about finding a solution than they are about doing the one thing you can obviously do in order to proceed. When in doubt, suck up all the gunk, and the way will become clear. If there's no gunk, then you need to create a platform by spawning new fungus in a glowing pool of liquid. If there's no missing platform, then you need to blow up a metal barrier with exploding fungus. And that's it. After discovering the exploding fungus, there are no new types of fungus to find. Eventually, the gunk produces enemies that you will have to fight as much as you Hoover up. Rani's arm is able to scan materials, which gives you XP towards new abilities.

That's pretty much it.



Follow the feathered deer.





Unfortunately, there were very few changes in the four hours that follow. The Gunk is heavily front-loaded. After a time, nothing felt new. For a five hour game, that creates a disappointingly boring experience.

Scanning items reveals very little besides, "This is another kind of fungus" or, "This is an alien chair." The XP you gain from scanning lets you unlock new abilities for Pumpkin if you have the crafting materials. However, the new abilities are fairly useless: you can suck up gunk faster or from a greater distance; you can stun or lure enemies; you can run faster. There are three types of enemies. I never needed to stun them or do much of anything besides suck them up, or dodge their attack and then suck them up. Plot-wise, little happens. You find some artifacts. Rani theorizes that maybe the gunk is a result of alien technology gone wrong.

You learn that, yes, they did this to themselves. Of course, Rani wants to fix things. Becks says they need to worry about themselves. Since Rani is the protagonist, she is right. Their money problems and the dismal life that they live are never really mentioned again.

Rani says some of the most annoyingly optimistic things (no offence to the voice actor), while Becks wonders how they will make payments on their ship. It felt like when I was a kid and confided in an adult about something that felt significant and worrying to me, and their response was, "It'll be ok," without any advice or acknowledgement of my feelings. Fittingly, the majestic alien deer that started the whole adventure never makes another appearance. Much like the worldbuilding, the conflict between Rani and Becks and their goal of freeing themselves from their capitalistic hell is forgotten.



However, to say some positive things again, the game looks nice. A fungal ecosystem is not something I've seen often in games. It contrasts nicely with the drab areas where the gunk has taken over. There was a song that felt very fitting for the reveal that the aliens destroyed their civilization and ecosystem in their desire for an easier life. In moments of exploration, the ambient music is pretty nice too. I don't remember how any of those songs sound now.

That's really about it. I can't recommend The Gunk. If you want a casual game, there are countless better titles. If you want a platforming game, if you want a game with similar themes (that feels like it actually does anything meaningful with them), or you want a game with a cleaning mechanic, again, there are better titles out there.

I don't see passion in this game. I don't see an adherence to any sort of gaming philosophy or statement. I don't really even see a desire to make a fun game. It feels like a group of people sat down for a single conversation where they said something like, "People care about the environment, right? Let's make a game where you save the world by cleaning up pollution! Any questions? No? Alright, here we go!" To tie this all back to the unfortunate news of Thunderful Games (with all due sympathy for the people who lost their jobs because I know that sucks), they kind of did this to themselves.



Even an ancient alien civilization uses yellow paint to mark platforms

52

■ sweetcuppincakes

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

#### the good

- Nice music
- Unique visual style
- Promising start

#### the bad

- Very little challenge
- All aspects of character, story, and setting feel forgotten by the end of the game
- Gameplay changes very little from start to finish

Gunk rhymes with Junk.





The background of the page is a detailed illustration from the game NieR: Automata. It depicts a misty, forested landscape with large, ancient trees. In the foreground, a small, dark, mechanical figure (an android) stands on a grassy patch, looking towards a large, rusted, and overgrown mechanical structure that resembles a broken-down vehicle or machine. The overall atmosphere is somber and mysterious.

# NieR: Automata<sup>®</sup>

ニーア オートマタ

Game of the YoRHa Edition

I'm not particularly used to this kind of genre of games like NieR, as it's not my favorite one. I think this works in my favor, as I'm not taking certain things for granted, not adding any preconceptions, nor putting any high bar expectations.

So given the lack of expertise from me, I think the best for this situation will be to dig right in on this one with a direct roleplay approach: I will take the role of a Scientist and analyze this Android, piece by piece, only with pure, exacting logic.



Let's start this with a basic and simple piece to analyze, and judge this book by the cover:

## The Visuals.



NieR:Automata excels in this category with several elements and will make you more than happy to see the game... as a matter of fact, a lot of times I stopped what I was doing to shift the camera and enjoy the visuals!

When we take a look at our characters (2B, 9S, A2), NPCs, and Enemy Bosses, we will see a lot of dedication to details that are expertly crafted. This gives us the feeling that they are not just clones being copy+pasted one after the other. The style that each of them have conveys to us not only that individualism from those differences, but also the feeling that they belong to that group where they are (no desert guys have winter clothes). For the protagonist and the sidekicks, we can see that the default clothing & the alternate skins/dress/accessories that can be obtainable in the game are all designed to be beautiful and stylish. I'm certain that you will love them, they are great.



A friend!

There are just a few ground animals (a big boar, and a moose), that look wild and pretty well done in terms of details. For birds, well... we sometimes can see shadows on the ground from some flying over, which is a nice touch.



For the enemies, at first they seem kinda simple and even with some cuteness, and nothing more than that. But then, once you start to play 2 or 3 sessions into the game, you can understand how they are created to give you visual clues of how they "evolve" or "improve" from those first simple and cute bots. And with this, there are also times when we will think "I should probably not mess with that one". So we can start to appreciate the look of them, and the extra details involved.



We should recognize that we are going to fight lots and lots of enemies. So, there will be many instances where a lot of enemies are looking the same. An unavoidable situation, that isn't bothersome at all given the previous facts said.

Now, visuals cannot be analyzed without looking at the scenery, background, and stages. In this, I have mixed emotions (like a Rolling Stone) and I think it is **good** and **not-so-good** at the same time.

As for the indoors, the scenery and background are simple and we don't get much detail in them. They are by no way displeasing, but we get a sensation of generic walls and surfaces.

Perhaps it is in part to blame for the fine aesthetics presented on the characters and enemies/NPCs that have set the bar high, but the feeling of this department lacking is present.

As for the outdoors, there is a really well-made symbiosis of nature overtaking the man-made buildings that gives us the exact feeling of humanity leaving the place and being overrun by nature and the invading enemies. Another thing is that this outdoor scenery gives us the sense of scale, which helps us to better understand the world that we left behind. And I can attest that there are some landscapes that can be described as breathtaking (unless you are a robotic Android... and you don't need to breathe).



Continuing with my review, I will say to you “There is no Storytelling without Story”, and keep my roleplay for the analysis of this piece.

Don't worry, we won't have any, even small spoiler in this. I wouldn't even think of ruining it like that. For me, that's a capital sin and should be a bannable crime! Rest assured.

I think that the Story and Storytelling in NieR:Automata is by far the best content that it gives us, and it's what truly makes this game one everyone is praising. This segment of review will be divided in 2 sections:

## Chapter 1: Existentialism within the game philosophy.

This game has arguably the most intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and philosophical depth of any game. It may not be the absolute best of those individually, you can surely find a few games that can beat NieR:Automata in one of those categories. But what NieR:Automata does is that it gives us a cohesive insight on all of those together, all in a balanced and accessible way. Meanwhile, it doesn't lose any of the meanings of those elements, nor bargain with the intention to make us consider and reflect on them. This is all thanks to the master storyteller and director, Yoko Taro.

Surely, you will say,

“Aren't you being a little pretentious with this claim?”

“No”, I then will say.

“How so?!” You will immediately say, angry face included.

