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CIS 487 Game Review “Cave Story”

Doukutsu Monogatari (Cave Story) is a 2D adventure game by Studio Pixel. Studio Pixel’s sole member is a man by the name of Daisuke Amaya. Over the course of 5 years this one man made every piece of this game including the soundtrack, art, and storyline. Then he gave it away for free. To this day you can still download this game legally free of charge from various sites that host it. The game isn’t demanding as it only requires Windows 98 or later and DirectX 5.0 or later. There isn’t any listed minimum requirements due to the fact this game is an indie game. There is no installation you just unzip the files and it is ready to play. To install the English translation patch simply run the exe and choose the folder that holds Cave Story.

Cave Story is a story about a robot that wakes up in the middle of a cave and has no memory of what has happened to him or where he even is. Through exploration you find out that you are underground near a society of creatures called Mimigas. He quickly learns of a plot led by an evil entity named “The Doctor” to use the Mimigas to take over the surface world, and he must save them. You play as this unnamed robot throughout the whole game. The user interface is really simple. You use the arrow keys to move around. The Z key and X key are jump and shoot respectively, A and S cycle through your different weapons and Q accesses the inventory screen. There is a displayed health bar and weapon level bar. You explore the cave system as you find out more about what has happened in the past to these Mimigas, as well as more about what you can do to save them.

The artwork in this game was chosen to give it a retro feel. So it appears to be using graphics similar to the SNES or Sega Genesis systems. This suits the gameplay very well as it is very reminisce of Metroid and Castlevania style. I personally think this makes many of the stages and characters very memorable. The pixilated art style gives the whole game a gritty feel. As if one was underground (which is where the game takes place). Following suit the music is also in a retro style. The music matches the setting very much. I personally feel that the music is actually one of the best points of this game. Each area’s music is so fitting and diverse that one wonders how simple noises could be so different when presented at each level. There are a few “easter eggs” for the player to find. Most of them involve sexual innuendo or implications.

What makes this game so good is the fact that everything about it melds together into one masterpiece that is simply “just right.” The game is challenging enough that it feels rewarding, yet not so difficult that it has huge moments of frustration where the player will want to stop playing. The story is engaging so you want to find out more, yet not so deep that the player looses himself in the many plot points. The music and art are beautifully presented, yet not as the main point so the player doesn’t lose sight of the story. Everything is just as it should be. There aren’t many bad points. The only thing I can think of is a single part which is some people find to be a bit tedious. Other than that everyone only has good things to say about it.

Other games in this genre are widely considered to be the best of their time like Super Metroid and Castlevania Symphony of the Night. However, all these games have many parts that are very repetitive and tedious. Cave Story has only one part that could be considered tedious, which in my mind makes it far better.

I feel this game is designed at to be playable at the younger teen audience and up. Yet, I feel this game was meant for the people a little bit older, in their late teens early twenties, who had experience with the older games as Cave Story is very much a tribute to them. As far as I have found there are no known design flaws in this game.

Cave Story to me is a masterpiece. Very few games can even come close to what this one is. The love the creator put into making this game is very apparent in this game as you play through it. When someone asks me to show them a game that proves that video games are an art form, I tell them the story of Cave Story; the story of one man making the game of his dreams and giving it away so that the world can enjoy it too. The simple yet effective gameplay, the beautiful art and music, and endearing storyline and characters, make this price tag of 0 Yen ($0.00 USD) a hard bargain to pass up. This game is an example of what we as a class can aspire to do. Nothing added to this game could make it any better in my eyes. Adding anything or improving the graphics/music would only take away from the retro feel this game gives so well. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again. *Cave Story is a masterpiece*. For $0.00 you’re going have a hard time finding a better deal.