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28 Free Game Picks From *Ludum Dare 28*

Posted by Chris Priestman   December 17, 2013 at 1:19 pm

Last weekend saw another Ludum Dare pass. This time, it was number 28, and the theme was "You Only Get One." Ludum Dare is a 48-hour game jam Competition (no actual prizes) which sees developers working by themselves to create a game that hopefully applies to the theme in some way.

Aside from the competition, there's also a longer three-day Jam, which has slightly more relaxed rules. People can use assets from previous development projects of their own, and they can work in teams if they so wish.

For Ludum Dare 28, 2065 games have been created over the three days, and I've tried to go over as many of them as I can to find ones that are worth giving a look. As such, below is a list of games and my thoughts on them, with links to go and play them. Of course, I'd love it if you'd check them out, but don't forget the rest of the entries, which you can see the giant list of here. We'll be covering more Ludum Dare entries on top of this, so please send them to editors@indiestatik.com.

TITAN SOULS
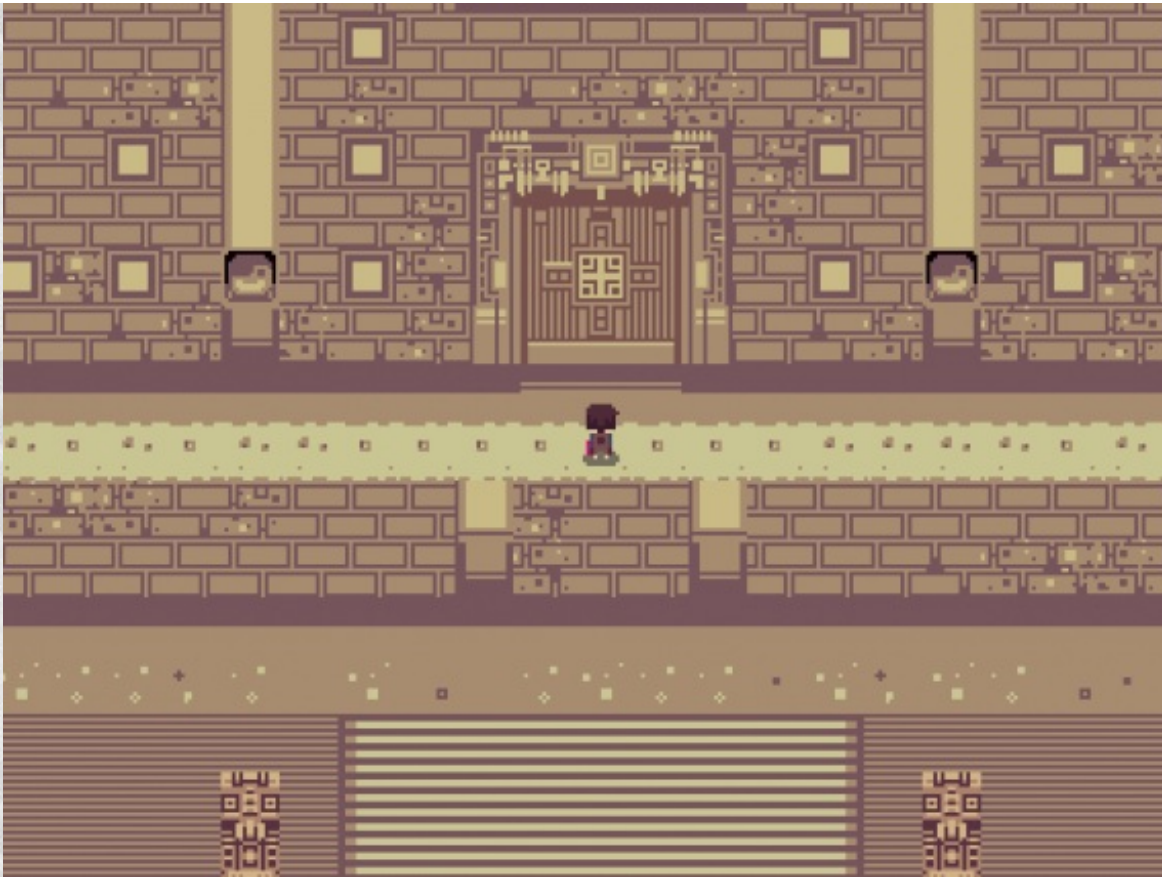
Shadow of the Colossus, except cuter. TITAN SOULS gives you one arrow to kill the four titans locked away in the temples that branch off from the central starting point. It's a gorgeous isometric action-adventure with some incredible music. The music really gives the game soul throughout. Really great work.

The titan fights are pretty tricky as you work out what to do in order to defeat them. Get hit once, and you're reset to the center of the overworld and will have to make your way back, which may become a little annoying. The secret is to be observational and look for the weak points. Make good use of your roll, too.

Make sure you stick with the game and get to the ending as well, which really fits in with the Shadow of the Colossus vibe the game has, truly. Oh, and if you get stuck beyond the fourth door, then all I'll say is that you'll want to make sure you look out for any peculiarities in the room.

Underbyte

Things kick off in Underbyte as you attempt to make the first jump in a Mario-like world, but fall down into a pit and fall for a long time. Upon reaching the bottom, you find yourself in a minus world, a garbage dump, where visual glitches and bugs are part of the décor. There are also a whole bunch of other yous running around, all of whom failed to make that jump. You discover that down here, you have the ability to quadruple-jump and shoot bullets until your heart's content.

The shooting in Underbyte is pretty great. The other yous explode when being killed, and the bullets feel weighty and hit with impact. The puzzles slow you down enough to ensure the game isn't a complete run-'n'-gun, but they do involve shooting explosive boxes to destroy your way through buggy blockades. But what really makes Underbyte such a truly wonderful experience is the music. It's so energetic and cheerful, enthusing you to press on and enjoy just being inside this action-platformer.