And then I will tell you that I'm not using big and fancy words just for the sake of sounding intellectual. And then I will explain the following: This is because, throughout the several routes and side-quests that the game provides, it always directly gives us some paths to the existentialism questions that the game asks us **without** breaking the fourth wall. And how does it do this? It makes use of some particularly intelligent resources: we are not playing as humans; humanity as a collective is in hiding and they send us Androids to fight for them against aliens and other robots. Also, this is done 10,000 years in the future. So the game makes use of those resources, and with it makes an androids & robots debate about several philosophical questions (that are also included in most cutscenes/dialogues in game/wall of texts). So, in a way, we feel included in this situation by being Androids, as we are forcefully detached from the humans. We solve the quests and paths; we think and internally debate on the uncertainties and existentialism; so, we start to put meaning to our gaming actions, and our progress in the game.

I think this is marvelous, and you will surely love it. Because this is not a “mindless button-smash/headbutt to the keyboard” way of playing, devoid of meaning, as we do our actions and quests within the game, we also try to find meaning in it and have a purpose to keep going. And a deep truth that we understand as gamers: The reward after completing those meaningful actions is one of the most enjoyable of any gaming moment, for sure.



I know this is a little hard to grasp without more examples, but there is a fine line between giving you an example and spoiling the journey... and it will be better if you discover it while playing. Trust me, I'm Faloperito.

For all of you to get a glimpse of what I mean by questions of existentialism, I will give you the game's opening lines:

*"Everything that lives is designed to end.  
We are perpetually trapped... in a never-ending spiral of life and death.  
Is this a curse? Or some kind of punishment?  
I often think about the god who blessed us with this cryptic puzzle...  
and wonder if we'll have the chance to kill him."*

## Chapter 2: Bonding with the different characters.

The game is really good at this, using some key elements that I will quickly detail below.

It creates some amusement when us Androids try to decode what remains of humanity from this world. An example is when 2B finds an elk who is ill, and then together with 9S they try to understand how an entity like a living animal can be cured... because animals aren't "repaired". Or we find toothpaste, and our Pod tries to explain what a cavity is. Or 2B asks what the idiom "The pen is mightier than the sword" means. Yeah, explain that logic to an Android. With all this, we create bonds of fraternity with the laughter and innocence of those moments.

Moreover, the game creates a compelling story about relations, within the characters we use and also within the enemies themselves that cross our path. The script is well made, so with each quest and action we will see how the story unfolds, with believable situations and reactions. Each route gives us more and more. Also, it's a script that is not predictable at all.

I can say that the old wisdom of "There are always two sides of the story" is well set here. With time, each character grows and develops, so when we advance in the game we can see how the love and/or hate with each relationship evolves (and can also change!) through that time set. We will surely see it for the protagonist, and also for those around them (friends and enemies alike).

And the two most laudable things here are that

(A) we get ample time and many memorable moments to see and recognize this, and

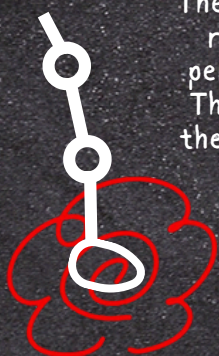
(B) the game doesn't tell us what to think. It does not form our opinion for us, doesn't tell us what should be right and what should be wrong.

We see and feel the facts of what's happening, having characters react in their own way, and we start to internally form those relationships. Loving or hating robots, androids, aliens, humans... will be our decision.



Yeah, yeah, a lot of science and thinking around here. But what about the actual part of playing the game, the play game... the gameplay?

Okay, I will get to what you surely consider the most important part. And related to this, there are many things to consider. So as Jack the Ripper said "Let's go by parts."



The part of how we move with our character, I can tell you that the movement is really fluid, with grace and perfection. We jump/evade/run/climb, all done in a perfect manner. There is no moment where this felt out of place or out of sync. The timing felt normal and natural. "It goes along with how we as Androids are the perfect killing machines are created to be the perfect killing machines. I think the right word for this is "finesse". Not necessarily like a showoff, but as someone who has trained to master this trade.

Movement felt really good.

The part of how we look and see with our character, we have a free-floating camera view that we can move at our leisure. I found out that when the battle was raging and shit was hitting the fan: it was a little hard for me to master the camera and the angle, even after finishing the game there were moments where I attacked blindly to my enemies... because my camera was looking at the wrong side. The camera was something that I found a little pain, but I could overcome by relying on my instincts more than the current camera view.

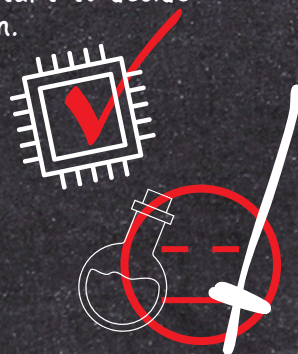


Viewing felt kinda bad.

58

The part of how you build and suit up your character is going to give you lots of playtime, scheming and strategizing what could be the best build for you. We are Androids, and the Elite ones here: in order to upgrade ourselves, what we can do is install chips that increase/improve an element of our build. That can be attack power, critical chance, evasion, health, defense, speed, and sooo many more things. If there's a possibility of something, we could probably find a chip that can enhance it. We have a finite room to add chips on us, and as a chip is more powerful, it also takes more room. And here is where we start to decide what's best for us, and let the Strategic Scheming Games begin.

We also have upgrades for our Pods and Swords, for which we need to find materials and use a certain NPC with the ability to perform the upgrade. And voilà, the thingy is made better. The game is not built necessarily for farming, so it's something more like we will gradually find them and make use when we have collected enough. We also have different potions and life regen. I didn't find much allure on the potions, didn't see a real difference with or without drinking it.



Upgrading felt good for chips, and kinda bad for the rest.

The part of how you set up the game difficulty for your character is something separated in four options that will give you an edge in terms of more or less challenge. Fundamentally, I think it gets harder by adding more strength to enemies. I didn't find different enemies in the same area depending on difficulty. So if you change difficulty to something harder, in essence you will need to level up and gear up before jumping into the area. The degree by which it changes between those four options is not really steep, so you would be able to test those differences and surely find something balanced for you.

Difficulty felt good.







The part of how we fight with our character, you do your hack & slash with swords or fists using a light attack and heavy attack. You can do some combos depending on the sword (and the upgrades added to it), and it gives you a variety of fighting playstyles. You also have a wide range of swords to choose from. But to be honest, many times it felt the same with whichever one I choose (both in playstyle and damage). And again, all this was outshone with the elegance of how it performs these moves and combos. Not flashy at all, it was elegant. It was like a murdering dance, and it pushed me to perform perfectly to the audience of one: Me. We are paired with a Pod, a robot who follows us and helps us by shooting (depending on difficulty, you can lock on target or not). You can find and unlock different Pods that will shoot differently, and also you can upgrade them with certain damaging abilities. And if we choose them strategically, depending on the battle situation it can greatly aid us.

You also have moments of having aerial fights where we can jump to a mini-Macross/Robotech style individual ship that we pilot. It can do a barrel roll, it does pew-pew, it transforms into a robot with legs and arms that swing a blade, and of course, it has a super-ability. It was a change of pace, and happened not so often. Stages were easy to beat. For the boss fights, those were intense and with many stages that required full concentration to avoid making any mistakes. They are quite long, with scripts that are intelligent and not following a simple pattern. Challenging, and a little enraging when you die at a stage 3 transformation, and need to start from the first stage.

59



Fighting felt good.

