


#13

The Monthly Silly


Hollow Knight

I wish I could say it was a 10/10

Eugenics,
with a mew!



...What are you?



TOP 25
BEST STORY GAMES
YOU SHOULD PLAY

Table of Contents

1 – Silly Spotlight EX

One single 4-page review of a game I think deserves the extra space

5 – Kill Your Friends

Section where I recommend a good multiplayer game.

7 – Easy Emulation

Two game reviews focusing on anything from before the PS1/N64, guaranteeing that if you see something interesting here and have a computer, even a bad one, you can play it for free via emulation.

9 – Shame Corner

A review of a really bad game, typically so bad I need to rant about how bad it is just to get it off my chest. If your game is here, consider yourself a complete and utter failure.

11 – Guest Edition

A review written by someone other than myself, typically of a game which I would never normally play.

13 – The Ancient Ones

Review of any game made during or before 1982, particularly with an emphasis on what it might have contributed to gaming today and what can be learned from it. “Story” category replaced with “Innovation”, because, let’s be honest, none of these games had any story. Only segment type where I’ll engage in any sort of “good-for-the-time-ism”.

14 – The Yap Trap

Just me rambling about whatever I feel like. Always something gaming-related, but generally not about a specific individual game.

Silly Spotlight EX

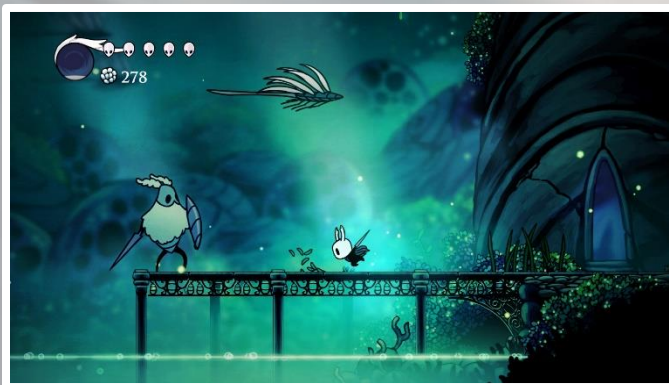
HOLLOW KNIGHT

Hollow Knight is a game I'm sure you're familiar with. Released in 2017 by Australian developer Team Cherry, you play as The Knight, a small figure tasked with venturing down into the ruined kingdom of Hallownest.

At first, you're not really sure what you're doing. The game doesn't really tell you much of anything, it's very content to leave you to it and discover your true mission much later on. To a large extent, this sense of mystery is what the whole game is built on; the minimalist storytelling, the focus on exploration in



gameplay, even the way it's all presented, it all comes together to create a uniquely intriguing experience. It's one of those games where each aspect feeds into the next, so it's hard to know where to start with describing it.



I suppose we'll start with how it plays, though. Hollow Knight is a Metroidvania, meaning it features a large, open map that slowly unfolds as you unlock new methods of traversal. I really like this; the feeling of being lost and confused, needing to navigate a maze-like world that's gone uninhabited for ages, works perfectly with

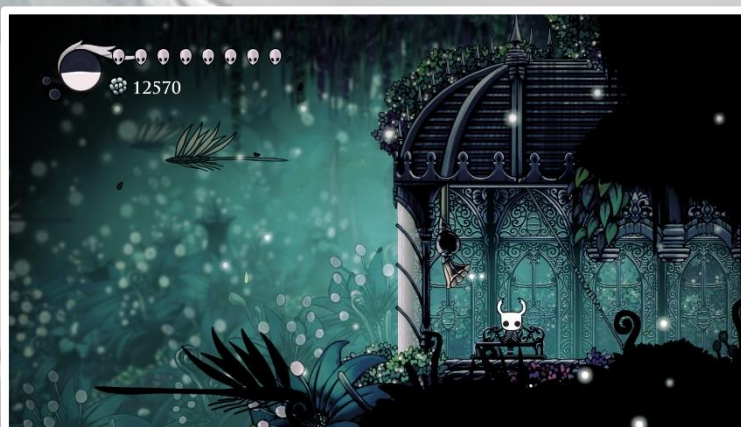
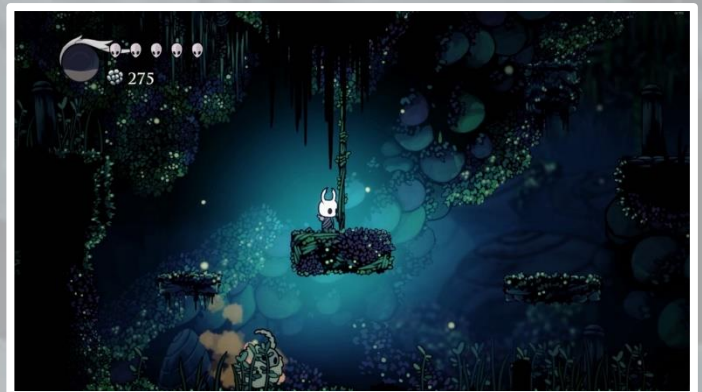
the game's setting, and unlike some other recent entries in its genre (Metroid Dread), Hollow Knight fully commits to this. The game refuses to signpost where you're "supposed to go", offers no direct hints of any sort, and crucially, turns navigation itself into a challenge. The game features various equippable charms, each of which grant different bonuses and take up a certain number of charm slots. These are great fun, granting a great degree of freedom and customization in how you approach the game's many challenges, but crucially, one of these charms allows you to see your position on the map. Something that would be a default in any other game is a piece of equipment where using it detracts from your ability to use your other charms to their fullest, and I absolutely love it.



