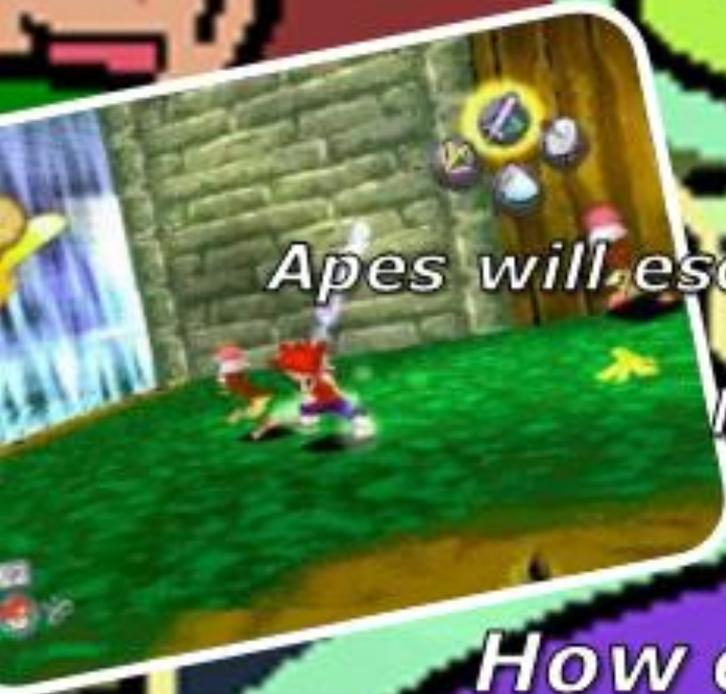


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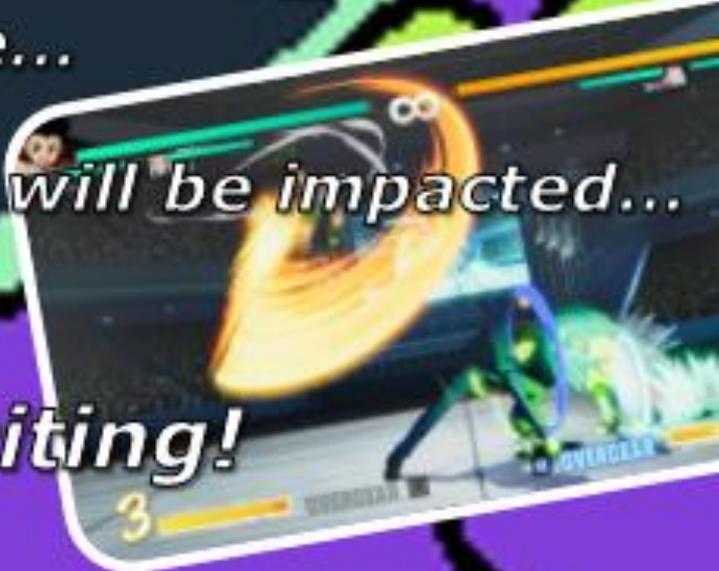
The Monthly Silly

Forever

A moonlight vagabond's journey,
eternally unfinished



Apes will escape...



Nen will be impacted...

How exciting!

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Silly Spotlight 1

APE ESCAPE

Ape Escape is a game where you travel through time to hunt down an army of intelligent monkeys that stole your time machine and want to use it to take over the world. Released in 1999 for the PS1, it's a silly little game, and I'm quite fond of it.



The game takes place across 7 time periods, each with 3 open-ended levels, and you need to catch a certain amount of the nefarious time-travelling monkeys scattered throughout them. What sets it apart from the countless other 3D collectathon platformers of its time, though, is how the monkeys can be such slippery and annoying little bastards in the best way possible. Catching them is rarely as simple as just walking up and swinging your net over them, they each have their own

ways of dealing with you. These vary by the monkeys' personality, indicated by the colour of their trousers; blue are fast runners, red will batter you with their fists if you get close, white are intelligent and good at using their environments, and black ones with sunglasses stay strapped at all times and will not hesitate to spray you with bullets if you come anywhere near them.