DISTANT WORLD FOR THE BOTH OF US
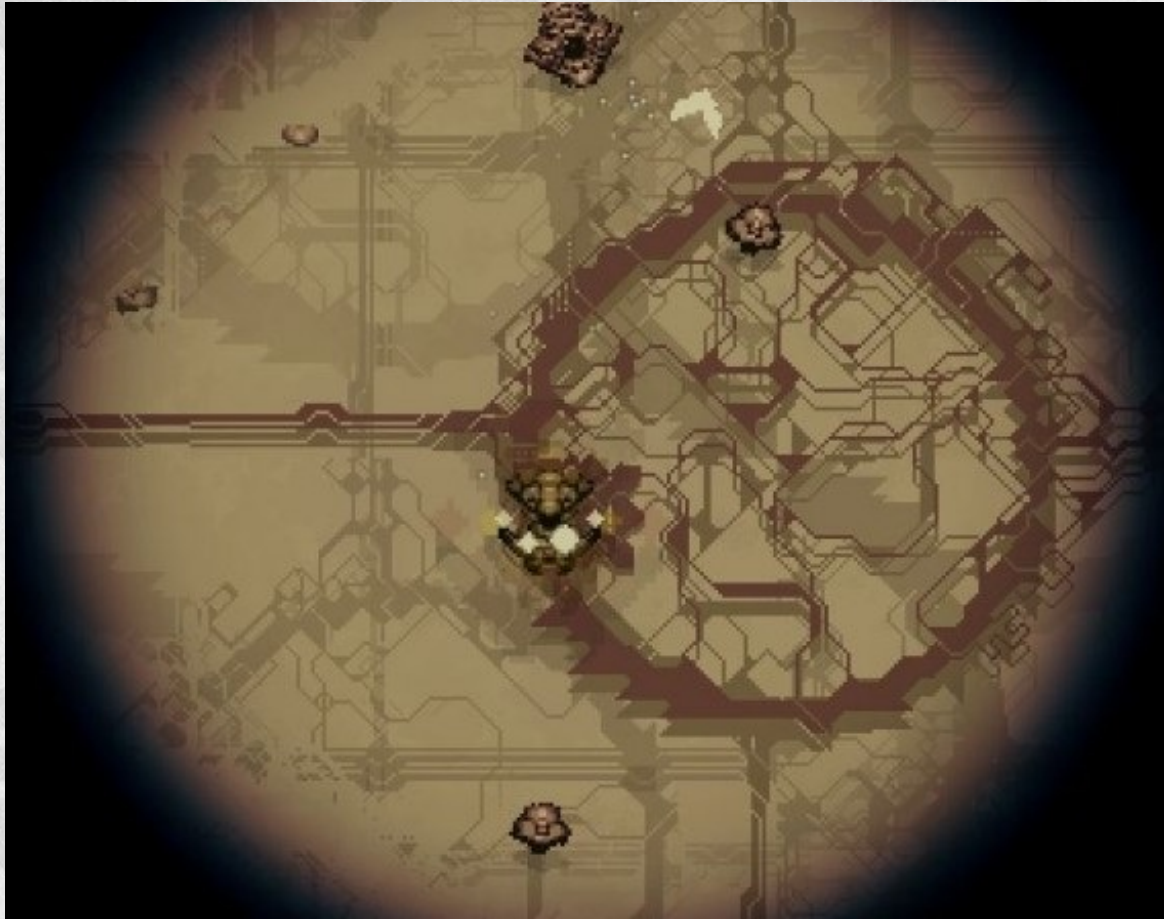
As you can see, Cellusious has gifted his game with some fantastic pixel art. I had to call a time-out just so I could stare at the intricate details in the background for a while. Once I was ready, it was back to shooting. Unusually for the genre, you're stuck to a gear in DISTANT WORLD FOR THE BOTH OF US, and it's this that you spin upon, trying to avoid the incoming bullets from the angry mushrooms coming at you from all sides. You're not travelling anywhere, just going in circles.

As you shoot the enemies that surround you, which seem to grow overwhelming in number quite early on, you may pick up the odd strange symbol. I think it's a power-up as my semi-automatic firing was traded for larger spreadshots at some point, as if it were a shotgun. The biggest shame was when the ballistics and explosive deaths got a little too much, and the game started to judder. But it also fitted with the feeling of nearing death, too.

I won't spoil the end, but once you get there, you'll discover the game's link to the theme.

Fountain

The audio thumps in Fountain already haunt me. The take on the theme here is, presumably, that you only get one chance, or one life. At the start, you walk your near-to-death character into the fountain of youth, which lies at the center of this square land. This then regenerates her and brings back full color to the game. Your task isn't made clear, but you'll then explore the lands that lie around this fountain. There are forests, lakes and deserts, as well as a disco section, or that's how I referred to it.

Unfortunately, your new lease of life doesn't last very long, and so the grey will start to overtake the colors, and in no time at all, the lady will be old once again, slowing in her pace, and then the game ends as she dies. Your back at the title screen, and you know there's much more to explore than what you managed to see. So you head back in, this time knowing what will happen and with an intent to battle it. Yes, you can drink from the fountain again, but your life seems shorter every time.

Fountain becomes this haunting recycle of near-death, with your desperately fighting away the age in order to find some objects that

are scattered around the edges of this world. I presume that it is possible to see something different happen if you manage to collect all of the objects. But I'm satisfied enough just with the chilling music and desperate attempts to clutch a little longer on to life.

Singular

This one surprised me a few times. It's an action-puzzle game in which you play a fearful green circle surrounded by the foul, flesh-eating red circles. Think of them as a bacteria that this green circle doesn't want to get anywhere near. You have to destroy the reds one at a time, but doing so causes a circular force to be exerted from them. This force pushes the other circles around, and so you need a combination of forward planning and quick reactions to ensure that the green circle never gets touched.

The green circle talks to you before each level, giving you some hints as to how you may be able to use the different types of circles to your advantage. Actually managing to work out a way to solve each puzzle, despite knowing how each of the various elements work, however, proves to be a little more difficult. One moment that really surprised me and had me giggling was when I accidentally pushed a red circle into another, and they multiplied so fast that they filled the screen in half a second. It was crazy.

There are a few silly moments like that to be found in Singular, so give the game a go. A fun puzzler that I wasn't expecting to be so personable and challenging.