The part of how we do the central tasks/side quests/different routes with our character, it feels like we had good control of what to do next. I never sensed that I was obliged to do a task that felt menial. I could decide what I would like to do with the quests. Of course, there were moments that I only had one quest to follow, but that was because I had exhausted all the rest. Roaming will give you new choices of quests or intriguing things to discover that lead to more quests, so it's rewarding in different ways. There are some quests that have prerequisites or conditional triggers, and the game doesn't always tell you about them. And also, there are some side-quests that are time-sensitive. So it can be a real bummer to find out you missed/failed one of those. There are lots of different stories and lore on them, so it's not boring at all. And a key factor that I want to mention: You will never feel like a dumb errand boy running around to do a quest (fuck those MMOs). Some sensitive quests give you the option of choosing the next step, so you can deny help to someone if you don't want to, or make a killing move right there. And by doing so... you will live with the consequences, so be warned! As you can see, the freedom that the game gives us is commendable.

Questing felt really good.







Sound is the repetitive motion of an object around its resting point, and as a Tech Scientist, I will follow this motion into my next topic.

For the Music, I think you'll find that the soundtrack has a good and professional team behind it. You can clearly hear a strong performance behind it, composed by Keiichi Okabe and the Monaca team. Music is really a subjective matter, but if we try to review this in terms of general taste within the gaming industry: I think it is a really good soundtrack within the categories of classical and orchestral. It has a total of 45 songs.

As for sounds, in battle sometimes we get more of a cacophony of shooting + grunting + robots screeching + sword hitting metal. Something common in the heat of battle; nonetheless, as we battle a lot in this game, it gets annoying. Please be mindful though, that I don't think it ruins any enjoyment at all. It's just mildly annoying.

When we are not in battle, things like small streams of water, the animals running, the robot jumping or walking, the sound of your boots while running, they all can be easily identified while we are playing and that's something nice to get. The game gives you great immersion with natural sounds that makes it feel more real.

Also, something cool that I noticed: When you are safe in one of those beautiful landscapes, the game gives you a little more silence so you can enjoy the moment. Yet again, a nice touch.

With all these parts analyzed, I will do my scientific report and conclusion for this Android.

I think that NieR:Automata is a perfect game when you want to immerse yourself in it; when you want a game that will make you forget about the real world, and just be part of a whole different adventure. It has a lot of elements to keep you busy. You'll get into exciting fights and solve interesting quests.

And even beyond that, you will come to deeply care about your gaming actions and the outcome of them. It may cause you to think deeper about the game philosophy itself, as it treats you as a sentient being and gives you some food for thought. Also, the story between us and each character is so well made... that it hits you in the Kokoro. I'm not afraid to say that I shed some tears, it is a lovely story and I felt part of it.

So, I will end my review with another game quote from inside the game, and I hope you muster the courage to start this epic journey called NieR:Automata:

"Everything that lives is designed to end. They are perpetually trapped... in a never-ending spiral of life and death.

However, life is all about the struggle within this cycle. That is what 'we' believe."

■ Faloperito.

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

#### the good

- The philosophy of the game makes you think about your actions in-game, and you feel part of the larger NieR world.
- The beauty of the visuals and movement, mostly on characters, NPCs, and enemies.
- Some landscapes are worth pausing the game to take in.
- Variety with main and side quests, hidden things, challenges; there are lots of options.
- Each sentient thing has its own personality, and their actions feel reasonable under their conviction. Noone is a placeholder.

#### the bad

- Depending on the difficulty, when you are close to the final chapters: gearing up felt like it didn't matter.
- Sometimes you don't have info about good side quests, so you end up missing/failing them. You need to roam and be vigilant on visual cues.

A resounding success.





# GHOST SONG



Can you ever honestly judge a game based on anything other than what you personally want it to be?

Should you even try? Blind yourself to every creative decision that isn't quite to your taste, ignore the circumstances out of which the game arose, cast from your mind the alternative design paths which might have been taken, and evaluate it as if in a pure vacuum, devoid of any wider context?

The problem being, every game hints at the ghosts of everything it once was, or even could have been. And sometimes, ghosts can be pretty damned disruptive...

## ***The Prelude To The Song***

There is a story posted as a Steam review, and repeated elsewhere, that the intended lead programmer of Ghost Song abandoned (or indeed, "ghosted") the project shortly after receiving half of the Kickstarter funds, leaving the full burden of coding the game on the shoulders of Matt White – with no background in programming, whose primary role was supposed to be just producing the art. This particular ghost story has been floating around for a couple of years, and not only hasn't it been substantiated, but based on all the information I can find on Kickstarter and elsewhere, I'm inclined to believe it is a myth (perhaps based on innocent misconceptions, or over-enthusiastic reading between the lines) pieced together by a sympathetic fan.



What is certain is that Matt had zero experience making games, but with his love of gaming and talent as an artist, he decided to see what he could achieve as a hobbyist. He tried out an engine called “Stencyl”, straightforward enough for an amateur to feel comfortable and which he enjoyed using, but which seemed to have some limitations in the scope of what gameplay it could include, and more pressingly in the level of performance the final result could offer. However, his experimentation just made him fall deeper in love with the idea of making a game. The experience convinced him that he should dedicate himself 100% to bringing his ghost to life.



It seems instead to be the case that, rather than using the friend to “help” with some moderate assistance, or even as an equal partner in the work, Matt’s inexperience meant he was entirely dependent on them, every step of the way. For every single idea, every implementation, tweak, or fix, Matt would have to explain what was in his head and wait for his friend to guide him through everything (or indeed, simply write up the necessary code). It certainly doesn’t seem to be the case that he just wanted to work on the art and expected his friend to do all the coding. He mentions getting to a point of extreme frustration that he was not able to work “hands-on” on his own project – he obviously wanted to get stuck in, but felt incapable of doing so.

He had struggled to push ahead following this original plan for several months, but while all this had been happening, Stencyl had moved forward to a new release – a version which seemed to address precisely the performance issues which had previously caused him to rule it out. And so, he felt like he had to make a choice: either to crawl ahead with Unity, leaning enormously on his friend and learning on the job, little-by-little, through a methodology that was already driving him crazy – or switch back to Stencyl, and make smooth progress in an engine he had built up some familiarity with and felt sure he could handle on his own. It is understandable that he

He went to Kickstarter with the very modest goal of 15k, and a plan that if the target was met, the project would continue in Unity, with Matt working full time and an experienced friend helping him to code. The target was obliterated, and the project went ahead as intended... But not for long.

What happens next is perhaps the grey area that allowed the (apparent) myth to form, but Matt never seems to have publicly implied that this friend failed to meet any agreed commitments, or received a hefty payment with little to show for it, and beyond that he even goes so far as to be extremely complimentary about them. I can find no evidence of bad blood.





seemingly felt very confident in changing course.

After almost 4 years of work on the build, despite the fruits of his efforts being impressive enough to gain a good deal of attention and foster a growing atmosphere of hype, the cracks were not just beginning to show, but becoming impossible to ignore. The improvements had been enough to make Stencyl seem a viable option, but it was still very poorly suited for a large-scale, fully-featured game. Even with all Matt's progress, the game wasn't close to being ready for release, and each attempt to tackle the ever-increasing list of issues and bugs (let alone to finish adding content) just made it clearer and unmistakably clearer that the engine had been pushed to its limit. He came to an agonising conclusion: if he stuck with Stencyl, he would never get the game into a state he could be happy with.

So, he sacrificed his game.

And started from scratch.

(In Unity).



After another 5 years of work, the game finally released. To the sympathetic ear, it is a somewhat tragic backstory, full of pathos, and potent dramatic irony – but culminating with a shot at redemption. What could have been just one more

cautionary tale of Kickstarter backers never receiving what they paid for, instead becoming a story of one man refusing to give up, adamant that he would release a game he was happy with, even if it took him a few months shy of a decade to do so. It is a story that primes you to wish the best for the game. Surely, if there's any justice, after all the blood, sweat, and tears, all that frustration and emotional torment, the final result would vindicate it all by being a shining example of indie craftsmanship.