I really like this structure. The levels by themselves are inherently varied, well-designed and great fun to move through, but the sheer variety in the different monkey encounters is what really makes this game great. No two ever feel exactly the same, both thanks to the monkeys' unique behaviours and the way their environment forces you to approach them, and it really helps keep the game fresh. And you don't actually have to go for all of them, either. Each level has a certain amount of monkeys you need to catch before you can move onto the next, and for the most part, the game strikes a perfect balance between requiring you to catch enough that you've properly explored the level without forcing you to go for ones you might not want to.





The choice in which monkey to go for is especially appreciated given how surprisingly difficult the game can be a lot of the time. It's not an unreasonably hard game by any means, not even difficult enough to be sectioned off into the category of "hard games people play because they're hard" in my opinion, but it can be surprisingly challenging at times, to the point where even the smallest of health pickups feels like a proper relief.

The game also features a somewhat bizarre control scheme. You use the left stick to move around, face buttons to switch between the four gadgets you've mapped to each of them, right stick to use whatever gadget you have selected, and the R1 button of all things to jump. It's a bit insane, but it works surprisingly well, and allows the player to quickly switch between gadgets on the fly in a way that's immensely satisfying once you get good at it. Nothing in this game feels better than using the Dash Hoop to run up to a monkey, switching instantly to the Stun Club at the press of a button to stun it, and then switching from that to the Time Net to catch it. The controls in this game are strange, but once you get used to them, they're amazing.



I'd also be doing Ape Escape a disservice if I didn't mention just how great the game's presentation is. Each level looks and feels absolutely nothing like the last, even the ones that are within the same time period, and it's obvious a great amount of care went into the visual design of every single location the player visits. The soundtrack is also excellent, often one of the main things people think of now when they hear this game mentioned, but for me personally, the excellent visual design and art direction of this game are the real selling points.

Overall, Ape Escape is an amazing game. The overall gameplay structure is fun and unique, backed up by consistently great level design, and it's got lots of things going for it, like the unique monkey behaviours and strange but fun control scheme, that make it well worth a look even if you've played plenty of other open-ended early 3D platformers like it. This is all aided by a great drum-and-bass soundtrack that helps create a really distinct vibe for the game compared to the way so many others like it would have sounded, as well as a wide variety of unique locations, none of which feel anything like the last – which, for a game with around 20 total levels, is certainly an accomplishment.

Final Score	
Gameplay - 10	9
Story - 6	
Look/Sound - 10	

Silly Spotlight 2

FOREVER

This is a strange one, probably my most obscure Silly Spotlight pick yet. Forever is a demo released by indie developer NS3K that came out in December 2015, of a game that in the end was never finished, and which can only be played through a Mediafire link in the description of a YouTube video. And somehow, it's an absolute masterpiece that I wish its developer had managed to complete.

Forever is an action RPG with quite a unique battle system. When an encounter begins, you're transferred to a 2D side-scrolling area to battle enemies in real time, with each party member battling at the same time. Combat is fast, and surprisingly hard to get used to, but once you get the hang of it, it's great fun. Characters' skill sets are quite simple, since the demo only covers the game's first hour or so, but even early on it shows promise, with an immensely satisfying dash cancel system that lets the player chain together attacks and a system for switching between which party member you're controlling instantly at any time that helps keep the pace flowing well.



If you want, you can also choose to go into battles alone, without bringing any of your other party members, although it's clear the game is designed with you bringing all of them in mind, as even regular battles can become intensely challenging this way. I'd recommend it for getting used to the battle system, since it's less to keep track of, but once you're used to how everything works, there's really no reason to battle alone; aside from anything,

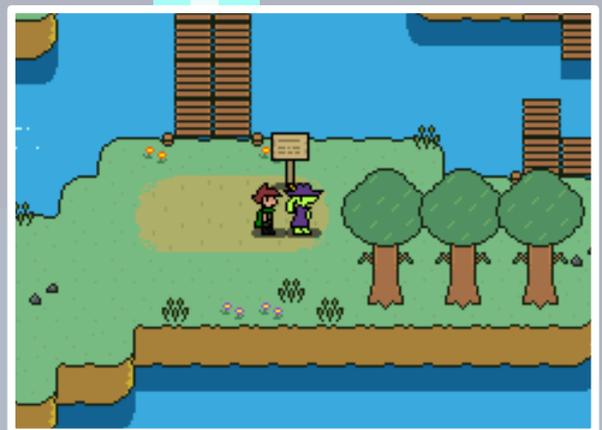
it's not nearly as fun that way. In between battles, you can also rest to recover HP, recovering a greater percentage the more battles it's been since your last rest. This system is fine as it is, but the amount recovered is just a linear 15% HP per battle for a maximum of 60% in one go; personally, I think it'd be more interesting if each extra battle added a higher percentage than the last, for an interesting risk/reward element of wanting to do more battles without healing so you can recover more once you do decide to rest.