0RBITALIS
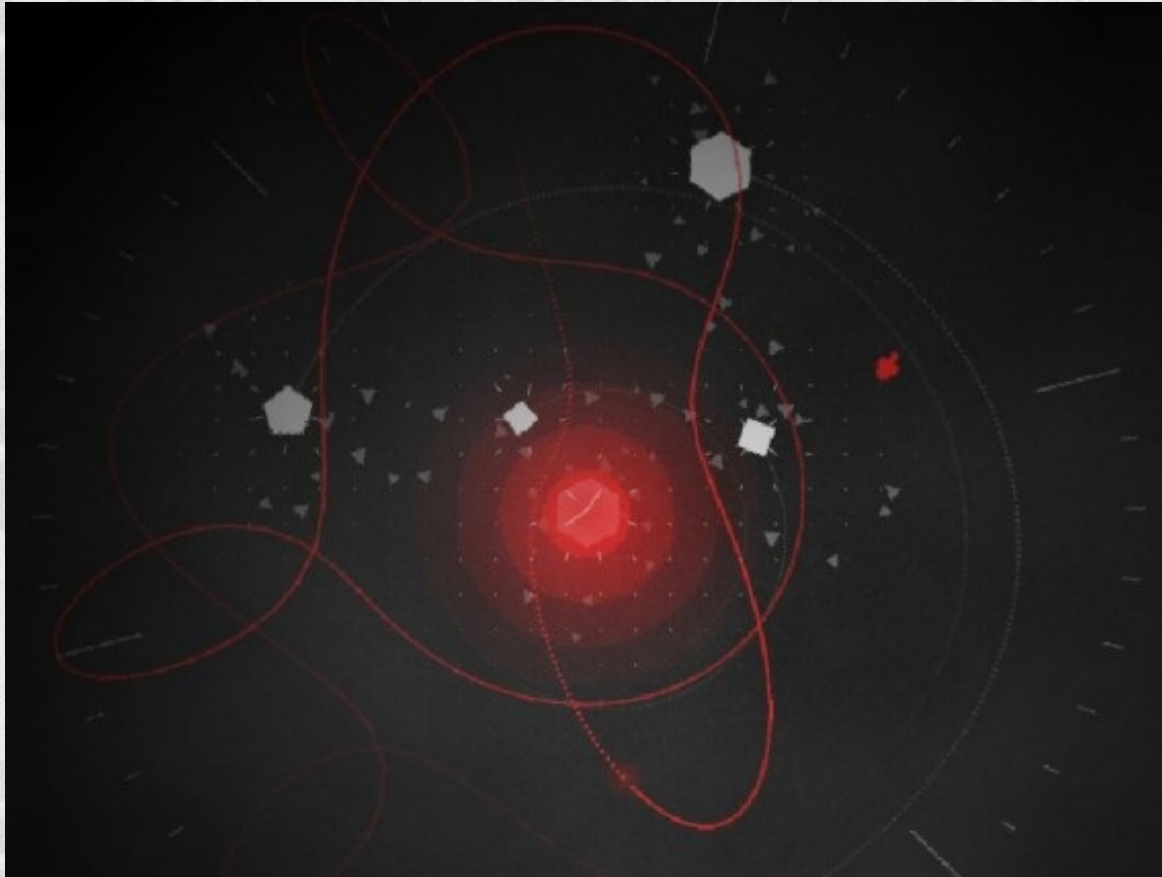
You only have one shot to launch a satellite so that it's within orbiting range of the central star for long enough to complete the level. Your satellite is launched from the outer rim, and you use your mouse to aim your shot. What you'll want to be spending most of your time with is the dotted line that predicts the orbit your satellite will take. Once you think it's lined up right, you let the satellite go and hope that it doesn't shoot off into the void or smash into the star or any of its surrounding planets.

0RBITALIS is a tough game, but very fun to mess around with, making tiny tweaks with each attempt to see if you can get any closer to success. Sometimes, you'll want to make use of the small planets orbiting the star to gain tiny tweaks in the trajectory, and this

introduces the need to launch the satellite at the right time, as well as at the right angle. The presentation is noisy in visuals and audio to give you the feeling that you're looking through a aged machine's interface. A very playful and surprisingly strategic game.

Princess Kingdom

This wonderful, emergent little game has you playing as the princess who sets out to save the hero. They've been kidnapped by the Evil, you see. Unfortunately, she only has one seed with her to do the job. Luckily, there's a farmer nearby who offers his services, so you give him the seed, and he produces wheat. You then pass this on to a brewer, who creates beer. The beer is then used to recruit soldiers, who are pumped enough by the alcohol to head into the caves full of evil, a sacrificial journey.

There's much more to the Princess Kingdom than that, too. Soon, you'll be gathering more and more resources and dishing them out

to various workers to produce a constant cycle of resource shifting, managed entirely by your clicks. Lots to discover in here, though it takes a while to get going after you've seen the first wave of features introduced. You can probably spend a while with Princess Kingdom.

Shine

Here's a smart and quite tricky platformer that you'll need both hands for. With one hand, you'll be moving the wizard Lucia through the dark passages filled with spikes, crumbling floors and moving platforms. With your mouse, you'll need to drag Lucia's ball of light through the levels without it touching any of the walls, floors or just about anything else. The light orb also acts as the only way of seeing the levels with Lucia, so you'll need to move both of them through at about the same time.

What makes the game tricky is that it often separates Lucia from the orb with multiple tiers. What it effectively does is ensure that you can't, or don't dare, get the orb too close to Lucia, so each step has to be made carefully. It doesn't do anything unusual in terms of level design otherwise, but it doesn't need to because the mechanics ensure that, anyway. Shine also has a cute story to

accompany it, which just sees Lucia trying to end the Age of Darkness by restoring light to the lighthouse that shines all over the world, usually.

Dead Planet

Didn't you know that you only get one planet?

I love the epic intro to Dead Planet, with the choral sounds echoing the doom that the words detail, telling you that the human race is to be wiped out for destroying the only planet they're given. Naturally, being the stubborn bastards we are, we send out three huge satellites to keep the nasty aliens from wrecking the planet entirely.

Your task is to rotate these three large satellites so that the aliens hit them and bounce off. There are at least a few different types of alien, with the bigger red ones being your standard enemy, the smaller red ones coming in faster and in a conga, while the yellow

ones disable your satellites by chewing on it for a couple of seconds. The game isn't too hard most of the time as it's only really when you get a couple of the yellow ones coming in that it becomes challenging.

Of course, it's all about getting the highest score possible, and so you'll probably want to outdo yourself a few times before moving on.

