Pikuniku is a weird and whimsical adventure for the Switch

It can be difficult to find time to finish a video game, especially if you only have a few hours a week to play. In our biweekly column Short Play we suggest video games that can be started and finished in a weekend.

Pikuniku is hard to describe. Despite its simple, colorful aesthetic, there are a number of complex and subtle choices to how the game is structured, and how it plays that make it hard to categorize. It's often an adventure game with platforming controls like *Night in the Woods*, while at other times it's more of a puzzle platformer like *Semblance*. But the game's charm comes from how earnestly silly it is, not just in its writing, but also in its gameplay.

[embedded content]

In *Pikuniku* you control what looks like a red oval with legs. They don't really have a name, but everyone living in the village outside their cave fears them, calling them "the beast." As the beast you're able to run and jump around like you might expect, but you're also able to kick and tuck your legs in to just be an oval. Both of these are necessary skills, allowing you to roll around as an oval or kick rocks and other things around.

The real star is the physics engine, which creates an inherent silliness and chaos that attempting to simulate things accurately can bring. The game never takes full advantage of the physics engine for any of the actual platforming or puzzle-solving in the game's single player. Instead, it's used for things that just feel fun to do: kicking rocks down hills, or knocking villagers off ledges. It does an especially good

job at animating the beast’s legs, producing some delightful and silly effects. As they walk uphill, their legs extend to surprising lengths, or do a stutter step when they stop moving. It goes on just long enough to be awkwardly funny.

The only time the physics actually comes to the forefront of gameplay is during a one-on-one basketball-like minigame where you try to kick a ball into a basket while preventing the computer opponent from doing it. It’s also utilized in the game’s co-op mode, where two players each control an oval with legs (one red, one orange) and work together to navigate a number of puzzle platforming levels. You’re also able to run into, jump off of, or kick around the other player just to mess with them.

It may be hard to describe, but *Pikuniku* is a delight. There’s always something new to see or do, so many playful ideas that are introduced and then tossed aside. It’s a lot of whimsy crammed into a five-hour runtime.

Pikuniku *was created by Sectordub. You can get it on Nintendo Switch, or Steam, Itchi.io, and Gog (for Windows, Mac OS, and Linux), for $12.99. It takes about five hours to finish.*

https://www.theverge.com/2019/2/17/18224928/pikuniku-nintendo-switch-steam-puzzle-platformer