The game clearly wants you to get good at reading the map and discerning your position on it, and it makes the whole thing so much more immersive. Speaking of getting good, a big thing you'll hear about this game online is that it's "hard", which... not really? It's certainly not an easy game, but rather than being exceptionally difficult, I think the thing about it is that it just

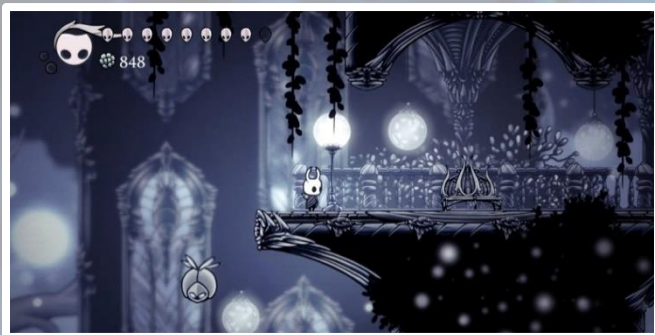
doesn't pull its punches. It requires you to meet it on its level; no easy mode, no pity feature to make bosses easier after you die enough times, Hollow Knight just "is". I love this; aside from just personally preferring this style of design anyway, it makes sense for the setting. Hallownest is an abandoned kingdom infested with all sorts of unknown threats, of course it'd be a harsh environment.

Speaking of the setting, the worldbuilding and story here are all excellent. Hallownest is a vast, richly detailed kingdom, with a history that only reveals itself to the most dedicated of players. Like how the game's areas are designed to encourage exploration rather than a more linear structure, the story is also told in a much less direct way, with the player really having to work to uncover more about Hallownest's past. At times it can feel more like the game has less of a "story" and more of a vague hint of something resembling one, but honestly, that's part of the charm. Even putting the worldbuilding aside, the game also features various characters who have all also been drawn to Hallownest for one reason or another, and running into them throughout your adventures and seeing what they've been up to makes the world feel so much more alive. Their reoccurring appearances really give the impression that there's something much bigger going on here, and you're just one small part of it.



As I'm sure you've noticed by now, the game is also beautiful to look at. With visually stunning hand-drawn environments and expressive, fluid animations, it probably wouldn't be an exaggeration to call it one of the best-looking games I've ever played. Probably the only game I can think of that I personally prefer aesthetically is