Crew: A Futuristic Detective Game

Here we have a "futuristic" version of Clue, by which the developer means you attempt to track down the murderer of the captain of a spaceship. You're given rooms to investigate, which will reveal which room is the place of the murder, and also what weapons were not used to commit the murder. You can also talk to the crew, who will never lie to you, so the idea is to attempt to deduce who it was that committed the murder out of what you're told.

Once you've got the murderer, the location and the weapon, you can then accuse. If you get it right, you'll be graded by how right you

were and how many clues you needed before getting all of the information. If you get it wrong, you can try again.

At the moment, the game is a little more difficult than it's supposed to be, apparently, as the dialogue inter-laps make it highly difficult or impossible to be led to just one person. However, you can guess and get the right answer, of course. That explains why I completely suck at the game and didn't really feel like I understood what was going on, or how exactly I was supposed to get the right answer. The tutorial is on the Ludum Dare entry page, so make sure to read up on it.

BOIDCAK

I insist that you say, "BOIDCAK," out loud, because it's a sweet and adorable way to alter your dialect. Plus, it will give the two things

that this little game is all about. You play a BOID with stupid, fat arms, which is unfortunate as it means you can only carry one of the three weapons with you as you try to escape the "NIGHTMARE NEO-BIRTHDAY CAKE DUNGEON."

So, with your spoon, knife or fork, you head into the game with twenty cake-filled floors to fight through. There are mean enemies that will push BOID around, so ideally, you should smack them about a bit before they can kill BOID. However, your weapon won't last forever, so being careful to not overuse it and see it break is a tactic you should employ. Luckily, the cakes in the levels can be dug into, and inside there may be a cupcake, which will repair a broken weapon or level it up so it's more powerful.

You also have to manage BOID's durability by eating cakes to restore it. The durability goes down every time you swing BOID's weapon, you see. So BOIDCAK is a game in which death is very likely as you have to manage running through the dungeon, eating cake and fighting back the enemies with ensuring BOID can still fight back with his tired wings and a non-broken weapon. A delightful cakey adventure that tastes quite delicious.

SUPERBLADE
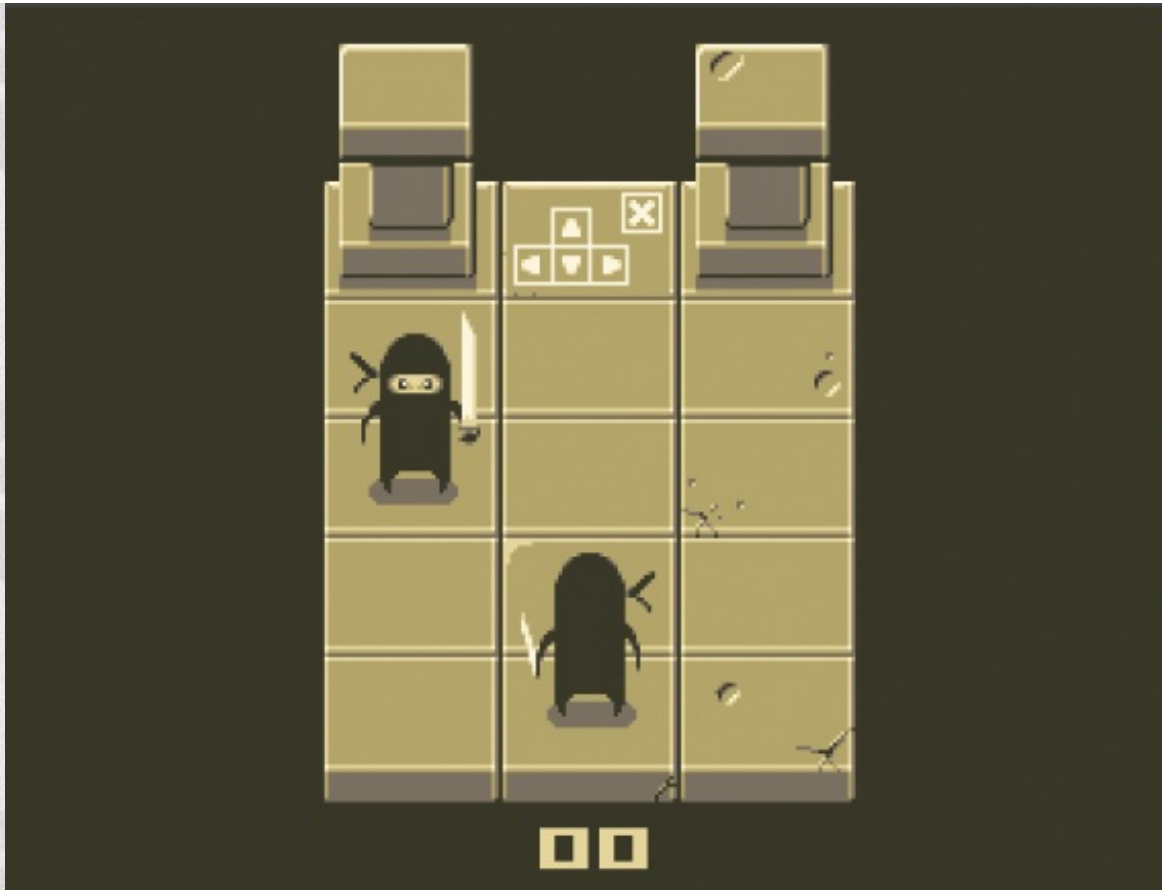
SUPERBLADE is a test of your reaction speed and movement on a grid. You play a ninja that can only attack one square ahead with a quick swish of the sword. Your enemy ninjas move around on a beat and come with swords, shotguns and fireballs, each of which need to be played against differently to be beaten. Making matters worse is the fact that some of the grids are populated with spikes, so you have to dodge those, as well as your enemy.

Your task is not just to defeat the ninjas, but to kill as many of them as you can consecutively to amount a high score. It's pretty tough to get more than a few before you get caught out by a cheeky, armed ninja. I love that the music builds up steadily over time as that drives you on while playing at first. It's bold and meaty, too, much like the game. "Concise" is another word I'd use. A basic game with solid mechanics and with a great look. Challenging too.

One Arrow

With just one arrow, you have to fend off waves of creatures as they appear in this multi-tiered arena with you. Every time you fire the arrow, you'll have to run over to where it landed to retrieve it before being able to fire again. I love this mechanic, just because it means that sometimes you have to put yourself in danger in order to defeat your enemy.