But is it wise to go into a ghost story expecting a happy ending?

## ***A Stranger In A Strange Land***

Ghost Song starts out with a diminutive set of power armour referred to as the “deadsuit” booting up on some unknown planet, evidently for the first time in many years. You are inside the deadsuit, or maybe... you *are* the deadsuit? Right from the beginning, there is this level of mystery and uncertainty, and for much of the game, both character and player cannot say who – or even what – you really are. It serves as the first sign of an atmosphere of ambiguity and mystique, which is one of the game's greatest successes.

The music contributes enormously to this effect. With its evocative, lo-fi vibes, it is sparse and open enough to emphasise the sense of loss and loneliness of the desolate alien environments perfectly, and occasional rough, scratchy, dissonant sounds impose themselves to remind you that there is a brutal edge to this barren world... Yet, at the same time, there is a humanity in its echoing guitars and nostalgic, crackling melodies, and a fuzzy





warmth to its synth tones, which feel like a comforting contrast to juxtapose with the melancholy atmosphere. I enjoyed it a great deal, but found it frustrating that the music simply starts and stops throughout the game, sometimes seemingly at random. It often felt very abrupt, and almost always left me disappointed at its sudden absence or jolted by its sudden appearance.

64

The other major factor in establishing the atmosphere is the artwork, the hand-drawn stylings of which often achieve a somewhat mesmerising combination of beautiful yet forsaken or even grotesque. Matt White is undeniably a very talented artist, and the creativity and quality of his work on display here is impressive. That said, I feel it harms immersion that the backgrounds routinely include a level of

depth and distance which just doesn't make any sense in the context of a network of tunnels, making them feel more like an extremely striking but very artificial backdrop, rather than anchoring you in the reality of the game. In addition, they do very little to establish a distinct and cohesive sense of identity for each of the several different zones in the map. Perhaps this is partly to blame for why, over your many trips back and forth, all parts of the dungeon soon feel monotonous, despite any initial impact.

### ***Going The Extra Mile***

Speaking of those trips back and forth, they most certainly will be very many indeed. Of course, you might think that is to be expected from any metroidvania – but Ghost Song really feels like it demands more than most from the player in this regard. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, because the main quest itself is really just 5 fetch quests – one by one, find your way to each of five specified points scattered around the map to pick up a replacement spaceship part, and return to the crash site to drop it off before moving







on to the next. Fine; if it was the only issue, I wouldn't particularly object to that in itself, nor to the fact that while carrying one of these MacGuffin doodads, the game informs you that the fast travel mechanic cannot be used (without even a token effort made to give any in-world explanation of why this might be the case).

Partly why this restriction doesn't feel especially punitive, though, is the second reason that the backtracking feels so substantial: the 7 fast travel hubs on the map are almost impressively useless in their placement. It is remarkable that the vast majority of the time, even if you need to go a significant distance across the map, you are better off taking the "direct" route (despite this invariably involving a good deal of meandering, with the dungeon layout being as convoluted as it often is) rather than using the fast travel points.

Far from being located at key junctions to make them as practical as possible, it is almost always the case that the diversion required to get to one is extensive enough, and the benefit derived from the destinations offered so minimal, that it is very rarely worth bothering. It feels like they may have been included somewhat reluctantly, and surely not with the dungeon tactically planned around their implementation. I even have to genuinely question whether they might intentionally be very limited in their helpfulness. Worse yet, they are also the point you must head to in order to upgrade your character, adding further cause for frustration at their inconvenience.

Another potential reason why the amount of trekking around can definitively become excessive is if you attempt to complete the side quests, all of which are based around characters who you stumble upon during your





exploring. In each of these cases, after you meet them, when you proceed to complete the next phase of the main quest by returning a ship part, the character will move to a new location ready to be found again – and after finding and chatting to them another time, then returning another part, they will move once more, and so on. At the end of each of these chains (and sometimes after helping them out with a little slaughtering along the way), you receive a reward in the form of a new weapon or module, or sometimes just an achievement.

Unfortunately, the final, and most significant motive for the burdensome feeling when roaming across the map is the deadsuit itself. It is unpleasantly stilted and clunky, especially so in the early stages when only a single jump is possible, and throughout the entire game it trots along at a dismally slow jog. A dash is unlocked early on via an upgrade module, but that is primarily a dodge mechanism, and only carries you a short distance. It can be used repeatedly, but then will quickly drain your stamina – as is also the case with the sprint module which you receive a little later. I can think of a host of games in which the movement is so fluid and satisfying that just absent-mindedly exploring is half the fun in itself. In *Ghost Song*, at best it feels functional, at worst like a chore you wish could be avoided.

### ***Well-armed***

Reading that last paragraph, you might imagine that stilted and clunky movement does not exactly bode well for the combat in the game... And you would be correct. To some extent, anyway: there's more to it than just that. You start out with 2 forms of attack: your arm is a blaster cannon, providing your standard ranged attack throughout the game, and you also have a melee option – initially, just a punch from



The problem is that, in almost every case, there is no way of knowing where they might be waiting for you to find them at each stage. Honestly, even if you follow a guide to help you locate them, these quests add a great deal of additional trudging around to the game – and if you don't want to use a guide, it means potentially needing to explore practically the entire map between dropping off every single part. And, if you do complete a phase or two of the main quest without meeting up with them again, you can easily make it impossible for these chains to ever be completed. What's more, the game does nothing to hint at this structure for the side quests, and so if you are going into a first playthrough blind, you are very likely to inadvertently lock yourself out of completing most (if not all) of them without even realising this is the case.





that same blaster-arm. Soon, however, you start to discover alternative melee weapons, and also a variety of blaster modules enabling secondary projectile attacks.

By the end of the game, you have built up an impressive arsenal, with melee weapons including a massive hammer, a buster sword, and a spinning spiked wheel, and projectile options ranging from mini-rockets or chunks of ice through to plasma, or even alien eggs, which hatch to release flying bug-beasts to attack on your behalf. This diverse range of options is quite fun to play around with, and when boosted by the right stats and paired with the right combination of upgrade modules, their power can be multiplied with devastating effect.

There is no form of ammunition in the game, but each of the 3 attack modes is limited in its own way: melee through expending stamina, secondary attacks through expending energy, and basic blaster attacks through overheating, causing a sharp reduction in fire rate. And here's where another interesting little twist comes into the tale: when your blaster is red hot, that heat carries into your melee attacks, making them vastly more damaging – which makes perfect sense when you're punching them with the same blaster arm, and very little indeed when you're using any of the other options, but who cares when you get to swing around a giant, glowing-hot buster sword!

There's another rather unexpected idea implemented in the combat, too – the damage from your blaster is \*highly\* proximity-dependent, so the same enemy who barely notices a volley of shots from a few metres away might be completely decimated by them at close range. The rub

being that every enemy in the game has contact damage, so whether moving into melee range or trying to make the most of the blaster, there's always the chance that a tiny slip can be very costly.

And there's the first reason why that graceless movement makes such a dent in the enjoyment of combat. When maneuvering your character feels this unwieldy, taking a hit to your health any time you end up positioned a fraction off target just feels cheap, and outdated to boot. It's worsened by the fact that the damage from an enemy successfully completing an attack against you, or simply touching you, is often indistinguishable. Especially egregious is the fact that this is also the case for bosses, some of which can kill you in just a few devastating attacks and/or miniscule touches.

A similar issue is that your dash, which is your only true dodge in the sense of offering any invincibility frames, feels as unsatisfyingly rough and ready as the rest of your movement. Aside from that, its effectiveness in avoiding hitbox collisions sometimes feels frustratingly inconsistent and unpredictable, depending on the enemy and the attack. It also employs a





somewhat convoluted cooldown system, in which your first dash grants you a few momentary i-frames, and you are able to immediately dash again, but this time it will not in fact give you any such protection at all.