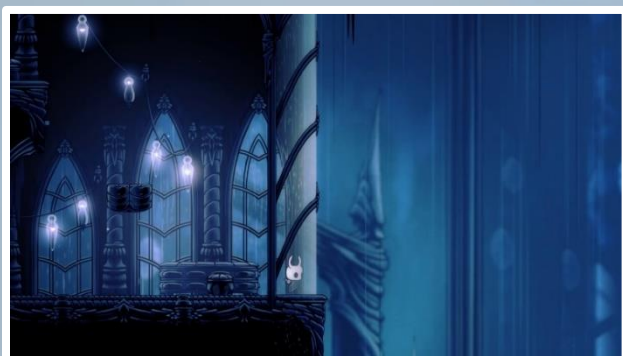
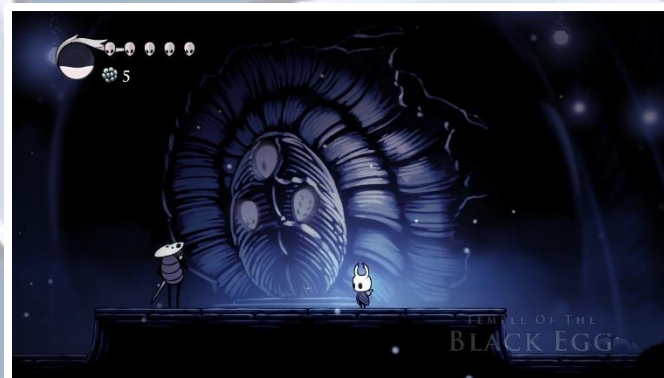
Solatorobo for the DS, and if you know me at all, you'll know that's one of the highest compliments I could give a game. The soundtrack is also excellent too, perfectly complementing each area's unique, distinct atmosphere, and it all comes together to create one of the most beautiful games out there.



This all being said... why write this review? Everything I've said so far, while all true, has also been remarkably unoriginal. Look around online for even a few seconds, and you'll find hundreds of people praising basically the same things about this game, and I wouldn't blame you for thinking this review seemed a little pointless.

Well, it's because Hollow Knight also features one of the sharpest, most drastic late-game fall-offs in quality I've ever seen, and I don't see nearly enough people talking about it.

Once you clear a certain objective, a door near the beginning of the game is opened, and you can walk through it to challenge what we'll call "Final Boss A". However, if you want the True Ending, clearing this same objective also causes various other changes to occur across the world, creating new other things you need to do before going through that door. None of these are telegraphed! I'll be honest, I don't fully remember what all of them are, but if I hadn't had someone else who'd already played the game, I'd have completely missed all of it.

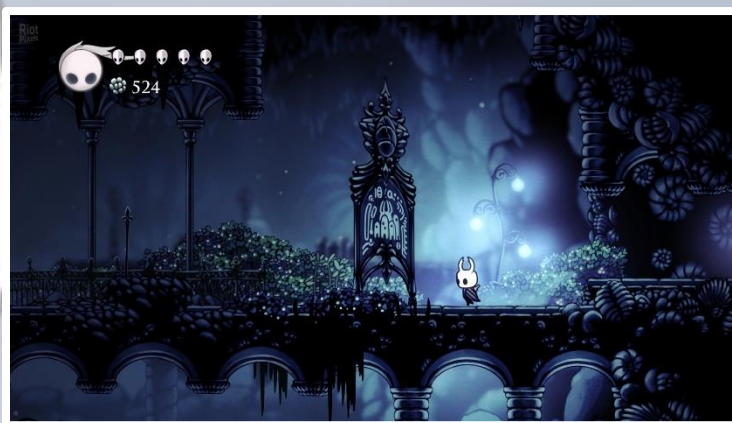
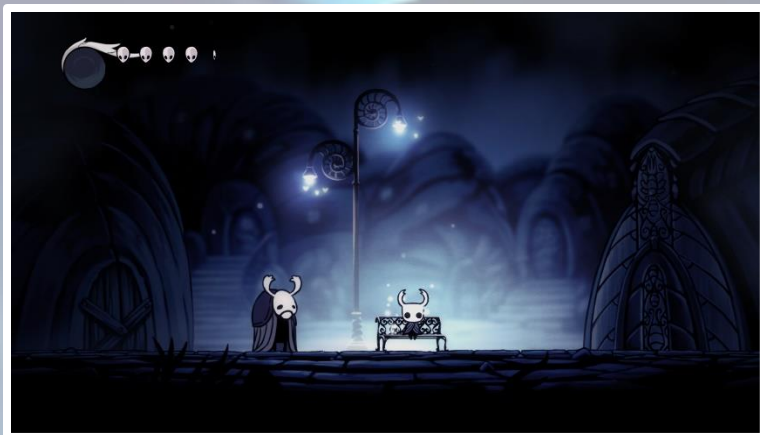


A big one, though, is that you can now re-fight certain bosses, battling harder versions of them to gather the Spirit Essence required for the true ending. Which bosses? No clue! Does the game ever even so much as hint that you might have a reason to revisit these old areas? No, of course not! I think this is a big part of my problem with the late game;

so many of the true ending requirements take place in old areas you've already visited, with zero indication that you'd ever have any reason to go back there. It really does feel like a part of the game that expects John Hollowknight, your friend who's done every ending and spends his time watching 6-hour lore recaps, to be watching you play at all times, giving you hints on which random area from 15 hours ago you should revisit.

