

Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair
James Moller
Klutch Kitten Gaming Podcast
03/13/20

Introduction:

[upbeat intro music]

Hello and welcome everyone! This is James Moller, also known as Klutch Kitten, and I'm so glad that you're here for episode 71 of the show!

Before we dive straight into this week's review, I want to let you know about something exciting that's in the works! I'm currently working on a name change for the podcast with hopes of rolling it out before the end of the month! I'll make sure to keep you in the loop, but if you decide to go AFK for a few weeks and come back to a new looking show in your feed, you can probably assume it's this one.

My reason for the name change is that I want the title of the show to convey what the podcast is all about. Despite Klutch Kitten Gaming holding an important spot in my heart, I think it's time to move onto something new. There won't be any major changes to the actual content I'm producing, so if that's a concern, you won't have to worry about reviews being different!

Let's move on now to this week's game!

[transition music]

Game Facts:

Today we're going to be talking about Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair, which is a 2.5D platformer and sequel to the original Yooka-Laylee.

As a quick heads-up before we get too far into the episode, I haven't played the original Yooka-Laylee, so if we get into the review and you're wondering why I'm not comparing the two games, now you know! One thing I do know, however, is that just like with the first game, Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair was developed by Playtonic Games. Although it's only Playtonic's second game, there's a ton of game development history at the studio.

It was founded in the United Kingdom in 2014 by Steve Hurst, Steve Mayles, Gavin Price, Jens Restemeier, Mark

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Stevenson, and Chris Sutherland, all of whom came from working at Rare. If you're unfamiliar with Rare, their most recent game is Sea of Thieves, and they're most widely known for their development of Donkey Kong Country, Banjo-Kazooie, Perfect Dark, and Golden Eye. Even if you haven't been gaming for long, there's a good chance you've heard of at least one of those titles. Playtonic is a relatively new studio, but it's clear that the devs aren't new to creating games!

Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair was released on October 8th of 2019 for PC, PS4, XBOX 1 and Switch for \$29.99 and according to howlongtobeat.com, it takes anywhere from 14 to 19 hours to beat.

Let's transition now to discuss the narrative!

[transition music]

Narrative:

Oh no! Capital B has done it again!

[begin upbeat jazz...]

Queen Phoebee, he's stolen the hive mind device and is seeking to enslave the Royal Stingdom! With all that power and without your beattallions, he'll be unstoppable!

...I guess it's time for Laylee and I to jump into action!

[...end upbeat jazz]

Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair has a straightforward and compelling narrative. The zzzzany Capital B, who bears a striking resemblance to Gru from Despicable Me, has decided to cause trouble by capturing the Queen's army, and something has to be done.

You play as Yooka, who's a green chameleon, and you're joined by your adorable pal, Laylee the bat! Since Queen Phoebee seems to be helpless without her hive mind, it's up to you and your partner to rescue the beattallion and take down Capital B in his Impossible Lair.

Despite the premise of the game sounding a bit dark, you know, with a bunch of bees being enslaved and all, there's a

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refreshingly bright tone to the entire game. Capital B is less of a psychopath and more of a stuck-up dude whose brain didn't develop past adolescence.

In a lot of ways, there's a real Nintendo vibe to the story and world. Yooka and Laylee are energetic and fearless protagonists, NPCs in the overworld are wacky and fun, and enemies talk a big game but are actually just misguided souls at heart.

One NPC that cracked me up every time I saw him was a character named Trowzer. Trowzer is a snake with dollar signs for eyes. Instead of seeing the chaos of Capital B as a detriment to the world, Trowzer instead sees it as a chance for capitalism to shine. Around the overworld map he sets up large paywalls which can be lowered, at the expense of a few Twit coins of course. Whether it's Trowzer, Blasto, Pagie or one of the many other hilarious NPCs, the overworld is filled with unique locations and amusing characters.

Despite the core plot being pretty one-note, Playtonic created a world that has an overabundance of charm. Just the act of exploring levels and wandering around the overworld is enjoyable because characters and locations are distinct.

When it comes to the writing specifically, the humor struck a perfect balance between silly and clever. Dialogue is clever enough that I enjoyed it as an adult, and it's silly enough to maintain the lighthearted feel of the game.