It's a shame, because the combat system is clearly intended to encourage quite a dynamic mix of back-and-forth between combat methods, but it is heavily undermined by all these factors. I also have to add that, from my perspective, quite a few of the enemies suffer from really poor attack telegraphing, again disincentivising attempts at more fluid, risk-taking combat.



68

## ***Up For A Fight?***

An even bigger issue with combat, though, is that you have all the ideas of these different mechanics and systems, combined with all the variety of weapons and modules and player upgrades, and the balancing of this nebulous mix of variables is frankly a shambles. For most of my first playthrough, combat was primarily drudgery, and in the case of many of the bosses, miserably drawn-out drudgery at that. They consistently felt like huge damage sponges, and the weaknesses in the combat and movement just made it a deeply unenjoyable experience.

Worse yet, the terrible positioning of the fast travel locations is only marginally improved in the case of the save locations, which feel similarly random and poorly thought-out, and on several occasions resulted in a long and dejected grind to get back to the fight location. That's before we even get into the fact that, on the default difficulty, every time you die your maximum health takes a dent (which can be recovered at a cost, if you trek your way to one of the fast travel hubs), just to make it a little bit harder for you to beat the enemy which has just bested you. And sometimes, as the final kick in teeth, far from defeating that boss being vital for my continued progress through the game, I discovered I could have completely ignored them, and they did not, as imagined, provide access to a useful new route or any reward I would make use of. There is really no way of knowing until the battle is done.

And yet, on my second run of the game, it was a wildly different experience. Equipped with the knowledge of where to find some choice weapons and modules, and of the right character traits to upgrade, suddenly the drudgery became a cakewalk.



Once you know what is available and how it all works, the potent combinations are unmistakable, and even the most punishing bosses can become trivial. There are multiple strategies which are overpowered enough that you feel you are basically cheesing the “big fights” – but when the alternative is so flawed, that doesn’t seem like such a bad option.

## ***Finish With Finesse***

All of this got me thinking: how on earth do you accurately balance a game (and the first you’ve ever made, at that) which you have been playing in one form or another for almost 10 years? How can you possibly understand what it is like for a “normal” player, and what they will experience as they jump in for the first time? Then throw into the mix a heavy influence from Dark Souls, with its unforgiving systems and vague obfuscation, and the temptation arises to consider that every case of a player not having a smooth or pleasant experience with the game... might not even be an issue? “It’s supposed to be like that! It’s intentionally antagonistic! GIT GUD!”

Ultimately, all the issues I’ve outlined arguably come down to a lack of polish, and I’m all in favour of giving a single indie dev (who went through a hell of a lot to get his

game done) a great deal of leeway in that regard. In terms of technical limitations, for example, though it isn’t my preference, I can get over the fact that the game doesn’t have mouse support, so gamepad is really the only way to play. Likewise, I can just about forgive the clumsiness of the sound effects, which too often stray into an oppressive cacophony of burbling and squelching, and on a few occasions seem to totally disregard your preference settings and blast out way too loud. What I find harder to gloss over is the way that conversations work.

The writing is not exactly wonderful, but is serviceable, and I won’t take issue with that (not even with the ending, though it certainly did feel anticlimactic). Perhaps a little over half the dialogue is presented as text on screen, with a panel depicting the speaker, and the rest has voice actors who feel a little amateurish, but that also isn’t a major issue for me, and even gives them a certain charm. The problem, then, is in how





the dialogue progresses. When it is text on screen, you just press the button to advance and pass through it at your own speed. All good there.

When it is voiced, on the other hand, you press the button, and hear the line being spoken... And then there is a pause of a few seconds. Then maybe you will respond, or maybe another line will come... And then another pause. These dead pauses are inserted extremely frequently in the speech, and make every single conversation feel absolutely interminable. Sometimes the pause is even longer, because you need to wait for the prompt to appear so you can press the button to continue with the conversation, and sometimes it jumps back and forth between voiced and unvoiced dialogue, just to add another layer of stiff uncertainty to the interaction.

It is agonising in its awkwardness, and utterly decimates any interest I had in ever hearing what anybody had to say. I appreciate that personal preference can vary a great deal, but it is hard for me to fathom how anyone could endure this conversation system and come away thinking, "Hell yeah, that was an engaging chat! I hope that I get to sit through a few dozen more of them!"

## Denouement For The Dead

If I were Matt White, I would be overjoyed that the game ended up as it is, after nigh-on ten fraught years of tirelessly enduring to get it over the finish line. Not only that, but as a first game, and one made almost entirely single-handedly, it is a genuine achievement. Honestly, I feel glad that the steam reviews are sitting at "Very Positive", with a commendable 84% of 797 being favourable. I can even understand why the majority of players might have had an experience that they considered, overall, positive.

But Ghost Song simply isn't the game I want it to be, and I can't recommend it. In a crowded market of metroidvanias, the atmosphere, artwork, and music could have made it stand out, but the lack of development experience uncomfortably asserts itself in too many ways to abide. It has some interesting ideas, but the lack of polish means they are implemented poorly, becoming counter-productive to the enjoyment of the overall experience. The lack of balance robs the beginner of fun and the returning player of satisfaction, the poor placement for the essential functions of save, upgrade, and fast travel are such an unnecessary annoyance, and that conversation system is atrocious. Out of respect for the dead(suit), let us never have those moments of silence again.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Rest in peace, Ghost Song. You almost made it.

■ PsychoApeMan

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

### the good

- Great atmosphere
- Wonderful music
- Excellent artwork
- Nice variety of weapons, which can be fun
- It got finished! In an acceptable state

### the bad

- Lack of balance means difficulty can feel unreasonable – or trivial
- Dungeon quickly feels monotonous
- Excessive back and forth
- Deadsuit is slow and clunky
- Extremely poor placement of save and upgrade/fast travel points
- Dialogue system is soul-crushingly bad

A haunting harmony... for the wrong reasons





# MORTAL KOMBAT™

## ULTIMATE

Before I properly start my review I have to get something off my chest – it's a personal peeve and doesn't really affect anything in my review, but by the elder gods! Stop with the overuse of the K. I get it already!

And what annoys me even more is the absolute lack of konsistency in committing to the bit! Why does **CURRENCY** begin with a 'C' when all the rest of the 'kuh' sounds begin with K? Huh?! If you're going to be gimmicky, at least be consistent about it!

-shakes fist angrily-



71

Alright, with that the pre-review rant is now over, so let's get to the actual review. Wait... where are you going...? No, wait! Seriously, don't go! I said—



Ahem. Let's get on with it, shall we?



The base MKII story campaign has a total of 50 fights, separated into 12 chapters, each of which focuses on a certain character or duo, with you having the ability to choose your fighter in case of the latter. The Aftermath DLC set immediately after the base game continues this trend, adding 5 more extra chapters with 27 additional story battles to the game while debuting the assist mechanic for a couple of its story battles, a prelude to the Kameo mechanic in MK's current incarnation. Though in MKII's case, the mechanic is limited to those aforementioned story battles and solo offline matches, provided you use a specific type of consumable before a match.



And with that, let's get into the story, shall we?

The game begins with Raiden in the midst of torturing Shinnok (apparently the god of evil in the MK universe) before beheading him and then espousing his plan to deliver his still-alive head to Liu Kang and his allies (who are now apparently evil and in control of Netherrealm), when suddenly time appears to crawl to a stop as a woman appears mere moments after Raiden leaves and swears a foreboding promise to the now-beheaded Shinnok.