The soundtrack is also amazing. Looking at the game's simplistic, somewhat amateur-ish pixel art might lead you to assume the presentation overall won't be anything incredible, but I was honestly surprised by how great the music was; looking at NS3K's YouTube channel, music seems to be their primary interest, with various chiptune themes for various cancelled projects scattered about the place, and it absolutely shows in how phenomenal the music for Forever is. If

nothing else, I'd highly recommend going to NS3K's channel and listening to the music on there. Even the pixel art, as admittedly mediocre as it is, has a certain handmade charm to it, and even if it's not the best, it's still obvious a lot of care and passion went into its creation.

The story also seems quite good, from what's available of it in the demo at least. Like I said before, only the first hour or so is here, so it's hard to talk about the story in any real capacity, but what little we got still has me intrigued. The characters seem generally likeable and bounce off each other well, the world and setting seems fun and unique, and there's just enough cryptic hints and foreshadowing that I'm raging we'll likely never get to know what happens.



Forever occupies a strange place in my mind, as it has done for some time now. NS3K seems to have moved on entirely to a new, crowdfunded project, AbyssStride; that one's had its own share of development problems (it was originally supposed to be out in September 2020), but it makes sense to prioritize it over Forever given the \$8,000 of funding it managed to raise. Development is slow, but it's still ongoing, with a new piece of its soundtrack having



been uploaded to NS3K's Soundcloud just last month. That said, even if AbyssStride does release some day, it's been nine years since the last development update on Forever. Once AbyssStride finally releases (if it ever does), will Forever's one singular developer even want to come back to it? Personally, I doubt we'll ever get to see Forever's final release, but I absolutely loved the demo, and wanted to talk about it here anyway. Usually, a game's main strength is in its gameplay, story or presentation; it's rare to find one that excels at all three, and even rarer for a game like that to be made by just one person. The only reason its score isn't higher is because there's not enough of it; if it was finished, I could easily see it being a 10/10.

Final Score	
Gameplay - 8	7
Story - 8	
Look/Sound - 7	

Kill Your Friends!

HUNTER X HUNTER

NEN IMPACT

Hunter X Hunter: Nen Impact is a 2D fighting game developed by Bushiroad and Eighting for PC, Switch and PS5, and released in July of this year, making it a rare example of me talking about a game that's actually relevant in the current year. It is also very, very silly.



Nen Impact is very fast, not very well-balanced, and has the player choose three separate characters to battle as, being able to switch between them and tag them in for an assist move mid-battle, which has led to it being called a “Marvel vs Capcom 3-like” by people who’ve never played a fighting game that isn’t Street Fighter or MvC. I’m aware it breaks the

flow of the review, but I don’t care, these people annoy me and I needed to slander them as soon as possible. Absolute heathens.

Anyway, the basic mechanics are seemingly designed with the primary intention of causing as much chaos as possible, which I find quite fun. Movement is decently fluid thanks to the universal airdash and a fair few characters having some form of unique movement tool, even if the game using a step-type dash instead of a proper run bothers me, but the main thing I want to talk about is the

Overgear system! Some fighting games have a system that lets you cancel your current action in exchange for a limited resource, letting you do tricky mixups and cancel attacks to extend your combos. Nen Impact has two of these! The first, Quick Gear, gives you a slight damage boost after it’s used and can be used fairly often, but Overgear is much funnier. In exchange for only being usable once per round, alongside letting you cancel any action at any time, Overgear greatly boosts your damage output and movement speed (the damage boost can be stacked with Quick Gear for even more silliness), and causes your dash move to deal damage.





Every design decision in this game was made purely based on what the developers thought would be fun without even considering for a second if it's "good balance", and I absolutely love it for that. Plenty of lesser fighting games give you these action-cancel mechanics but only let you use them in certain situations, because they're cowards. Not Nen Impact! Nen

Impact is proudly demented, and I love it for that.

