

I Played 'Let It Die,' the Game with the Skateboarding Reaper

By Phil Hornshaw
June 1, 2016



One of the first things you can do in *Let It Die* is stomp on a frog, pick it up, and tuck it into what one assumes must be the pocket of your loincloth. And it really only gets weirder from there.

After they wake up in a strange tower, wearing only underwear, players of *Let It Die* have only one objective: kill everyone they come across. It's not unlike the gladiator blood sport game shows imagined by '80s science fiction that never actually came to pass. Like Arnold Schwarzenegger in *The Running Man*, your mandate is kill or be killed. Last one standing wins.

Everything you have—weapons, armor, weird mushrooms that have positive and negative effects on you if you eat them, even clothes—you find in the tower. Much of it you'll take off the enemies you defeat. Some of them are just like you. Some of them are weird horror movie monsters. All of them can be punched to death, if your fists are the only instruments of mayhem you yet possess.

That frog you stomped earlier? He's for eating. So are any rats you might come across. They're how you keep yourself alive after a brawl. You have to stomp on them first to make them your lunch.

There's also a very encouraging Grim Reaper on a skateboard.

A FREAKY FUTURE FREE-TO-PLAY 'DARK SOULS'



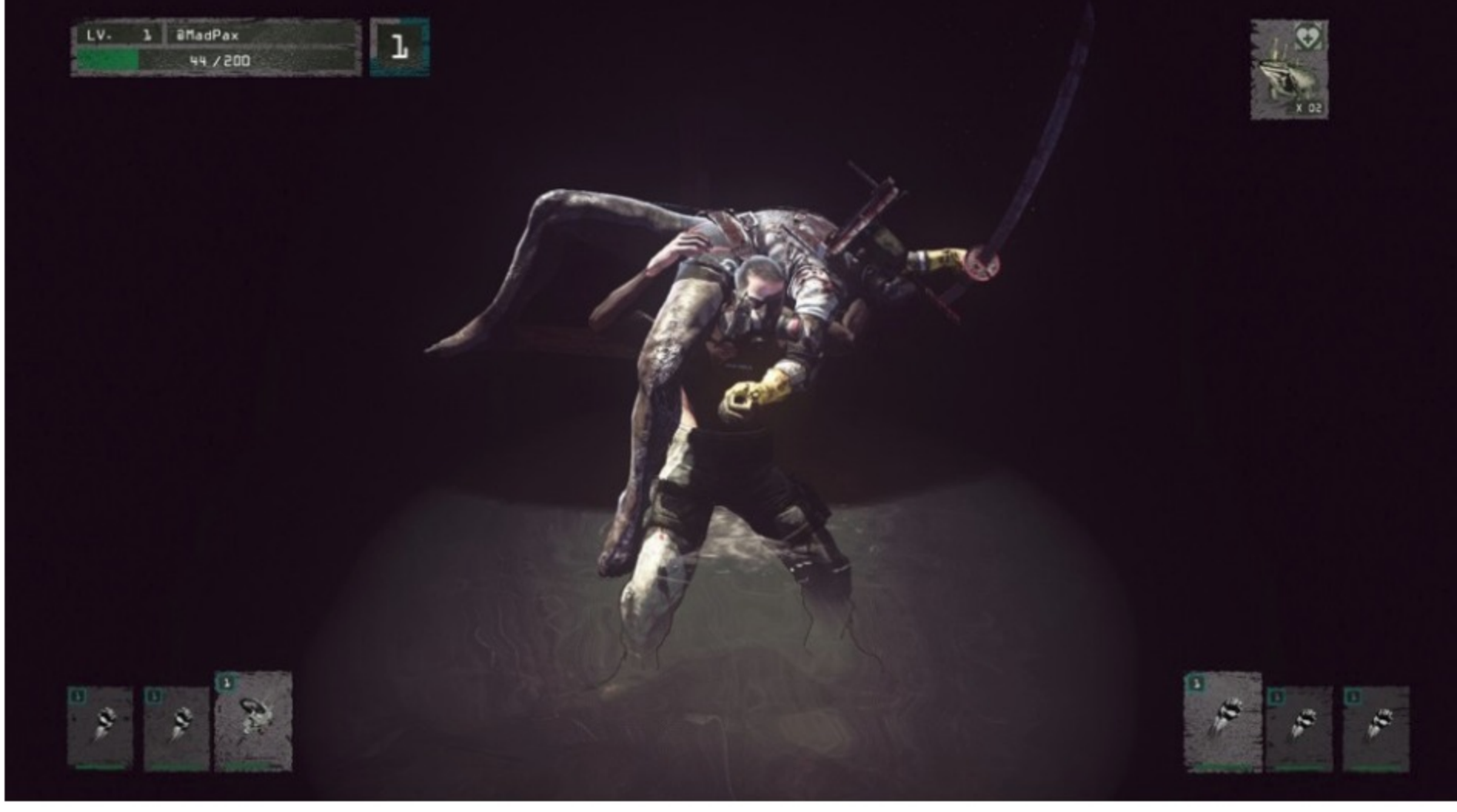
Quite a few of Grasshopper Manufacture's past games lean on fast-paced high action, with players slicing through enemies with swords and super-quick combos. *Let It Die* is a bit slower and more methodical, and although it retains the same comic book-ish look and feel, it's just as violent as any other game by controversial Japanese auteur Suda 51. You're working your way through *Let It Die*'s murder tower slowly and deliberately, fighting a couple of enemies at a time, the stakes always high. It's a game where every punch thrown, wrench swung or chainsaw revved has to be a deliberate choice.

