

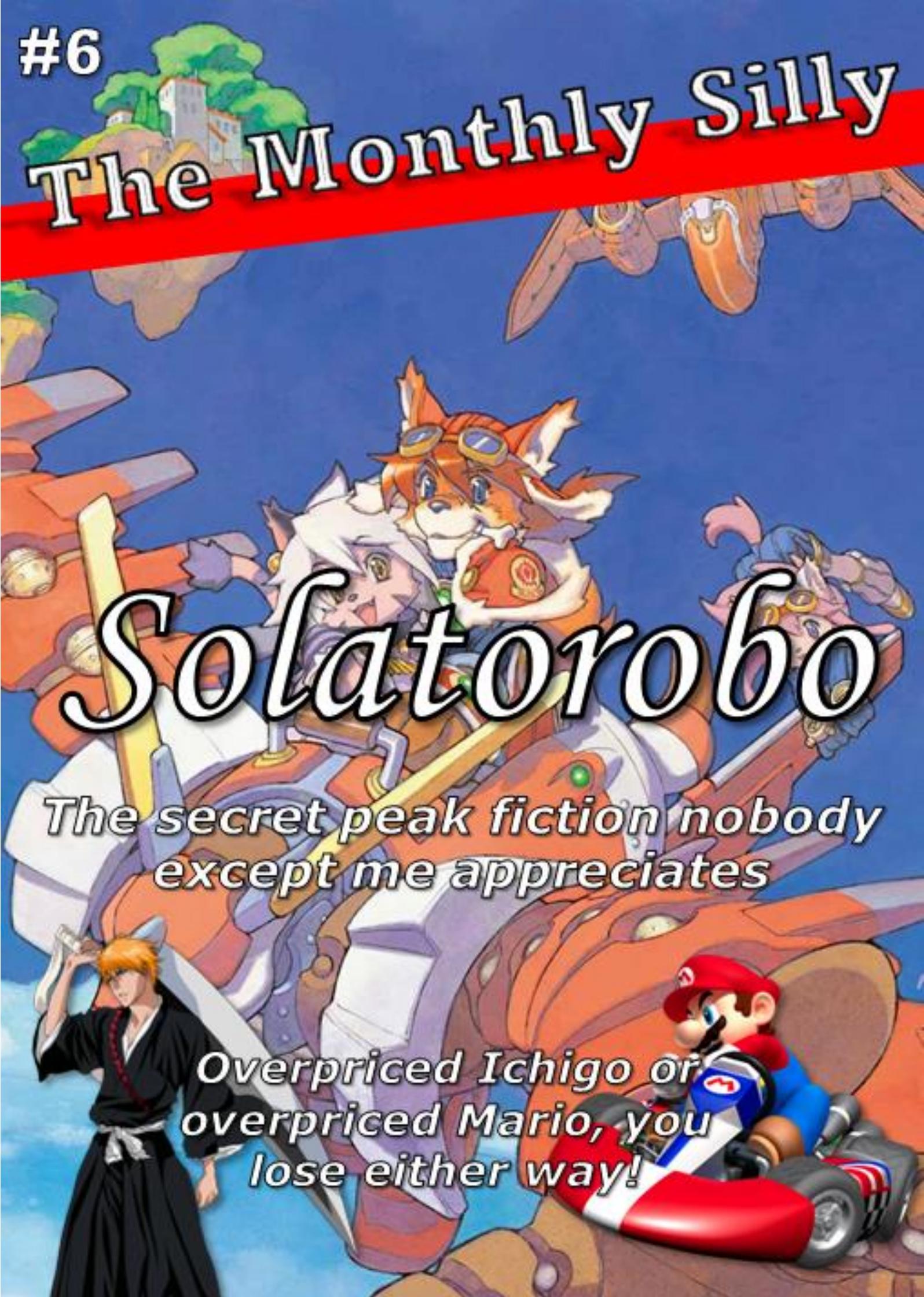
#6

# The Monthly Silly

## Solatorobo

*The secret peak fiction nobody  
except me appreciates*

*Overpriced Ichigo or  
overpriced Mario, you  
lose either way!*



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## Silly Spotlight 1

# Solatorobo

## Red the Hunter

This is a review I've wanted to write for a long time. Solatorobo: Red the Hunter is an action RPG released for the DS in 2010, and easily my favourite game I've played recently.