This design philosophy is also reflected in its cast! Admittedly, charging €60 for a 3-vs-3 fighting game with only 16 characters and then expecting players to pay MORE for new ones after that is a bit absurd, and probably my only real problem with this game, but the ones we do have are very fun.



Some of my favourites include Killua, who can use his Godspeed mode to zoom across the entire screen in less than a second, Machi, who can set traps across the stage and attach Nen Threads to pull the opponent towards her at will, and Razor, who can summon an army of strange little volleyball men to bully the opponent from anywhere on the screen. Special mention should also be given to Uvogin, who can combine Overgear, Quick Gear and his own unique Fired Up super form to kill opponents in just two or three hits, and Leorio, who can

fire off an incomprehensible assault of flying fists that emerge from the ground in ways that easily make him the most annoying character to fight in the game.

Most characters in this game feels really unique and interesting to play as, and even if I enjoy some more than others, they all feel like great



reflections of the characters' fighting styles from the series. Ok, not all of them, Kite feels extremely boring and simplistic, lacking his unique random weapon-switching ability, and although Chrollo works well enough, I'm disappointed they didn't include any of his abilities from his fight with Hisoka, as that was where I found his fighting style to be at its most interesting. Overall, Hunter X Hunter: Nen Impact is a great game, and the fast, bizarre, slightly psychotic action of it all feels like everything I could want from a fighting game based on this series. The story mode is a lazily put together slideshow of scenes from the anime, so forgettable I forgot it existed until I was nearly done writing this thing, and the 16-character base roster is something of a disappointment, but overall, I'm still really happy with how this one turned out.

Final Score	
Gameplay - 9	8
Story - 4	
Look/Sound - 6	

Easy Emulation

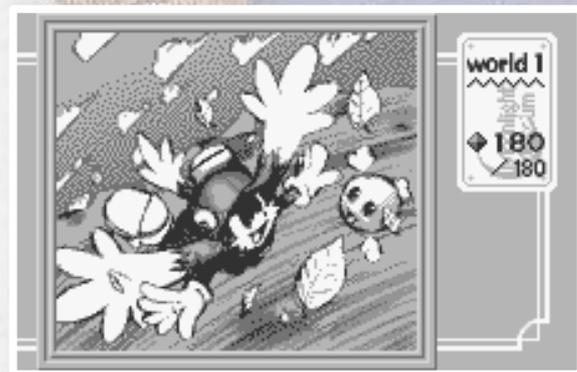
KLONOA

ムーンライト・ミュージアム

The logo for Klonoa Moonlight Museum features the word "KLONOA" in a large, bold, yellow font with a blue outline. Below it, "Moonlight Museum" is written in a cursive, yellow font inside a blue circular emblem. The Japanese text "ムーンライト・ミュージアム" is written in white on either side of the emblem. A registered trademark symbol (®) is visible to the right of the main title.

We've got lots of strange ones today! Klonoa: Moonlight Museum is a 1999 2D platformer spinoff of the Klonoa series released exclusively for the WonderSwan, a Japan-only handheld I doubt most of you have ever heard of. It is a very strange game, easily the most obscure of its series, but is it any good? I doubt it, but let's find out!

The game starts with a cutscene of Klonoa entering the titular Moonlight Museum, which to be fair, is actually quite nice. The game's cutscenes are all made up of a variety of hand-drawn illustrations, which despite the hardware limitations, are surprisingly appealing to look at. I'm quite fond, really.



This game's art direction is consistently its strongest aspect. Aside from the cutscenes, it also features unlockable illustrations for each world obtained by getting all the gems in every level, which are consistently beautiful to look at and provide an excellent motivation to thoroughly search each level for gems. During my playthrough of this game, seeing all the artwork it had to offer was a consistent delight,

and an aspect of it I personally absolutely loved.

