This weirdo Xbox game about a walking lighthouse is a Keeper

It’s a testament to the developers at Double Fine that it doesn’t take long before controlling a sentient lighthouse with spidery legs starts to feel almost normal. *Keeper*, the latest from the studio behind *Psychonauts* and *Grim Fandango*, is obviously a strange game. You play as a building that can walk and solve puzzles and which befriends a cute bird while on a quest to rid a fantastical realm of an encroaching darkness. It’s like a cross between the wordless storytelling of *Wall-E* and the cinematic platforming of *Limbo*, with a psychedelic splash of Lisa Frank’s paints coating it all. It’s also a game that proves to be much more than it first seems. Somehow, things get even *weirder*.

Things start out simple. For unexplained reasons, you, a lighthouse, sprout legs and start stumbling about. There’s not much you can do aside from walk – awkwardly, at that – and point your big spotlight at things. Quickly enough, and after maybe accidentally crushing a few houses as you learn how to move, you’ll meet a big bird who immediately becomes your best friend. All you can do is keep moving forward, and as you do, you’re pulled into a strange world that’s clearly in need of help.

When you first start out, *Keeper* plays like a very linear kind of puzzle game. You walk down set paths so you can’t really get lost, and there are simple obstacles in your way. In most cases, you can trigger a magical switch or eliminate a hazardous impediment by shining your light on it. I’m glad the

game starts slow because it took some getting used to; unlike most modern games, *Keeper* has a fixed camera, and you instead use the right stick to rotate the light at the top of the lighthouse.

From there, things slowly but surely open up. Even with only a few actions at your disposal, the puzzles can get surprisingly complex. You'll be sending off your bird to collect items and flip switches and even messing around with the flow of time. *Keeper* manages to squeeze a lot out of its limited vocabulary — and then suddenly, it becomes something very different, multiple times. I don't want to spoil anything because these moments are some of the most enjoyable parts of the game, but eventually, you'll be able to jump and swim and, I kid you not, by the end the game, it resembles something like *Tony Hawk*. And along with this, the world similarly expands, giving you more space to explore.

And really, that world is the heart of *Keeper*. The puzzles are just there to give you something to do while you take it all in. It's a strange, colorful, vibrant place, one teeming with life (though there's not a human in sight). There are giant creatures made out of trees and adorable baby turtles the size of school buses. At one point, you have to find your way out of a clockwork town populated by little robots on wheels; later, you're traversing caves that pulse with a hideous kind of life. Even though you're a piece of architecture, *Keeper* makes you feel a part of this world, like you're making it better over time. You also make a lot of cute friends who stick around to help when things get tough.

I put *Keeper* in the same category as experiences like *Gris* or *Inside*, where playing them is just a means to an end, and that end is moving through an imaginative, bizarre, and constantly changing space. The clever puzzles and strange forms of movement are just ways for me to feel more a part of the world. By the end of the game, which lasts just long enough to not overstay its welcome, it was almost hard to imagine I ever

thought a walking lighthouse was weird at all. *Almost*.

Keeper *is available October 17th on Xbox and PC.*

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