In Solatorobo, you play as Red, a Hunter who takes on requests in exchange for money from the people of the Shepherd Republic, a country made up of several floating sky islands the people travel between by airship. In the game, this manifests as the player being able to visit a local Quest Broker at any time and take on requests of their

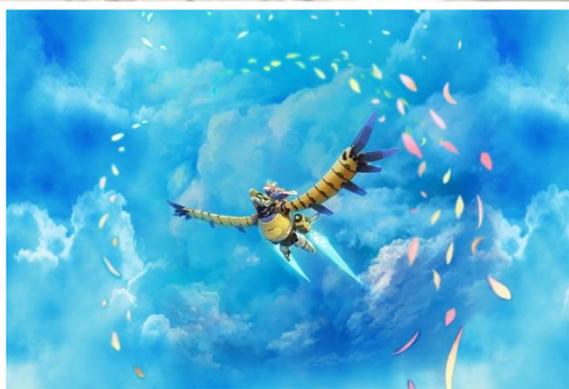
choice, which can be anything from helping to defeat an evil fish living in the sewers to attending a trivia competition in the capital city.

This structure works perfectly. The side quests tend to be more relaxed than the action packed main story, and finishing a story chapter always unlocks new requests, so the whole game has a fun gameplay loop of doing a few requests here and there to help immerse yourself in the world, diving headfirst into the main story full of twists and turns, and then returning to the much less serious side quests. As a result, if you're the type who just ignores side content and blasts through the main story, some of this game's appeal might be lost on you, but if you like seeing everything a game has to offer, Solatorobo has no shortage of amazing, creative side



quests that do a perfect job of fleshing out the world.

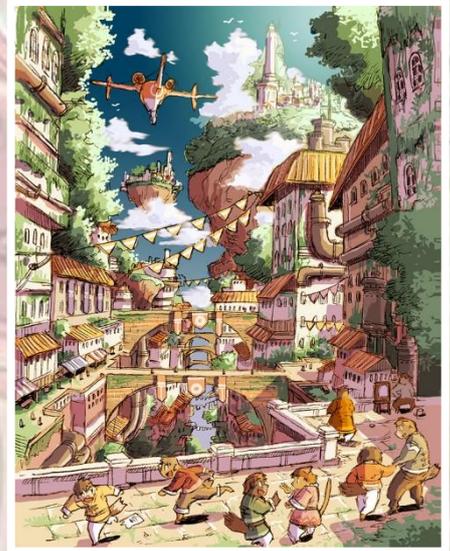
The game's art direction is flawless, too. The whole game just has this sense of beauty to it that, while it can't quite be described with words, really adds to the whole experience in a way that makes it a completely unforgettable game. There's no way to describe the art in this game other than pure perfection on every level.



Another thing that adds to Solatorobo's timeless appeal is its worldbuilding. I spoke briefly earlier about how the game's quest structure helps immerse the player in the world, but this wouldn't work nearly as well if the Shepherd Republic hadn't been made with the utmost amount of care and detail.

Everything about it feels like a full, lived-in world, to the point where I don't think it would be an exaggeration to call it some of the best worldbuilding I've ever seen in a game. This is really what makes the game tick; with every request you take on,

another part of this game's world reveals itself, and it starts to feel more and more familiar over time. The way the requests work is perfect for a game like this – if you ever play it, please, don't ignore them. This game's best qualities aren't immediately obvious, they only reveal themselves when you take a moment to slow down, take on a few requests, and let yourself become truly familiar with its world. And if you're really interested, the game even features a library where you can read about the Republic's history and culture! I spent far too much time on this part when I played this game.



