World of Goo

LINUX FORMAT
On the DVD
» Demo version

Two whizz-kid programmers exit EA, create a game, win awards, and **Alex Cox** gets to play with some goo as a result. It's a hard life.

In brief…

» A construction-based puzzler starring an adorable collection of, er, goo. See also: *Bridge Construction Set*.

LINUX FORMAT
★★★★★
TOP STUFF

They say the simplest ideas are the best. Strip most games down to their essence and you'll be left with either a dull husk of nothingness or a database. But not *World of Goo*: it's nigh impossible to pare down any further. Every extraneous idea has been lanced and excised. It's an uncannily addictive puzzle game with no HUD, no 3D extrusions, and only the bare minimum of exposition laid upon its core of pure physics-based construction.

That's not to say there's no window dressing: the music is fantastic, and the layered 2D graphics are beautifully stylish. *World of Goo*'s tiny team has employed artistic mastery to imbue each and every goo ball with a layer of personality and charm; your goo, blessed only with eyes to express itself, has been rendered undeniably cute and incredibly innocent. It's just merrily going about its business. You're grabbing it, stretching it and sticking it, like the evil overlord you truly are. Sure, the plot revolves around you saving the goo from the ravenous stomach of a hungry beast, but those sad little eyes say different.

> "The physics are core to the game and are brilliantly realised."

» Your constructions will naturally sag as more weight is added to them, meaning subtly-smiling helium balloons are quite a necessity.

Brilliantly, *World of Goo* never explicitly tells you anything about the game itself. It doesn't need to tell you how to play, it leads you – you lead yourself – through its barmy collection of levels. Would *Tetris* have been quite the same if Mario or Princess Daisy had kept popping up to suggest a home for that tricky S-piece? No. And *World of Goo* is no different. The first time you tease out a bit of oily black goo and a

triangular span snap-wobbles into place, the undulating goo balls have fed back most of what you need to know. The large billboard pointing at the 'goal' pipe in the sky fills in the only remaining blank.

Let's get physical

The physics are core to the game and are brilliantly realised, coupled with stellar collision detection and

Step by step: Avoid spinning cogs of death

» **Get your bearings**
In this level we've got to get our supply of goo to the platform above. Problem is, there's a spinning cog of death in the way.
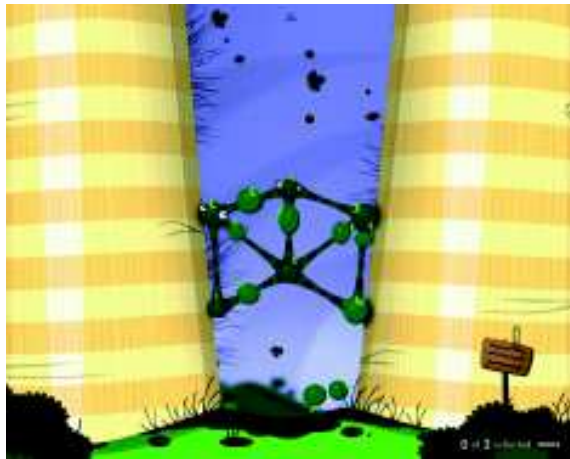
» **A sturdy platform**
If you make a wobbly platform, your extrusion of goo will bounce its way into the deadly cog or snap off into the pit below.

» **Build high**
With a sturdy bottom, it's straightforward to build a column upwards and let it tip on to the grass above the cog.

❯ **Using the abilities of individual goo types is paramount. These green fellas, for example, always stretch out as far as they can, meaning you can use them to climb up tubes.**

universally brilliant puzzle design. This game instantly feels like home. While the nuts and bolts of *World of Goo* rely on subtle feedback, you're told plenty about the other goings-on in the world.

Fantastic animated cut scenes push the plot along, and there are signposts littered about the place – ostensibly gameplay pointers – but these are a mystery in themselves. They're little messages left by some stranded narrator; sometimes worrying cries for help, sometimes cryptic clues, sometimes completely unrelated nonsense, but always special. So much so that you will relish each and every signpost you find. Each time you

~~LXF~~ PCF says…

"An obvious amount of love went into this title, and in return we love the game too. A masterpiece has been born."

