

#16

The Monthly Silly

KILLER 7

Raaah!! Eeeyahh!!! This dude's a killin' machine!!!! In the name of Harman.

SHYAAORAHHHH

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Silly Spotlight 1

Killer7™

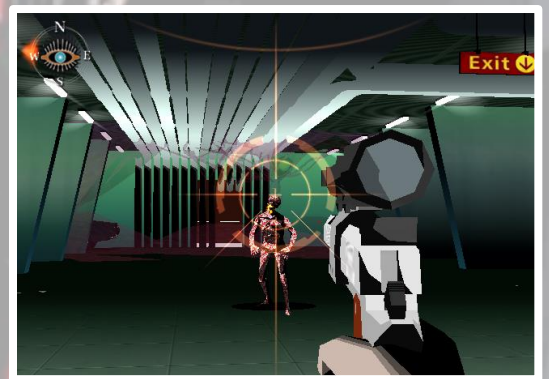
Killer7 is just some fucking thing published by Capcom for GameCube and PS2 in 2005, and PC in 2018. You play as Garcian Smith, an assassin with a bad case of split personality disorder where his multiple personalities manifest as six other physical forms he can take, including a Mexican wrestler, a shirtless ninja with ghostly white skin, and a woman.

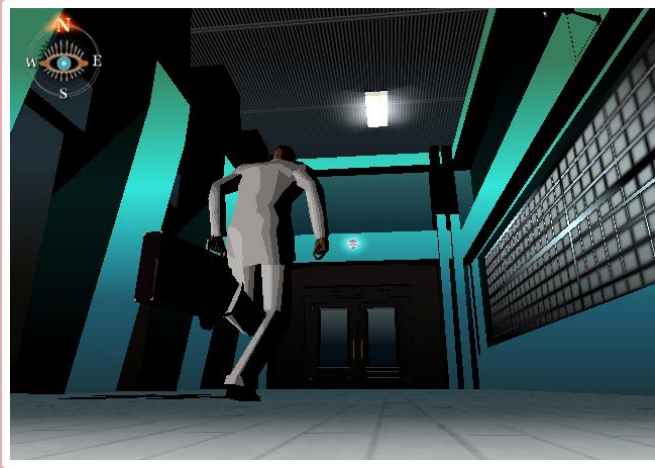


I absolutely love this game's visual style. The harsh, blocky shading combined with most textures just being a flat colour with maybe a gradient applied to it at most creates a really striking look, and there's some great camera work and cinematography going on through the whole thing as well. I don't just mean cutscenes, either; even during gameplay, the camera often prioritizes creating a cool-looking shot over simply showing you all the relevant

information around your character. Typing that out I'm realizing it sounds kind of annoying, but trust me, it's great.

Speaking of, the gameplay! It's strange and unique and I won't go into the minutia of it, but basically, you run around in third person until there are enemies, at which point you hold the R button to switch to a first person perspective and shoot them down. You can shoot most enemies anywhere to deal damage, but they each have a glowing yellow weak point placed randomly on their body; shoot this, and you can instantly kill them and gain valuable Blood you can use to heal or to activate each Smith's unique ability. I love this system; for every encounter, there's this great risk/reward dynamic at play, with the player always having to choose between using up a few shots for a quick, easy kill, or trying to aim for the weak point, which is often more time-consuming and might give other enemies more time to approach, but ends up being more efficient if your aim is good, and allows you to gather Blood much faster. The different Smiths also each emphasize a different balance between weak points and raw damage; Kaede can scope in for better aim but takes forever to reload, Con shoots and reloads quickly but has poor aim, the system works well in helping to differentiate them from each other.





Gameplay is, for the most part, very fun! The core mechanics are great, there's a wide variety of enemy types, and only some of them make me want to tear my hair out! You just have to make sure you don't die. Yes, if you die as anyone other than Garcian, you'll lose access to that Smith until you either finish the stage or go to where they died as Garcian and grab their severed head so you can revive them. I actually don't know what happens if you die as Garcian because I

didn't use him much, and I didn't use him much because he sucks to play as. Deliberately the weakest of the Killer7, Garcian is a character you'll only want to use for his ability to revive the other better Smiths, and this whole mechanic just amounts to an occasional bit of tedium you have to put up with if you die.