Honestly, I have nothing negative to say about the narrative and world building, so let's move on to discuss the gameplay!

[transition music]

Gameplay:

As you might expect, it's not hard to see gameplay inspiration from the likes of Donkey Kong Country, but before we dive straight into platforming, let's set the stage for how the game flows.

One of the most unique aspects is that from the very beginning, you're able to tackle the Impossible Lair. Literally, after you make it through the initial cutscenes and tutorial,

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you can hop into the endgame level. You would be a complete fool if you did, but the game allows you to try the Impossible Lair as many times as you'd like.

From there, you can run around the overworld, tackle new levels, find collectables, and build strength until you're ready to take on the Impossible Lair again. What does it actually look like to build strength though?

Beyond the obvious answer of gaining skill through playing the game, there are two main ways you're going to improve the dynamic duo.

First off, every bee you save turns into an extra life in the Impossible Lair. You might be thinking that's a bit overpowered, but trust me, it's not. I got to a point where I saved around 20 bees and felt confident enough to tackle the lair for the first time. Friends, I literally only made it 4 fucking percent through the level. That's with 20 extra lives! To soften the blow to my ego, it was my first attempt at the lair, but damn, it is not easy. Each and every bee you save is a pretty big deal when it comes to beating the game, so it's not something to overlook.

The second way you can improve your chances of winning is through tonics. Tonics are collectables you find in the overworld which allow you to make the game easier or harder depending on which ones you equip.

For example, you can equip a tonic that makes enemies take two hits to die, and in return you'll receive a quill multiplier. Quills are your primary form of currency for progression and unlocks, so getting a quill multiplier is pretty handy, but if you don't care as much about min-maxing your bonus, you can also make the game easier through tonics.

For example, one tonic makes it so Laylee sticks around longer if he gets separated from Yooka!

Beyond those two examples, there are tons of tonics to choose from depending on your tolerance for pain. I love the design of tonics because it gives agency to players. They allow you to tweak specific aspects of the game, and if you choose to tune the difficulty up, you're rewarded with bonus quills. It's a feel-good system all around.

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Now that we've touched on basic progression, let's discuss where you'll spend the majority of your time: the overworld and levels.

When I was initially put into the overworld map, I assumed it would be pretty linear. Although there is a certain level of linearity, it's much more in-depth than meets the eye. It takes an isometric perspective, and although it's your means of getting to new levels, it's also full of secrets, puzzles, platforming, and character interactions!

I could get way in the weeds with this discussion, so I'll try to keep it high level. What started out as a system I planned to mostly ignore, ended up being one of my favorite elements of the game! Sure, some of the puzzles are annoying, and there are points where traversal is tedious, but overall, puzzles are simple and rewarding, character interactions are engaging, and searching for collectables and secrets is a joy!

Doing simple activities in the overworld ends up providing a breath of fresh air between increasingly difficult platforming experiences, so even if you get pissed off in a level, you can take a break and wander around in a low stakes environment.

Although the overworld is awesome, I still think platforming is where the game shines most. Apart from the tutorial and Impossible Lair, there are a total of 20 levels, each of which has a variant to unlock. For example, one level is fairly standard, but after you unblock a waterfall in the overworld, the level gets a flooded variant. A large portion of the level you had just played becomes immersed in water and changes the experience entirely, so saying the game only has 20 levels is a bit confusing since it feels more like 40 levels.

Like I mentioned earlier, platforming is 2.5D, which means that the character models and environments are 3D, but the gameplay perspective is 2D. Unlike a platformer like Celeste, where levels have a lot of verticality, Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair is more in the vein of a Mario or Donkey Kong platformer. There's a beginning and end, and although there's a bit of verticality, it's pretty limited overall.

Since it would be ridiculous to describe every system at play, I'll mention one of the key mechanics that sets this game apart. Laylee ends up acting like a second life as you work through levels. If you bump into an enemy, Laylee jumps off your

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head in fright and only returns if you catch him before he runs away or find a bell in the environment to call him back.

When you're without your bat buddy, there are two main downsides. First, you'll die if you bump into an enemy or mess up again, and second, your abilities are more limited. One move that can only be used with Laylee is a ground slam, so if you've scared off your best bud, you might be unable to access certain areas until you get him back.