This woman is revealed to be Kronika (yep, the dreaded K strikes again), the

Titan of time, who, in the aftermath of the action-packed prologue, properly reveals herself in-story, claiming her place as the primary antagonist for this game — with a grand plan involving resetting the current timeline to create a New Era more aligned to her wishes. And for this purpose of hers, she brings forward certain characters — both allies and enemies — from the past to the current time, kickstarting the game's primary plotline.

And this is where I come clean if the many “apparentlys” haven't clued you in already — I have absolutely zero idea about who most of these characters are. Most of my MK knowledge begins and ends with the first MK game I played on god knows what console and the 1995 and 1997 movies, which I barely remember aside from a few details that have refused to leave my head despite the years (if you know, you know). Hence, quite a lot of the story beats and character reveals, which seemed to revolve around someone or something that had occurred in the far (or recent for some) past, did not hit nearly as hard as the writers probably intended them to. Which honestly makes sense when you jump into the deep end of the pool, and starting a series with its 11th entry was definitely that.







Still, being a nigh beginner to the MK lore did allow me to get into the heads of our time-traveling heroes more easily. I do wonder if it was intentional that we don't really get many concrete details about what exactly happened to quite a lot of our past heroes to make them fall to the dark side in the present – aside from multiple conflicting testimonials which are obviously biased. I guess if you had played the previous games, you'd know the truth of it, but if you hadn't – like myself in this case – you'd automatically find yourself in the same headspace as them, not knowing what to believe. If it was deliberate, then it was a very nice touch. And if it wasn't? Well, happy accident.

As for the rules of time travel in the game itself, I found it best not to think about it too hard and simply take it as it comes. Something which is especially true during the Aftermath DLC, which makes Swiss cheese out of it.

Also, as an aside, MKII tries its best at averting a very common pitfall of fighting games – the gameplay and story segregation – by withholding all fatalities and brutalities being inflicted by the player (trust me, I tried), though it really doesn't succeed all that well with it when the Fatal Blow mechanic exists and can still be utilized by the player across all story battles.

I mean, just look at this:





It's the very first fight in the game and my Cassie is more or less shredding her mom with bullets – and not just your run-of-the-mill kind, no, but magical green bullets, I might add.

Spoilers, btw, but she didn't die from this.

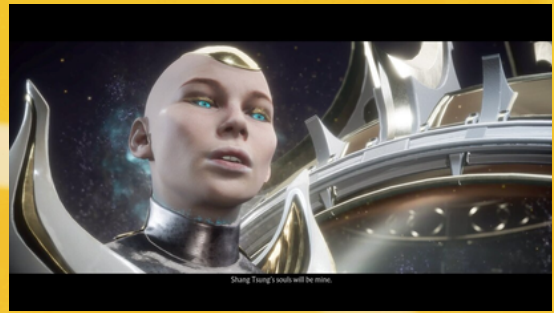
In fact, the fight wasn't even over after said bullet shredder, despite Cassie

Cage's callous cruelty, casually committed against Sonya. No, instead I had to finish beating her up with some kicks and punches thrown afterwards. And honestly, Cassie is not even the worst offender in the game or anywhere close to it. Although, admittedly, it did make me giggle at its ridiculousness. Kotal Kahn's one, however, made me actually laugh out loud as I watched it unfold before me:



Ignoring my terrible sense of humor and above digression, the storytelling still serves its purpose admirably well in introducing the roster and their characteristics to the player. And despite my unfamiliarity with most of the characters and the setting at large, I enjoyed my time with the campaign and its characters quite a lot.

While it could be a bit... korny (I'm sorry, but I had to do it) at times, and even with some of the battles using paper-thin excuses to pit certain characters against each other in the story, I found myself liking the humor and heart in the game, including some of the tongue-and-cheek callbacks being interspersed with the known goriness of the series.



However, I decidedly did not feel the same for the DLC campaign, which left me with a bitter **aftertaste** in my mouth despite the proper ending it gives to the story.

Onto matters of gameplay now – the basics of the combat in MKII are more or less the same as in most fighting games.

There's the general moveset that is shared by all the characters in the game roster: the front kick, the back kick, the front punch, the back punch, the horizontal and vertical movements, the block, the throw, the stance switching, and finally, the interaction/amplify. This last button on its own allows the player to interact with certain background objects in most stages if they are within reach – weaponizing them against their opponents or using them for a quick escape. It also amplifies certain moves or combos, making them hit harder. Meanwhile, the stance switching doesn't really do anything on its own aside from... well, switching the stance of the characters, but when used in combination with some other inputs, it provides the player with a variety of results.

Then, of course, there's the series mainstays of Fatalities and Brutalities, which are present in all their glorious goriness, as well as a few more finishers like Friendships, Mercy, etc., along with a couple of newcomers in Krushing Blows and Fatal Blows. The former are essentially critical hits that are triggered



for a move or a combo when its conditions are met, which you'll know from the brief slow-mo x-ray it invokes, while the latter are a kind of hail mary available to each character for a single use during the entire match whenever their HP falls below 30%, which if connected causes an incredible amount of damage with a cutscene combo that is unique to each character. Careful, though, because if your opponent predicts it, then they CAN block or interrupt it before you can execute it.

Now, got all that? Good, because then we can get into the actual gameplay. Most of these buttons can be strung together in different orders for multi-hit moves or entirely new ones, in what the game refers to as Kombos and Special Abilities.

Most of these are unique for each character in the roster, though of course there's overlap in button inputs across the entire roster – which, including the base game and all its DLCs (provided by MKII Ultimate to you in a neat package), consists of a total of 37 characters.

Most online matches – in fact, all that I witnessed personally – are usually

decided by how well versed a player is in using these “kombos” or in reading the deficiencies of their opponent’s “kombos”. Then again, that might be a bit of an oversimplification of the entire process, which includes, but is not limited to, keeping your enemy at the most favorable distance for the specific character you're using, specific move cancelings (the process of canceling your last active input by overriding it with another combo or special ability), frame data, and some more...

Yep.

In all honesty, fighting games have always been too incredibly dense and complex for me to properly get into once I eventually learnt there was more to it than button smashing, and while I theoretically understand that itself is the appeal of the genre, in practice, it's difficult to acknowledge when you get your ass kicked for the dozenth time against yet another player who seems to run circles around you.

And MKII fortunately (or unfortunately, for some) doesn't really break away from this trend. There's tutorials, of course, covering a slew of things I mentioned above and even a decent AI to practice against locally, but until you enter the competitive scene, none of it truly prepares you for facing real, flesh-and-blood players who range from spamming the same cheap moves over and over and over and over and over, to those who treat you like a punching bag with their unending combos, to everything in between.

In contrast to the aforementioned artistry – cheap moves included – oft on display from both the other players online and sometimes even the AI, I was the neanderthal striking two rocks together, hoping to conjure flames and occasionally creating sparks.





That's something you can quite quickly surmise from my online history:



Still, even with these terrible results, I can't help but admit that the moments where you eke out a victory over your opponent through either luck or skill by the rarest of margins give you a rush that's indescribable. In light of that, I can easily see how people might get addicted to fighting games – though the effort and time needed to do it consistently enough against the entire roster is indeed going to be an ungodly amount.

And all of that for just one character. Which makes me wonder about players who have more than a single main. That is so not me; I just picked Cassie and decided to git gud. I mean, I didn't, but I tried, so it has to count for something, right?

Thankfully, if you feel exhausted or frustrated by the online aspects of the games, be they the casual matches or the ranked ones, the game provides a plethora of options for local and solo enjoyment, with the Towers being the most significant of these. They provide multiple kinds of solo combat, ranging from survivor, where your health is carried over between each match, to endless, which is exactly as the name suggests, to those with fixed sets of matches that can go from 1 to 12, pitting you against AI opponents. However, a lot of the towers allow you the usage of consumables (or konsumables, if you want to be game accurate) to make the

challenge easier on yourself. The prize at the end is usually some consumable and/or one of the three currencies that MKII uses: koins, souls, and hearts. A few of these towers also provide you with character-specific endings for the character you choose to complete them with. And if you do feel the monotonous nature of it boring you at times, you can decide to switch the AI on for your character and watch them clear the tower for you. It's not always consistent, of course, but I always found it entertaining watching the AI fight itself.

