



Spelunky
by Derek Yu

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When Derek Yu released Spelunky for free in 2008, his roguelike-inspired platformer took the indie game community by storm with its combination of classic platform mechanics, extreme difficulty, and random level generation. Four years later, Spelunky's HD remake went on to become PC Gamer's Game of the Year and earn perfect scores from Polygon and Eurogamer. But how is a "perfect" game made?

Spelunky is Boss Fight's first autobiographical book: the story of a game's creation as told by its creator. Using his own game as a vehicle, Derek Yu discusses such wide-ranging topics as randomization, challenge, indifferent game worlds, player feedback, development team dynamics, and what's required to actually finish a game. Grab some ropes, a mattock, and your favorite pug—this book is going to dig deep.

Spelunky Details

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Author : Derek Yu

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From Reader Review Spelunky for online ebook

Ben says

Despite Spelunky being a masterpiece (as close as you can get to a literally perfect videogame), I knew very little before reading this about its creator Derek Yu. I expected him to be some John Carmack style uber-geek who dreams in C++ but he's anything but really - remarkably down to earth and relatable. It's fascinating learning from the horse's mouth how the game's features and systems came to be as part of Spelunky's rather long-winded development.

Maybe not one to read if you're not a Spelunky player, but if you know your eggplant from your Ankh then this is a must-read.

BW Diederich says

It is by the person who designed what I think is the best game in the entire world. It's got a lot of great insight into decisions made, and design choices. Mostly though it made me want to finish it and start playing Spelunky regularly again, which I am now doing.

Amar Pai says

Pretty good. I read this on Kindle Cloud E-Reader! Dot com. Truly, the future is here. I already feel ripped off though that I paid \$5

Martin says

Derek Yu is not just a great game designer but also a great writer. Spelunky is entertaining book full of interesting little stories from game development and designing advices. If you are interested in game development, you should read it.

Jacob Tjornholm says

Spelunky is an amazing game.

Personally I'm not a huge fan of actually playing it, because I suck and die all the time. However, I still fire it up from time to time and play for half an hour before I get frustrated again.

I keep coming back to this game even though I know that I'll get my ass kicked yet again. This is quite rare for me. Usually I'll just move on if a game is too hard. I'm that kind of gamer, I guess. Apart from Super Meat Boy, Spelunky is the only game that keep pulling me back for more punishment. Why? Simply because

its mechanics are amazingly well designed (oh, and it has an awesome soundtrack).

The book is written by the author of the game, Derek Yu. As luck would have it, he's a great writer. Much better than I had expected from a video game developer.

I really like how the book has two sides to it: It tells the story about how Spelunky was developed and how it evolved as a game. But it also goes into quite a bit of depth about details of the game design. All the little dilemmas and details that you probably don't even think about when playing the finished game.

Excellent games like Spelunky can be so deceptive. I still remember the first time I saw it. I loved the soundtrack immediately, but was unimpressed by the game mechanics. It looked so simple! What was all the fuss about?

Then, it slowly became apparent to me that although it is a simple game, it is so extremely well designed that it grows on you in a very special way.

The satisfaction of learning to control the basic weapon, the whip. Like...really control it. There's a lot more finesse to this than just pressing the button.

The joy of seeing NPCs interact with each other in completely unexpected ways. The classic example of this is the boomerang man in the jungle (forgot his actual name) who loses his boomerang and steals a new one in a nearby shop, angering the shopkeeper and getting shot to pieces. Because, well, he was missing his boomerang and he is programmed to pick up the first one he comes across. Which in this case happened to be in a shop.

It's a small detail, but it just contributes to a wonderful sense of coherence in the game that is probably one of the main reasons I love it so much. At some weird level, it actually feels authentic.

I mention these things because even though I'd noticed them from the game itself, the book gave me a much deeper appreciation of the work behind it. The reasoning behind why things behave the way they do. Also, it was really interesting to learn about a few of the more technical details that I'd never considered.

Note that (unsurprisingly) the book contains some pretty major spoilers about the game. Casual players may not even notice these secrets though, so this is mostly relevant if you expect to really geek out and pour hundreds of hours into the game to really master it.