I found the buddy system to be really well balanced! It makes levels feel less punishing while creating these split-second decisions which elevate the tension and excitement of the game. If you try to stick around and grab Laylee before he flies off, you run the risk of dying to whatever hurt you in the first place, but if you move on, you become more vulnerable and rely on finding a bell to get him back!

Apart from the buddy system, there aren't any specific mechanics that stand out, but the platforming and level design is still solid overall. Pretty much everything you could want from a 2D platformer is there: hidden secrets, unique environments, well-spaced checkpoints, and clever platforming puzzles. I know I keep mentioning it, but it's easy to see that industry veterans created this game.

In terms of downsides to the platforming, only two came to mind.

First off, an inherent element of many 2.5D platformers is a sluggish feeling in movement. When you play a well-designed sprite-based platformer, movement is tight and instantaneous in a way that 2.5D platformers often struggle with. Although I think Playtonic did an excellent job of making this game feel good to play overall, I did notice some sluggishness when it came to popping out of a roll. It wasn't a constant issue, but it did make some areas more noticeably difficult.

My second complaint specifically has to do with visual clarity. Certain levels have instant kill areas if you fall off of a platform, and although that's not an issue in and of itself, some of them are not clear about where the danger zones are. Thankfully checkpoints are generous, but this issue led me to some cheap deaths, which is never a great feeling.

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Beyond those two complaints, I was overwhelmingly happy with the level of platforming quality!

[transition music]

Art & Sound Design:

Now that we've made it through the narrative and gameplay, let's touch on the art and sound design.

On the art side, this game is super cute. Another game that kept coming to mind as I played was actually Mario v. Rabbids Kingdom Battle. To me there's a similar feel to the art style, which is, again, another indication of the talent working on this game. Both the overworld and levels have their own charming quality that's inviting and heartwarming even if you're not the biggest fan of the cartoony style.

When it comes to the sound design, the score was what stood out the most. Grant Kirkhope and David Wise were the primary composers, and they did a phenomenal job. I know I sound like a broken record, but both of these men are industry veterans, and that fact shines through in how well the score enhances every element of the game. It communicates the tone of the experience before you even start the first level, and it maintains positive energy the whole time.

What's funny though is that my favorite jingle from the game is actually the song that plays when Pagie changes the map. Pagie is an NPC that is literally just a piece of paper with eyes who gives you challenges in the overworld. After successfully completing a challenge, Pagie uses his magical, page powers to change the map and allow for more progression. When that happens, Pagie and his page gang fly over the map like the Blue Angels and jam out to a ridiculous rockin' riff. It's the dumbest thing, but dumb in a way that makes you chuckle every time it happens.

[transition music]

Summary:

Now that we've talked about the narrative, gameplay, art and sound design, let's summarize with some positives and negatives:

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First off on the positive side, Playtonic's clean approach to the narrative paid off. The simple plot allowed for them to flesh out the world and create an inviting space to play.

Second, the loop of cycling between clever puzzles in the overworld and exciting platforming in levels prevents the game from becoming stale.

Third, the artistic elements, particularly the 3D modeling, is of a quality level that's infrequently seen in the indie space. Even if the art style isn't your cup of tea, it's not hard to appreciate the craftsmanship at work.

On the negative side, the most notable flaw is the lack of clarity in a few of the levels. It ended up leading to some cheap deaths, which could have been avoided with a tweak or two to the environment.

[transition music]

Verdict:

We've made it now to the final boss! This is the part of the podcast where I let you know whether you should slay the game and buy it, flee the game and avoid it, or farm up and wait for a sale. My verdict for Yooka-Laylee and the Impossible Lair is to slay this game.

If you've been yearning for a modern take on the Donkey Kong Country formula, look no further. Playtonic delivers on an incredible experience that hearkens back to the core of what attracted many of us to gaming in the first place.

[transition music]

Conclusion:

As always, thank you so much for taking the time to listen in! If you enjoy the show, let a friend know! And if you'd like to get in touch, you can reach me at klutchkittengaming on Instagram and Facebook, on Twitter at kkgpodcast, and via email at klutchkittengaming@gmail.com.

I hope you have a lovely rest of the day, and I'll see you in game!

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[upbeat outro music]