But, that's not right, I hear you saying! The Killer7 are Garcian's split personalities, how can he find and retrieve their severed heads like they're different people? Well, I don't know, the game doesn't explain that or really much of any of what's going on. NPCs babble incoherently at you in strange, off-putting text-to-speech voices, characters spend entire cutscenes saying stylishly directed non-sequiturs at each other, and I barely understand any of it. What little I was able to grasp was cool and interesting, and I'm sure there's lots going on under the surface that's fascinating to dig into, but I found a whole guide on GameFAQs just dedicated to explaining the plot with chapter names like "Four Narrative Levels: Cosmic, Political, Individual and Spiritual". I read a small chunk of it and I feel like I



need a guide to understand the guide to understanding this game's plot and really I think that says it all.

Killer7 is a bizarre game. Everything about it is unlike anything else I've ever played, and on some level I'm not entirely sure I was fully able to appreciate whatever it was I just experienced. That said, though, I still absolutely loved my time with it, and that strange, disorienting uniqueness is exactly why I'd recommend it to anyone with

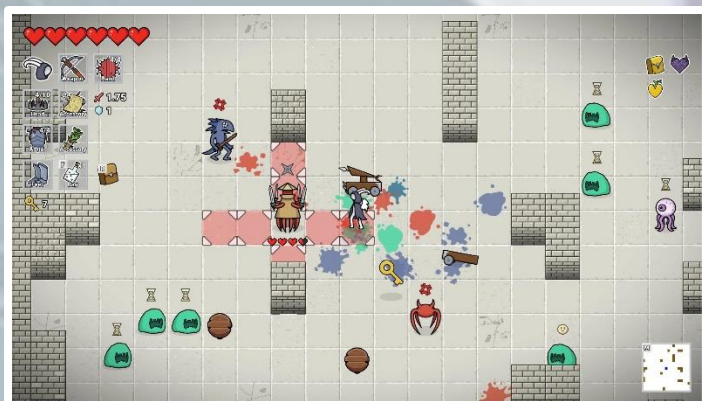
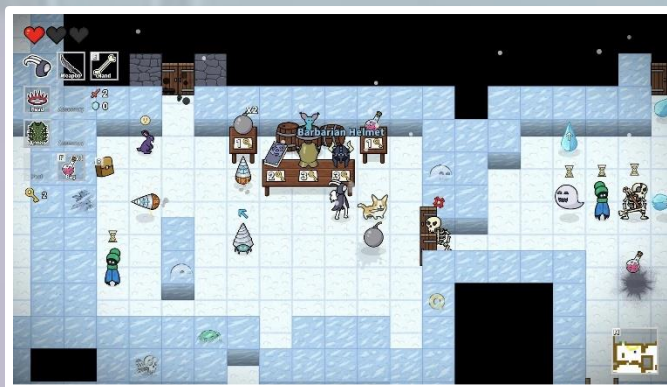
even the slightest bit of interest in playing it. It's sometimes annoying, usually confusing, but always 100% worth playing. I'm not entirely sure what I played, but I know it was a great time.

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

Silly Spotlight 2

Babel of Ystilia

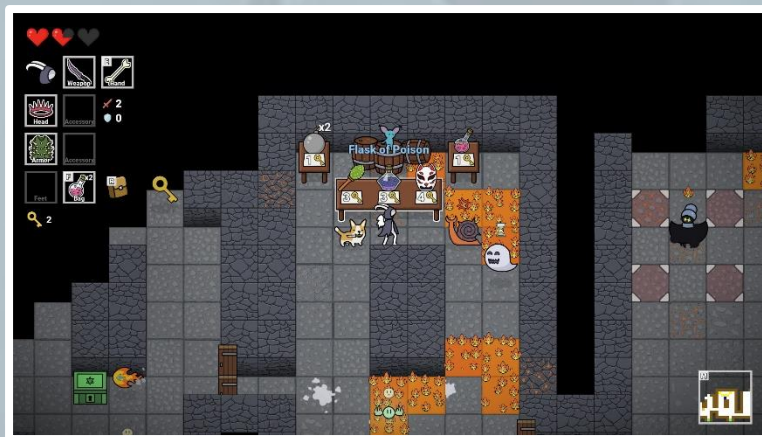
Babel of Ystilia is a Roguelike released for PC in 2025. You play as the Banished, a... I'm not really sure, actually. There's obviously a story somewhere in there, hinted at through small details like the "True Seraph" playable character you unlock after beating the "False Seraph" boss fought at the end of Stage 4, or how the achievement you unlock for defeating the final boss is called "God's Will: Rejected", but there's no actual dialogue or anything that explicitly tells you what's happening. My personal theory is that there was some sort of coup in Heaven, and you play as a former angel trying to restore the previous order, but it's up to interpretation. It might seem like an odd way to open a review, but I think subtle, indirect storytelling like this is important for a Roguelike, so I wanted to give the game immediate praise for it. Also, to be honest, I wasn't really sure how else to explain the game's premise.



