

Gastro Truck Melee

by Sarah Vessels

Hot dogs, tacos, and cutthroat culinary competition--Turnpike's Gastro Truck Melee has it all. This game is a quirky take on your usual MMORPG experience, and while it has some rough edges, there are enough questionably-meaty innards to satisfy your cravings for several weeks' play. Let's dig right in.

You begin your savory journey by choosing from one of three classes: Food Truck Owner, Restaurant Critic, or the basic Customer. Each class has its merits and weaknesses, and there's no one set way to play a given class. The Food Truck Owner is the default option, and its skill tree focuses on cooking abilities, salesmanship, and the ability to wield your chosen food as a weapon.

The Restaurant Critic is a kind of bard/ranger option as far as a traditional RPG goes, with perks ranging from Barbed Tongue and other persuasion techniques to the ability to intimidate Food Truck Owners into giving you extra food in return for a good review. The Critic is also the only class that can use ranged weapons, including the deadly sauerkraut-flinging power of the Krauttoss which becomes especially deadly after you unlock the Spicy!! Mustard mod.

The Customer's rise to power starts out slowly compared to the other classes, but by level ten you can easily be one of the richest players at your level. The Customer is all about eating and investing your money in the food trucks you think will do best. I only leveled my Customer to level thirty, but I definitely developed an appreciation for its depth: it is the class easiest to learn but hardest to master.

For the sake of this review, I'll be focusing on my time as Food Truck Owner. You have the option of developing your cooking talents in many directions at once, or putting points into only one cuisine for maximum power. I opted to put the majority into Traditional-Style Pizza, with a few in Salesmanship and only three in Girth by the time I was level fifty. I saw many Food Truck Owners focusing in Girth as a primary skill, and it's certainly doable, but I preferred to inflict damage with my food rather than my gut. It really just comes down to personal



efficient route to move a tool over every part of a surface. In this case, you're wiping away yellow biofilm from a mouthful of pearly whites. Visually, you're inside the mouth staring out. It's an unpleasant vantage point for the task at hand.

Each level (a brushing session) is time-limited.

Brush away the required amount of gunk and you'll move on to the next level. Fall behind, and you'll start the next level at a disadvantage. If you fail by a lot, and often, your virtual teeth will begin to rot out of your virtual skull and tumble from your virtual lips right before your eyes. If you didn't already suffer from that recurring nightmare, you will now. The first time it happened to me, my stomach flipped with panic and I instinctively slapped a hand over my own mouth. You've been warned.

Unlockables include new brushes, new flavors of paste, and a flossing minigame. The brushes all look the same, they're just painted different colors and bear different brand names (none of which you'd recognize—a missed opportunity). The paste flavors have a small effect on the tongue's behavior.

The tongue is your foil. It wags about like an air dancer at a



Social behavior in players, Ravatars are equipped with spray cans, cleaning tools, and other methods of modifying, prettyfying and cleaning their lunar compartments. It is not uncommon to stumble upon a contingent of Ravatars grooming each other in the pale blue glow of the earth, as it slowly dances behind them. At these times I see the emergent art of this game, a ruleset that creates a sincere complimentarity on the awe-inspiring ingenuity of humanity coupled with about a game that is only available to the highest economic tier. I find a certain edge of bitterness in saying such wonderful things Fortunately, companies and universities are lining up to offer sponsorships and scholarships for passionate individuals willing to join the Lunar cause, while socially-minded players are spending their days building more Ravatars to drive down the cost of the game—because after all, the moon is made of us.