

♥ WHY I LOVE
WHAT MAKES GAMES SPECIAL

NIGHT IN THE WOODS' DEMONTOWER MINIGAME

The Palecat's quest is my low-key Game of the Year. *By Alyssa Hatmaker*



RIGHT: You'll encounter a mysterious birdlike character who holds clues to a secret in the tower.



Night in the Woods is a deeply human story about an anthropomorphic cat, Mae Borowski, who dropped out of college to return to her hometown of Possum Springs. It's full of surprises and is easily one of my top games of 2017. Perhaps most surprising is that I found another favourite within it – the minigame *Demontower*.

Its full title, *Ancient Doom Spire: Demontower Part IV – Slaughter of the Blood Thief*, is a string of dark fantasy clichés. You gain access to it after Mae's tech-savvy friend Angus does her a solid by getting rid of the embarrassing adware on her laptop. He installs the game as a bonus and promises to, "Talk *Demontower* sometime. It's really cool!" He's right.

When developers spend extra effort creating a breakaway experience, it can feel like a gift, adding variety while offering reprieve at the same time. At times, you'll find homages to other games you hold dear. In *Demontower*'s case, that's *Hyper Light Drifter*, an action-RPG I fell in love with last year that itself pays homage to *A Link to the Past*.

THE CLIMB

Demontower could easily fit as a location in *Hyper Light Drifter*'s beautiful but punishing 2D world. Playing as the Palecat, who's slowly dying from a mysterious affliction, you must ascend nine floors while fighting through procedurally generated rooms. You start with nine heart containers, but you'll lose one at the beginning of each level, knocking down your max health permanently. You're also trying to adapt to tougher enemies and bosses, each with new attack patterns to master. As the game gets harder, you

NEED TO KNOW

RELEASED 10 January 2017	EXPECT TO PAY £15
OUR REVIEW 82%	LINK www.nightinthewoods.com

EXTRA BITS *Minigames that add spice to the main dish*



WITH FIRE AND SWORD: SPIDERS OBSERVER
The retro-style main title is matched with a minigame riffing on 8-bit puzzlers.



GWENT THE WITCHER III
Continuing the legacy of great CCGs in RPGs, *Gwent* was good enough to warrant its own release.



SLOTS-O-DEATH
SPACE QUEST: CHAPTER 1 – THE SARIEN ENCOUNTER
Playing this slot game may actually kill your character.



PADDEWAR! COMMANDER KEEN 4-6
Kid genius Billy Blaze had a *Pong* knockoff installed on his wristwatch.

become more vulnerable, and it's essential that you aren't hit.

You have a sword that slashes in a wide arc and a dash to be used for strategic evasion or luring enemies into traps. You can only slash twice in quick succession before becoming exhausted, preventing you from attacking and thus slowing you down. Dashing will recharge your attack and restore your speed, but your dash also has to recharge, so it should be used strategically in tandem with your strikes. This offers creative possibilities for dispatching enemies and forces thoughtful movements.

I spent a couple of hours playing *Demontower*, all told, attempting to get both the good and bad endings – how many minigames do you know of that have multiple endings? When I was finished, I had to take a moment to separate myself from it mentally and remember that I was still playing something else entirely.

Demontower is a testament to the abundant attention to detail paid to Mae's world, which is meant to mirror ours. It's a game I would choose to play on my own, and booting it up was one of the many salient moments in which I could have been Mae – sitting on my unmade bed with my laptop, trading reality's overwhelming chaos for pixelated mayhem.

In a way, Mae's favourite game reflects her state of mind. She's given up on college, struggling to deal with the expectations of people around her and unsure of her path through life. The Palecat is visibly tired,

struggling to make it to the top of the tower and unsure what awaits her if she does. Throughout *Night in the Woods*, Mae often feels trapped by her own mind, but taking time to focus on small victories can mean the difference between hope and defeat.

COMING HOME

Night in the Woods is a meditation on small town living and a look at how time can begin to chip away at something you thought was solidly built – whether it's your education, career, friendships or hometown. It's about coping when it feels like life

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has delivered punches to the gut far more than it has offered pats on the back. Vignettes of life in Possum Springs play out over the course of the game. You get to know the minor characters and become invested in their struggles.

Night in the Woods rewards you for digging deeper and spending more time with it, and *Demontower* is the most obvious example of that. The upheaval in Mae's life teaches her to be patient, adapt, and learn from her mistakes. *Demontower* does the same. It's a great game made more impressive by the fact that it sits inside and enhances another great game. ■



RIGHT:
Demontower's simple controls belie its punishing level design, which requires patience and precision.