Anyway! The game takes place from a top-down, grid-based perspective, where each time you move, so do your enemies. The enemies are one of the game's best aspects; each one has their own unique movement pattern you have to consider to avoid their attacks, and they combine to create some really interesting scenarios. Ghosts who

teleport behind you when you attack them, mages who can conjure walls around you, snails that leave a trail of poison behind them when they move, there's all sorts of different enemies here. Individually they're all quite simple, but when you put them together they combine to create some really tricky situations. Adding to this, many enemies and especially bosses can fire off huge volleys of projectiles at you, each of which have predictable, clearly telegraphed movement patterns; at times, it can start to feel like you're playing a turn-based bullet hell, as odd as that sounds, and safely dodging out of the way is always really satisfying. I love this game's use of projectiles, I've really never seen anything quite like it.

But of course, it being a Roguelike, there's all sorts of equipment you can pick up along the way. As you explore, you'll find keys, either dropped by enemies or just lying around on the floor, and I love the way these work. Keys can of course be spent to open chests, which each contain a random item, but somewhere in each stage, there's also a shop where you can spend your keys to buy equipment. This creates a really fun dynamic; chests tend not to cost many keys to open, usually just 1 or 2, but you never know what'll be inside; by contrast, items bought at the shop are always more expensive, but with these, you know what you're getting, so there's less risk of a bad item. I will say, the game doesn't actually tell you what shop items do until you buy them either, meaning if it's an item you've never seen before it might as well be random anyway which can be annoying, but once you've used enough items



this becomes less of an issue.



The items themselves are also great. There's sadly not much of the resource management Roguelikes can do so well, the only consumables being health potions you use whenever you need healing and bombs which are situational enough that you'll probably never run out, but the different types of

equipment are all amazing. There are so many weapons and accessories here that all feel completely different to use, some of my favourites being the spear with 2 range that swaps your position and the target's, the gun that can instantly kill regular enemies from a distance but costs health to use, and the RC car that moves however you move but faster, and stuns enemies on contact. There's so much more here though, and nearly all the equipment has some kind of unique gimmick to it, helping the game stay fresh even after countless runs.

I really like Babel of Ystilia. It's a fun, charming little game with some really interesting mechanics, and while it presents itself as very much a "gameplay-first" type of thing, there's something I find quite interesting about the world it presents. Oh, and I forgot to mention, I really like the game's art direction. It fits this particular aesthetic I call "MS Paint Fantasy", which I have no other examples of off the top of my head but which I swear is real and something I was aware of before I played this game. MS Paint Fantasy is very archetypal, often in a very low-detail art style with bright colours and a few anachronistic elements here and there. Very "wizard casts lightning magic to defeat the goblin that attacked him in the woods while his friend John who somehow has a gun on him watches", if that makes sense. Anyway great game, rather fond.

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

Kill Your Friends!

THE KING OF FIGHTERS 2001™

The King of Fighters 2001 is the eighth mainline entry in the KoF series, released in arcades in 2001 and later for Dreamcast/NeoGeo in 2002 and PS2/PC in 2003. 2001 works a bit different from the other yearly KoF games, but for the most part, they all play pretty similarly, so much of what I say in this review will apply to basically the entire series. 2003 is an oddball entry, that and maybe XI are both ones I'd like to review separately, but this review should double as an overview of my thoughts on KoF as a whole.

KoF is an interesting series, there's very few fighting games that play quite like it. Characters' movesets are generally on the more grounded end; sure, there's some magic powers involved, but it lacks many of the unique movement options and wacky character gimmicks of airdashing anime fighters like BlazBlue and Under Night, and many characters are just plain old martial artists. But unlike something like, say, Street Fighter, it's overall a much faster series. Movement is more grounded, yes, but the feeling is much freer than many of the series' contemporaries; dashes are a full run rather than a quick step forwards, everyone gets a dodge roll, and the way you input a jump can have great influence over your trajectory, from vast high jumps that can take you across the entire screen to short hops perfect for throwing out a quick overhead.



The character movesets add to this. Not to say they all play too similarly, but KoF games tend to have lots of rushdown characters, lots of grapplers, and barely any zoners. There's a handful of characters with strong projectiles, but honestly not that many, and they tend to be something to throw out in neutral occasionally to keep your opponent on their toes rather than something to build your whole gameplan around.