The thing is, John tells you, a hole has opened up in the floor of the Abyssal One's Lair, and if you jump through the hole you'll fight Smickly Tim, secret extra boss who drops the crucial Unending Soul item you need to have with you if you want to fight the "real" final boss. The reason the open-ended structure of the early game worked was because the unlocks made sense. When you unlock the Thing That Lets You Wall Jump, of course you'll think back to that conspicuously jumpable wall in another area that previously blocked your progress and go, "hmm, maybe I can use this to get past there!" The game doesn't need to explain itself, because there's already a coherent link between the new unlockable and what new areas have now been unlocked.

Oh, and let's talk about that "real final boss" you unlock from doing all this! So, you do all the secret ending requirements, you walk through the door, and you fight Final Boss A. Once he's dealt with, if you've done everything right, you're transported to a strange new area, with this wonderfully ethereal feeling to it. You walk up to Final Boss B, challenge him, and you'll probably immediately die. That's fine, though! This is the secret, true final boss, hidden behind all sorts of vague cryptic nonsense, it makes sense that it'd be absurdly difficult too. This is the true final test of your skills, if you've gotten this far, you'll probably want it to be hard. No, the fun part comes after you die! You find yourself outside that big door, and... you see Final Boss A again, and... what?



I'll be honest, this is where I gave up. Final Boss A is, to put it bluntly, piss easy. It takes about 5 minutes to defeat, and I first beat it on my second try. It's very obvious that this fight is the game's way of telling you, "there's more here, you need to do something else before you come back here". By itself that's fine, but... why do I have to re-fight it every time I want to challenge the

other, much harder Final Boss B? That fight being as hard as it is by itself isn't a problem, it should be harder than anything else in the game, but when you have to go through 5 minutes of tedium after every failed attempt, it just turns the fight into a chore.

Hollow Knight is a game you can say a lot of things about, as evidenced by this being the longest review I've ever written for a single game. For the most part, it's an incredible time, featuring an endlessly intriguing story and setting, consistently amazing gameplay and some of the most incredible art direction I've ever seen in a game. However, it's also a game that absolutely falls off a cliff near the end, at least if you're going for the optional true ending, and for how much of a slog it becomes, I'm surprised you never really see anyone talking about it like this. Honestly I was disappointed, I was looking forward to having another 10/10 game to add to the list. It's still an incredible time overall, and I'd recommend you go play it in a heartbeat, just... maybe think twice about if you want to go for anything other than the base neutral ending. Trust me, Final Boss B really isn't worth it.

Final Score	
Gameplay - 8	9
Story - 10	
Look/Sound - 10	

Kill Your Friends!

New SUPER MARIO BROS.™ Wii



New Super Mario Bros: Wii is a 2D platformer released for the Wii in 2009. To be honest, it's a fairly basic game; the whole purpose behind its development seems to have been "let's make the most default, basic 2D Mario game ever", and to be fair, it's quite good at this. It's a fun game that generally works quite well; controls are smooth,

level design is consistently solid, and the visual presentation, while also admittedly being exactly what you'd expect from a Mario game, is also quite nice to look at. It, for the most part, is the white bread of gaming, a bowl of plain rice if you will.

Probably the only thing of note is the way the map works. You travel through 8 differently themed worlds, with interconnected levels represented by these circle things. Occasionally there will be enemies on the map, which you're forced to fight if you run into. Solid mechanic, not much to say here. The more interesting part is how some levels have alternate secret exits! By finding these hidden exits, you can unlock alternate pathways through the world, and even sometimes entire secret extra levels! But, more often than not, you'll find cannons that let you skip ahead by a few worlds.



These are... weird? If I'm playing a game, I presumably want to see as much of it as possible, not just get it over with as fast as I can. In theory, these secret exits are a really fun idea, but in practice, the reward for finding them is often just "having to play less of the game", which I find really strange and a bit disappointing.

So, that's most of what there is to say about NSMB Wii. But, ah! You may have noticed! This is a Kill Your Friends segment! And yet, this appears to be a straightforward 2D Mario game! Where are the "friends" I am supposed to "kill", you may be "asking"? Fret not, dear "friend"!

