

Part 1 of the Itch Bundles Review!

By Nicole (ThermiteFe8)

Where I play through the more obscure games in my Itch.io library and review them! Because indie games are cool.

In this session we've got

- [Painty Balls](#) by Miguel Antunes
- [MewnBase](#) by Cairn4
- [Falling Skies](#) by Ironmonger Games
- [TimeOut](#) by Christopher Lee and a lotta other people
- [Mobility](#) by Aurorix
- [Gun Rounds](#) by Blabberf
- [Magnibox](#) by Joseph Gribbin

Starting with [TimeOut](#) by Christopher Lee and a lotta other people! This was a student game for a final senior project, created by a huge team of



students. And all their hard work genuinely paid off - this game looks amazing. If I stop and focus on any specific part, it might look a little wonky with the way the pixelart is lit and I (assume) the handpainted normal maps, but the

composition, lighting, and environment details *hard* carry this game. This is the only game I beat just because I wanted to look at more environments.

The story premise is interesting - a world where time is currency and there's someone scamming people with "fake" time so that their timers tick down too fast and then they just fucking die. You play as a detective tryna

solve it. The VAing also works, but I didn't really enjoy the moment to moment dialogue and story beats. The main villain's motivation didn't really make sense to me. However, there's still some cool story stuff - like all the time related puns/jokes and how everyone's "health" is directly tied to how "wealthy" they are. It also allows them to show how much "time" the main villain's stolen from people because of his high HP.



I do wish the shooting weren't here at all. I don't understand how it works and it doesn't really add anything to the experience since it's so shallow. I'm guessing that this is just a symptom of it being a student game with a huge team. You gotta give the excess programmers *something* to do, after all.

Next, **Falling Skies** by Ironmonger Games This one's more straightforward - it's just a shmup where you shoot ships and pick up powerups and try not to get hit by the enemy beams.

This project's very clearly this dev's first game, and it's interesting to compare three types of amateur/indie devs and the unique ways they succeed they fail. You got the "educated" indie devs, the self taught indie devs, and the huge team of both educated and self taught indie devs. TimeOut was the third thing - the huge team. And TimeOut succeeds in its presentation and visual/auditory polish just because you've got teams of 20-30 people putting their whole artistussies into individual areas for a whole semester/year. Huge indie dev teams tend to succeed in terms of presentation and breadth, but the mechanics tend to struggle a bit, which is what happened with TimeOut. Additionally, the story can kinda take a hit, since you've got more people than

necessary giving their input on a story, guaranteeing that it goes nowhere and, at its worst, says absolutely nothing with as many words as possible.

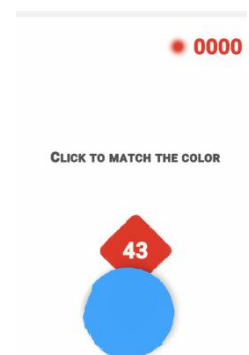
In contrast, the self taught solo indie devs tend to have more solid mechanics, but struggle in areas where it's handy to have multiple eyes and some education. The most obvious part is the UI - it looks good and there was effort put into the presentation, but you can see



that it isn't scaling properly. The filter doesn't reach the ends of the screen and the title/pause screens look really wonky. It's simple to fix in Unity - it's a setting on the Canvas gameobject to have it scale with screen size properly - but it doesn't draw attention to itself and it's hard to figure out if you're self taught. The way invincibility powerups can interfere with the win trigger is annoying, but also kinda charming I am kinda impressed with the explosion and "juice" effects though - those look really good.

PaintyBalls by Miguel Antunes is very simple.

It's clearly meant to be a mobile game with the vertical screen and simple "tap/click thing" mechanics, but it works well enough. You tap the circle to get it to match the color within the timespan. Then they spawn more circles for you to juggle, and it's kinda fun to manage it. It doesn't go beyond "kinda fun", but that's fine because it isn't trying to.



With any game concerned with color matching, I'm always worried about accessibility, but they do have a colorblind setting. I don't actually know how much it helps though - I'm not even really sure if it does anything.

Meanwhile, **MewnBase** by Cairn4 is frustrating.