So, that's KoF. From 1994 to 2003, they basically all followed that general gameplay formula, without huge changes to the core game feel and a very consistent visual style throughout it all. The later numbered entries were somewhat more willing to shake things up a little, but it's been a very consistent series throughout, and particularly with the yearly releases, your preference will largely just rest on which one's roster you like the most. This might sound like a bad thing, but honestly it's something I really enjoy about the series, I can't quite articulate why but there's something comforting about it.

Among the series' yearly entries, 2001 is actually one of the more unusual ones. Returning from KoF 1999 and 2000, '01 retains the Striker system, where alongside your usual team of three fighters, you have a fourth Striker character you can call in for a quick assist in exchange for some metre. Unlike those games, though, '01 lets you choose how many of your team are Strikers and how many are actually going to fight! The more Strikers you have, the more capacity your super metre has, and the faster it builds up.



I love this system, it adds a great deal of player expression and individuality to an already really fun game. Really want to use a full four characters? Sure, but you won't have a Striker, and you won't be able to easily build up or store a lot of charge for your supers. Have one character you absolutely love? Just use them with three Strikers and you'll be able to constantly throw out supers like it's nothing, but in exchange, you'll need to defeat several of your opponent's characters with just the

one main fighter. It's a really fun system, one which helps '01 stand out among the other yearly KoF releases while still maintaining the series' core identity.

Overall, I really like King of Fighters 2001, as well as the broader KoF series as a whole. It's a fun series, great for anyone looking for something faster than the usual Street Fighters or Mortal Kombats but less complicated than the wackier anime fighters (not to mention the much more grounded aesthetic), and there's no big fighting game series out there quite like it. And 2001 is a solid entry, with a really fun Striker system and one of my favourite rosters of any of the yearly releases, featuring a decent handful of characters who aren't in that many other games aside from this one. Admittedly I'm not a huge fan of the art style on the character portraits, but that's really my only issue with this one, it's still a great time overall and a worthy entry in an excellent series of games.

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

Easy Emulation

THE MYSTERIOUS MURASAME CASTLE

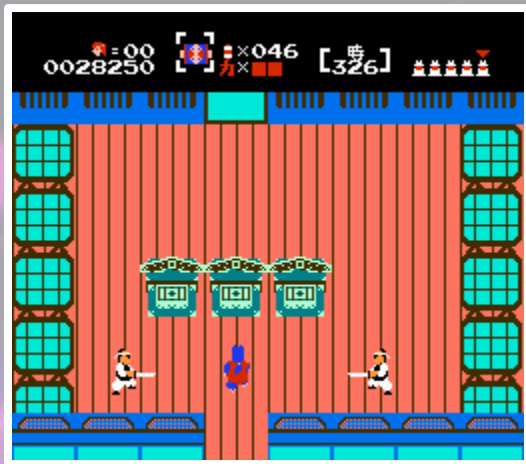
The Mysterious Murasame Castle is a sort of top-down proto-hack-and-slash released exclusively in Japan for the Famicom Disk System in 1986.

You play as Takamaru, and are tasked with making your way through the game's five castles (split up into two stages each), defeating the countless hordes of enemies that will seemingly all stop at nothing to kill you. You have two attacks, the long-range Knives and short-range Katana, as well as a Special Item you can activate a limited number of times for some sort of effect. Sounds simple, but everything about the game is made to feel like an absolute mad dash, scrambling your way through an endless onslaught of foes until, with barely a sliver of health remaining, you reach the end of the stage.



For one, there's the sheer amount of enemies. The game's main enemy type is these small little ninja fellows you can see in the screenshots; they're individually very weak, going down easily in one hit, but they're a constant threat, always running in from offscreen or jumping out at you from the bushes and always forcing you to stay on your toes. Once you reach a new screen, you can't just look at where all the enemies are and plan your route from there, you have to constantly react to these little bastards always popping up where you least want them.

I will say, I do like what the ninjas' behaviour adds to the game's pacing, but the bombers are an exception. From Castle 2 onwards, some ninjas carry bombs! Kill one and the bomb goes off, damaging you if you're caught in the blast. This effectively just boils down to killing the player for being too effective, bomb ninjas don't look any different so sometimes you kill one up close and just take damage anyway for no reason. It's not a huge problem, but I'd definitely have enjoyed the game more if it didn't have these, I can't see what this adds from a design perspective.



of them is a dead end, so each time you go through a stage, you'll understand the layout a little better than you did last time.