The big transition

Kyle Gabler and Ron Carmel's *World of Goo* has been fan-translated into a number of languages and, yes, ported to Linux. We spoke to Ron Carmel about making the jump from Windows to Linux.

Linux Format: How has *World of Goo* been doing on Linux, sales-wise?
Ron Carmel: Doing the port has been a very good investment for us. So far, about 10% of our direct sales (via **http://2dboy. com**) have come from the Linux version.

LXF: You quoted a very high piracy rate on Windows platforms. Have Linux users been more honest?

RC: We have no way to distinguish between operating systems when doing the piracy calculation, but the Linux version did take much longer to make it on to torrent sites than the Windows version. That reinforced my impression that Linux users tend to be more conscientious when it comes to software distribution.

LXF: Do you plan to keep supporting the platform in the future?
RC: Yes, for any game that has decent sales we will absolutely support Linux. If the game is a flop it might not make sense to invest in a Linux port, but in that case Linux users probably won't want it anyway!

traverse one of *World of Goo*'s forced scrolling points, which neatly hide sections of the level to keep the bit you're in all the more bemusing, the chances are that you'll get a further morsel of the parallel story being experienced by your narrator. As you progress, you might be offered a vague explanation of the reason you're creating a humungous tongue for a hollow frog or suddenly languishing inside a brilliantly realised eight-bit universe. But you probably won't.

A wild ride
For a game that's so compellingly simple, *World of Goo* doesn't actually last that long. There's no getting around it; you'll probably bang through it in a week. But that's only because it is so addictive. Every one of the 48 levels is unique, every challenge utterly charming. While you're only ever given control of goo balls and helium balloons, a host of other characters crop up along the way, adding personality and sometimes level architecture.

We'd be tempted to say that *World of Goo* suffers a little from *Zelda* syndrome – where gameplay concepts are introduced gradually, used once or twice, then replaced with something new and never seen again – but it doesn't. Every stage presents a new learning experience. You don't just get toys, you get knowledge as a reward. The difficulty curve is smooth and precise, although it doesn't end at much of a peak, which is a plus for accessibility but a minus if you're looking for a really difficult challenge.

Any extra goo balls you collect along the way are thrown to the World of Goo Corporation, the mysterious entity at the centre of the proceedings. Here 2D Boy has created a strange hybrid of single- and multiplayer action, where you compete with others around the world in building the highest tower possible out of the balls available to you. If you need a higher tower, you're going

❯ **You're rewarded with billboard messages as you climb higher in the World of Goo Corporation.**
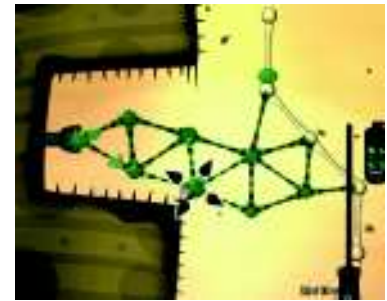
❯ **You're often building in tight confines; hit the spikes, and goo will die.**

to have to go back in and earn some more balls. The central hub does away with the usual 'use these special parts creatively' approach, since all you're given is basic black goo-balls with which to build. And it's not easy; building a good tower requires good judgment and a fair bit of luck.

A palpable hit
And no, don't have any fears that this version is somehow less capable, less impressive or less refined than its Windows original – we didn't mention any differences between the two in this review because there simply aren't any. Whether you install via the RPM, the Deb or even the plain-old tarball, it works fine on both 32-bit and 64-bit machines, just as software ought to.

You should buy *World of Goo* straight away. And we mean buy it, don't just 'find' it on the internet, since the DRM-free Windows version saw a shocking level of piracy. *World of Goo* is one of those games that almost exhausts our adjective supply. It really is a supremely presented, brilliantly assembled gaming creation. Gabler and Carmel have backpedalled along all the wrong turns that gaming has taken and brought the fundamentals that made the eight-bit era so great into a world that's lost its way. If you can use a mouse, you really have no excuse not to. **LXF**

LINUX FORMAT **Verdict**

World of Goo

Developer: 2D Boy/Maks Verver
Web: http://2dboy.com
Price: $20

Gameplay	10/10
Graphics	10/10
Longevity	8/10
Value for money	10/10

❯ *An intoxicating masterpiece of gaming ingenuity, beautifully constructed and universally enjoyable.*

Rating 10/10