With the rise of Indy games in the past couple years, we have seen resurgence of long forgotten game genres, games that entertain without requiring the learning of numerous mechanics.

Running through a level layout you might find familiar you might think: “How cruel is this game!” And you may be right; as Risk of Rain pulls its roots from the Roguelike genre, you inevitably will hurt yourself against the wall of permanent death and a bit of spiteful difficulty.

But this does not make it less enjoyable necessarily. The action packed gameplay will keep you on the edge of your seat, trying to survive. And this is what the game is about: survival. There is one simple goal you ought to achieve: reach the portal of the level that you were thrown in, summon the boss and progress to the next stage. While doing so, you will collect various power ups that will give you additional tools to crush the ever-spawning enemies.

Your death being permanent, you might think there is not much value in playing several games because of the repetitive loss of bits of progress you have made. But achieving various objectives in a playthrough will unlock yourself new droppable items and new characters that have their own unique abilities. This makes subsequent instances interesting as you know you might discover new treasures, making one more step toward repentance of this god forbidden planet.

Difficulty is another concern in Risk of Rain. You may think, just like in any other RPGs that you may be able to hustle your way up in power ups and experience to become the ultimate warrior, disregarding any once-were-threats coming from the monster around you… but you would be mistaking yourself. As time progress in a single game, so does the difficulty. This creates a sense of urge to balance to the incentive of farming monsters to empower yourself with powerful items.

However, even though it is one of its charm the game’s rushing sense of survival comes at a price: you die a lot and play the same levels several times before developing level-adapted strategies, enabling you to progress to the next one. It is sometimes frustrating how you so easily die. New players will certainly struggle their way through adaptation.

Oddly enough, this is also what gives the game its charm: every kill you make without taking damage is a victory that you will bear with you until you have to start another game. Furthermore, achievements are finely tuned so some of them can be attained by the simple mean of playing several times, even if you do not reach a far point in game.

Your journey through the hostile alien environments you crashed on will be painted to you with an esthetic pixelated art style. While this may not be everyone’s favorite visual representation the game’s soundtrack is an undeniable asset to the game’s stressful climate. Personally, I have been impregnated with the sounds of the levels I would wander in and would even get excited as I entered a new one, knowing that another track would accompany my through my journey.

Pros:

Good incorporation of sense progression to the permanent death.

Simple but rewarding gameplay

Great soundtrack

Cons:

Unforgiving death system might discourage players.

Personification of mercenaries crashing on a hostile planet have never been as well recreated as it is in Risk of Rain… atmospherically speaking at least. The cruel difficulty will make you hustle through death by trying to avenge your previous character. It is how Risk of Rain gradually rewards you for your efforts that it will inoculate an instinctive sense of survival to your gameplay style. Your taste for revenge will become an appeal by itself. Only the toughest will enjoy this game at the height of its cruelty… and quality.