Wargroove is the Advance Wars-style strategy game you've been waiting for

It's been a decade since Nintendo released the last *Advance Wars*. For fans, those years have felt like an eternity. While there have been plenty of turn-based strategy games released in the interim, there hasn't been anything that balanced complexity and approachability the way *Advance Wars* did. With developer Intelligent Systems seemingly now focused entirely on the increasingly popular *Fire Emblem* series, it seems unlikely we'll get a proper sequel anytime soon.

But as is so often the case, an indie developer has stepped in to fill that gap. Chucklefish's *Wargroove* offers the best parts of *Advance Wars* – challenging battles, varied units, clever scenarios – but it adds its own distinct personality, thanks to some wonderful characters and a charming story. It also has some very, very good dogs.

Wargroove takes place in a fantasy realm of warring kingdoms, and you take control of different armies across a series of missions, learning more about the world and characters along the way. There are four distinct kingdoms in the game, each with their own culture, history, and internal politics. Like the best fantasy stories, in *Wargroove,* it's not always clear who the bad guy is.

On a very basic level, the game plays a lot like *Advance Wars*. In each battle, you control a handful of units with particular properties – mages are strong against flying creatures, knights move faster than soldiers on foot – and you take turns making moves with your opponent. The goal in most stages is to

either wipe out your enemy, destroy their base, or defeat their commander.

Unlike most strategy games, *Wargroove* is incredibly easy to pick up; it's bright and colorful, the goals are clear, and the controls are simple. But once you get past the tutorial missions, it's also an incredibly challenging game. You really need to understand how each unit works, and even a small mistake can result in defeat. I've spent upwards of an hour in a single battle only to lose in the end. But that only makes your eventual victory even sweeter.

One of the things that makes *Wargroove* feel different from *Advance Wars* is the various commanders you can control. They're your most powerful units, with special skills that often dramatically alter a battle. But they're also your most precious soldiers. (If you lose a commander, it's game over.) These characters a great example of how *Wargroove* seamlessly blends storytelling and gameplay, as each commander's special power ties directly to their personality. The forest chieftain Greenfinger can summon huge vines to protect his soldiers, while the erratic Ragna can teleport around the map. My favorite is Caeser, the golden retriever general, who is so inspirational that his troops get an extra turn.

The best thing about *Wargroove* is the variety and inventiveness on display. Sure, the battles can be incredibly challenging, but what makes them great is how different each conflict feels. Each commander offers vastly different tactics, and how you utilize them depends greatly on whether you're fighting flying vampires or stealthy forest creatures. Likewise, the armies at your command feature plenty of unique units, like the battlepup scouts or actual, fire-breathing dragons. I especially loved the clever side missions. One early on has you rescuing prisoners in a dark, seemingly

abandoned building. It was tense and foreboding in a way that I've never experienced in a turn-based game.

While it's clear that the game was inspired by *Advance Wars*, these kinds of features — commanders, inventive missions, unique units — help *Wargroove* feel like its own thing with its own personality. I even loved delving into the lore-filled codex to learn about the various factions and characters. It's also a very meaty package. Outside of the campaign, there's an arcade mode, multiplayer, and a map editor where you can create your own missions. I'm pretty sure I'll be playing *Wargroove* for quite some time.

The game is available on PC and Xbox One (a PS4 version is also in the works), but I played it on the Switch, and it felt perfectly at home. The game looks great on a big screen, but I found it much more comfortable playing in portable mode, where it's easier to parse all of the different units and see the details of the map. Plus, if you squint, it's almost like you're playing the latest brilliant Game Boy Advance strategy game.

Wargroove *is available today on PC, Xbox One, and the Nintendo Switch.*

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