Gavin Brandenburger

The Indie Dream

Coming from the new studio, Balloon games, Botany manor is a modest puzzle that places in the manor home of the Greene family. Follow the head of the Greene family as she returns from a trip away from home. Explore the home and cultivate many mystical flora that live around the period

The first thing to notice from Botany manor is the visuals. Botany manor has a simple clean aesthetic. Although being nearly the opposite from in visual tone the visuals are reminiscent of the Long Dark. However, where the Long Dark used its visuals to bring out the darkness in nature, Botany Manor seeks to bring out some of the light. It’s an aesthetic that allows everything to be easily recognizable and brings out some of the simpler beauties. Sadly, if your one to notice the signs of unity game with distant objects turning into a game of dots and boxes some of the visuals could distract you from the beauty this game has.

The whole game is bright and expressive. Every moment amazes in its ability to show the most complex of objects in the simplest of colors. Nothing is asking for the players attention, and nothing asking the game to do any more than it is. The game allows itself the room to let the player and the game interact. The player seeing the game, and not just the visuals that present the gameplay.

The soundscape of the manor goes hand in hand with the visual style. Many moments are scored perfectly by instruments I can’t even begin to guess at. Moments of discovery are always reinforced by music heralding your discovery. The end of chapters always feels like a triumphant march back to finish line as the music is at its loudest. And as you explore and think of the puzzles put Infront of you, the music leaves you be. There is nothing but the chirping of birds and the rustling of the leaves to keep you company as you spend time in the manor’s gardens. Everything works perfectly together to put you in the mood to just relax and enjoy the experience. Creating the perfect casual atmosphere that would go just as well into a meditative playlist.

The experience itself of solving puzzles and exploring the manor is similar in its meditative nature. From the first moment the game sets its tone as a very casual puzzler. Everything you need to know is laid out nearby and easily accessible. Every puzzle involves you trying to a new species of plant. Each one with its own magical properties that need to be accounted for.

There were many times in which I wished the puzzles could have been just a little bit harder. Or maybe just a few more of them. Every time I felt like I might not understand the answer or feel like I must be missing something, it would just click int place. It’s both the perfect difficulty to serve as a relaxing game to spend a few hours in, but also not easy enough to be a joke.

The main annoyance from the core gameplay is only seen through the light of how well the visuals and audio do to set the tone of the game. More than once I wish the character was just a centimeter smaller to fit through a gap, and very early on there was a clear use of an invisible wall to hold back the player as they solved a puzzle. Along with a few more minor inconveniences, like not being able to read notes while holding something, while able to read other things perfectly fine. Inconsequential all things considered, yet with an experience this tightly packed, small things that take you out of the world can really hurt the immersive nature of the game.

And as tightly packed as this game is, coming in for an experienced puzzler at less than two hours. The gameplay loop is just as well refined. Much like Lucas Popes’ Obra dinn, the game sets you forth to fill out a book based on what you find around the manor. And when you complete a puzzle, a small vignette plays as the information about the plant is filled out and a small painting of its likeness is made. Every plant uses a wholly unique method to sprout. Sometimes leaving you wishing there were some hidden note to look out for that would be helpful in the future. Although the wishing really comes from just wanting more, more puzzles and more manor to explore.

Never overstaying its welcome, perhaps leaving too soon, Botany Manor is the perfect experience you hope for from an indie game of its genre. A simple adventure that lets you spend some time just enjoying the experience. A few puzzles that let you learn and think about things in a new way. Its one of those rare games that comes along and is just enjoyable to experience, not wanting for the player to do anything more than open it up and enjoy their time.