As you can see, One Arrow is a beautiful game with a colorful forest to jump around inside, and the smooth animations add extra character to the scene, even going so far as to have hair blowing in the breeze. It's not too hard, or at least it doesn't feel it, but that may be because you don't take damage. Instead, your main interest is in being fast as the seconds left on the timer once you beat each wave become your score for that level. If you do get hurt by an enemy, then you fall over for a second, so it's a time penalty, essentially.

I love that there are different creatures with varied attacks, but I do wish there were more of them as shooting the orange chaps gets a little repetitive.

Fever Blue

Fever Blue manages to be thick with spacey mystery, even without music. I really wish it did have music, though. You play as Blue, who wakes up in a void by himself and with no clue as to what to do. Before long, you'll help him find a gun and a guide, the latter warning you of the danger up ahead, while the former gives you some confidence in handling whatever it may be.

Interestingly, what you come across is a maze-like series of structures that you can't wander as you wish. Instead, you need to use markings on the floor to change the way that an arrow is pointing, which is the way you're able to travel. You then have to work out the way you get around the mazes while shooting back green slimes, black spectres and vicious turrets. Your aim is to get inside the temple and see what lies within.

A good mix of mystery, puzzles and action. Just a shame it doesn't have music to make it even better.

No Mistakes

This game is terrifying! And also a little too hard. A computer voice gives your simple instruction at the start.

"No mistakes," it says. You're sitting at a computer, with bloodstains and cigarettes populating the scene. Cheerful.

Then the printer starts printing something out, and after it scrolls the paper out a little, you'll see a long number. What you have to do is then type that number out into the computer with no mistakes, and you must do it before the number scrolls off the screen. It's a little too hard, and you'll probably join the seven-second club many, many times. I love how scary the situation feels.

Only one light

It's short with just four levels, but Only one light has a lovely tale to go along with its need-for-speed platforming. You play a single flame in the snow, and one that needs to sustain their life for as long as possible. The reason this flame is so important is because it will bring back color and light in this world, just in time for the festive celebrations.

In the levels themselves, you have to light a series of matches that are laid out for you to hop across, igniting them as you do. They provide a little bit of bounce, too, so ideally, you'll use them to get through the levels in mere seconds. If you don't, then it's quite possible that the flame will die out, and you'll have to restart the level. Sad, but true.

Doubt
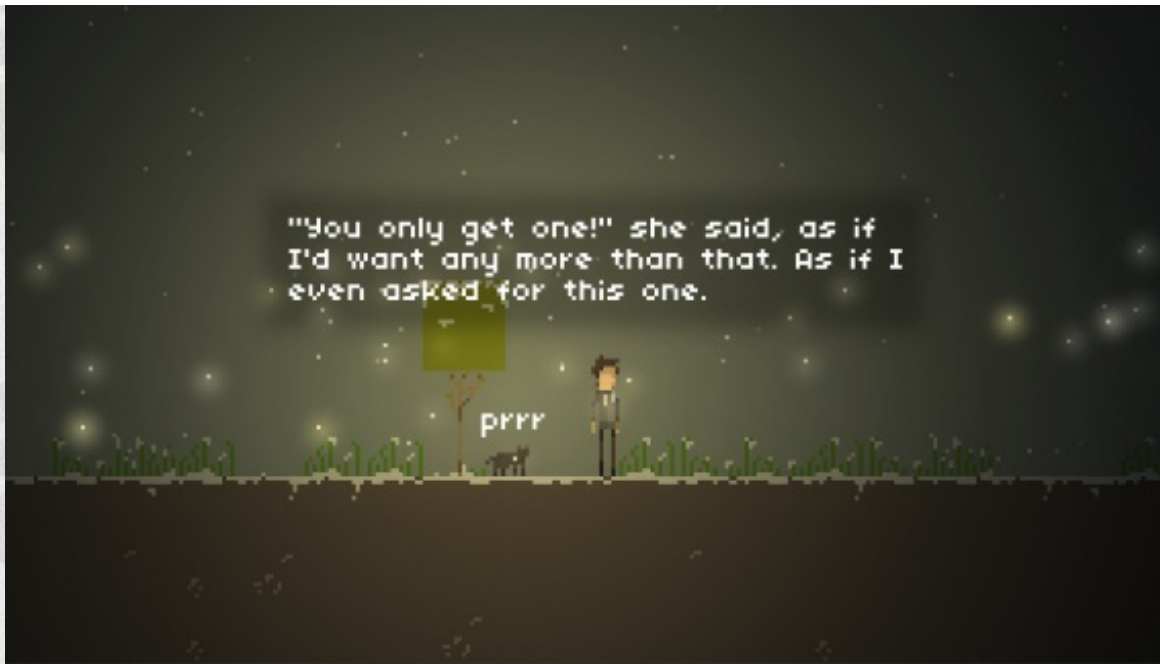
A beautiful mix of pixel art, cat meows, walking through atmospheric countryside and dreamy sequences of events. Doubt looks the part, and although I was certainly gripped by the game's mysterious nature, I think it could do with being a little more intriguing than walking through doors and repeating hillsides. I think everyone who plays the game will get a little turned off by the four-door puzzle, too.

Still, it's a very wonderful little game, considering the time it was made in. Perhaps it could be brushed post-compo into something even more engaging and dreamy, rather than becoming a little tedious after a few minutes.

Super Sneaky Sample Stealer

At first, you're a little nervous. You're being naughty. In Super Sneaky Sample Stealer, you travel between four vendors giving out free samples, but they only give one per person. Two of them close as the other two open, so in theory, I think it's possible to get a high score by just being patient for them each to open in turn.

What you're supposed to do, however, is get a sample from the two vendors that are open, but then you swap shirts without the security guards noticing. That's enough to convince the vendors that you're someone else, and therefore entitled to a free sample. You keep doing this until you accidentally get caught swapping shirts by one of the security guards, at which point you'll be thrown in jail and told how many samples you stole, how many shirts you wore and how long you were out there.

It feels a little unfinished as you can play the game endlessly and rack up a big score if you ensure you dodge the security. Having a time limit on how long you can play the game for would probably work.