All of the characters are excellent, too. From the endearing but slightly incompetent Kurvaz Special Ops division, to the main trio of Red, Chocolat and Elh (ok, maybe not Chocolat, she's a bit annoying), and even the minor characters that only appear in optional requests, all of the characters here feel memorable and well-written enough that I could probably list all of them on the spot if you

asked me to. Actually, that might just be the autism speaking, but they're great either way.

I know I haven't talked about the main gameplay much, aside from the quest structure, and that's because it's probably the aspect with the least there to talk about. It's very fun, the way the customization works being a highlight for me, but if you're playing this game, it's for the story, characters, world, and just the whole aesthetic of it all, not the gameplay. The game does do this strange thing where halfway through, you get a set of new moves that makes the previous moveset feel a bit basic by comparison, but every other aspect of this game is so perfect I just can't bring myself to care about whatever tiny gameplay flaws it might have. Solatorobo is an absolute masterpiece, certainly the best game I played last year, and if you have any way of playing it, I'd 100% suggest doing so as soon as possible.

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

## Silly Spotlight 2

# TOMODACHI LIFE

Tomodachi life is a 3DS game, released in 2013 in Japan and 2014 everywhere else, and I'm not quite sure how to describe it. You start by making your Lookalike, a Mii meant to represent you, and then they get a little apartment on an island you can name whatever you like. And then, you add more Miis, and then you just kind of... watch them go about their days.



It's a silly little game that's not easily categorized, and it doesn't have that much in the way of actual gameplay. You can give your Miis food and clothes, decorate their rooms and give them catchphrases and even songs to sing, but they're largely autonomous and do whatever they like without your input. It's not a game with any

particular goal, you just populate your island with Miis and watch them live their silly little lives. They can make friends, get into arguments, fall in love and even have children together! For the first time ever, your Miis can finally have sex.

That's not to say you can't do anything. Endless ability to dress them up in silly outfits aside, they'll also sometimes come to you with problems they need solving. Usually these are fairly basic things like "I'm hungry" or "I want new clothes", but sometimes they'll ask for your opinion on something they've been thinking about, or get you to play a fun minigame with them, and regardless, these little requests give the player enough to do that it keeps the game from getting stale for a long time. Additionally, you can also have them perform songs in eight different genres, with lyrics you write yourself (there is a profanity filter but it's very easy to get around), and take photos of them together in front of several different backgrounds, all with unique posing options. The game also features a variety of different dreams you can watch your Miis have if you check on them while they're sleeping, as well as different news broadcasts about various events that have happened around the island lately, both of which are as bizarre and silly as possible.





By now, it might sound like I'm just listing features the game has without much rhyme or reason at all, but that's because it's the best way to show the type of game this is. It's one with an extremely simple premise – “put some Miis on an island and watch them live their slightly bizarre lives together” – but one which executes on that idea

with such consistent detail and skill that it's hard not to fall in love with it. There are so many tiny things in this game which, individually, don't feel all that important at first glance, but they all add up to create a truly memorable experience.

Really, it's hard to find anything to criticize at all with this game; the only thing I can think of would be that the Miis like to start arguments, and sorting them out can be a bit tedious. This takes around 2-3 minutes, the process is exactly the same every single time, and to be honest, it's not even all that entertaining the first time.



The Miis in this game are belligerent little fellows who spend far too much time arguing, and it's the only real proper “flaw” I can think of with this game.



Other than that, Tomodachi Life is an excellent game, although it's hyper-targeted towards a certain type of person. If you enjoy the sound of a silly, lighthearted game where you can populate an island with Miis and watch them have sometimes bizzarely hilarious and sometimes oddly heartwarming things happen in their

strange little lives, then Tomodachi Life is absolutely the game for you. If, however, you're looking for a game with more directly interactive gameplay that's consistently “fun” in the direct, game-y sense of the word, you probably won't enjoy it. It's a great game if you're the type who'd enjoy what it has to offer, but it makes no effort to provide any sort of interesting gameplay challenge whatsoever. To be honest, if it did try to have more “gameplay” in the usual sense it probably wouldn't be as good, part of the appeal is seeing what your islanders will get up to next without your input at all, but as much as I personally love this game, it's definitely one some people would be bored to death by.