For some reason, Nintendo added multiplayer to NSMB Wii, and it's by far the thing that stands out the most about it. This one addition turns the game from John Video Game itself to an absolute chaotic mess, and I love it. Up to 4 players can play through a level at the exact same time, and are left fully able to interfere with each other. If you jump on someone, you can use them as a springboard to reach new heights. Shake the Wii remote while standing next to them to pick them up, at which point you can then throw them wherever you like. Get Yoshi and you can Eat Them. Etc, etc.



New Super Mario's Brothers for the Nintendo Wii is the purest distillation of "kill your friends". Play it and kill your friends. Knock your friends into bottomless pits. Toss your friends at evil skeletal turtles. Drown your friends in lava. Electrocute your friends. Shoot your friends with the all-new patented Mario Glock. And so on, and so forth.

(The Mario Glock in question:)



NSMB Wii is a really funny game. Possibly one of the most generic games I've ever played, certainly out of Nintendo's library, it feels like such an unremarkable (albeit still quite fun) experience, until you try out the multiplayer. Then it immediately turns into what feels like a completely different game, a much more frantic and chaotic one which will either irreversibly damage friendships or strengthen them into something truly unbreakable. Of course, you can choose to all be responsible and not interfere with each other, but where's the fun in that? Surprisingly demented game, very fond.

Final Score	
Gameplay - 7	7
Story - lmao	
Look/Sound - 6	

Easy Emulation

PAC-IN-TIME

Pac-in-Time is a 2D platformer released for various platforms in 1995, each with significant differences between them; this review will focus on the SNES version.

The game has you playing through a variety of different open-ended levels as Pac-Man, requiring you to find all of the pac-dots hidden in the level before you can leave and proceed onto the next one. There are various items you can find hidden in the levels to help you accomplish this goal: the rope you can use to swing around, the fireball you can use to shoot enemies, the hammer you can use to destroy certain obstacles, and the shoes you can use to swim underwater.



I quite like this structure. These 4 items can all be found in most levels, and once you pick them up, you keep them until you move to the next one, so it gives the game a maze-like structure I think suits Pac-Man well. For example, you might see a high cliff you can't reach, or a wall with some cracks in it, and then have to make a mental note of where those areas were so you can come back once you find the Rope or the Hammer. Each level almost feels like its own mini self-contained Metroidvania, which I really like, it's not a structure I've seen many other games attempt. The Fireball is the only item you never need for progression, but it's still handy to have for dealing with enemies.



By far my favourite item is the Rope. By holding the button, the rope will automatically extend from Pac-Man to whatever surface is above him if there's one available, and you can swing left and right with it, letting go by releasing the button. This is a great mechanic; the speed it lets you build up is insane, chaining multiple rope swings together is always really satisfying, it's just a really fun item to use, and is a large part of what gives Pac-in-Time its identity. However, it

can also be a bit fiddly and imprecise, which leads into another thing that makes this game stand out, that being the utterly insane physics.



Pac-in-Time is not a game that's very easy to control. Pac-Man himself feels extremely slippery, with regular movement feeling like you're sliding around on ice at speeds where he really has no business being this fast, and the way the rope lets you further build up speed only adds to this general feeling. It's a fiddly and imprecise game at the best of times, with Pac-Man bouncing about like someone laced those pac-dots with something mysterious if your finger even so much as hovers near the general direction of the jump button. This probably

sounds awful, and to an extent it is a bit annoying... but, it's also really satisfying.

Pac-Man's movement might be weird and erratic, but there's a great sense of speed behind it, meaning once you do get good at controlling him, everything becomes really satisfying. He bounces through the levels at a chaotic, frenzied pace, and it can be hard to keep him in check, but once you master the game's controls, it's great. I don't think I've played anything else that has this same level of erratic, energetic silliness to the way it feels to play, it's wonderful. If you don't mind a character who doesn't always go strictly where you're telling



him to, Pac-in-Time is immensely fun. The image on the left isn't from this game, it's from the box art for Pac-Man 2, but it conveys how it often feels to play Pac-in-Time pretty well, I think.

The way the game is presented also leans into this whole feeling. The visuals go hard on making everything feel cartoony and exaggerated, and the whole soundtrack has this fast, chaotically bouncy feeling to it that fits the game

perfectly. It's a fairly average looking and sounding game in isolation, but the way it all comes together to match the frantic energy of the core gameplay is perfect.

Pac-in-Time is chaos personified. If you like solid, well-made platformers with tight, intuitive controls, then it... might not be the game for you, but if you like having to try your best to grab hold of the chaos, to try and move with its flow to the best of your ability without letting it overtake you outright, then you'll absolutely enjoy what it has to offer. Insane game, but I love it.

