

Demo Roundup - 30th June

The Doorframe - *"Locked away in a facility far underground lies a mysterious and foreboding doorframe. There is no door, yet it remains an open gateway into a familiar place. You are an employee whose job is to enter it, record what lies within, and get out. At least that was the case originally in this Survival Horror."*

Seemed like an interesting concept but, for me, it felt a little flat. Like the description says, you're locked in an unnamed facility with nothing but an ominous doorframe. At first glance there's nothing abnormal (apart from it being a doorless doorframe in the middle of a room), but before long it becomes a gateway to a sprawling expanse of a seemingly endless series of corridors and multiple doors; some open, some locked, and some that require keycards for access. As you begin to lose contact with the people running the experiment the deeper you go, your task of exploration quickly deteriorates into desperately trying to find a way out.

While searching for an exit you'll encounter puzzles, hunt for keycards and power sources to get through specific doors, defend yourself against hostile eldritch entities and even find notes from mysterious people who were there before you. It's very [Backrooms](#) in vibes, and it kind of felt a little reminiscent of the classic [DOOM](#) games. Part of me is interested to go deeper and find out more about what that place is and who the people leaving the notes are, but while I was playing I found myself a little, I don't know, I don't want to say *bored* but some of it felt a little tedious and repetitive.

Okay, don't get me wrong, I get that looping repetition is kind of the point of these sorts of liminal spaces, but I found myself running around in circles while searching for a specific room that I'd already been to several times. I get that realistically speaking you wouldn't have a map of the place, but if you had a piece of blank paper with a rudimentary, hand drawn map that got filled out more and more the deeper you go, it'd make navigating a little easier. Also they've gone for a grainy, VHS//bodycam/found footage aesthetic but at times it made things hard to read. Possibly worth checking out if you're into those sort of psychological horror/liminal space vibes, but there are definitely some issues that need ironing out. **6/10**

O.B.O.L - *"Play a high stake game of head or tails against a mysterious opponent, trapped under the ocean in a claustrophobic, eldritch, Lovecraftian horror atmosphere, all while slowly losing your sanity."*

Quite literally [Buckshot Roulette](#) but with a coin toss instead of a shotgun. As each round starts you'll be shown how many coin flips there will be, how many of them will be heads and how many of them will be tails. The order is randomised so it's pretty much luck/probability based. You bet with bottle caps (that eventually become fish heads. Also you're under the sea for some reason), if you guess right your opponent loses however many caps you bet, guess wrong and you lose them instead. Lose all your caps and it's game over.

There are items you can use (again, much like *Buckshot Roulette*) that can give you an edge. I'm not sure how many there are or what they all do, but when I played I encountered a bottle of mystery alcohol that gives you an extra cap, a can of something foul smelling that

makes your opponent miss their next turn, and a telescope that *supposedly* lets you see what the next coin flip will land on. Why I say supposedly; I used it twice and found myself still none the wiser as to what the next flip would be.

It's a pretty fun game and I'd like to play more, but the random chance of the outcome makes it surprisingly difficult. Maybe the game will be a little easier with different items, if I can figure out how the telescope actually works, or if I could have one single ounce of luck for once in my life. **7/10**

The Bright Future Village - *"An atmospheric first-person horror where you take on the role of a watchman in a small post-Soviet village. Patrol the grounds, interact with eccentric villagers, and uncover the unsettling truth lurking behind the facade of Bright Future."*

A short and sweet demo where not a whole lot happens, but it feels like the full release could be a decent short horror game. You play as Leonid, who's taking on the role of watchman in a small village (the entire area is fenced off so it's more like a gated community) in the middle of the woods. You are greeted by your uncle who shows you to your house and, after unpacking and checking/locking the gates to the village, get some rest before your first shift. Probably worth mentioning that I stepped outside the gates to explore a little and found a small graveyard with a note saying that several local residents had been seriously injured by 'unknown activity' the past few months, and that the suspect has been described as 'a very large man presumably wearing fluorescent red contact lenses'.

You wake up in the middle of the night to be greeted by another uncle from the house across from yours. He tells you to go and check on a resident, an old friend of yours, who 'is on drugs and making noise'. Arriving at his house, there's no noise to speak of and no answer upon knocking on the door, suddenly a strange dragging sound can be heard. Heading back to the street you find a trail of blood which leads to another house. After searching the house and eventually finding a severed head, you head back to your house to call the cops, but as you approach the door a severed arm drops from above. Looking up, there is a large silhouette with glowing red eyes on the roof, and that's where the demo ends.

It's mostly a linear walking simulator with some investigation elements. It's tagged as a psychological horror, but I can't say I felt particularly scared at any point; however, with the village being in the middle of nowhere, there's a general looming feeling of unease that usually comes with isolation. Luckily, you don't have to do the job on your own, as you're accompanied by your canine companion, Bobik! A very good boy, and yes you can pet him! (sort of? You press the pet command and he'll sit down in front of and raise his front paws) I think the devs are Russian(?), so the localisation is a little janky at times, but in a charming way.

Like I said, I feel like the full release might be quite decent. I get the feeling it'll be one of those like \$6, two hour long games. If it's longer or more expensive I think it might struggle. **6/10**

[Stonemachia](#) - *“Fight, Zefiro! Arm yourself with the power of chess and explore Medhelan, a land haunted by the Plague of Angels, in a dark action-adventure soulslike. Will you be able to return to Heaven?”*

This is literally like someone said *“What if Dark Souls, but chess?”* And you know what? I’m absolutely here for it. I may be a little biased, but as you know ya boy loves a soulslike.

Inspired by Italian folklore, you take on the role of Zefiro, a pawn in a...chess piece army? Fighting a war against...angels? Look, I’ll level with you, I’m not entirely sure what the plot is, but trust me, this game is a lot of fun. Combat is much like any other soulslike; attacking using the shoulder buttons, dodge and parry mechanics etc, but its lack of a stamina bar makes the combat much more fast paced and feel similar to hack and slash games like [Devil May Cry](#).

There are three specific mechanics I want to talk about. Firstly, Zefiro has the ability to transform into other chess pieces (once unlocked). There’s the Bishop, with a low attack power but high attack speed, the Knight that basically forms a unicorn horn/drill and charges the enemy, and the Rook, a slow giant with a high attack power (the [design](#) made me think of a much more family friendly version of an [Anchorite Shrine](#) from [Trench Crusade](#)). There appeared to be other pieces you could become, but they weren’t available in the demo.

Secondly, the dodge and parry mechanics are pretty interesting. The dodging mechanic is pretty standard, however if you execute it at the right time you’ll perform a perfect dodge that will then give you the opportunity to perform a counterattack that deals greater damage than your standard attack. Defeating enemies, but more importantly, successfully parrying an enemy will fill your ‘*Angelical Ampulla*’ (healing item), which *really* comes in handy during boss fights, and gives you this risk/reward choice between trying for the perfect dodge to deal extra damage, or playing it safe and going for a parry.

Lastly, the leveling system has a really nice feature. You collect feathers (this game’s version of souls) and just go up a level with all your stats improving rather than raising individual stats. The nice feature I mentioned is that you can spend all your feathers, even if you don’t have enough to level up, and it basically banks them and saves the progress you’ve made towards the next level, so there’ll be less panicked run backs to pick up your stuff after dying.

The full game came out back in May and is pretty reasonably priced at £16.75 (around \$22), and I will definitely be picking it up at some point. Wholly recommend checking out the demo! **8/10**