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

# Kill Your Friends

# BLEACH REBIRTH OF SOULS

Bleach: ReBirth of Souls is a 3D fighting game released in March 2025 for PC, PS4/5 and Xbox series S/X, based on Tite Kubo's Bleach manga series.

Immediately, I should address the elephant in the room with this one, that being the quite frankly terrible story mode. Have you ever wanted to watch 3D models of Bleach characters awkwardly stumble about and poorly re-enact scenes from the original series, with a few pitifully easy battles against boring Hollow enemies



sprinkled in for good measure? If so, then ReBirth of Souls' story mode is for you! It's just not fun, either to watch or to play, the stiff animation and boring regular enemy battles both adding up to create a thoroughly unenjoyable experience. The battles against other playable characters can be fun, but at that point, I might as well just fight them in the regular Versus mode. I personally was never buying the game for this mode to begin with, so this wasn't a huge issue for me, but many people were, and its sheer lack of quality is shocking regardless.



The game does feature Secret Stories, smaller, character-specific side stories that actually have something new to offer instead of being bad retellings of a story players will likely already be familiar with. To me, these sounded like a fun concept, but you have to play the main story mode to unlock them, so I suppose I'll never be seeing

them. Story mode's genuinely terrible animation aside, the main battle animations used for Kikon moves are fortunately more well-animated, and it's clear that's where the budget went. As someone who never cared much about story mode anyway, I'd rather this than have it the other way around, but story mode's blatant lack of any effort at all is still a disappointment.



Speaking of Kikon moves, I should probably explain what those are! The game features a slightly bizarre health system where you start with 9 “konpaku” (lives), and a “reishi gauge” (health bar); once you deplete an enemy’s reishi, you can then use a Kikon move, a brief flashy cutscene that depletes a certain amount of their konpaku. In case you’re not confused yet, each character can also use an Awakening halfway through the battle, which depending on the character, can do anything from providing a simple power boost to completely changing how they play.

I... think I like these systems? The health system is a bit confusing, but Awakenings as a mechanic are really fun, and do a great job of replicating the feeling you’d get reading a fight in Bleach where a character is forced to activate their Bankai, or seeing an Espada enter Resurreccion for the first time. The animations for both Awakenings and Kikon moves are also, unlike the story mode, very good. They strike a perfect balance between feeling flashy and expressive while, at the same time, not overstaying their welcome and forcing you to wait for them to end. Overall, I’m very fond of most of this game’s mechanics,



with the exception of the Reitsu Gauge.

The Reitsu Gauge is your super metre for this game. It slowly builds up as you play, and can be spent to use special moves! All of your special moves, except for your one singular Signature Move you can use whenever, are a limited resource.



As a result, this game can be very fun, but only when you pick the right character. The more complex ones, with a lot of depth in their signature moves, are a blast to play as, but simpler characters are often left with barely anything to do most of the time, since all of their most interesting moves are a limited resource. Overall, Bleach: ReBirth of Souls is a slightly above average anime fighting game – great fun if you like that sort of thing, but not remotely worth the absurd €60 price tag. At half that price it’d be an easy recommendation, but if you’re not already a fan of Bleach, or you care about having an enjoyable story mode in your fighting games, I sadly can’t recommend this one.

