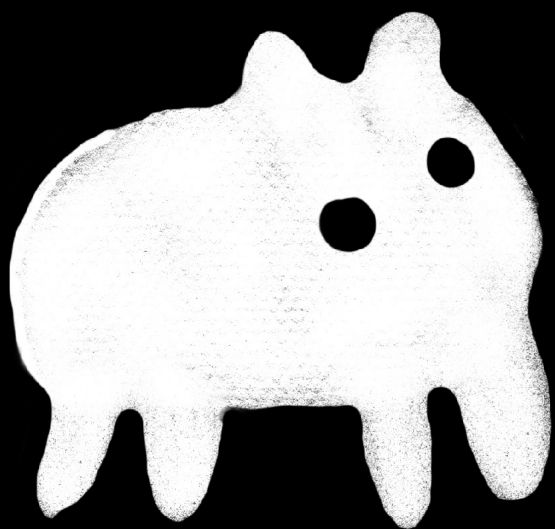


BABA IS



RULES ARE MEANT TO BE BROKEN

Written by **Bobby Jack**

Just as *Tetris* was simple-yet-good enough to sell millions of Game Boys, *Baba Is You* is a game perfectly suited to the Switch. Its pick-up-and-play nature, turn-based play style, and undemanding graphics suit Nintendo's cheery handheld down to the ground — it can't be a complete coincidence that the Switch is currently the sole console that can play this game.

At first glance, *Baba Is You* looks like a basic box-pushing game, in which the aim is to navigate a 2D screen turn-by-turn, ending up at the finish. Yet with one twist, the game introduces a world of possibilities: the rules themselves can be changed. Phrases such as "BABA IS YOU" and "KEY IS OPEN" help to define exactly what can be done, but since they are represented as in-game objects, they can be moved about and rearranged just like anything else. So "WATER IS SINK" can become "WATER IS PUSH" and all your previous assumptions need rethinking.

As all the best puzzle games do, *Baba Is You* creates far more opportunity and potential than its initial ruleset might suggest. It's an incredibly playful mechanic, leading to some bizarre and, occasionally, hilarious situations. "WALL IS YOU" gives you control of all the wall tiles in the game, moving together as one great Baba-substitute. But touching the flag still completes the level, even if you are a wall. Unless "FLAG IS WIN" has somehow been shuffled, and now it's time to think again.

As if rule-rewriting weren't liberating enough, *Baba Is You* adds a couple of small yet vital features which make the game even more enjoyable. The use of non-linear level selection means no level needs to be a dead-end, however fiendish, and the ability to undo moves gives this tricky puzzler more of a sandbox feel. Both

elements aid experimentation and contribute to a satisfying sense of freedom without diminishing from that crucial overall challenge — individual levels still retain their difficulty, but they're more pleasant to play with those edges rounded off.

Baba Is You delivers a real sense of accomplishment when each level is finally conquered. Time and time again I've found myself faced with a scenario in this game that seems utterly impossible, however many ways I turn it over, inspecting it from every angle. And then, eventually, something clicks, the pieces fall into place, and the solution appears, clear and obvious all along.

It's that individual puzzle design that really makes this game, of course. Just difficult enough to force your brain to work hard whilst still, most of the time, remaining achievable. Some levels remix others, yet their solution is utterly unique. This is the kind of design that gives you a quick peek behind the curtain before closing it back altogether. There are moments you can see the designer laughing at your futile attempts at progression — in an encouraging manner, of course.

Baba recently enjoyed their first birthday, and our review back in June 2019 awarded the game a solid 4/5 score. In the meantime, developer Hempuli has been hard at work on a level editor, streaming some of the process on Twitch. It remains to be seen whether anyone else can create such satisfying and captivating levels, but it's going to be fun finding out!

Baba Is You is a game that should be in every Switch library, for posterity if nothing else. But it's so much more than that: a compelling, infuriating, wondrous achievement that's been polished to perfection. It's a perfect demonstration of how quirky, innovative games have a welcoming home on the Switch.

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