To add to this, there's also hidden items that appear when you get close to them; finding these might basically amount to luck, but there's enough in each stage you'll definitely happen across a handful, and combined with the process of learning the map layouts, it all helps you feel like you're making real progress, even when you just keep dying over and over. Oh, and you can also parry certain projectiles by hitting them out of the air with your sword. Couldn't find a better place to mention that in the review, but I love it, it's always



really satisfying. The Mysterious Murasame Castle isn't for everyone, but I loved my time with it. It's fast, frantic and a little ridiculous in how hard it can get, but that's the point. It's a game from that era where it almost came across like developers didn't want you to finish their games, where "beating" them was more of an accomplishment than an expectation, and as far as that design philosophy goes, it's remarkably fun and fair about it. The gameplay even gives Takamaru a sense of character, too; it's easy to imagine him as a sort of underdog, not especially strong but able to speed through the castles dodging whatever's thrown at him, and taking a moment to catch his breath once it's all over. Finishing a level in this game never feels like you've "mastered" it, more like this time, somehow, you've just barely managed to scrape by. It can be a frustrating game at times, but just about managing to get through a level by the skin of your teeth is always really satisfying, and if you're looking for a real challenge, Mysterious Murasame Castle might be exactly what you're looking for.



Final Score		
Gameplay - 7	Story - 6	6
Look/Sound - 5		

Reheated Remix

SONIC™ RACING CROSSWORLDS

I was too nice to this game. Sonic Racing Crossworlds is a kart racer released for all major platforms last year, which I reviewed as part of Issue #11's Kill Your Friends segment. I still stand by most of what I said in that review, but I've decided for non-gameplay-related reasons that this game fucking sucks actually and an 8/10 score was entirely too nice, so I need to review it again.

I suppose I should briefly go over the general gameplay though, for anyone who didn't read Issue #11. Crossworlds is a kart racer, so you probably have an idea of how it plays already, but one thing it does that sets it apart from the rest of the genre is the Gadget system. Basically, the game lets you create "decks"

made up of various gadgets you unlock over time by playing the game, each of which do different things. Some are simple stat boosts, some let you start with certain items or increase their likelihood of showing up, and others have more unique effects, like the Ring Thief gadget which lets you steal other players' rings on contact. I really like this system! It's fun to play around with, you can create all sorts of decks which all feel really unique to use... but, if you want to see praise for this game's mechanical depth, you can read the other review, because that's really not what this one's about.



Birds, they're really letting anyone in this fucking thing now. What, you wanted a Sonic game? Go fuck yourself, how about you drive around Bikini Bottom as one of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles instead.



So, anyway! Crossworlds was originally revealed as a Sonic racing game featuring Sonic characters racing around in Sonic locations, but then along the way someone decided this wasn't marketable enough, so it's really just some bullshit now.

Hatsune Miku, Minecraft Steve, Red from Angry



Crossworlds is a fun example of a game which will literally only get worse as it continues its putrid existence. At its base form, it's a fun, solid Sonic kart racer with a good sense of speed to it, an excellent Gadget system and some really great tracks. It doesn't get to stay that way though, you need to be marketed at instead! Why have a game with a coherent

aesthetic identity when you could have this visual sludge, an amalgamation of countless unrelated, utterly incoherent "random popular things" chosen solely to make the game as marketable to as many people as possible?

I despise guest characters like these in games, full stop. They only serve to dilute a game's unique, distinct aesthetic identity in exchange for a cheap "woah that's the guy from popular thing", I'm sick of it. I do not give a flying fuck how "funny" it is, it only serves to cheapen the feel of the entire thing and make it feel less like something anyone genuinely believed in and more like a cynical marketing plot.



There's a certain soullessness to Crossworlds; it's a fun game, sure, but one where even just looking at it makes my spirit feel hollow.

It's not like the crossovers even have any level of effort put into them either. Crossworlds' singleplayer mode features fully voiced character interactions, with unique lines for each possible combination. This sort of thing is perfect for fun crossover stuff, right? No! Guest characters don't get any of these! Or any voice lines for that matter, they just drive around silently, it's really weird. Not even Hatsune Miku gets any, and she's a personified text to speech program you wouldn't even need to hire anyone or record anything new for.