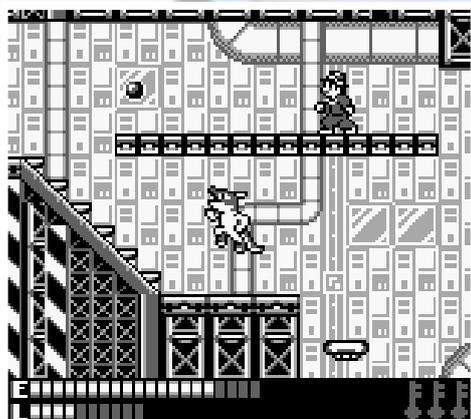
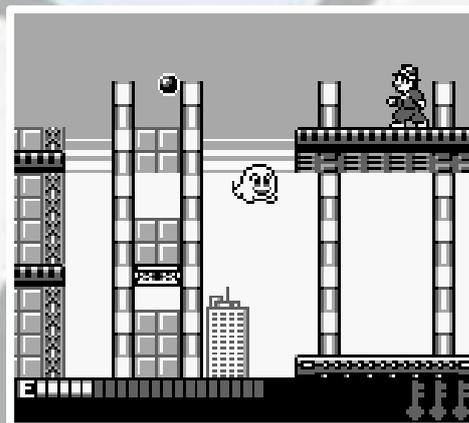
Final Score	
Gameplay - 7	6
Story - 2	
Look/Sound - 5	

# Easy Emulation

# AVENGING SPIRIT

Avenging Spirit was released in arcades in 1991, and ported to the Gameboy in 1992 – the Gameboy port is the one I played, so it's the one I'm reviewing for this segment.

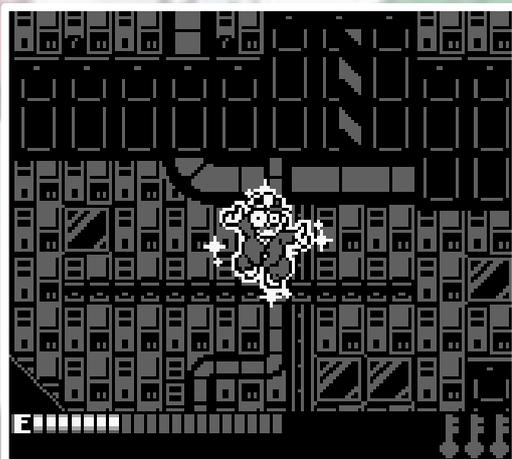
The game's premise is a unique one. You play as a ghost whose girlfriend has been kidnapped by the mafia, and progress through the game's six action platforming stages by possessing and controlling enemies. It's a simple premise, but it works – each enemy controls slightly differently, with a different movement speed, jump height and method of attack, and some even have unique gimmicks, such as the meditating turban man's ability to jump an infinite number of times. You have two health bars, one "life" and one "energy" bar. When you get hit as a possessed enemy, your life bar decreases, and if it empties, you're left floating around as a ghost like in the image above. While in this state, your energy quickly empties, and if you let it empty all the way before you possess another enemy, you die.



Additionally, you can also press Select to exit the enemy you're currently possessing if you see another you'd like to enter, but this presents one of my few real problems with the core mechanics. Doing this causes you to lose an amount of energy equal to your remaining life (for example, if you had 4 life left, you'd lose 4 energy), and I personally don't really like this. I think being able to switch between taking control of different enemies at different times to switch up your

playstyle is a big part of the appeal of this game, so having this mechanic directly disincentivize doing this and encouraging the player to stick to the same enemy for as long as possible is just kind of annoying to me. I'm not really sure why it's like this, it's quite irritating.

In spite of this, though, the core gameplay loop is still good fun. It's simple, but it's still engaging, especially for a game on the original Gameboy, and the variety in how the different enemies play makes it immensely replayable. Gameplay aside, though, there's... not really a whole lot to talk about with this one.



The story is about as deep and engaging as you'd expect from an action platformer on the Gameboy, and the soundtrack and visual direction are... good, but again, they both leave about as much to talk about as you'd expect. The enemy designs are fun to look at, there's one hooded mage enemy later on where you can only see his eyes who I particularly like, but visually, there's not much to talk about aside from that. The sprites are all expressive and well-drawn, but it's nothing crazy aesthetically.