Finally, this is a short and easy read. Well written in an easy language, and not very long (notice that the font size is quite big).

Highly recommended for anyone with an interest in indie games, also if you're not a developer.

Bemmu says

If you've seen the NoClip documentary on Spelunky, you'll already know a lot of the story behind this game, but the overlap with this book is rather small—plenty more to learn here.

How the idea for Spelunky came about, and advice on how to find ideas in general. What it was like

prototyping the first version. How the elements of the game came together, with detail on how the procedural level generation works. How the indie community received the game, and how the free game turned into start of development for the commercial XBox version, which was a much longer project than I had imagined. Lots of great insight into how to actually make sure you make progress and really release things instead of getting stuck with a project.

Why is there an eggplant in the cover? That's one of the secrets of Spelunky, covered in great detail. Overall an excellent book on an excellent game, written by the author of the game himself. I enjoyed reading this as much as Making of Prince of Persia, which had been my favorite gamedev book so far.

Mr Anderson says

Overview of Game Development and Community with a Case Study

The Developer and Lead Designer of Spelunky thoughtfully takes the reader through his process and art of game design. He offers lots of valuable advise comfortably wrapped in stories that provide context and conveys his indie based perspective. Often a birdseye view of the rarely exposed creative and technical processes with a number of nose dives into some of the details. A tale about artistic process, self reflection and personal triumphs will interest anyone curious about the industry and the many communities that offer friendships, and launch pads.

Sjors says

Read it through from beginning to end in one sitting, something I haven't done in about 15 years. Of course very much dependent on my current obsession with the game, but Yu very clearly and interestingly goes into the depths of his creative process. Hard to put down.

Ben says

This is a thoroughly enjoyable little read. I would really only recommend this to a reader who has actually spent some time playing Spelunky, because even if it is super fascinating to see some of the creative process explained from the game developer himself, it seemed necessary to have at least a passing familiarity with the source material to appreciate certain sections. Regardless, this was very entertaining and extremely interesting to go 'behind-the-scenes' into the world of indie development.

Bill Mason says

I contributed to Boss Fight Books' Kickstarter campaign pretty much solely for this book. While a bunch of them looked interesting, at the time of the campaign I was subject to the austerity inherent in founding a startup. There were two reasons why I couldn't pass up the Spelunky book, though (above the fact that the digital copy was inexpensive): 1) a couple of years ago, I played a lot of Spelunky -- **a lot of Spelunky**; 2)

this is one of the few (only?) books in the series written by the subject's creator.

The book covers the genesis of Spelunky Classic (née Spelunky): a freeware 2D platformer/dungeon crawl/rogue-like coded by just one dude (author Derek Yu) in GameMaker. It gives you the designer's perspective on things like the algorithms the game uses to randomly generate levels as well as how simple, logically consistent rules layered atop each other yield complex behaviors (enemies, game physics, etc.). Derek also recounts the (at-the-time) nascent indie developer community, the inspiration behind the game as a whole, and the difference between working by yourself on a small game versus working with a couple other people on a (slightly) less small game. It talks about working with Microsoft on the remake for XBLA, as well as pulling in programming & music collaborators, and its eventual port to PSN and Steam. It closes by discussing some of the secrets and easter eggs hidden in the remake and their discovery over the ensuing years after its release.

The writing style is pretty solid: conversational rather than dryly technical. There aren't many typographical errors; I think I only caught one, and that was in the notes addendum. A+++ would buy from again.

Alex Keen says

I really enjoyed Derek's discussion about the development and the reasoning behind many of his decisions. However, as the book went along it seemed more and more like writing this book was more of a burden than a pleasure. I greatly appreciate that he took the time out of his life to bring the development of this essential game to life and I look forward to what he makes next! (Spelunk 2 please)

Peter Derk says

Such a great read!

Spelunky, if you haven't played it, is a roguelike platformer. Which means it's kinda like crossing The Legend of Zelda with Super Mario Bros. with D&D.

The gimmick is that the game randomly generates the levels. Which sounds like it totally shouldn't work, but it totally does. Through some clever coding, each level being made of tiles with certain rules, levels are always generated in such a way that the player can navigate from beginning to end using only movements that are built in to the game. You won't start in a walled-off room and just be screwed. It's clever that way.