Sonic Racing Crossworlds, to me, is proof fun isn't everything when it comes to making a good game. Judged purely on a gameplay level, it's actually a great game, a fast, engaging kart racer with mechanics that easily set it apart from the crowd; however, watching it slowly degenerate into crossover slop as more and more absurd guest characters are added, I can't help but despise what it's become. It's "fun", sure, but it's also a vapid, creatively bankrupt experience, and I really can't recommend it at all. Everything is Fortnite now and I hate every second of it.

Final Score	
Gameplay - 10	3
Story - 1	
Look/Sound - 2	

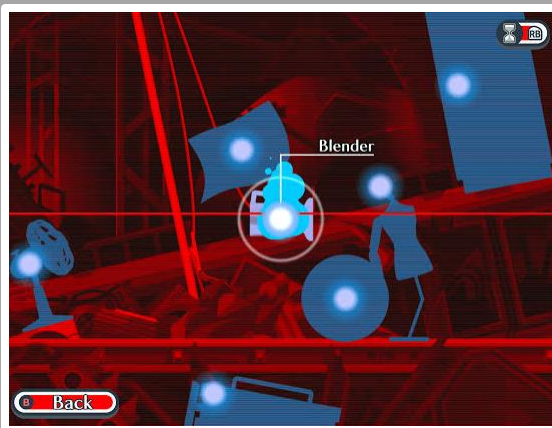
Guest Edition!
BY TOONSTUFF

GHOST TRICK™

Phantom Detective

Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective is a puzzle game released on the DS in 2010. It follows Sissel, who finds himself dead one night in a junkyard, and after awakening as a ghost, seeks the truth behind his identity and his death.

Unlike a regular game, where you control your character and move them around the environment, Sissel is, well, a ghost. There's no body for the player to move. To traverse the game's various levels, Sissel must use his (very creatively named) "Ghost Tricks" to manipulate objects in the environment, move between them, and influence those still living.



Playing a game in this way, not being able to directly control your character, turns even the simple act of moving around the environment into a puzzle. If you can't get somewhere because it's too far away, you'll have to figure out how by manipulating the right objects in the right order to make a pathway possible. Doing this is usually pretty straightforward since all the tools you need are right in front of you, but there are still more than enough head-scratchers for the game to usually require some thought.

The most involved of these usually happen in rewind time, another one of Sissel's ghostly abilities. If Sissel can make it to a corpse, then he can rewind time to 4 minutes prior to their death, and by using Ghost Tricks, he can prevent that death from ever happening in the first place. These sections can be really tense since you're on a time limit and some actions are only possible once a certain amount of time has passed. I did find myself getting confused every now and then though, and the game has a tendency to throw a ton of things at you and expect you to quickly understand how they work together, but I feel like this is more a product of me not being very good at puzzle games and this will naturally depend on the individual player. If you're more experienced with this sort of game than me, you shouldn't have any issues.

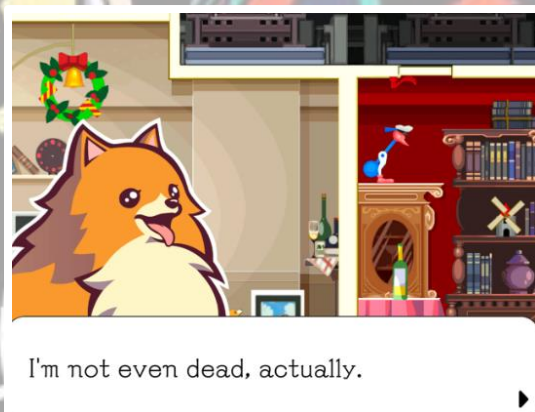


The game essentially follows this formula through its whole runtime. Go to a place, find your way around, interact with characters, living and dead, and if they are dead, try your best to stop that from happening. It sounds simple, but there's more than enough variety in the things you're interacting with and the scenarios you find yourself in to keep things engaging. Be it a runaway police vehicle that you must stop, or a prison break, or escaping a sinking submarine, the game has plenty of unique and fun set pieces that make the whole experience very memorable. There really is no other game like it.

Gameplay is only half the appeal of Ghost Trick though. You see, Ghost Trick is the brainchild of and a passion project for Ace Attorney creator Shu Takami, and you can absolutely tell. Beyond its one-of-a-kind gameplay, Ghost Trick features an interesting mystery and the exact sort of zany, charming cast of characters you'd expect from a game like Ace Attorney. Most of the game revolves around Lynn, a rookie detective with a surprising knack for getting herself murdered, in her desperate attempt to save her idol, former detective Jowd, from death row for a crime she's convinced he didn't commit.