I want to play it more - so much effort's gone into the presentation, the sound effects, the crafting mechanics, the systems, and everything. It's clear that this developer *knows* what they're doing and I wanna support it. But I have a really hard time getting into these "complex" systems games. It doesn't help that you don't have a set goal or clear missions/milestones. You have only one goal - survive for the set amount of time. I wanna come back to this one, but it might be a while.



Magnibox by Joseph Gribbin, on the other hand, is easy to grasp.

It's a block-pushing game with a twist! You play as a magnet and if you're pointed at a magnet block, you can do magnet stuff. It's cute and it's got



surprisingly good game feel. The sound effects are nice, and it's easy to read everything and figure out what's going on. I've only beaten the first world because it does get kinda repetitive, but the puzzles aren't mindless and they do make me go

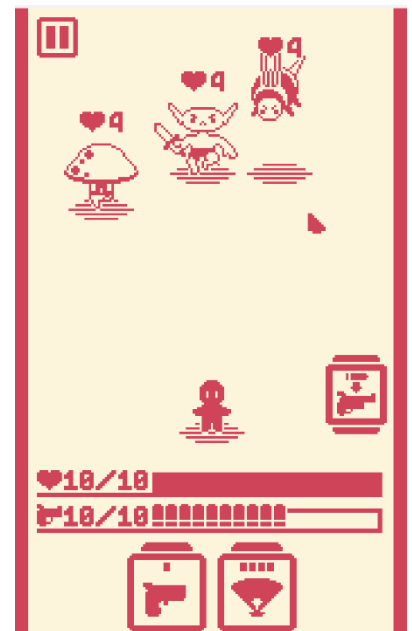
"aha!". Block-pushing puzzle games can get stale, but this one works pretty well. It's not my favorite, but it's still a good time.

The one thing that I wish was made more clear is the fact that you can't push two "pushable" blocks at once. You can only do it one at a time.

In terms of game feel though, **Gun Rounds** cannot be beat.

It's a turn-based game where you attack by shooting at a field of moving/weaving enemies. You can choose between a set of weapons (which can change as you unlock more), and each weapon "moves" around the field in a different way). Then each enemy gets to attack and you need to time a parry/shield to avoid taking damage. If you do it well, you can even reload your bullets! The sound effects are crisp and clean, and it's fun as hell to shoot, interact with the menus, and block enemy bullets. It's such an obvious twist on the turn-based battle genre, but I've never seen it done like this. It gives your weapons different ways to express themselves and it allows your enemy bullet patterns to express something about the enemy, similar to Undertale's bullet patterns.

This game's addicting as hell too. It just works so well.



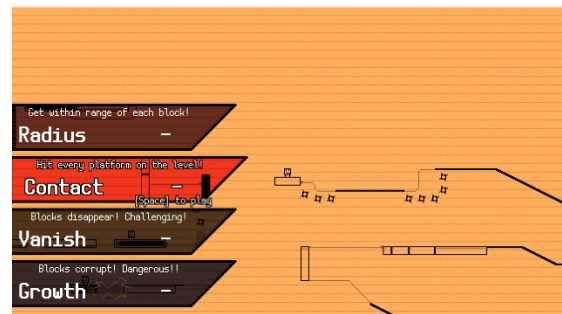
Finally, **Mobility** by AuroriAx is a well made game with some frustrations.

The concept's pretty fun - jump around a hub and at each broken hub/station, complete a mini platforming challenge. At each challenge, you can

choose between four different platform mechanics, which effectively function as your "difficulty" setting. The double jump, spin jump, and wall jump are cool, though the long-jump feels weirdly shoehorned in. I can't help but feel like the controls were made early on and the dev learned more as they made this game, but didn't get to go back and overhaul their controls. There's some weird decisions, like pressing down to enter doors and start levels.

This'd be a fun game to grind for faster times on the hardest difficulty on, but it doesn't have volume sliders. I can't turn down the music and listen to my own "brain off swag on" stuff or a video essay while also being able to hear the

surprisingly good SFX because the music's always drowning it out. The music isn't bad, but it isn't necessarily the vibe I want, and I feel like that's so important for this game. I really do think the dev learned more as they went on, because nearly every aspect of this game is so polished, but stuff like



volume sliders needs to be set up early on before you put in a buncha sounds in the wrong mixer groups or smthn.