Now, when playing, the randomness didn't impress me much. Because I'm not a programmer, and also because I like to use the phrase "That don't impress me much" whenever I can. Any chance I get to break into a Shania Twain song, I takes. But reading this book helped me understand the decision to make the levels randomly-generated wasn't just a hook. It was part of a whole philosophy of gameplay constructed by Derek Yu.

If you have any interest in gaming, game design, or the philosophy of fun, this is the book you need to read, the best book that'll come out on the topics in 2016, I promise you.

If you don't, I still recommend reading this book. There's a lot in here about turning a hobby into a career, how important it is to actually finish creative projects, and even some project management stuff from a surprising and really excellent source.

If you haven't played the game, I recommend that too.

I'll admit, I kinda hated it at first. It was so hard. And the objectives weren't clear to me. And it seemed so luck-based. The random generations could mean that you had an easy area to clear, or a very difficult one. That didn't seem fair to me.

But then I played it with my brother. And that was so much fun. When it was fun to die in the game, when we challenged each other to piss off berserk shopkeepers, when my brother showed me how to unlock some of the game's secrets, when we tested the boundaries of the game and each other, that's when I saw the real joy of the game. That's when I saw that it's not about luck. It's about playing often enough that your skill level allows you to navigate through any iteration of the terrain. The mastery is about skill-building, not treasure hunting or finishing levels. It's a really different idea of mastery, and I have a new appreciation for it after reading this book.

The game is also a really good answer to something that plagues modern games, the easy availability of walkthroughs. A walkthrough is nice when you're stuck, but it can be a crutch. And not the kind of crutch you use when your leg is hurt. The kind you use to reach across the coffee table and bring a bowl of Funyuns closer to your spot on the couch.

If no two levels look the same, what good would a walkthrough be?

So I'll admit, I needed a little guidance. I needed an experienced player to show me how things worked. To explain the rules to me a bit. What you can and can't get away with. And then? It was so fun. It was a blast. It took me back to the days when I played games with my brother all the time.

If you've played the game, read the book. Even if you didn't like the game, I think you'll like this book. If you haven't played the game, play a little or watch a little online, and then read the book. It's a really cool book.

Also, if you can get your hands on the print, do it. Boss Fight puts out some really kickass physical books. Totally worth the extra layout.

Steven says

A super interesting window into the development process of one of the best designed games in the last decade.

MarvelousMonomaniacMonkeyMan says

Game design student and rogue-like lover, I never played Spelunky, not once. Of course I've heard about this game, a lot, I've seen many footages, I've had friends spending hours telling me about the hundreds of hours

they spent on the game, how hard it is to get to the true last boss, all the little secrets that turn a "simple" game into emerging stories that can be shared with people.

This book's not only a report about some technical aspects of the game, or the process of indie game development in 2008, which it does really well and is really pleasant to read, given you've played a video game once in your life and aren't afraid with some low-level specific terms, it's also and above all a story about artistic creation, about *human* creation. Whether you like video games or not, whether you're creative or not, it doesn't really matter, as this book is about a person that went from creating a small thing for fun and sharing it with some people with no further intentions, to working hard day and night to release it on (the at the time) the best platform for independant games developer to reach the mainstream public. He saw this little project, that nobody was meant to see but himself, become one of the most successful indie game of its time, participating in the huge rise of indie games in the next years, and creating a vast community that still lasts today.

To conclude, I believe Derek Yu already has the best words:

"In the end, isn't that why we create things? Not just for the power of putting something into existence, but to connect with people and be part of the conversation that is human history. To have something that speaks for us when we're not speaking and even after we're gone."

Maximiliano says

An incredible journey into the world of game development, more specifically Spelunky.

The game's creator - Derek Yu - walks with us by all the steps he took while developing and launching the game.

Expect a fun and light read, while learning about the challenges of game development, publishing, the easter eggs and inspirations of the game, and several personal tips from this amazing developer.

As a game developer "wanna be" I couldn't be happier having the opportunity to learn about his trajectory.
