

Rise And Shiny Recap: Neverdaunt 8Bit

I have a buddy who creates all types of music, and recently he decided to experiment with 8-bit. We've talked about it, and at first I think he was worried about how I would feel about it. After all, I've been playing in heavy rock bands since I was around 13 years old, so my disdain for most things electronica or artificial is pretty well-known. For the record, I do not hate all sounds that are created by a computer -- I just haven't found much that I like.

So, as I watched 8-bit become a slightly hipper and hipper form of music, my tolerance has had time to adjust. True 8-bit art and design is about reduction, if you ask me -- it's about breaking down everything into single blocks of color or sound, and then rearranging those bits in an attempt to recreate something beautiful.

When done well, 8-bit can be fun and exciting. Neverdaunt:8Bit is done well, for sure. While it is still only in "early" testing, it shows a ton of promise -- even if it is only made up of a few basic blocks of noise and color.

We've all heard of Minecraft, I'm sure. I have been enjoying it quite a bit over the last few days. The 8-bitness of the game isn't what draws you in, at least in my opinion. It's the texture of the experience that hooks you. Neverdaunt has a similar effect, if not a slightly rougher one. The graphics feel like more of a homage to 8-bit rather than a recreation of a modern MMO if it had been created "back in the day." Ironically, I would bet that many fans of this style trend are too young to have grown up significantly on all the older games and systems that are so loved by the community, so there must be something about the reduction process that attracts fans of all ages and maturity levels.

I literally met a player who called herself Grandmother and spoke about cookies and tea -- she literally used the term "dearie," if I remember correctly. Then I met helpful younger-seeming players, as well as horribly annoying PvP kids. The mix was refreshing and surreal, especially given the unusual setting.

That's right, this 8-bit game is free-for-all PvP. Well, in certain areas I should say. The point is to wander around the landscape, looking for a place to build or for an area to conquer. Let's say that you stumble across a nice plot of land, and you want it. Unfortunately, someone has taken the time to build a massive forest or home of some kind right on top of your chosen spot. You need to get a bomb (in exchange for stars or tickets, something I am still confused about) and blow apart any walls or objects that guard the red glowing Shrine in the center of the plot. Then you attack it, and upon its destruction, the plot becomes yours.

Granted, I could be off by a bit. At first I thought the objects to destroy were red "cells." Minecraft servers I found a red cell once or twice and attacked them, but it seemed to take so long that I left for lack of interest. Also, I did not want to be the kind of new player who instantly breaks all sorts of unspoken community rules -- that might cause trouble for me later. Other than that, though, I did not experience much more of the building process. I

wandered the landscape searching for build spots but then gave up since I did not own a cell (again, I believe I was confused about what exactly was required). Still, it was a blast just to wander around, to meander amongst massive misshapen buildings, and to come across other players to chat with.

Chatting is, frankly, a trip in itself. You type like normal, but your avatar speaks in a sort of robotic Simlish, sometimes even seemingly pronouncing words. "LOL" actually sounds a bit like that, but spoken in a robotic chipmunk voice, and I swear that I could hear the actual words being pronounced as I typed them. I would be interested to hear what sort of voice program the developers are using.

Combat is pretty basic and consists of swinging a sword in real-time. I killed a few wandering mobs -- skeletons and bird-thingies -- and picked up stars from where they fell. Once again, it seems, I have stumbled upon a game that would take much more than a week to understand completely. While it didn't help that I was still recovering from being ill during this time (my energy level was not exactly that high), combat was simple enough to understand. You can find better weapons as well -- swords with skulls and flames popping out from them.

Free-building and experimenting is done similarly to the way it's done in Second Life. In appropriate areas, you can drag and drop solid blocks of pixel or smaller bits of pre-arranged electronics. There is even an inventory tab for "monsters" that I wanted to explore more. Once the pixel is dropped, you can edit it by rotating and moving. It feels really basic, but once I saw some of the community creations, I could see what could be done with some patience. I wish I knew whether or not all of the build would be lost if someone decided to attack you, but I have a feeling that it saves for future use.

Overall, my experience with Neverdaunt is much too basic. Granted, this is only a first impression of the game, but there is so much I still do not understand. The community seems passionate and unusual, and the sounds and look of the world feel legitimate, so it is easy to see how much could be done with a game like Neverdaunt:8Bit. Will it stay on my hard drive? For sure. There's something intriguing about a wonderful indie game like Neverdaunt -- especially one that comes along at a time in which its style is so achingly hip. There seems to be plenty behind the curtain to maintain the game well after the Scott Pilgrim posters come down.

On a side-note, I was unable to Livestream the game. Normally, for games that run in a window on my desktop, streaming is achieved by capturing the entire desktop. For some reason, my PC has been troubled by Livestream's desktop client -- something I hope passes very soon. In lieu of the embedded video, enjoy the trailer from the official site, included above.

Next week I will be covering GDC Online for Massively. I decided to look into Pocket Legends for the iPad, since I can join the readers from anywhere. Look for me in game under the name of Beauhindman!

Now, go log in!

Each week, Rise and Shiny asks you to download and try a different free-to-play, indie or unusual game, chosen by me, Beau Hindman. We meet each Tuesday and Friday night at 9 p.m. EDT (6 p.m. PDT); the column will run on the following Sunday. I welcome any suggestions for games -- drop me a note in the comments or email, or follow me on Twitter or Raptr!