"*Dark Souls* with Punching" springs to mind as a good way to describe *Let It Die*—or maybe, "*Dark Souls* with Painful-looking Improved Weapons." That game is primarily about wielding a sword and fighting big enemies in one-on-one throwdowns where each attack and dodge is important, and you can only swing your sword, block with your shield or roll clear of an attack so many times before a gauge measuring your character's "stamina" depletes, briefly leaving you unable to do any of those things.

Let It Die has a similar system: stamina, portrayed as your racing heartbeat accelerating as you strain yourself, dictates how much you can swing a weapon or sprint around to avoid attacks. You have a light swing and a haymaker-like heavy attack, each of which depletes your gauge in different ways, so planning how to take down your opponent is as important as executing that plan.

Your reward is looting their bodies for goodies, the kind you can use to inflict more pain on further enemies. You might snag a pistol from one guy, good until you run out of ammo, or a nail-studded baseball bat you can embed in someone's skull. Weapons last until they break, but you'll constantly be digging new ones out of the environment or prying them from the cold dead hands of your adversaries. You might also try picking up mushrooms and eating them—you might find yourself poisoned, but position the resulting purge from your toxic binge just right, and you can use your puke to share the poison with your adversaries.

In the demo showed to journalists at Gung-Ho, and later at Penny Arcade Expo East in Boston, details were thin—there are bad guys to fight who look like people and bad guys to fight who are weird monsters. The demo culminated in a battle with a giant hulking creature that was actually made up of a pile of corpses. It would leap into battle, yanking dead bodies off itself to smash the player with, or leave from across the room. It was completely gross.



And it was also blind. Carefully maneuvering around it, dodging its angry charge attacks, and attacking it in the back with anything from a firearm to a baseball bat was enough to bring it down.

Like in *Dark Souls*, death is a big deal in *Let It Die*, and it's how the game is trying to catch players' attention. When you die, you lose all your junk, just like the poor fools you kill in the tower. Get killed in your game, and your character will appear as an enemy in someone else's. Complete with all your stuff.

It's *Let It Die*'s approach to "asynchronous" multiplayer, or the idea that you're playing with other people even though you're not playing with other people. You'll never actually share a world with anyone else—you won't run across somebody else like you might in *Dark Souls*. But you will encounter player characters who've been killed, and apparently, they'll act like the player who controlled them.

This whole asynchronous death system will be central to *Let It Die*, Grasshopper says, but it's not clear just how yet beyond it being a fun gimmick. It'll factor into the game's story—Grasshopper says that playing online with other people filtering in is the best way to experience what it's trying to convey with *Let It Die*—but again, there are no details about what any of that actually means.