This quest leads her and Sissel to meet tons of wacky characters, uncover shocking revelations, and ultimately bring them back to the source of everything that's affected both of their lives from the beginning, and the truth of Sissel's identity. It's a great mystery with all the twists and turns you'd want out of a crime thriller combined with the absurdity you'd expect out of Ace Attorney. There are some aspects of the narrative I find to be a tad underbaked, namely some villains who don't really do much in the second half and feel like they're kind of just there, but the story overall is very strong and a great time throughout.



The game also features a Pomeranian named Missile, who is one of the greatest dogs in all of fiction. This is not an exaggeration, and it would be a crime for me not to mention him. The GOAT.

Ghost Trick is probably one of the most unique games ever created. Not only is the gameplay incredibly innovative, but it's also polished to a sheen. It uses its ideas to their fullest extent, and even if there are some frustrating moments along the way, I feel that has less to do with the game and more to do with me. Top it off with a story that serves that gameplay very well, and you have a game I'd happily recommend to anyone. It's an experience no other game can provide, and that alone is reason enough to give it a shot.

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

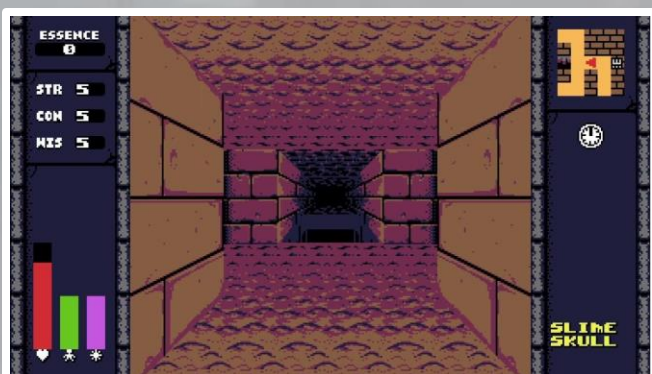
Lost in Space



VALBRACE

Valbrace is a first-person dungeon crawler, and the 37th game in the UFO 50 collection. You play as a knight, tasked with venturing down into Gnothrok Keep and vanquishing the evil Abyss Lord; only, when you get there, he immediately steals everything you brought to the fight and casts you down into the dungeons.

Now, you must venture through the game's 6 floors, scavenging for equipment and battling monsters as you work your way up and arise once more to challenge the Abyss Lord. The first thing you'll probably notice about the game is the complete lack of any sort of map whatsoever. Ok, fine, there's a minimap in the top right corner, but if you want to get anywhere, you'll have to get the graph paper out and draw one yourself. I immediately fell in love with this game the moment I noticed this; games that turn navigation itself into part of the challenge really appeal to me, and there aren't a whole lot of those out there, so I was always going to like this one regardless.



Personal taste aside, the game uses this to great effect; one thing you'll also quickly notice about this game is that it's hard. From floor 2 onwards, you'll probably die several times on each one, and each death resets you back to the start of the floor. But the one thing they can't take away from you is your map! The use of a physical map means that, with each attempt at a floor, you're able to

map out a little bit more of it, helping you optimize that next run just a little bit more until you've fully discovered the best route through.



The whole thing makes for a really satisfying gameplay loop, one which I personally never once got at all bored of. The combat's great too; when you run into an enemy, the battle starts, and you'll have to dodge around their attacks and find the right time to strike. I've seen it compared to Punch-Out a lot, which is fair, but given things like the multiple different stats you can level up at dedicated

areas to create your own unique build, the various types of equipment which each feel very different to use and the stamina bar you need to carefully manage, I was personally reminded more of a kind of 2D Soulslike if anything. Personally I'm not normally a huge fan of the genre, I find them a little too patience-testing and have something of a grudge against them for how they've basically replaced the much faster 3D action games I usually like, but combat here doesn't feature too much waiting, so I find it quite fun overall. There's also no parry, thank goodness for that.

Another thing that helps to enhance the combat is the excellent spellcasting system. Throughout the game, you'll find engravings on the walls showing certain magic symbols; at any time, you can hold B and quickly draw out these symbols with the D-pad to cast the corresponding spell! I absolutely love this; there's something really satisfying about rapidly tapping out a few directions in quick succession and seeing bolts of lightning strike your enemies, or a quick magic slash emerging to pierce through their defences.



has been taken away, and you've been cast right down to the lowest dungeons of the Abyss Lord's castle; now, you have to fight your way back up, relying on whatever knives and rags you can find lying about, and deciphering the way through all by yourself. It's a game that uses its mechanics to express the harshness of its environment, and I think it's really cool for that. It's also just great fun, I absolutely love the navigation and sense of discovery the whole thing has going on.

