



My obsession with Castlevania

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Circle of the Moon was my first introduction to Castlevania. The Gameboy was the rage back then and I was in on it too. All the games I played during that time were cutesy and kid-friendly, stuff like Pokémon and Bomberman. So when I turned on Circle of the Moon for the first time, I thought it was cursed.

The menu had this ominous opera music. The colour palette was distinctly different, tones of dark browns and blues. However, I was actually amazed when I started playing the game itself. Battling these weird monsters, going through different paths in a 2D environment, getting power-ups to further traverse said environment, it was a whole new world for me and at that time my obsession with this series had begun.

There are many reasons why I find these games amazing, the simplest one being that the game combines two of my favourite genres: RPGs and Metroidvanias. Oh, and the absolutely marvellous soundtracks. Note: All these apply to the 2D Castlevanias only.

RPGs need no explanation. Powering up and customising your character feels highly fulfilling. It's that micromanagement that personally keeps me hooked and invested for so long. Aside from the standard levelling, Castlevania games always have unique weapon systems, from the card system in Circle of the Moon to the soul system in Aria of Sorrow. The dual wielding weapons in Order of Ecclesia were a joy to use. On top of that, every game has these over the top special attacks which you get to

acquire as you move along.

Let's get to the main structure which makes Castlevania what it is—Dracula's castle. So, you get thrown into this huge castle and you have to find Dracula and kill him. Sounds simple enough but the castle itself will hinder you in every step of the way. You have these paths that branch off in every direction, some leading to completely new areas (where you shouldn't be yet), others to dead ends blocked off by an object you can't destroy or maybe a platform too high to traverse. You keep on wondering what might be beyond, how to get through and when will you get the power-up required. You end up going to the correct path and still don't find the power-up and eventually you forget and just keep on fighting the bosses. When the time comes you come back and a whole new part of the castle waits for you.

A lot of people might argue that the constant back and forth between the areas is quite boring but that is what attracts me the most. Platforming throughout the castle feels like second nature as you keep

advancing, this might seem weird but you seem to establish a bond with it, every minute it becomes more and more familiar, as if it's slowly unravelling all its secrets to you. In my opinion, no 3D game I've played bar one has managed to encapsulate the same essence.

The one game which came really close was Prince of Persia: Warrior Within.

Exploring the Island of Time had the same effect for me, platforming through the deadly traps, jumping between different timelines, all felt similar in a good way. They both even had conditions to get the true ending.

You might be wondering that I just like freedom to go anywhere I want to.

Not quite. GTA games are famous because the places have a purpose and things to try out. No Man's Sky is

looked down upon because you have infinite freedom but nothing much to do with said freedom. In Castlevania, you aren't free if you think about it. You have to find ways to get that freedom, so when you finally get that ability to fly or jump really high, you feel like you've beaten the castle already. Another weird thing is I think the castle has that aura and atmosphere because it's an enclosed placed. You're trapped and you have to get out. I don't get the same feeling when I play Guacamelee or Ori and the Blind Forest because the areas are open. That doesn't make them bad, just different. That's why I immensely appreciate the way they design the whole castle in each of the games.

Moving on to the soundtrack, there are very few game soundtracks which I will listen to outside of playing the game itself, Castlevania is one of them. I personally love melodious orchestral pieces and they go splendidly with the sad and gothic atmosphere. Did you ever fall in love with an area because of its soundtrack? That happens over and over in Castlevania.

My whole point wasn't to declare that Castlevania is the epitome of games but just to put forward the idea that Castlevania presents an experience which cannot be easily found in other games. Whether that experience is good or bad is up to you. If you want to find out for yourself, check out all the DS and Gameboy games and especially play the PS1 masterpiece: Symphony of the Night.

Shoaib Ahmed Sayam tortures himself by watching fake sports and Vietnamese cartoons. Help him at fb.com/ooribabamama