KOSMOTROT

With purples and greens providing the sense of alien exploration, and an acoustic guitar and sweet voice singing you through, KOSMOTROT is a pleasant and somewhat memorable charge through four levels. You're an astronaut who is running out of oxygen, and as such, you have to get through the levels before you die. Stopping you along the way are cacti, underground creatures that spit at you, bugs that trip you over and rocks that need to be bashed through.

The challenge is mostly just one of navigation through a maze as the obstructions don't really do too much to slow you down, not as much as getting lost will, anyway. You have a charge attack that you can use to speed through straight passages, and it's also used to bash through rocks. I have no idea what happens if you don't make it to the end of the level in time because that never happened to me.

Tall Grass

This rather cute tribute to Pokemon has been made in PuzzleScript, and, yes, it is a puzzle game. It probably won't seem like it at first, though. You move a young boy through some grassy fields, and you soon encounter a small yellow creature that he calls Peewee. Together, they move across the the rest of the fields, at first playing soccer by kicking a ball into a goal. If you mess up and get the ball stuck, then you can always reset by pressing R.

After this, you'll come across some vicious creatures that have to be avoided at all costs as they patrol up and down. The hardest part is getting Peewee and yourself through intact. Every time you manage it, you'll acquire a new red-and-white ball that helps you get rid of them. A sweet little tale with a good mix of narrative puzzles and careful dodging.

Burial

Burial makes great use of Twine to bring its themes of digital existence and life after death. You may be interested to know that it's based on the short story Dilitriel by Aliceffekt. You start off with logging into some kind of system after it has booted up. Once you're in, you find yourself at a train station, which you can explore to the north and south.

In both directions, there isn't too much to see, but what you will find are strange, esoteric symbols that you can inspect a little. Every couple of minutes, the white message band that goes through the middle of the game page will inform you that a train is arriving. You can try to get onto it, but you're told there are no doors. I haven't actually worked out if the game's point is based on being stuck at this train station or if there's somewhere else to travel. Either way, Burial is an interesting game that paints plenty of images in your head with its vivid descriptions, and the basic, but smart interface is great.

M'Lady and The Tramp

In M'Lady and The Tramp, you only get one virginity, and it's your job to help a rather, um, warty guy get rid of his. It's a WarioWare-style game, which means you're given several different tasks to perform by hammering your keyboard and moving your mouse around, each of which come with a timer. If you don't perform the action required before the time runs out, then you'll lose that section. I should say that the game is for adults only, really, but the hilarious cartoon visuals make all of the crude scenes and jokes quite light-hearted. Still, expect scenes depicting gross sex, man-stroking and man boobs. Some of the tasks include brushing knotty hair, cracking mirrors with your looks, scratching your spotty arse and purchasing a bag of chips.

In the Story mode, you'll get a ranking at the end of it for how well you did. I played through a few times and found that a couple of quick scenes didn't work as well as the others, mostly the ones in which you have to drag the mouse back and forth. The ones in which you have to type a word that appears on the screen really takes you by surprise the first time around, too, and so those don't work as well as those confined to the arrow keys and mouse clicks.

Still, M'Lady and The Tramp is a hilarious and gross trip through the loss of one guy's virginity. I'm undecided if that's the majority of games or if the game is unique in that respect (that was a bad joke).

Going Down

You're the pilot on a commercial flight, and for whatever reason, the plane is going down, and there's nothing you can do about it. In Going Down, death is an inevitability for everyone on board, except for the one person who manages to make it out with the single parachute available. Your task is to grab that parachute, and maybe a weapon, and then smack your way through the crowds of passengers to escape from the other end of the plane.

It's a chaotic, and rather hilarious, desperate struggle for survival as everyone turns mad and thinks only of their own life, not worrying about taking a fist or umbrella to the faces of family and friends. It's quite hard, too. Once you get near to the other end of the plane, the passengers seem to manage to gather all around the door, and one of the buggers always gets out with the parachute.

Go Long!!

As an up-and-coming child athlete, you want to make your dad proud. So you sit there before the track and try to mentally prepare yourself for the next minute. Take drugs, drink and maybe even sing to your dad. That should help. When the minute is over, it's time to run as fast as you can by mashing the arrow keys to charge through the hurdles forever and ever, sending them high into the sky behind you.

Go Long!! feels like an amusing snippet of some crazy, cartoon-like, narrative-based game. It's a bit wacky in theme and how it looks, and the music comes in at the right time to really escalate the plight of the kid in this insane reality. Short, but a lot of fun, in other words, and worth playing for the giggle.

One-Minute Robbery
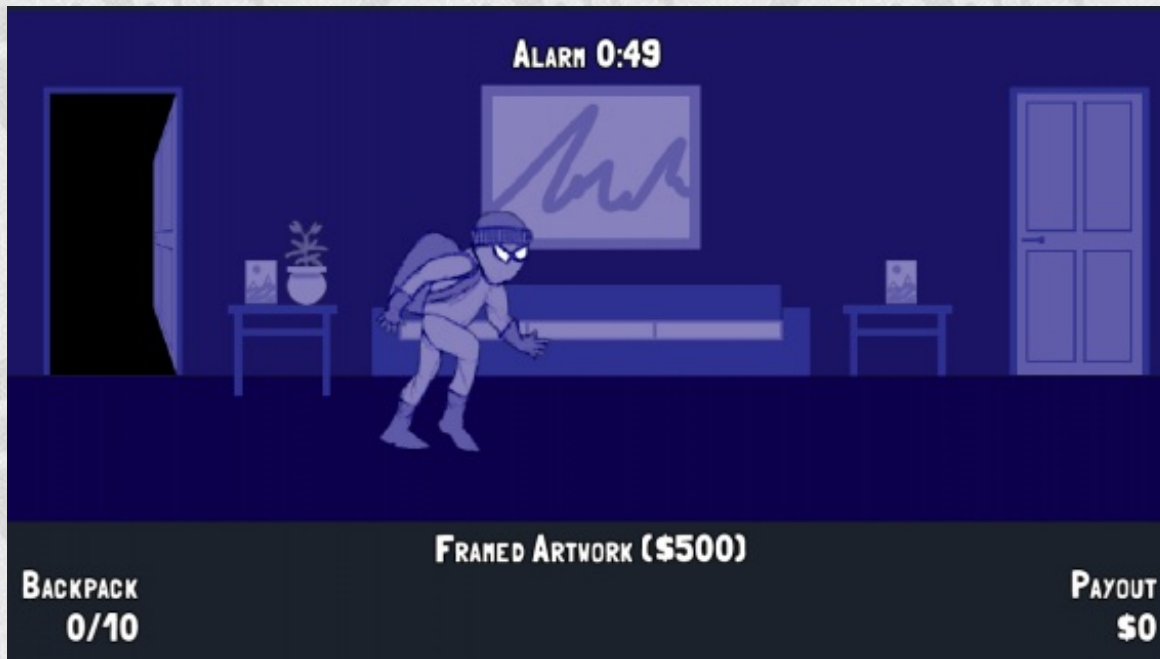
As the title says, you have one minute to perform a robbery. This game is entirely operated by mouse, so you just need to click items to grab them, double-click doors to go through them and click the floor where you want your robber to move. Before you start, you get to choose one perk to help with your robbery, such as a no movement penalty when carrying bigger items or being able to pack more smaller items into your backpack.