It's also a free-to-play game, one in which the game itself costs nothing and players can purchase digital goods within it for real money. That's a major departure for Grasshopper Manufacture, which has never released anything but traditional, premium games before. What will you buy in *Let It Die*? We don't know. One presumes you'll be able to spend a little money to get ahead in bludgeoning implements and armor, but that's yet another detail Grasshopper is holding back right now.

A STRANGE GAME FROM A MAKER OF STRANGE GAMES



Head to the [official website for Let It Die](#) and you'll be greeted by said skateboarding skeleton. He crosses the screen, revealing the words "Death cancels everything. Except the truth."

Even having played *Let It Die* back in April at the offices of its publisher, Gung-Ho Online Entertainment, in Los Angeles, I'm not completely sure what that means. Not sure what that Reaper is all about either. But all will be revealed, a Grasshopper representative told me, eventually.

This sort of thing is kind of par for the course for a game from Grasshopper Manufacture. It's the studio that, led by Japanese auteur game director Suda 51, first popped up on a lot of gamer radars with *Killer 7*, a game for Nintendo's GameCube about a league of seven assassins. As it turned out, though, the assassins were all the multiple personalities of the same (feeble old) man, somehow. Then there was *No More Heroes*, another game first released on Nintendo's Wii, about an anime-watching, video game-loving kid who buys what is essentially a lightsaber, from what is essentially eBay, and decides to pursue becoming the No. 1 assassin in the world. To get there, he cuts through a comical number of bad guys, each exploding in fountains of blood as if the whole game were made up of deleted scenes from *Kill Bill*. *Shadows of the Damned*, a Suda 51 take on a psychological horror game, had players hunting demons while armed with a talking gun called Johnson. Dick jokes abounded.

Suda 51 caught some hell for the sexualized protagonist of *Lollipop Chainsaw*, a goofy game about a scantily clad cheerleader slicing her way through the zombie apocalypse with her boyfriend's severed head—still alive—clipped to her belt. And then he caught more for *Killer 7*, another game about a sword-wielding assassin that contained a mode in which players convince women in the game to sleep with them by buying them the right gifts.



Let It Die has its own idiosyncrasies, but compared to a game about a shotgun standing in for a penis, a zombie-killing chainsaw-wielding teenager, and a cyborg assassin who fights moon monsters, it might be relatively, uh, tame. Mostly, Grasshopper Manufacture has kept information about the game under wraps.

And that's where *Let It Die* stands now: violent, weird and nebulous. Having spent an hour with *Let It Die*, I still know next to nothing about it. Its demo level was an intense, strategic experience of assessing enemies before burying blunt objects into their skulls, but what Grasshopper Manufacture hasn't revealed just yet is the *why*. Why are we in this tower? Why does everything want to kill us? Why are we friends with a visage of Death that seems to enjoy X Games sports?

Even more compelling are the ideas that Suda 51 seems to have buried in *Let It Die* to germinate into something potentially stranger, like *Let It Die*'s free-to-play systems—i.e. what microtransactions will be present—which will undoubtedly factor deeply into how the game plays and yet has not been revealed in the slightest. Or its asynchronous multiplayer, an aspect Grasshopper has said will be very meaningful to the experience *Let It Die* is trying to get across to players.

So far, it's all out there. And it's all weird. But as with all Suda 51's games, more than likely, weird could turn out to be good.

Phil Hornshaw is a freelance writer and the co-author of So You Created a Wormhole: The Time Traveler's Guide to Time Travel and The Space Hero's Guide to Glory. He was hoping the latter would help him get Han Solo hair, but so far he's been unsuccessful. He lives with his wife and annoying cats in Los Angeles.

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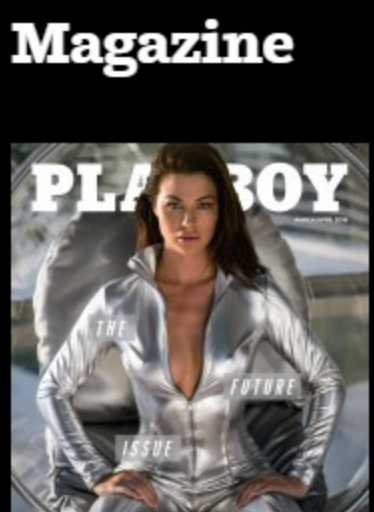
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