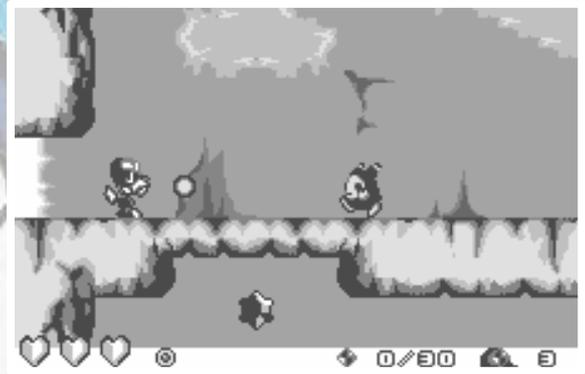
The game is a puzzle platformer, opting for a slower pace compared to the previous Door to Phantomile to make up for the hardware limitations that prevent it from being quite as much of a spectacle as that game was. It's a move that makes sense, and although the first world is horrifically easy, the second and third worlds have some actually quite clever puzzle designs to them, that suit Klonoa's unique moveset really well. I never played past those first three worlds, though, for reasons I'll get into now.



The main thing that ruins this game for me is its pacing. When I say it “goes for a slower pace”, I mean it, everything in this game happens at a snail’s pace.

So much of your time in this game will be spent either holding the forward button and spending 10-15 seconds waiting for Klonoa to go where you want him to, or waiting for a moving platform to take you to the next area, it’s absolutely insufferable and

completely kills any enjoyment the game might otherwise have to it. There’s also the fact that nothing about the platforming is particularly challenging, so it’s a game that’s purely reliant on clever puzzle designs to be in any way engaging; worlds two and three are actually alright at this, but world 1 is pitifully easy, making the slow pace even more of an issue.



There’s also the soundtrack! It’s horrible, but kind of hilarious at the same time. No doubt owing to the Wonderswan’s technical limitations, the whole thing sounds so dinky and stupid and unintentionally ominous that, even if I can’t recommend that you ever play this game, I would say you should at least listen to its music online. Combined with the black and white

graphics, the music lends the whole thing a vaguely creepy energy that makes it feel hilarious and slightly unnerving at the same time. It also probably doesn’t help that world 3 takes place in an area called “The Laughing Prison”. The Klonoa series is about Klonoa exploring strange new worlds in his dreams, which might prompt the question of “well, what happens when he has a strange fever dream”? Well, we have an answer, Moonlight Museum happens.

And, aside from all that, I can’t recommend you play this game when better versions of it basically already exist. The Klonoa games on GBA, Empire of Dreams and Dream Champ Tournament, both build on Moonlight Museum’s core formula to make something not held back by the Wonderswan’s limitations, being faster to play, much nicer to look at, and having soundtracks that don’t give me a headache after 15 minutes of listening to them. DCT is an especially amazing game, even featuring more unlockable artwork like what MM had.

Klonoa: Moonlight Museum is not a very good game, but I put it in Easy Emulation and not Shame Corner because I honestly can’t feel any genuine hatred for it. It’s not bad because its developers didn’t care, it’s bad because the Wonderswan held it back; the surprisingly beautiful unlockable artwork makes it clear this game was made by a team that really did want to make something good, and even if they failed, they got another shot at the formula on the GBA later on, with much better results. Even if this game is kind of bad, I just can’t bring myself to hate it. More than anything, I just feel sorry for the people who worked on it.

Final Score	
Gameplay - 3	4
Story - 5	
Look/Sound - 5	

The Yap Trap

“Accessible” fighting games are a lie

This is one that’s been bothering me for a long time, to the point where I’m surprised it took me this long to get around to writing a Yap Trap article about it.



Tell me if this sounds like a familiar pitch: “hey, you there! Fighting games are really hard, right? Well, not to worry! With our new Accessible™ fighting game, you can get good easily, without worrying about pesky things like complicated motion inputs or hard movement mechanics! Every other fighting game is just so hard, nobody has ever done this before!” Despite that last sentence, this has in fact been done to death, particularly over the last ten years or so. And yet, fighting games are just as niche of a genre as they were

back when this whole trend started. Why might that be?

Everyone agrees that fighting games are hard, but no one can quite seem to agree on why that is. The intuitive answer is that it’s because the mechanics are hard to get used to, which might be true to an extent, but I don’t believe it’s the full answer, and I think attempts to address this “problem” always end up doing more harm than good in the end. Before I get to my own opinions on why fighting games are hard, though, let’s talk about those “solutions” intended to “fix” mechanical complexity, from the bafflingly infuriating to the bad but understandable.



