

Platform:

PC

Reviewed on:

PC

Genre:

Strategy

Publisher:

Versus Evil

Developer:

Skyshine Games

Release:

16/9/2015

You will hate *Skyshine's Bedlam*.

Well, at some point while playing the game, anyway—but that doesn't mean it is a poorly designed one. *Bedlam* is like attending a lesson in patience and perseverance; even for a roguelike, it is extremely punishing, penalising you for either being too reckless or stepping around too cautiously.

Wearing its *Mad Max* influence on its sleeve, the game's harsh and threatening world mirrors the desolate wasteland of the films, and traversing this world can feel like such a hopeless, futile experience. To boot, I spent most of my time either spitting words of vitriol or clapping my hands in silent prayer, hoping that the A.I. would not take advantage of my stupidly unnecessary moves to wipe out my crew.

Despite my best efforts, my first attempt lasted a glorious 20 minutes.

One chance, one crew

In *Bedlam*, you are the Mechanic, a mysterious masked guy chosen by a mysterious fellow to transport a bunch of mysterious freeloaders to the mysterious utopia called Aztec City... well, the plot's not that important anyway. In fact, you are not even offered any sort of background about your expedition, save for an introduction video that you can choose to watch or ignore completely. All you need to know is this: your goal is to travel to the other side of the map before you run out of resources—your crew of combat experts, passengers, crude, meat and power cells. They are all necessary for your expedition to run smoothly; running out of meat means that your passengers will starve to death, and without crude, the fuel for your trusty mobile fortress called the Dozer, you cannot transport your passengers across the treacherous wilderness.



And wow, this game is so frustrating that it made me howl and ragequit quite a couple of times. *Bedlam* has an incredibly steep learning curve, constantly tossing you in situations where you have to make difficult decisions because of rapidly depleting resources. For instance, should you explore this cave which might contain just enough crude for you to make it to the next pit stop, or avoid it entirely in case of a Marauder ambush? Any wrong decision can quickly spell the end of your expedition.

Try not to die too much

Combat in *Bedlam* is a key example of its tremendous difficulty. Each side is given two action points, each of which can be used to move any of your units across the battlefield, attack an enemy grunt, or collect a much-needed resource. What's more, unit permadeath is in effect, meaning that every single move needs to be carefully deliberated. The individual health of each combatant is pretty low too, with the highest pegged at a measly ten, which means most of them can be killed within two or three hits. Throw in the fact that the enemy can be supercharged with additional action points or temporary damage immunity when the battle drags on for too long and you will learn not to grow too attached to your crew. They will die. A lot.



Tons of strategising, practice, and hard work are necessary just to survive the round, and with a bit of luck you might even get out of the ordeal with an unscathed crew. The biggest problem, though, is getting over the Mount Everest-high learning curve first. Aside from a few tutorial videos, *Bedlam* doesn't hold your hand at all, so being thrust into combat with little to no directions can be confusing and intimidating.

Occasionally, you get the opportunity to recruit elite combatants to your crew. The process of recruiting them usually entails defeating them in combat first, which adds another notch to the sky-high difficulty level of combat. However, should you succeed, the payoff is colossal, because they will make combat much more bearable for you.



Once you get the hang of combat, though, it does start to get quite fun. Many Steam reviewers bemoan the supposedly limited combat rounds with only two action points, with combat somewhat driven by luck due to the random placement of the troops. However, I find that much like chess, *Bedlam* forces me to consider carefully how I utilise every point such that it will not go to waste. Like I mentioned before, it is not a matter of poor design, just that it makes the game so (insert expletive here) difficult.

Look out for flesh-eaters



Another highlight of *Bedlam* is the game's comic book art style, and by golly, is it gorgeous. The various factions in the game—Humans, Marauders, Mutant, Cyborgs and A.I.—are illustrated with their own distinct style: brightly coloured Mutants with their irradiated bile and spiked scale armour; Cyborgs as ex-humans with bits of technology peeking out of their bodies, and lawless Marauders with their patchwork of armours, masks and sand goggles. Combat is a sight to behold, and fluid animations that depict the mowing down of your units and enemy grunts into a puddle of goo is an entertaining spectacle. While its music—composed by Kevin Riepl of *Gears of War* fame—is not particularly outstanding, it encapsulates the mood and the wild-wild-west nature of *Bedlam* rather perfectly.

