R.I.P.

KLONOA
—Door To Phantomile—

BULBOUS AND HOLY
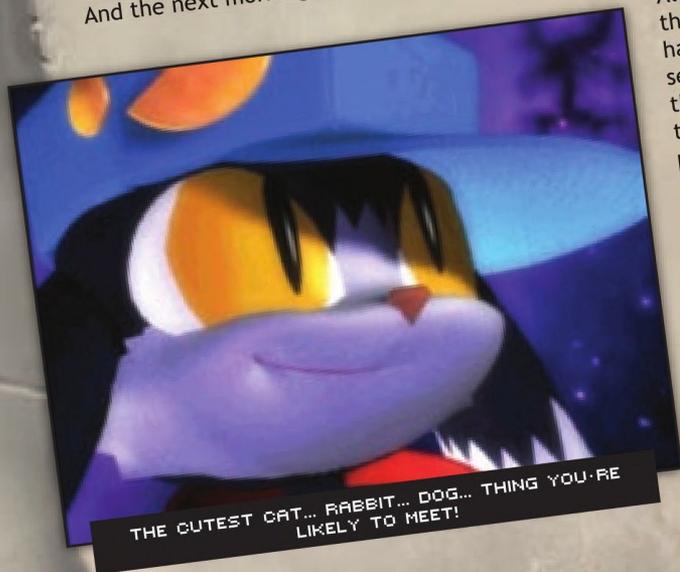
HALF GHOST, HALF TONGUE. 100% INFLATABLE.

In the land of Phantomile, in the village of Breezegale, dwelt a young boy named Klonoa. He was a large-eared dog/cat thing, but seeing as Phantomile was one of those worlds where no two intelligent races look the same, nobody really noticed. He lived with his grandfather and played the days away with his friend Huepow, a ball-shaped spirit who lived in a large ring that Klonoa found in the forest. One day Klonoa dreamed of an explosion on the hill outside of town, and the darkness that spread across the land because of it. And the next morning, things started to go wrong.

but they twist around to connect in unexpected ways in the 3D space. The possibilities of the 2.5D platformer were never fully explored before the genre was forgotten, but *Klonoa* is a good indicator of where things might have gone. Up mountains with paths curving around to end up on top of each other, through towers on both the out- and inside, and of course into multiple cave systems. Although the settings have been seen more than a few times in other platformers, the level design makes even the most cliché areas worth exploring.
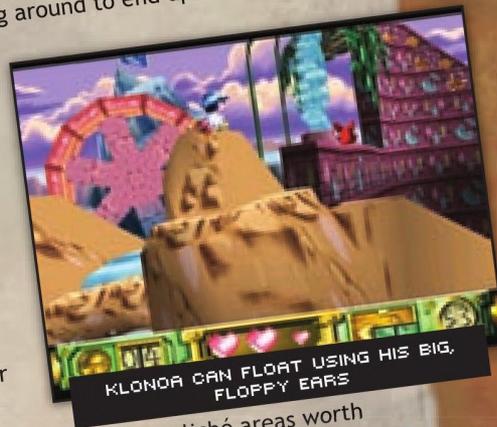
KLONOA CAN FLOAT USING HIS BIG, FLOPPY EARS

Each level has a story segment attached to it, and Klonoa is usually given good reason to traipse through the areas beyond a transparent "need more levels to make the game bigger" rationale. Ghadius and his henchman Joker have kidnapped the diva Lephise, and plan to imprison her in darkness so her song of rebirth can't revive the world. While not to be confused with Shakespeare,

THE CUTEST CAT... RABBIT... DOG... THING YOU'RE LIKELY TO MEET!

Only one thing for it, then. It's time to run, jump, grab, and throw things across a dozen levels' worth of 2.5D platforming heaven. *Klonoa: Door to Phantomile* is one of the most creative games in the small sub-genre of platformers that have their feet in the realms of both 2D and 3D design. Movement is confined to set paths,

Platform: PlayStation
Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco
Release Date: 1997
Genre: Platformer adventure
Category: Action
# of Players: 1

Exhumed by James

EVEN ON RAILS, 3D ENVIRONMENTS ARE SKILLFULLY APPLIED IN LEVEL DESIGN

WOAH, CALM DOWN THERE, TUFFY!

THAT'S NOT A DRAGON QUEST SLIME; IT'S HUEPOW, KLONOA'S BUDDY.

or even Terry Pratchett, the story does a good job of pushing the action along and keeping Klonoa motivated. Comedy and tragedy are there in equal measure, and the ending will stay with you long after any of the tricky jumping puzzles have been forgotten.

Another thing that sets *Klonoa* apart from the platforming herd is the Wind Bullet attack. The ring Huepow lives in shoots out a force that inflates enemies, then brings them back so Klonoa can grab hold. The helpless ballooned-up creatures can then be tossed around for various effects such as activating switches, killing other enemies, or gaining extra height in a jump. It's all very simple until a cliff needs to be scaled by grabbing and throwing four enemies in a row, with a single miss meaning a plummet back to the base. The Wind Bullet only shoots out a few feet, and its vertical area of effect is tiny, so without careful aim it's easy to shoot the gap between two hovering critters rather than nailing either of them. The reload time on the shot is only a second, but that's still plenty of time to screw up a tricky section. Fortunately, the really brutal parts are saved for the post-game bonus area.

PUZZLE ELEMENTS MAKE THIS PLATFORMER UNIQUELY SATISFYING

Getting there won't be easy, though. While twelve side-scrolling levels doesn't sound like much, they're fairly intricate affairs. Each level has the usual switches to throw, puzzles to solve, loads of enemies, and even six prisoners to rescue. One of the many nice touches that make up the game is that freed prisoners play a tune on the end-of-level screen, and missing even one of them makes for a noticeable difference in the music.

Clearing up the missing guys will have to wait until the main game is beaten, though. The level select doesn't open up until the post-game, but it offers a few bonus goals to work towards. Going back through the levels to get the missing prisoners opens up Balue's Tower, a bonus level so evil that certain sections have ten extra lives in front of them and it still doesn't end up being enough. There's also a score challenge for the truly masochistic, with the goal being to get all 150 gems in each level. It's a nice addition for the perfectionists, but little more than a curiosity to anyone else. Snagging all 150 gems is much tougher than it looks, and doing it on more than a few levels would take a scary level of obsession.

While *Klonoa* is one of the great platform games, it's not totally faultless. *Klonoa*'s controls are pretty good, but the little skid he does when he stops running makes it too easy to slide into enemies or off ledges, leading to cheap hits or instant death depending on circumstance. The sprite graphics are also a bit chunky, even by PS1 standards, with Klonoa, his enemies, and his allies turning into a Lego block affair when the camera pans in. It can be jarring to see the well-textured 3D part of the game looking sharp while a low-res sprite stands on top, exposing its giant pixels to the world. On the plus side, most of the 2D creatures have a decent amount of animation and move relatively smoothly. It's usually only in the cut-scenes, with their fancy close-ups and camerawork, where sprites end up being so much brickwork.

Still, the perfect game has yet to be made and these are forgivable (if slightly aggravating) sins. What makes *Klonoa* special is the way story, level design, and a classic fairy tale theme come together to make a game that's more than just another excuse to run and jump for a few hours. While it's gotten scarce over the years, and commands a slightly hefty price tag when it appears, *Klonoa* is absolutely worth tracking down for anyone who's ever enjoyed a good round of platforming.