Overall, Avenging Spirit is a simple game, so simple it barely warrants being discussed in a full two pages, but I still like it a lot. The core mechanics are a lot of fun to play around with and lend it a great deal of replayability, and the level design is challenging without being irritating or annoying, and even though nothing else about the game particularly warrants talking about... who cares? It's a Gameboy game from 1992, if you're going in expecting a deep, moving story or particularly impressive graphics, you need to be sent to the Insanium. At the end of the day, it's a fun, replayable action platformer that's still fun to this day, and that's all it needs to be. More than anything, I think it's remarkable how it seems like someone flipped a switch in 1990 that made developers stop making their games annoying on purpose. If this game had released even a few years earlier on the NES, it'd probably have been terrible...

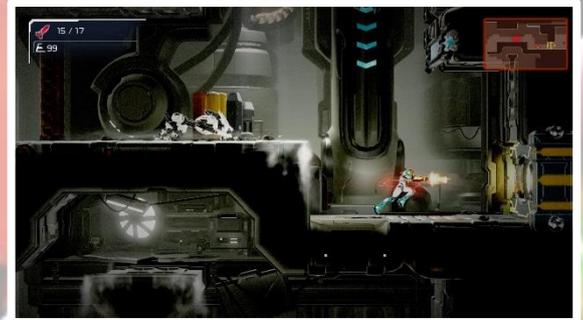
Final Score	
Gameplay - 8	7
Story - 5	
Look/Sound - 6	



# Shame Corner

# METROID DREAD

Turns out, there aren't actually that many games I truly hate. The point of Shame Corner was to review games I really have a passionate hatred for to balance out the positivity of the rest of this magazine, but I think I've reviewed all of those already, so all we're left with is Metroid Dread, an honestly alright game that just does a lot of things I really don't like. So, unless I play or remember another game that I just need to angrily rant about, this is probably the last Shame Corner for now. Not sure



what I'll replace it with yet, but I've got a few ideas.

Anyway, Metroid Dread! This is a Metroidvania action platformer developed by Nintendo for the Switch in 2021, the first proper new 2D Metroid game since Fusion in 2002. The game was praised by fans as a "return to form" for the series, but after I played it, I realized it

really wasn't that at all, and everyone was just saying that as a coping mechanism because their series hadn't had a new 2D game in 19 years. After all, when you've been starved for that long, even burnt fish will taste like a gourmet 5-star meal.

Now, relax, I'm not about to do the thing a bunch of unqualified game journos did when this game released and say it's "too confusing" or whatever – it's actually the opposite. Dread tries to present itself as a classic, Super Metroid-style entry in the series, with a big open-ended planet for the player to explore and get lost in to their heart's content. In reality, though, the game is terrified of ever letting the player go for more than a minute or two without knowing where they're "supposed to go", using all sorts of subtle, annoying little design tricks like one-way paths and conveniently placed teleporters to make sure you always know exactly where the game wants you to go. It's a game that constantly holds your hand, even if it wants to pretend it doesn't.

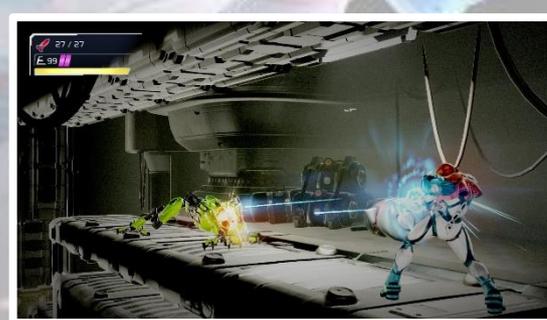




But, why is this a bad thing? Surely not getting lost as much should be good, right? Well, not really. If you don't notice this and the game successfully tricks you into thinking you're making your own way through the map, it probably won't bother you that much, but if you're more observant you'll definitely notice it, and

the moment you do, it all falls apart. Exploration starts to feel hollow and pointless from the moment you see what the game's doing, and it ruins a big part of the whole vibe. You're on a desolate, isolating alien planet, you should feel lost and alone, with every discovery being truly significant. Super Metroid did this perfectly almost 30 years before Dread's release, with a vast, often confusing map that perfectly matched its harsh setting, but Dread seems content to simply aim for the illusion of the same thing in the hopes you'll be successfully deceived.