What One-Minute Robbery basically boils down to is replaying it a few times to learn that there's nothing of any value in the kitchen, so you avoid that, but nick as many paintings, and other valuable goods, as possible in order to get the best score.

Mother
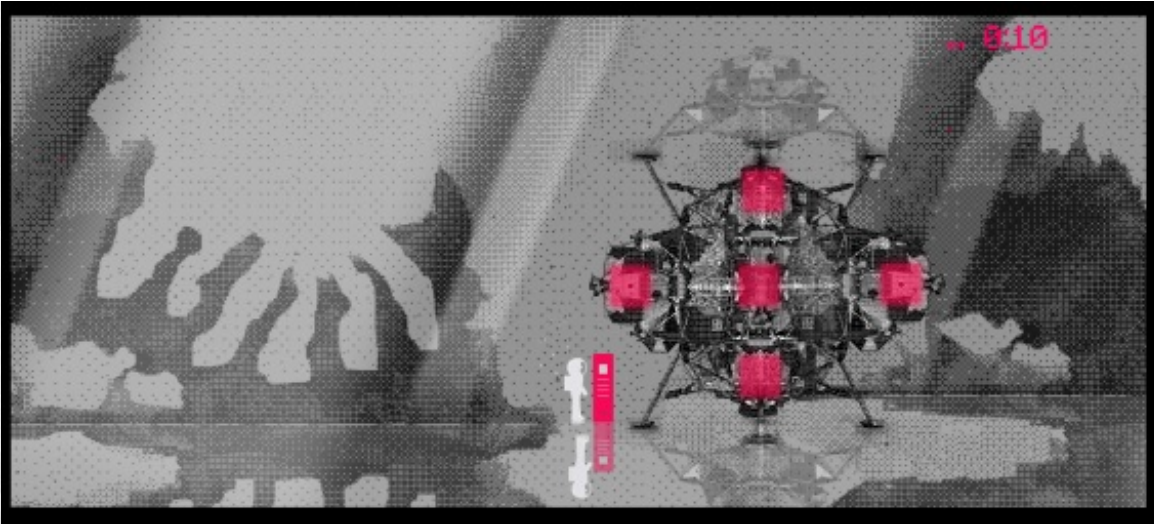
The slow breathing of an astronaut in a dithered space. What stands out about Mother is the tension that the sound design and slow movement provides. You're tasked with moving across the tiny slice of the planet you've landed on and finding a module that needs activating. You're given a series of instructions to follow, mostly holding down keys that spell out words at certain points in time. It involves a lot of waiting. Far too much waiting.

It's a shame, because the idea of having to fiddle with a module and perhaps repair it with more engaging mechanics could make Mother a great experience overall. Instead, the attempt to make the player absorb the aesthetics lean towards its becoming a little boring and tedious.

GAMEHAX
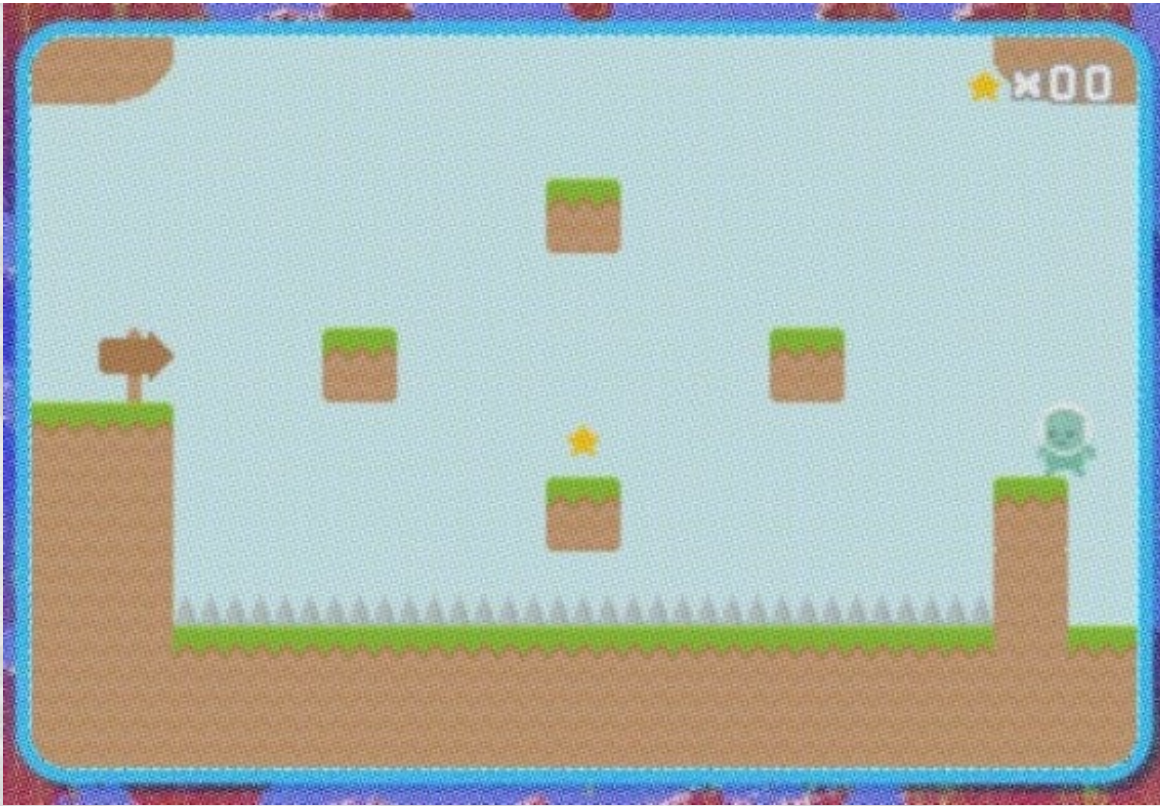
What seems like a fairly typical platformer opens up very quickly. You'll bounce over some spikes, grab a star, and then come to a dead end. Not being able to get through the lock in front of myself or jump up to the higher ledges, I doubled back on myself, hit a dead end and returned. At this point, I knew I was missing something. Then I noticed the message in the bottom-right of the screen, which told me a hack for the game to get a big double-jump.