The meltdown



Unfortunately, *Bedlam*'s writing was not as breathtaking. I once met a friendly A.I. who offered to elaborate on its faction's history, such as the various Machine Gods they worship and whatnot. While I usually gobble down flavour text like it is my last meal on Earth, I find that I cannot be bothered to do so in *Bedlam*, so I left the conversation quickly. Lore fascinates me because it adds more meaning and dimension to the games I play, even if it does not affect gameplay. However, *Bedlam*'s lore felt pretty inconsequential and bland.

In addition, gameplay outside of combat can be rather linear, even though it tries to give you the illusion of choice. *Bedlam*'s map is marked by several icons, indicating what routes you can take: embark on the shortest and most straightforward path to Aztec City, or explore the area for possible goodies from random events. Such events are portrayed by rambling flavour text that describes the setting, but they ultimately boil down to making a decision between choice A and B. Hence, I just found myself clicking past the text quickly so that I can get down to making a response.



Verdict

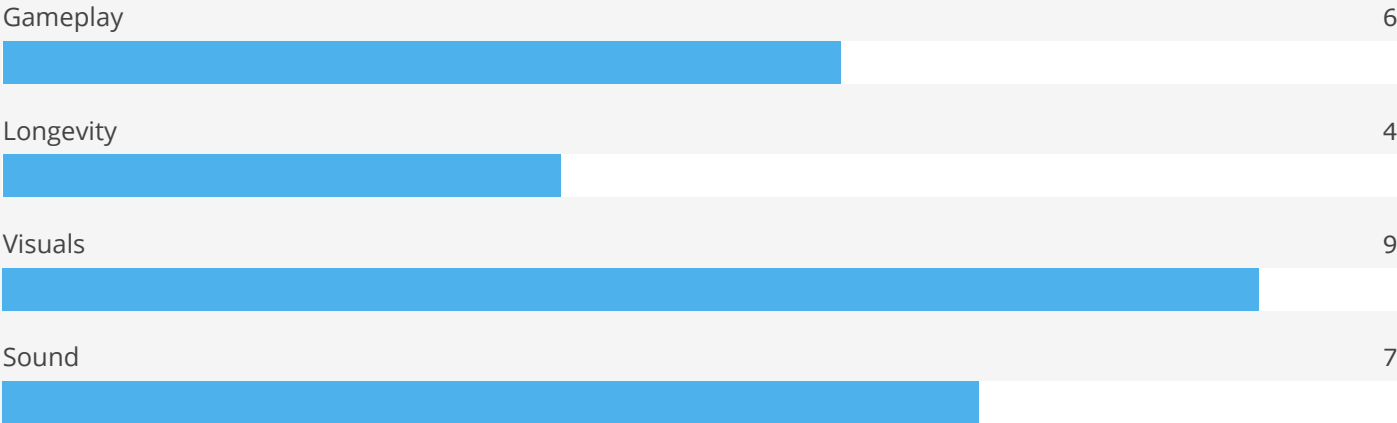
Bedlam is unforgivingly difficult, a game only for the most hardened and sharpest of minds. You will need to devote hours to it just to learn the basic skill of survival, and perhaps weeks and even months to truly thrive in and master its particular skillset.

But this isn't for me. While I did enjoy my time in *Bedlam*, I cannot see myself heading back there soon. Yes, combat was fun once I understood how the game functions, and I love the game's post-apocalyptic vibe. However, upon reaching the fabled Aztec City, I realised that there is nothing more about the game that will entice me back. Perhaps I will crawl back for another thrashing in a couple of weeks or so, but for now, this is where my expedition in *Bedlam* ends.



A downloadable code of Skyshine’s Bedlam was provided for the purpose of this review. Please see our [Ethics Policy](#) for more information.

REVIEW OVERVIEW



SUMMARY

Not for the faint of heart

6.5

★★★★☆

OVERALL SCORE