Final Score	
Gameplay - 7	7
Story - 5	
Look/Sound - 8	

Shame Corner

G U N G R A V E TM



Gungrave isn't the worst game I've played recently, but it might be the most disappointing. Released in 2002 for the PS2, you play as Beyond the Grave, and are tasked with taking down the Millenion crime syndicate.

I absolutely love the way this game looks. With an amazing cel-shaded art style and character designs by Trigun mangaka Nightow, the whole game is absolutely brimming with style, and features several pre-rendered cutscenes, all of which are excellently animated and directed and just overall really fun to watch. These are by far one of the game's main highlights; I might not have enjoyed my time with the game overall, but I must say, it's an amazing game visually.



This aesthetic appeal carries over to the main gameplay, too. Gameplay of course doesn't look quite as nice as the cutscenes, but it's damn close, and the stage environments are really nice to look at. Plus, there's just something really cool about playing as this slow, hulking red-and-black menace, gunning down countless waves of enemies doing everything in their power to stop you. It just oozes that early 2000s sense of edge, and I absolutely love it. Plus, PS2-era 3D action

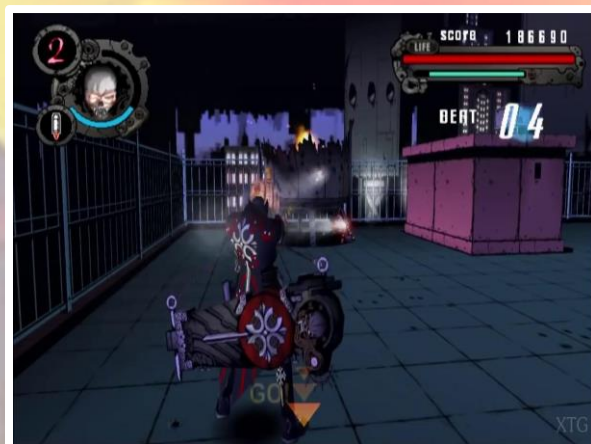
games like this tend to feature either fast, agile types of characters, like Dante from Devil May Cry or Lau Wong from Bujingai, or more general jack-of-all-trades types, like Kratos from God of War or Sieg from Chaos Legion, so having a slow power type as the sole playable character lends the game a really unique feel.



Unfortunately, there's another reason playing this game makes me look forward to the cutscenes, and that's because it isn't fun. The whole game is, put simply, pitifully easy. You have two main attacks, Square shooting your gun and R1 having Grave swing the massive coffin on his back for a powerful close-range attack. But here's the fun part: aiming is automatic! Your close-range coffin swing deals more damage by far, but the damage from your

guns is strong enough that, for 99% of the game's encounters, you can simply walk forwards and mash Square to deal with enemies. The absolute most difficulty you'll ever have to contend with playing this game is... I don't know, occasionally having to jump out of the way when an enemy fires a rocket launcher at you.

To Gungrave's credit, the later stages do get marginally harder, having more moments where you might need to avoid an attack occasionally, but it wasn't enough to save my enjoyment of this game. Rather than being a level design issue, I think it really just comes down to your moveset being bad. I don't know how I'd fix it, and I won't say you need more things to dodge and more movement options to dodge them with because that's so obviously not what this game is trying to be, but most situations the game puts you in simply do not require you to make any quick decisions or solve any problems in any interesting way. You walk into a room of enemies, mash Square until they fall over, and repeat that a few more times until you finish the stage.



Gungrave is... ok, I wouldn't go so far as to say it's "good", or even that it's not a bad game, but I think there's an audience for it. The visual presentation and overall style of the whole thing is amazing, and the story, while best described as "fairly alright", also manages to feel elevated by the way it's told and presented. If you're the type of person who just cares

about hype moments and aura, who can tolerate a game not really having anything interesting going on in its actual gameplay if it means you get to watch cool things happen, you might enjoy this one. I don't even really mean that in a bad way either, it's an amazing-looking game and I think you could argue for it being worth playing for that alone. I've heard there's an anime adaptation, I might watch that, it's probably very good.

Final Score	
Gameplay - 2	4
Story - 6	
Look/Sound - 10	

Guest Edition!

BY FISH TIDDIES

MEW-GENICS!