Of course, some of you might ask if there is any point to these solo activities, and the answer, as always, my fellow players, is collectibles. Over dozens and dozens of collectibles for each character, including outfits, victory poses, intros, etc., can be used to customize them according to your wishes. And while you can find some of these as prizes from a few select towers, the majority of them are meant to be discovered in the Krypt – an online dungeon/gacha of sorts, which is incidentally also the last solo mode I'm going to discuss in this review.

The Krypt drops you at the entrance of Shang Tsung's island, and after a short intro by the man himself, gives you somewhat free reign to explore the island and the various riches as well as the dangers it offers. The island is filled with treasure chests that can only be opened using one of your three currencies and that hide within them some randomized combination of the aforementioned collectibles and consumables. There's also quite a few additional secrets and zones hidden around the island, which you can uncover should you seek to explore it to its fullest. Admittedly, despite the nature of the Krypt, I honestly had a lot of fun exploring it and taking in the different sights present across the island.





*If you zoom in (and squint a bit), you can actually see two people fighting on the bridge in front.*



*Hex, I know this guy! Or knew. That and the dungeon aesthetic definitely reminds me a lot of the first MK film.*

Lastly, we come to the graphics and audio.

Graphics-wise, I don't really have too much to say apart from the fact that I liked it. While not the best I have ever seen, it still had its moments of cinematic beauty, and for the rest, it was perfectly fine. Add to that a variety of sets, cool outfits, and realistic character models, and playing through MKII was an easy treat for the eyes. Similarly, in terms of audio, the game provided some truly kickass OSTs during certain moments that enriched the gameplay experience.

Plus, there is something intrinsically satisfying about hearing the bone-crunching, meat-squelching blows connect with your opponents.

In terms of voice acting too, MKII provides what you should expect from a AAA game of its caliber – aside from a single jarring exception, that is. In fact, it was glaring enough that I had to actually look up just who the VA was for the role, and when I did, it cleared up the confusion a lot. Though being completely honest, said VA did seem to get better and more comfortable the further we got into the game, though I'm not sure if that was because she was actually performing

her lines better or if it was just me getting used to it.

In the end, though, despite some of the minor and major complaints I have regarding it, MKII Ultimate is something I'd recommend even if you're not a fighting game enthusiast. Though if you are of the type who loathes the genre or has sworn off it entirely, then admittedly, I don't believe it would change your views.

■ Almostn33t

77

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

#### the good

- A plethora of solo activities to keep you occupied should you not be in the... kompetitive mood.
- The somewhat slow-paced combat, compared to some of my previous experiences.
- A pretty large roster to play with.

#### the bad

- The grind. The heartless, soulless grind.
- No way to auto-skip the experience points gain at the end of each match.
- The outfit customization isn't as varied as I was expecting it to be.

Komplikated mekaniks kause no diskonfort!





# DON'T KNOW WHAT TO PLAY?

Here are some current sale recommendations!



-85% \$1.94



-90% \$2.99



-90% \$3.99



-90% \$4.99



-90% \$2.99



-89% \$2.19



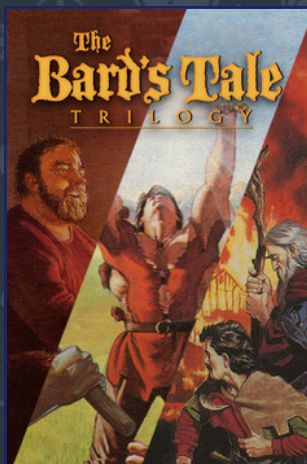
-50% \$1.49



-85% \$2.24



-90% \$2.49



-80% \$2.99



-60% \$5.99



-80% \$0.99



# DORONKO WANKO™

A lot of the free games available on Steam are from indie devs, folks getting their hands dirty on game development for the first time and deciding to share their best efforts that are still not worthy of monetization. Every now and then, we find a great game that works on every level, but for one reason or another, is F2P. But it's quite rare to find a free-to-play game on Steam from a major studio. But what if I told you Doronko Wanko is one of three free games released by freaking BANDAI NAMCO, the publisher of Elden Ring?

Doronko Wanko was released in March 2024 by GYAAR, a studio within BANDAI focused on developing talent internally. So give talented employees free rein to create vertical slices of games, apply a great coat of polish, and release it. And man, they cut no corners when polishing it. While the game is quite short, taking you no more than an hour to beat it, it looks, sounds, and plays pretty much perfectly. It only has one level, but I can see how it could be a full-priced PS2 release if it had eight or ten levels like the one available here. The game was released on the same day as NOTTOLOT and BOOMEROAD. All three are free, and apparently, all three are great (but I haven't played the other two yet).

Plot-wise, you control a pomeranian who lives in a fancy house with a loving family. Eventually, dad and son go on a shopping trip while mom naps a bit, which means there's no one taking care of our doggo. This actually means you can cause as much chaos and destruction as possible while you're alone in the house, and that's exactly what you do! Your goal is to make every room as absolutely dirty as possible, and once all twelve rooms are falling apart, you get access to a secret den where the family is planning a big surprise (and no, you won't get any spoilers from me). Gameplay-wise, it's a third-action platformer where you can run around and dash, but your main tool consists of shaking around and getting mud all over the place. If you get too clean at any point, you can just roll around on existing mud so it sticks to you, and then you can shake it again, rinse and repeat.

As you clear rooms, a "damage meter" will increase proportionally to how much destruction you caused. There are damage thresholds that, once crossed, unlock new cosmetics and actual gameplay items, such as Roomba robots that spread mud around, a paint cannon, or a water rifle. Anything and everything to help you bring the house down. And while the game has a silly premise, it is just so fun and addictive to play. I beat it the first time in around 30 minutes, and then immediately started another game, and then immediately started a third after beating it for the second time. It's just that much fun! With more levels, I could see myself getting totally addicted to this game, but unfortunately, with only one level, you'll probably put it down after two or three rounds. Still, it's very worth checking it out.



By the way, TIL that Doronko Wanko translates into "muddy puppy." The name checks out :)

■ fernandopa



# SGM LEADERBOARDS

PLEASE SOMEONE STOP ME FROM OVERTAKING THE  
MAGAZINE... I WAS JOKING WHEN I SAID IT... I DIDNT  
EXPECT TO GET THIS FAR...  
JBOND IS NOW STRANDED IN SPACE BECAUSE IM TOO  
STRONG, HELP!  
- CHOCOLATEVC

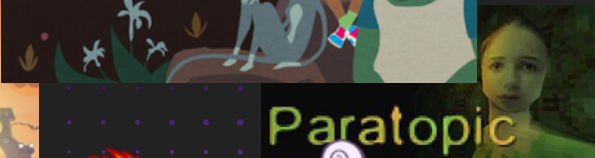
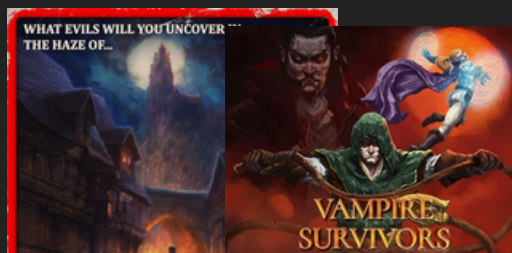
Hello, lovely readers!

As mentioned last issue, here are the leaderboards.

