Space Wreck is a hardcore, combat-optional, break-the-game RPG that clicks

reader comments

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“You can sequence break the game,” the developers of *Space Wreck* suggest on its Steam page. The game is “Inch wide, miles deep,” with “Combat 100% optional.” There is so little artifice to *Space Wreck*‘s presentation as a “Hardcore role-playing game,” no real sense of wider-audience marketing. Perhaps that’s because, after playing it, you get the sense the developers saved all their creativity for the possibilities inside.

The easiest point of comparison for the just-released *Space Wreck* are the first two *Fallout* games, the isometric, click-to-move kind, from the late 1990s. That’s because *Space Wreck’s* developers, two folks from Latvia, directly point to those games wherever they can. Having sunk hundreds of hours into those games, I see the homage. It’s a game with a post-apocalyptic, used-future aesthetic, intentionally clunky graphics, a wicked sense of humor, turn-based combat, and room for lots of builds and strategies.

[embedded content]
Full release trailer for Space Wreck
But *Space Wreck* offers a whole lot more role-playing than gaming, and that’s a good, refreshing thing. There’s no deep mythology here, very little voice acting, and combat is not

all that complicated. Instead, you get, according to the developer, three to eight ways to complete every quest. To get into a room guarded by a gun-toting security guard, you could, of course, win a shootout with the guard. You could persuade him to step aside. You could disguise yourself. You could, if small enough, climb into a nearby vent and sneak into the room. You could reprogram some nearby security bots to take out the guard for you. Nearly every situation in *Space Wreck* has this kind of flexibility, and some of them far more.

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- Using a multi-target shock gun on non-compliant robots.
- Listen, the game said you could play without “combat,” but that doesn’t mean without *violence*. Though you can probably get by non-lethal, too.
- An FAQ terminal helpfully explains … how the toilets work.
- There’s just enough graphical detail to make out what things are and where to click for them, but not much more.
- Eating things makes you better at hacking, says this game.

The plot is that you, a worker for an exploitative space mining corp in the not-too-distant future, have barely survived crashing on an installation. You need fuel and a fuel chip for your shuttle. A bunch of people, robots, doors, and puzzles stand in your way. Your build and your strategies determine how you will go through it all: sneaking, computer hacking, crafting and mechanical trickery, melee fighting, shooting, charming, perceptive, or some combination. To a large extent, all of them can work, and all of them are rich options for repeat playthroughs.

The earlier Fallout games were famous for their low intelligence moments, when there were real consequences, or just funny dialogue, if you min-maxed your character into a

dummy. Given my own fresh shot at this, I crafted a real "Executive's Son Was a Former High School Football Star" dude, one with absolutely no personality, knowledge skills, and a likely misplaced sense of work ethic.

- The real role-playing is me pretending like I'm okay with this build.
  Pahris Entertainment SIA
- The hero of every space-based sci-fi: the brash, stupid guy who hits things.
  Pahris Entertainment SIA

Here are some things that have happened to me during my run:

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- I have failed to craft a hairpin out of wire multiple times
- I have crashed nearly every computer I've tried to use simply by trying to turn them on
- I was so intimidated trying to speak to someone that I needed alcohol for the fake self-assurance
- I failed to loot several robots I destroyed, because they simply seemed like a pile of wires
- I cannot fit through any vents because I'm too big
- I kicked a guy out of orbital gravity, like a Marvel superhero
- I keep waiting for long-term effects from the painkillers I'm quaffing because I'm constantly fighting.

Space Wreck feels like a game in which every run is a challenge run. Like *Baldur's Gate 3,* the game shows you the dice rolls at big moments, like when you're trying to convince someone to join you or trying to craft something outside your skill. Things can go terribly wrong, but you should not, must not reload, because trying to get past with a different tactic is the fun.

Early player reviews of the game have noted a few quest-blocking bugs but also a mind-boggling amount of reactivity to the world, the NPCs, and the quest design. For its current price of $17, and knowing that each run-through is not likely to be more than five hours (at the far end), it’s easy to recommend to anybody who wants to feel that *Fallout* freedom again. It’s only one map location, the graphics are almost prankishly simple, and the combat is far more utilitarian. But you’re once more on the inside of an overwrought, yet still funny, joke about our busted future.

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