

## Puzzle Solving in *Another World*

The puzzle construction in *Another World* is almost horrific for a player. The level design constantly misdirects you, forces you to backtrack, and punishes you for missing something apparently minor. Interestingly, however, this harsh system serves to set the atmosphere and emotional resonance for the game. Rather than making the game hard for the sake of being hard, *Another World* is hard because it wants to communicate the development of a relationship over time between two characters, the protagonist and their friend alien.

*Another World* effectively communicates the hostility of the environment. This is a world full of dangers for the protagonist and, accordingly, the player can die in a wide variety of ways with very little warning. In the opening scene, for example, if the player doesn't swim up, they will be pulled down and drowned by the tentacles coming up to grab them. Moments like these—where the player can die without warning and with very small chances of succeeding the first time—are questionable from a design perspective, but work aesthetically. The player is always on edge, wondering what obstacle they will face next, which sets up an atmosphere of dread and hostility.

The level design also encourages familiarity with the digital environment. As I argued about *MegaMan 2*, in *Another World*, much of the expertise derives from learning the level through trial and error, over the course of which the player forms a mental map of the virtual space. But in *Another World*, this contributes to the narrative as well: placed in a foreign landscape, the protagonist must learn to understand their surroundings in order to survive. Thus the player's actions are reflected by the situation of the protagonist, creating a sort of harmony between what the player is tasked with doing, and the narrative of the game.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this convoluted, punishing level design, however, is the way it makes you appreciate your alien friend. Rather than making the game an escort mission (there are only brief moments of those), the game splits you up from your companion. For much of the game that I got through, in the caves and the palace-like area, you are separated from your friend, who showed you an escape route, and then you parted ways. Despite this, however, you see his actions at times running concurrently to your own, and so the bond is maintained. Here is where the level design functions in a strange way: if you miss anything, any little thing, like shooting the chandelier, your friend can't progress, and if he can't progress, neither can you. The game doesn't tell you you've failed, you just figure it out after a while. Thus you are dependent on your friend, without having to escort them directly. Furthermore, the hostile, desperate situations the game puts you into sometimes see the intervention of your friend. At the end of the palace area, when everything seems desperate, with an unstoppable enemy baring down on you, your friend reaches down and pulls you up. This is the first interaction you've had with him for a long time, but it is a powerful moment. In the depths of this hostile, frustrating, dangerous environment, here is a helping hand when you need it most. This kind of interplay is simple, but effective in making the player feel a bond with this alien.