To its credit, though, the moment-to-moment gameplay controls really well, and is actually very fun... for the first 2 thirds or so. A good Metroidvania challenges the player in 3 ways, through navigation, platforming and combat. We've established that the navigational challenge with this game is entirely non-existent, but we still have those other two! Until the game gives you the Space Jump, of course, giving you infinite double jumps and making platforming basically optional. That's fine, though, that



was the least important one, we've still got combat! Until you get the Screw Attack that lets you instantly kill enemies by jumping into them. Both of these abilities are series staples, but they're usually saved for much later on, especially the Screw Attack; as a result, the only thing the game has to offer for real challenge in

its entire last quarter is the boss fights, which are generally very good in fairness, but they're not nearly enough to make up for how, near the end, the game basically plays itself.

Overall, Metroid Dread is a weird one. There's lots here I didn't talk about, like the story (quite good), the general presentation (very good) or the EMMI chase sequences (less good), but that's because my issues with this game are so specific and so severe that I really felt they deserved the space to talk about at length. It's clear a lot of effort went into creating this game, and I can see why many people would love it, but personally, I just felt the game was trying its hardest to lie to me for every second I played of it.

Final Score	
Gameplay - 3	5
Story - 6	
Look/Sound - 7	

# The Yap Trap

## The Switch 2, just generally speaking

Nintendo revealed their next console, and everyone's furious! Let's see why.

The Switch 2 has already had a variety of new first-party games revealed for it, including the first new Mario Kart game in over 10 years (wow, really?) and a new Kirby Air Ride game, which to be honest, I'm more excited by than the Mario Kart. There's also Donkey Kong: Bonanza, an open-ended 3D platformer, and Hyrule Warriors: Age of



Imprisonment, a new Hyrule Warriors game that acts as a prequel to Tears of the Kingdom. Additionally, games such as the upcoming Daemon X Machina: Titanic Scion or the apparently very good Elden Ring (haven't played it but it looks cool) are also being ported to the Switch 2, taking advantage of its improved hardware for games that were too complex to run on the original Switch. Already, I'd say the console's doing alright for itself, given how it has more worthwhile exclusives despite not being out yet than the PS5 and Series X do now.



Of the exclusives, Mario Kart: World is the one we know the most about, but I'll save that one for a future What's Next segment if I feel like writing about it, because the games aren't the thing about the Switch 2 people have a problem with. The real controversy with the Switch 2 comes from the price

of the games – €80 for digital downloads, €90 for physical copies. I don't care what anyone says to defend this, this is absurd. A common argument given to defend developers charging more than the standard €60 for games is that they have to because "something something they need to keep up with inflation blah blah blah" shut up I don't care. Yes, games used to be "more expensive" in real terms given that the same €50 or €60 price tag was worth more thanks to inflation, but there are also more people buying games now than ever before. The numbers don't compare to the boost the industry got during Covid, sure, but they're still impressive, far more than they would have been in the past, so it should still be easy for a giant company like Nintendo to make a significant profit off €60 games.

“Oh, but games are too expensive to make now”, wow, I still don’t care! This one probably doesn’t hugely apply to Nintendo, as they’re still smart about not spending money on absurd hyper-realistic nonsense like making sure you can see every pore on a character’s skin, but it’s still a justification you hear a lot for price increases more broadly that annoys me. If you’re spending so much money making a game it becomes nearly



impossible to profit from it without squeezing the consumer dry, then stop spending so much money, it’s that simple. Even putting all that aside, though, it just doesn’t make sense to spend €90 on a single game when, by buying either indie games or cheaper secondhand copies of older games, you could get three or four still absolutely incredible games for that same amount of money. We live in a time when more people are buying games than ever before, and where it’s easier than ever to find absolutely amazing games for cheap prices, charging €90 for a new Mario Kart makes no sense whatsoever.