Some games include a system where mashing one button has the game string together a combo for you! This is stupid. In case I need to explain why, the goal with anything aimed at helping new players should be getting them closer to playing the game with intentionality – that is, making purposeful, conscious decisions during gameplay, rather than simply throwing shit at the wall and seeing what sticks. These autocombo mechanics do the exact opposite; nobody playing with any intentionality gets anything either way out of them, so all you’re left with is the previously mentioned shit-throwing becoming a marginally stronger option. Not enough to seriously work against anyone who knows what they’re doing, but enough that reaching that point of intentionality actually becomes harder; making calculated moves early on is a risk, so why take that risk when the game could make a nice, easy combo for you?



Right, ok, autocombos are a bad mechanic. What about some other, better options? Well, in most fighting games, you have to do a few directions and then press an attack button to do special moves. That's hard (apparently)! We need to get rid of that, and replace it with a designated special move button! Games like DnF Duel and HxH: Nen Impact and their

decision to get rid of motion inputs for special moves entirely represent my actual issue with this design mentality. It might seem small, but the design implications are significant; really, with a special move button, you can only fit four special moves (neutral, back, down and forwards) onto each character, drastically limiting moveset size and character depth. Additionally, many fighting games also like to put variations on special moves depending on the button you use after the motion input, something that's obviously impossible if you just use a special move button.

I'd talk about other ways developers try to make fighting games more "accessible", but rather than adding "beginner mechanics", most are content to simply remove harder ones. Removing options for metre usage, getting rid of character-specific movement options to make things more universal, that sort of thing. The real question is, what exactly is this for?



The assumption underpinning all of this has been that fighting games are hard because the mechanics are hard, but I honestly don't think that's the full story. More than anything, fighting games are simply a harsh genre by their nature. They're straightforward, 1-vs-1 battles between two players, where the only deciding factor is both players' skill and knowledge of the game. You have

no teammates to fall back on or blame when you lose, no randomized mechanics to help give worse players a leg up, it's all down to you, and lots of people don't like that. There are very few genres, especially in today's casual-ridden market, that will force you to confront your own inadequacy with such frequency, and this is something a lot of people don't like; for proof, just go online and look at the countless people whining about "sweats" and "tryhards" simply for being better at the game than them that you can find in virtually any competitive genre. It's for this reason I think the over-repeated design mantra of "low skill floor, high skill ceiling" is a lie, a mirage conjured to lead new developers astray. To create a fighting game with any sort of staying power, you NEED a level of competitive depth, and where there's depth, there's a difference in two players' skill. That difference makes a lot of people uncomfortable, but it's deeply tied into fighting games' identity as a genre, and there's no amount of simplification and removal of fun, interesting mechanics that can overcome it.

PS VS N64

PlayStation®

The last Console Chronicle segment in Issue #7, going over my thoughts on the Nintendo Wii, was perfectly fine, but it felt a bit basic in some ways. I still like the idea of Console Chronicle though, and given that I consider this magazine too good for current-year console war slop debates, I figured it could be fun to instead engage in console war slop debates from 30 years ago instead!

The PlayStation 1 and Nintendo 64 are interesting consoles to me, especially when compared with each other, for a few reasons. Let's start with the N64, first! Having some of the most influential games ever made, such as Super Mario 64 and The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, the N64 was a revolutionary console that sold a whopping 33 million units, which means basically everyone bought it. Or, so the Americans on the internet told me.



Alright, fine, fine. Before I start slandering the N64 too harshly, I should say that it did have some genuinely great games. That part about Mario 64 and Ocarina of Time both being incredibly influential was true, and games such as Star Fox 64, F-Zero X and Paper Mario were all really fun games that, in my opinion, are still well worth playing even today.



What the N64 is mainly remembered for, though, is its multiplayer library. Goldeneye, Super Smash Bros, Mario Kart 64, the Mario sports games, F-Zero X (again), the first 3 Mario Party games, I could go on. Of the two consoles, the N64 by far had better options for multiplayer, compared to the PS1 only really having a small handful here and there. There may have been a few

great multiplayer PS1 titles like Crash Team Racing and Twisted Metal 2, but the N64 was easily the better option, both in terms of the amount of high-quality games available and the fact that, for some reason, the PS1 required users to buy a dedicated Multi-Tap accessory in order to be able to plug in more than two controllers at a time.



Despite all this, I really think all the nostalgiaposting Americans you can find online who had N64s as children might be overselling the console somewhat, both in terms of its overall relevance and the quality of its individual games. It's true that Mario 64 was hugely influential, and anyone who tells you it's "aged poorly" is a filthy liar, but what else did the system really have?