Mewgenics is a tactical RPG made by Edmund McMillen, well known as the creator of the hit indie roguelike *The Binding of Isaac*, along with *Super Meat Boy* (although he no longer owns the property). Mewgenics focuses primarily on, you guessed it, eugenics. You breed freakish cats that grow up in a singular day with equally freakish mutations to take them out on adventures.

Before you go on an adventure you can assign your cats a class in the form of a collar, which also changes their color. You have classes like fighters who simply punch stuff, to Tinkerers who can make guns on the spot and then throw it at their enemies. However, classes don't only have one role, they actually have multiple different archetypes they can evolve into over the course of a run, leading to plenty of variety even if you always pick the same four classes. Every time your cats level up you'll be presented with four different options of either an active skill, a passive skill (the most powerful part of your cat) or simply a two stat increase, though you always get a singular stat point increase every time you level up.



It's very possible to get fucked over and just not given any synergies at all and just have only one or two things that are useful. Fans of *The Binding of Isaac* will feel right at home with Edmund's trademark tomfuckery and giant middle finger to the player for no reason, along with his crude sense of humor.

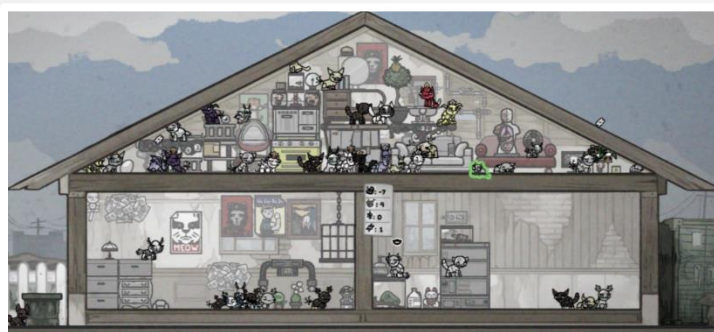


Adventures consist of Dungeons and Dragons / Fire Emblem inspired turn-based encounters, either being a normal encounter, a mini boss, or an actual boss. There will also be events in-between encounters similar to D&D which require passing a stat check to get a positive outcome, with the negative outcomes usually being run ending, like a parasite that slowly lowers your max health. There's also a hard path each chapter which provide an additional encounter per chapter, but also feature champion enemies, which have twice as much health, damage, and even turns.



One of the more unique parts of Mewgenics is the mana system, your charisma stat dictates your maximum and starting mana, while your intelligence dictates how much you regenerate each turn. The feature you'll be playing around the most (ideally) is the fact that unspent mana doesn't go to waste, you actually get to keep it for the next turn, so if you can't really do anything meaningful this turn with a certain cat, it may be wise to save that mana for a turn where it can make the most out of its mana.

But the game isn't all just grid based tactical encounters, because after all, the name of the game is eugenics (with a mew.) You'll be breeding your cats in a small house on a hill with almost zero control on who does the bow chika bow wow with who, including siblings and parents (eeyyikes, how problematic.) the only way you can stop them from doing the do with a cat you don't want is by putting them in separate rooms, which you gain fairly slowly by sending retired cats to frank. Oh yeah there's the quirky npcs you can send your cats to which provide permanent upgrades across runs to various things, from storage space for items between runs, to information on if a cat has anger issues or is homosexual, which sucks because m-preg isn't in the game (yet.)



You'll also encounter bosses that decide to attack you directly, coming to your house to beat the shit out of you, though you'll get a 7 day warning on when they'll arrive. This is where you can use your retired cats (ones that have already been on a run) to fight just one more time and obliterate the poor soul who acknowledged your existence. You'll also get main quest items from defeating them, which simply need to be taken to a location to be completed. Some are useful, but most make it essentially a challenge run, like reviving every enemy to full health at the end of each round. Unfortunately for some people who progress through the game faster than intended, house bosses will be sent at you out of order and you'll have to wait a long time to get the quest items needed to proceed.

There's so much more I want to talk about, like the godlike soundtrack by Ridiculon, and the refreshing elements system. But overall, I do genuinely think this is one of the greatest games made in the past five or ten years. It's made out of pure love for the tactical RPG genre, and it shows. Though it's not perfect, the difficulty curve can be a bit evil at times and the rng can certainly fuck you over, but just going into this game with an open mind will easily have you sinking hundreds of hours into it in the blink of an eye.

