

KLONOA

PUBLISHED AND DEVELOPED BY NAMCO

2D scrollers have been a staple of the Japanese gaming scene since time began, to the point where you now, almost instinctively, know just how far your character can jump, before you even plug in the game. Titles like Crash Bandicoot and Pandemonium have breathed new life into this classic style of gaming, by adding the illusion of three dimensions into the mix. While you're still mostly traveling in a straight line either to the right or left, there are moments when your character is allowed to move into the foreground or background of the screen. Klonoa, from Namco, is one of the first to use this "2 1/2D" perspective, while maintaining the feel of a classic Japanese platform game.

Klonoa is the main character of the game, a cute dog-like creature with big flappy ears. For the sake of clarity, I'm going to refer to Klonoa as a "he", although I want to make it very clear, right up front, that I wasn't able to turn the little sucker over to check. He's got a little glowing bowling ball of a pal named Huepow, who acts as both Klonoa's side-kick and his main line of defense. It seems that Klonoa's shiny, happy world of Phantomile is being threatened by your stereotypical evildoer, Ghadius, who has kidnapped the lovely Moon Princess, Lephise.

Klonoa takes it upon himself to travel across the various levels that make up his world, rescuing the various critters that have been captured by Ghadius' legion of baddies. Yeah, it's not much of a story, combining the plots and basic ideas of Mario, Sonic and Crash, but what the heck, you want a plot, go read



a good book; this game is all about running and jumping.

Yes, you can run and jump. Wouldn't be much of a platform game if you couldn't. Klonoa can also flap those big ears of his to keep himself airborne for a few precious seconds. This is particularly helpful when you're jumping across deep chasms, as the few seconds in the air buy you some precious time to line up your landing correctly. Your main weapon is Klonoa's ability to use his little blue buddy as a grabbing tool. You can snatch most of the enemies by pressing the button, and hoist them over your head to be used in a variety of different ways. Once you've nabbed one of the baddies, you can toss him at other enemies, use it to open eggs and hit switches, or even to boost yourself higher up into the air. This system is very similar to the one used in Yuke Yuke Troublemakers (a recent Nintendo 64 game), but it's executed much better in Klonoa.

Namco's designers have done a good job balancing the established Japanese 2D car-



RATED



toony-ness within their 3D world. Klonoa, Huepow and all the varmints that make up the world of Phantomile are straight outta Japanese anime, betraying obvious influences like "My Neighbor Totoro." The characters are pre-rendered sprites, placed into real polygonal environments, and they, thankfully, don't stand out stiffly like Colorforms.

There's lots o' secrets for you to dig up in this game. The main McGuffin, driving through each level, is your mission to search out and rescue the six trapped critters. Seems that Ghadius' henchmen have taken a serious disliking to the locals and penned them up in a number of different ways, usually in floating bubbles that you must puncture. There are also gems to collect (100 giving you an extra life, go figure), side routes off the main pathways and hidden eggs containing all sorts of goodies. You're likely to miss plenty of stuff on your first run through of the levels if you aren't keeping a close eye on the pathways. My best suggestion is to never take the easy route. If there's a door to your right and a pathway to the left, travel down the pathway first to see what you can discover, before committing yourself to the oh-so-inviting doorway.

At best, Klonoa has some fairly intricate level designs going on; at worst it can be a somewhat cloyingly cutesy Pandemonium clone. Camera movements around the levels are very

smooth and don't interfere with your gameplay. (i.e.: You'll never turn a corner and suddenly find that your controller directions have been reversed.) The Tree Mansion of Machinery area is very cool, basically a big clockwork machine inside of a tree, with a number of pathways and levels that you circle through, several times, before taking on the boss at the end. Forlock, the Dying Forest, on the other hand, looks like nothing more than a 3D version of the Native Fortress levels from the first Crash Bandicoot game.

This is an extremely happy game and should go over big with both the younger tykes and all those fans of Japanese side-scrollers. Klonoa is definitely not for those looking for a taste of the old ultra-violence, so please suppress your desires to run rampant through Phantomile with a grenade launcher and a smile. The characters are very cute and make



funny squeaky noises when they're talking or being bopped on the head. While Klonoa doesn't have much personality (I was more amused by the Pac-Man baseball cap he wears), the game did grow on me quickly. The main drawback, however, is its length, or lack thereof. I was able to rocket through Klonoa in about nine hours of steady play, making this one more of a rental suggestion.

Chris

PS THE BOTTOM LINE EXTREME

84%

COMPATIBILITY

1 Player

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Klonoa What have I done?
Grandpa This is a crest of the Moon Kingdom.