That aside, the magic system is also great at enhancing the game's overall mood. Everything here, from the mapping to the magic to the feeling of scrounging around looking for treasure, it all works in tandem to create a game that perfectly conveys the idea that you're all on your own. Everything you had as a knight

Final Score	
Gameplay - 10	8
Story - 7	
Look/Sound - 8	

The Yap Trap

Is Modern Gaming Just Worse?

Yes! Well, no. Well, maybe a little. Well, yes, but only in some ways. People love to argue about the current state of gaming; on one end, you've got the people convinced it's all just worse now, that nothing of value has come out at all lately, and on the other, there's the ones who insist that there's nothing wrong at all, and if anything, gaming's only ever gotten better with time. Predictably, I don't really agree with either side.

It's true that there are lots of great games coming out these days – I actually made sure to partially bias this issue's reviews towards more modern games to prove that I know this. Good games never stopped coming out, and the way indie development has become easier than ever is a genuine positive that shouldn't be overlooked. Honestly, I really don't think anything has been “lost” exactly; however, I'm also not sure that's the way to look at it.



The way I see it, it's less about what we may have lost, and more about all the new annoying little things we have to deal with now, where we used to take their absence for granted.

Probably the main thing for me is the AAA industry's complete aversion to any sort of originality whatsoever. You look at the period from around 1995-2010 and the big publishers were consistently putting out great games, that were interesting and experimental and unlike anything we'd ever seen and now we get Spongebob in Sonic. Be completely honest, could you really picture the Capcom of today publishing a Killer7 or a Ghost Trick?



It's just this relentless stream of remakes and remasters and the same tiny handful of franchises being drained for all they're worth and Christ it's all so boring. Anything truly original's off the table of course, but you can't even get a new game in your favourite series anymore if it's been dormant for more than 10 years. No, fuck you, here's the same game you already played but it's been remade and probably looks worse, buy this if you want a hope of ever getting something actually new. And then the few new games we do get need to be stuffed full of crossover guest character slop. Nothing can be allowed to have any sort of unique identity, the coherence of the game's world doesn't matter, everything is Fortnite forever and the dumb fucking cattle who love how “funny” it is keep eating this shit up.

Crossworlds might be one of the worst examples of this process, but fighting games have had it pretty bad too lately, and if Magic the Gathering's anything to go by, card games aren't safe either. And then, whenever the AAA developers get off their asses and finally make a new game, it's always one of the same three games. "Cinematic" linear third-person action thing with more cutscenes than actual gameplay, open-world stealth action thing with a map that's more jumble of random icons than actual map, or live-service shooter if they're feeling especially evil today, all in the same bland hyper-realistic style.



Games are more expensive to make now than ever before, so you need to do one of two things. You can either A, make them as blandly marketable as possible, utter vapid nonsense designed by committees to alienate absolutely nobody, or you can allow yourself maybe 10% more creativity in exchange for monetizing the ever-loving fuck out of your players. Ever since that whole lootbox fiasco, western developers have been a little wary of the second option, generally making sure you can only spend your Premium BattleCoins on optional cosmetics that don't really do anything, but it's honestly impressive how shameless the eastern ones are about it by comparison, even if I still hate it. For some reason, if you call your game a "gacha", it's completely fine to be as predatory as you want. So many games which 15-20 years ago would have been, you know, normal games you buy and then play, now require you to gamble in-game currency to have a chance at unlocking their many playable characters.

Of course, how much any of this matters is debatable. On the one hand, it absolutely does; the AAA industry are the ones who can afford all the shiny new tech, they're meant to be the cutting edge of what gaming has to offer and the surface-level impression most people will have of the industry, so I'd argue



it very much matters if they're seemingly incapable of putting out anything other than bland grey sludge. On the other... no one's making you play their games. Sure, it sucks that "you get the whole game when you buy it" has become a selling point rather than an expectation, but smaller indie games tend to be made by genuine creatives who have an actual idea they want to put out there; you have to look for them, sure, I doubt you'd heard of Babel of Ystilia before my review earlier in this issue for example, but the good ones aren't nearly as bland and forgettable as the usual AAA nonsense, and aren't nearly as aggressively monetized either. Plus, more importantly... when basically any game from 20+ years ago can be played for free on any half-decent computer, do modern games really need to be any good?