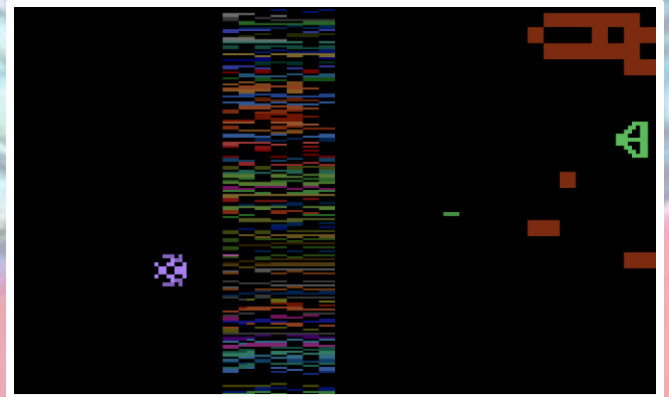
Final Score	
Gameplay - 9	9
Story - 7	
Look/Sound - 10	

The Ancient Ones

YARS' REVENGE

Yars' Revenge is a... what...? Released by Atari for the 2600 in 1982. In it, you play as a member of the fly-like Yars tribe, tasked with fighting back against the enemy Qotile race, by... what...?

My God this game is strange. You play as the purple thing starting on the left, and press the button to shoot. Unless you're inside the incomprehensible mass of distorted colour in the middle, in which case your gun won't work. You have to destroy the spaceship thing on the right by shooting down the fast-moving brown squares protecting it, all while it moves up and down and you're chased around slowly by an ambiguous horizontal line thing.



If you touch the ship, a strange flashing rectangle will appear on the left side; press the button, and it goes flying forwards. Ram it into the ship, and you win! Onto the second of two stages, repeat until you run out of lives. It's one of those looping score attack games where you just do the same thing over and over in the hope of a high score, and to be fair, it's not the worst as far as those kinds of games go.

What really gets me is the way it's all presented, though.

Playing this game feels like being experimented on by the CIA. There's this constant humming static sound in the background, nearly everything is either pulsating with a variety of colours or doing whatever that big strip of multicoloured Hell in the middle is doing, and the ambiguous bleeping sounds everything makes when anything happens just makes it all feel so... bizarre. It's easy to laugh when we hear stories of parents thinking video games were melting their children's brains, but if I'd grown up in the 50s, being entertained by films, comic strips and other things which broadly made sense, and then came home from work one day and saw my son playing this, I'd probably think the Devil was involved somehow too. Oddly fun game too all things considered, at least for 10 or 15 minutes, but mainly worth playing for how demented it all feels.

Final Score	
Gameplay - 5	6
Innovation - 3	
Look/Sound - 8	

The Yap Trap

What the Hell is a “Story Game”?

Around September of last year, I remember hearing someone refer to the concept of “story games” as if that’s a real genre, saying they hadn’t played many. Now, to be fair to them, they were self-admittedly the type who “only plays Minecraft and The Sims”, so I didn’t think much of it, I just assumed it was a term they came up with because they didn’t know game genres so I didn’t bother asking what they meant. That was the first time I’d heard the phrase.



A few months passed, though, and now I keep hearing it everywhere??? Unlike most Yap Trap segments, this one doesn’t really have a defined conclusion, I’m just confused. Feels like I can’t go more than a week or two without seeing someone refer to the concept of a “story game” online, whether that’s people talking about their “favourite story games”, memes about not

finishing story games because you’re playing Balatro (hate that shit for reasons I’ll get into in a future issue), or whatever else.

Where on Earth did this come from? It’s clearly not all these separate people coming up with the same vague half-genre idea I thought it was before, it’s too widespread for that. Usually when people talk about “story games” online, they cite things like Uncharted, The Last of Us or the recent God of War games as examples, which... ok, fine, even if I think “story game” is an abysmal name for it, those games very clearly fit into a certain genre, so it makes sense to have a name for it. But then you get things like the video thumbnail up above using examples like... Fallout and FF16? What? Are these people ok?

I really can’t tell anymore. Is a story game a coherent genre, used to describe the sort of third-person over-the-shoulder movieslop it’s usually applied to, or are those just the only games those sorts of people have played that have something involving a story? I find the idea of a story game really strange. Is the idea of a game having a story really so unusual that it gets boxed into being considered a single, dedicated genre by most people? Now that this magazine is freely available for anyone to read online, has there been someone who’s seen the “story” category in my rankings and gone, “why is this here, only a handful of games are story games”? Troubling thoughts.

