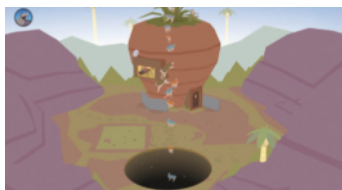


GM Review

The Final Verdict!



Your hole starts small, but grows with every object that falls into it. Get rid of everything to clear the level.



Format PS4, PC, Mobile Publisher Annapurna Interactive Developer Ben Esposito ETA Out now Players 1

DONUT COUNTY

A hole new world

DK the raccoon works in a doughnut shop, but doesn't appear to know what a doughnut is. Whenever a customer orders one, he doesn't send a frosted treat. Instead, he sends a giant, moveable hole to their garden into which tumble cars, bunnies, deck chairs and, eventually, the customer. These customers are now gathered in an underground cave that they must escape from - but first, you must slip into each of their memories to find out how they fell into the depths. Basically, it's an excuse to control the holes, and that's all we wanted, really.

In each level, your hole starts small and gets bigger every time you swallow an object. First it's rocks, bowls, and potted plants, but eventually you're gobbling up entire buildings, and Donut County makes that simple act feel oh-so-satisfying. Objects teeter on the edge before falling in with a crisp 'pop', the hole

instantly ballooning. It's the videogame equivalent of bursting bubble wrap - mindless fun, and we could do it all day.

Vicious circle

Most levels also contain a puzzle. Some involve combining objects (picking up ingredients for a soup in the right order so you can feed a bird, say) while in others you use a catapult to regurgitate the last object you collected. You'll throw key cards into a security pad and fire fireworks to destroy a rocky outcrop, for example. None are challenging, but they at least mix up what you're doing throughout your two-hour journey.

Sometimes, in our favourite moments, junk that you swallow mixes together and reacts, usually sending items spewing skywards. Swallow two rabbits and they'll make hundreds of babies - swallow a fire and then some corn to send popcorn erupting all over the level.

It's got plenty of charm between levels, too: the descriptions of the items you grab, filed in the 'Trashopedia' at the end of each stage, never fail to make us

chuckle. They avoid obvious punchlines in favour of surreal imagery: a soup can is a "small food fortress", a shovel is a "dirt spoon", and a snake is "alive spaghetti with the ability to hate". It's wonderful.

It's a very likeable game, then, but we'd like it more if the levels felt more alive, and responsive to your actions. Characters you're trying to coax into the holes are essentially stuck in place, never trying to prevent their impending doom. In one level, we flip a napping alligator head over heels in his garden lounge chair. He just carries on snoozing. After we've flipped him ten times, and sent him flying from one side of his garden to the other, he simply folds obediently into the ever-growing hole, still asleep.

We would've also liked more of the wacky physics. We enjoy the chaos that comes from toppling a wobbling stack of pots, or other towers of precariously balanced items, and it doesn't happen often enough. Certain levels are almost uniformly flat, and only seem to do something interesting (such as a building breaking apart) at pre-determined points.

But it's difficult to complain too much about Donut County. It manages pack a lot of variety into two hours while still remaining relaxing. It has buckets of charm, satisfying sound, and a simple story to tie it all together. It's not quite a hole in one, but it's close. ■

GM LOVES...

- ✓ Satisfying sound design makes swallowing objects a joy.
- ✓ Plenty of puzzle variety ensures you'll never get bored.

GM HATES...

- ✗ Levels feel wooden, and don't react to your actions.
- ✗ It plays it too safe with the design of certain stages.

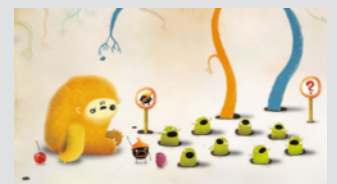
Better than...



I Am Bread

Piloting a slice of wholemeal into a toaster is fun for ten minutes or so, but the fiddly controls and janky physics soon frustrate.

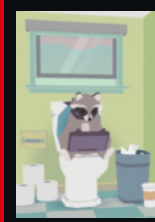
Worse than...



Chuchel

A properly funny comedy game filled with cute characters. Its puzzles are simple, but it throws you enough surreal surprises to keep you hooked.

i NEED TO KNOW



We like the way Donut County ramps up its story between each level. It starts with two friends casually texting, and ends with a climactic - albeit predictable - boss fight to save the town's future.

GM JUDGEMENT

77%



A fun way to spend two hours - but don't expect to remember it next month.
Samuel Horti

Why does the hole need to devour so many people and objects? Because the best doughnuts are jam-packed.

"IT'S THE VIDEOGAME EQUIVALENT OF BURSTING BUBBLE WRAP, AND WE COULD DO IT ALL DAY"