Somehow, though, this isn’t where the problems end! So, you know how you need to pay an extra €10 just to get a physical copy of a Switch 2 game instead of downloading it online, in a clear attempt to manufacture demand for digital-only gaming systems (ooh, new future Yap Trap article idea)? Well, sometimes, the game won’t even be on the cartridge when you buy it! Many games for the Switch 2 are “game key cards” instead of proper physical copies, where the cartridge will only tell the system to download it from the internet instead of having the actual game on it.

This means that, once the Switch 2 Eshop servers go down in probably about 15-20 years’ time, these “physical copies” will be completely worthless if the game’s not already downloaded. It’s not all bad, none of the first-party exclusives revealed so far have been game key cards, and it seems like it’s reserved for bigger third-party titles with file sizes too large to fit on a tiny cartridge, but it’s still just a little annoyance that makes me like the Switch 2 less.

Overall, the Switch 2 seems... promising, but with a lot of downsides. The added processing power is nice, and it certainly has more of a justification for its own existence relative to the Switch 1 compared to the PS5 and Series X, but the €90 games and digital-only “game key cards” just don’t seem worth it. I’ll probably pick one up eventually, but only when it’s possible to buy the games secondhand for lower prices. I’m not paying €90 for Mario Kart.

# What's Next?

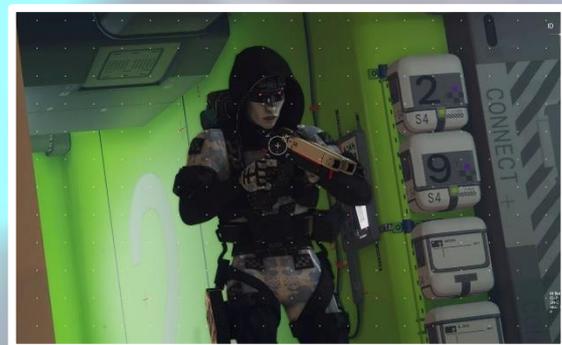
# MARATHON

Welcome to Tau Ceti IV, a mysterious abandoned space colony on a planet inhabited by surreal alien nightmares beyond human comprehension, and leftover security robots still diligently gunning down intruders on sight. The former inhabitants of this colony, before they vanished without any explanation, left behind crucial resources that various intergalactic federations want access to, and you play as a Runner, a mercenary who can take on contracts from these organizations to scavenge the colony's remains and find anything that might be useful. If you



can make it out alive, that is.

The cinematic trailer released for this game, which was my first exposure to its existence, does an excellent job in its first few minutes of establishing a surreal, darkly foreboding tone that's not quite like anything else I've ever seen. Sure, it goes slightly downhill as it goes on,



with a few off-putting character designs that feel like they're trying a bit too hard to be cool, but that's far from the end of the world when the presentation is this excellent in every other way. So, what does the game play like, exactly? Based on the trailer, it looks like some kind of Dead Space-esque sci-fi survival horror game, and it could... oh. Never mind. It's a team-based, online-only live service extraction shooter. With season passes. Oh no.

I feel so conflicted on this game. The world and setting looks genuinely interesting to me, and the presentation has this sense of style to it I've been wishing AAA developers would embrace instead of chasing after boring hyper-realism for a long time now, but the choice of genre feels somewhat incongruous with all of that. I love the atmosphere of the cinematic trailer, and it feels like the first western AAA game I've seen in a long while with a genuine sense of style and aesthetic to it, but it also feels like, at the last moment, a strange man in a suit forced the developers to turn it into what it is now, despite the fact that, aside from being infamously soulless cash grabs, these types of live service online shooters haven't even been that good at grabbing people's cash lately. Marathon feels like a sincere creative idea buried beneath too many layers of corporate meddling to truly surface, and there's something a bit tragic about it.