As a reminder, we now have a leaderboard for reviewers  
and one for designers, since we think design is a big factor  
in whether a review gets voted in the SG thread.  
The top of both leaderboards shall get various prizes after  
10 issues (or on our last issue, if we don't make it that  
far!), with our contributors offering some of the games  
pictured below!

On the next page you can see the current standings after  
issue #13. This is the sum of SG thread and discord votes!

If you feel like your opinion differs, hop on the [Discord](#)  
[server](#) and cast your votes there -  
they have more weight!





# SGM REVIEWERS LEADERBOARD

1	Chocolate Van Candy	65 PTS	9	BAEuro	11 PTS	17	Fallen Kal	4 PTS
2	fernandopa	49 PTS	10	Celtic7Guardian	10 PTS	18	Faloperito	3 PTS
3	Sir Packet Lossalot	34 PTS	11	PsychoApeMan	9 PTS	19	Vasharal	3 PTS
4	Excel.Elmira	29 PTS	12	Lexbya	9 PTS	20	Thexder	3 PTS
5	Abubis	26 PTS	13	jahas10	8 PTS	21	kiiroichi	3 PTS
6	Almostn33t	18 PTS	14	ManlyMeatMan	8 PTS	22	FSpectro	2 PTS
7	xurc	14 PTS	15	quijote3000	8 PTS	23	Hodexii	2 PTS
8	MyrXIII	12 PTS	16	GrowingStrong	7 PTS			

81

# SGM DESIGNERS LEADERBOARD

1	Chocolate Van Candy	78 PTS	5	VinroyIsViral	27 PTS
2	La Volpe	54 PTS	6	AtomicBlonde	27 PTS
3	Lexbya	37 PTS	7	kiiroichi	22 PTS
4	Sir Packet Lossalot	34 PTS			



# Screenshot of the month

82



oleksyuk  
STAR WARS Jedi: Survivor



# Honorable mentions



jbondguy007  
Trine 4



Zelruna  
SUMMERHOUSE

83



damianea103  
Forza Horizon 4



# LATEST NOTABLE RELEASES

With Lexbya, your host!



**RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 16, 2024**

**Awaria** is a new game from the creator of Helltaker. In this game instead of trying to promote sharply dressed demon girls we get lesbian ghost girls as blue collar workers.

Don't miss this short free game if you liked Helltaker!



**RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 3, 2024**

**ANTONBLAST** is a fast-paced explosive action platformer that's all about destruction. Play as the enraged Dynamite Anton (or his cranked-out coworker Annie) and use your Mighty F'n Hammer to demolish bizarre worlds, tussle with screen-filling bosses, and steal your Spirits back from Satan!

If you liked Pizza Tower, you will love this for sure.



**RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 6, 2024**

**Marvel Rivals** is a Super Hero Team-Based PVP Shooter! Assemble an all-star Marvel squad, devise countless strategies by combining powers to form unique Team-Up skills and fight in destructible, ever-changing battlefields across the continually evolving Marvel universe!

Will this finally be the real Overwatch killer?









**RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 11, 2024**

**DRAGON BALL: Sparking! ZERO** takes the legendary gameplay of the Budokai Tenkaichi series and raises it to whole new levels. Make yours the destructive power of the strongest fighters ever to appear in Dragon Ball!

Dragon Ball as always has the honor of being the only good anime arena fighter.



**RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 11, 2024**

From the creative minds behind Persona 3, 4, and 5 comes **Metaphor: ReFantazio**, a unique fantasy world, where your protagonist will journey alongside his fairy companion, Gallica, to lift the curse from the kingdom's lost prince. Control your destiny and face your fears!



**RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 8, 2024**

Investigating a letter from his late wife, James returns to where they made so many memories - Silent Hill. What he finds is a ghost town, prowled by disturbing monsters and cloaked in deep fog. Confront the monsters, solve puzzles, and search for traces of your wife in this remake of **SILENT HILL 2**.



**RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 25, 2024**

Shadow the Hedgehog is back with Classic and Modern Sonic in **SONIC X SHADOW GENERATIONS**, an all-new collection featuring two unique experiences!

I can't be only one that thought about the ship when they first heard about this game, right?





## Street Fighter (1994)

Street Fighter is a movie that was created to profit from the hit fighting game series of the same name. This is not to be confused with the game Street Fighter: The Movie, which is a game that is based on a movie that was based on a game. Said movie was also released in 1994, and anyone with knowledge of how video game movies fared in that time period should have some idea of how accurately it portrays its source material. Certainly, it's a horrible representation of the Street Fighter games, but how does it stand on its own?

The story is barebones and confusing simultaneously. This is because the movie attempts to cram almost the entire roster of Street Fighter characters into 102 minutes of run time. It starts off simple enough with General M. Bison capturing a bunch of relief workers. Colonel William F. Guile from the Allied Nations leads troops to rescue them, but his group (including Cammy and T. Hawk) isn't the only one acting against the maniacal overlord. Chun-Li, Balrog, and E. Honda form a trio with their own agendas against M. Bison. Ryu and Ken run underground deals with Sagat, resulting in them getting caught up in the haphazard narrative as well. On top of these three separate forces and M. Bison himself, there's yet another side plot involving Blanka getting made into a fighting monster by a scientist.

87





The movie jumps all over the place to follow its cast of over sixteen characters that the audience is expected to keep track of. In short, it's an absolute mess while offering almost nothing enticing as a plot. If you know the characters from the Street Fighter games, you'll recognize their names, some similarities in their appearances, and little else. If you don't know of them, this movie sure as heck won't teach you what they're like in their home series. As an adaptation, it leaves fans irritated and newcomers baffled.

Yet I still enjoyed this flick. The movie is cheesy enough to keep a family of rats fed through five winters, and it's clear some of the actors had a great time. Jean-Claude Van Damme makes an amusing Guile, Ming-Na Wen does well for what she's given as Chun-Li, and Raúl Juliá as Bison gives such a wonderfully over-the-top performance that it's worth seeing the movie for him alone. Though a much more minor character, a personal favorite of mine is Andrew Bryniarski as Zangief since he has some of the funniest lines.

Viewers who want a high-quality film will be disappointed by this movie. Viewers who want some more camp in their lives, such as myself, might find it worth a watch. I liked it in a goofy sense, but wouldn't recommend it to everyone.

**Personal Score:** OF COURSE!

■ Celtic7Guardian

88



Jean-Claude Van Damme



Raúl Juliá



Kylie Minogue



Ming-Na Wen



Damian Chapa



Byron Mann



# SGM's Playlist



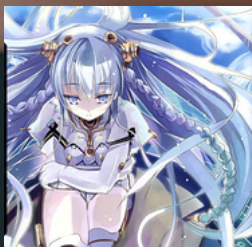
kiirioichi



Chocolate



La Volpe



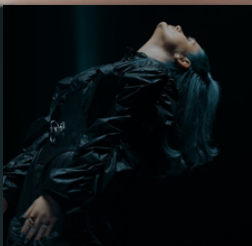
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VinroylsViral



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adam1224



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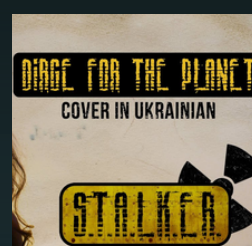
jbondguy007



Zelrune



Faloperito



oleksyuk



Sir Packet  
Lossalot



ManlyMeatMan



fernandopa



# ✦ CREDITS AND THANKS! ✦

And that's all we've got for this issue! We definitely couldn't have done it without the help of our wonderful team, our very generous contributors, our patient editors, our creative designers and in general of all the people who collaborated on the creation of this magazine. And so, we want to extend our thanks to:

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- Sleepyhead**, for giving us Nier: Automata

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SGM