I do honestly really like a lot of the N64's games, but it's always felt to me like more of a small sideshow than a serious competitor with the PS1. That "33 million" sales figure isn't really all that impressive compared to the PS1's 100 million, and 20 of the N64's 33 million units sold were in America alone. I don't think this is surprising either, given that

Nintendo and Rare are basically the only companies that made any games for the thing, so if you don't like what those specific developers have to offer, you're out of luck. Granted, that's not entirely true, Rakugakids is a fun, silly, underrated N64 fighting game by Konami, and I've heard Mischief Makers and Sin and Punishment by Treasure are both great (although I haven't played either), but those are really the only exceptions I can think of.



Overwhelmingly, the N64's library is dominated by two types of games; 3D platformers, and casual multiplayer games. Great if you like that sort of thing, and there were a handful of noteworthy exceptions here and there, but if neither of those two types of games appeal to you, the system's appeal is severely limited. And, honestly, as much as I hate when people say any game "hasn't aged well", those multiplayer games the N64 was so great for really

haven't. Multiplayer games are by their very nature much more easily replaceable compared to singleplayer titles, and when so many of the N64's best, like Mario Kart 64 or Super Smash Bros, have been easily surpassed by later entries in their series, there's not much of a reason to play them with friends aside from curiosity. Also Goldeneye is shite, Nightfire supremacy.

Compare this to what the PS1 had to offer. I'll be honest, I vastly prefer the PS1's library overall, so I'm a bit biased, but I still think I have a point with this one; some of the most beloved games on that console include the Crash and Spyro trilogies (3D platformers, both very different takes on the genre), Final Fantasy 7/8/9, Suikoden 1/2 and Legend of Dragoon (RPGs), Resident Evil 1/2/3 and Silent Hill (survival horror), and the Oddworld games (whatever Oddworld was). Already you can see the variety just in the console's most well-known games, but do you want to know the best part? I haven't even played a single one of those.





Now, some of you are probably thinking “well, he’s full of shite, he says he likes the PS1 but he hasn’t played [insert PS1 game here]”, but that’s kind of my point. You’ll never find anyone who calls the N64 one of their favourite consoles and hasn’t played most of the games I mentioned for it, but with the PS1, there’s such a wide array of incredible titles that you can find two different people who both say they “really like the PS1” and yet don’t have a single game in common.

The console’s use of game discs, unlike Nintendo’s decision to stick with cartridges for the N64, meant you could fit a lot more onto a single PS1 game; I think this is important to mention, given that it meant basically nobody wanted to make N64 games. This is what I meant earlier about the N64 being a small sideshow event; the American perception of this console generation being an even competition between the N64 and PS1, despite Nintendo and Rare’s undeniable popularity in that region, isn’t really an accurate reflection of reality at all. In practice, it’s closer to “Rare worked with Nintendo because they had an official agreement, and the rest of the gaming industry basically developed entirely for PS1”.



Quantity aside, the PS1 also had a far better quality of games compared to the N64. A lot of the N64’s most well-known games are honestly not that great, with Ocarina of Time featuring no way to speed up the absurdly slow text scrolling (you’d be surprised how hard this ruins the game), GoldenEye being a clunky and annoying mess (again, Nightfire supremacy), and Donkey Kong 64... ok, I’ve never played that one, but from everything I’ve heard, I’d really rather not.

Compared to this, the PS1 had countless games I’d easily recommend you go play right now, many of which I’ve reviewed before in this magazine, such as Klonoa: Door to Phantomile, MediEvil, and even Ape Escape earlier in this issue. Others include Jumping Flash, a surreal, bizarre mess of a game that’s surprisingly fun for being one of the first ever attempts at a proper 3D game, Strider 2, a fast-paced 2D action platformer, Rakugaki Showtime, a 3D fighting game with an emphasis on throwing items at each other, Tai Fu, a surprisingly in-depth hack-and-slash action game, and Azure Dreams, a roguelike monster-collecting RPG that’s great fun as long as you’re willing to cheat a little. Overall, the N64 had some great games on it, but if you have any interest in games of its time, it’s likely already a known quantity to you; the PS1, by comparison, is like an endless fountain of variety and quality, with something new to offer each time you come back.