You can jot down the cheat codes to the right of the game, which is a very cool feature to have, and almost a vital one, in fact. Once you've performed your first cheat, you'll start looking for others. You will also feel pretty unstoppable for a while. But soon enough, you discover that there is a slight penalty for having such a power. You'll come across puzzles that are designed around the abilities you can give yourself with the cheats, but you can only have one activated at a time.

To traverse some of the sections and to collect the stars, you'll need to make sure you have the appropriate cheat or hack activated. Otherwise, you could royally screw up. GAMEHAX is a surprising and smart puzzle game that makes you feel on top of the world before bringing crashing you back down to the ground, face-first.

Monocraft

A cute tribute to Minecraft, Monocraft lets you place a single block anywhere inside the shared online room to help with a collaborative structure. You can fly around as you like to get a good view of the cubes that have already been placed. You'll see some wooden blocks, brick blocks and kitten blocks, and a Notch block is in there, too. I placed the brick block next to Notch's face nearer the top.

I managed to come across a server bug, but hopefully, you won't. It involves placing a block and hearing the sound that indicates that you've placed a block, but not actually seeing the block appear. If this happens to you, and you do want to see what type of block you placed, then you'll have to reload the game page. Once you've placed your block, that's your job done; there's nothing more to do. However, you can come back on a regular basis to see how the structure has changed with other people adding their blocks. I like these collaborative projects, and you can't argue that Monocraft doesn't fit with the theme rather well.

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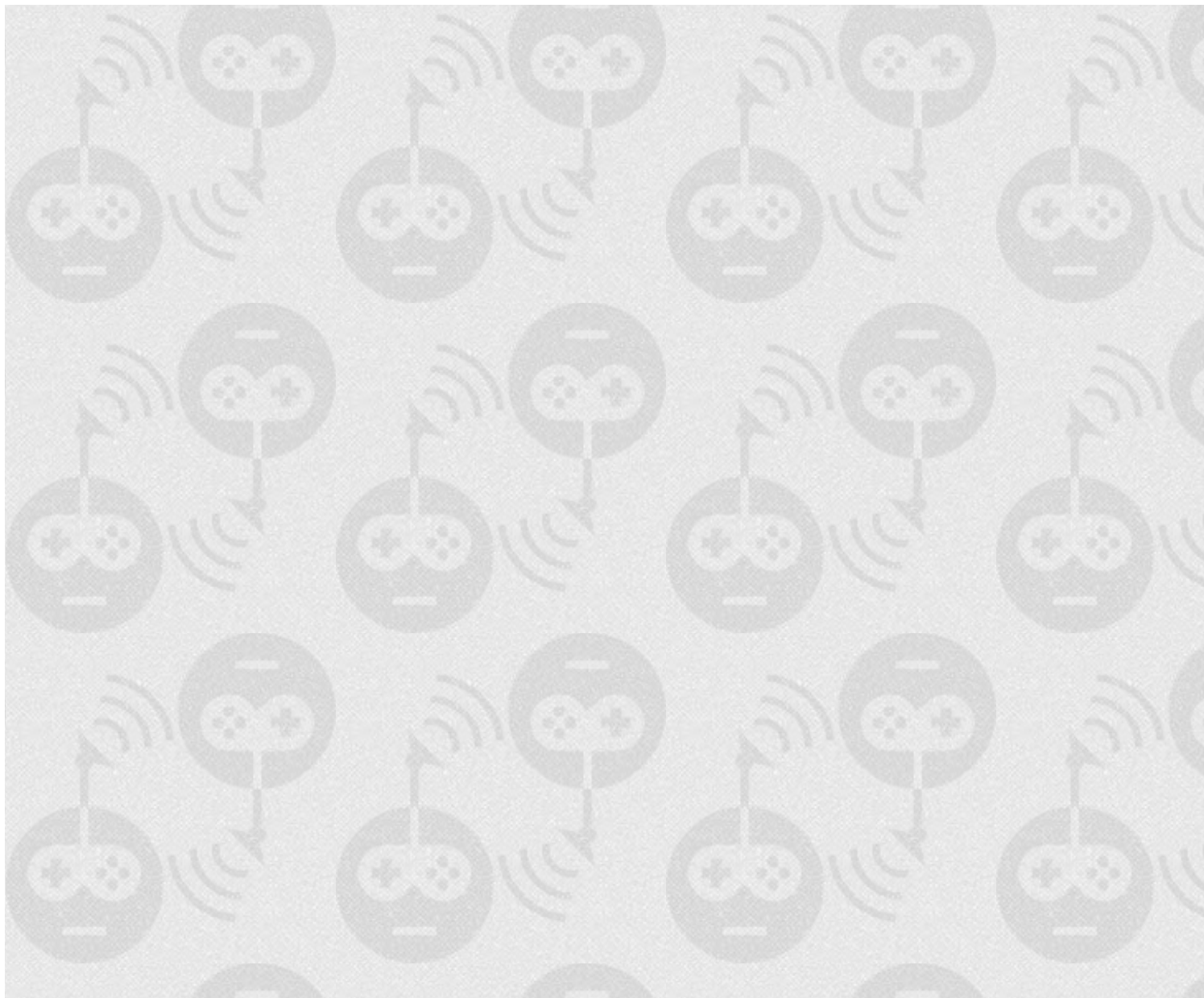**Ludum Dare 27 Compo & Jam Winners Are PROBE TEAM And NXTWPN10**
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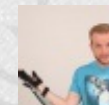**Chuck Other Passengers Overboard To Survive Disaster In Tinytanic**
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