

# UFG GOES HANDS ON WITH TEMBO THE BADASS ELEPHANT!

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SEGA and Game Freak partner up for a new IP that isn't exclusive to Nintendo (what?!). Such a statement is worthy of the hype it garnered. As gamers anticipated what could have come from this union, no one expected it would be a 2D platformer featuring an elephant – a badass elephant to be exact...

Tembo the Badass Elephant's plot, told via comic book-styled stills, takes place in the fictional Shell City. A rogue military group called Phantom (think of Cobra from GI Joe) launches a surprise attack, making short work of our armed forces before seizing control of the city. Thankfully they had an ace in the hole. Namely a retired commando elephant who rushed to their aid after receiving a distress call. Donning his red bandana, Ram...er... Tembo will smash, bash, and ram enemies in his effort to free the city from the clutches of Phantom.



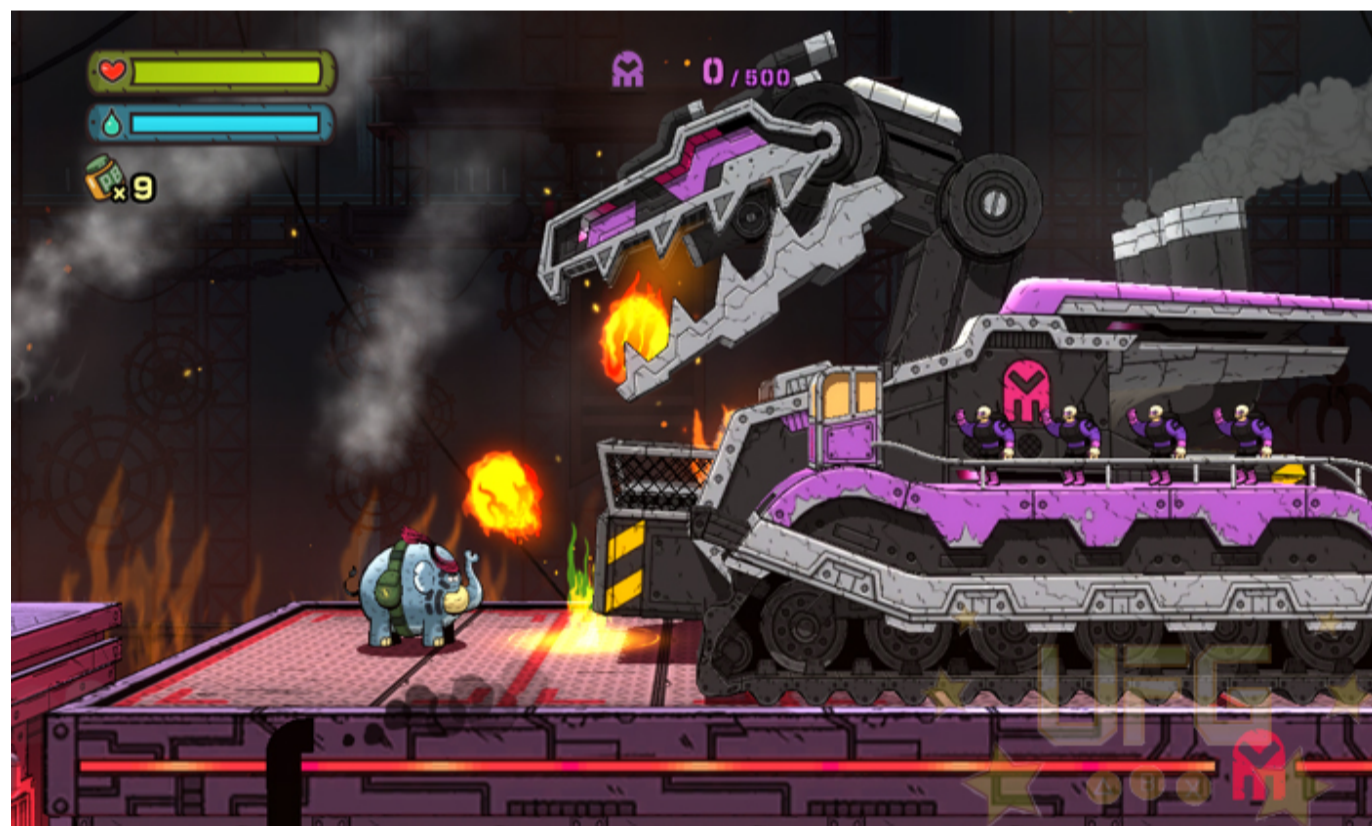
I found Tembo to be a rather entertaining platformer; the long and short of it, the game feels like a hybrid of the Donkey Kong Country and the Sonic The Hedgehog series. A somewhat odd combination, though with the parties involved it kind of makes sense. Players will guide Tembo from one side of the screen to the other while dispatching Phantom minions that get in his way. His basic movements are slow in nature; he casually walks around and his jumps are a little floaty. Holding the Dash button however sends Tembo charging in any given direction, allowing him to smash through obstacles. The peculiar placement of boxes filled with peanuts and breakable walls lead me to believe this sort of thing is encouraged. Even though he's here to save the day, Tembo doesn't mind bringing down a building or two dozen to get the job done.

To be honest, I really didn't mind demolishing everything in sight. Being the catalyst for the constant explosions and flying debris is exhilarating at times. This is especially true when using cannons. Similar to the barrels in Donkey Kong, jumping into one will rocket Tembo through the air, usually along a path consisting of floating peanut boxes and/or enemy aircraft. It's ultimately just a transition from a given location to another but I still enjoy the spectacle of it all. The game isn't all about speeding through levels and collecting peanuts though. Enemies with spiked armor, uneven terrain, floating fireballs, and shield-wielding mechs are among the plethora of deterrents along the way forcing you to slow down. The good news is that Tembo is full of tricks. Run into a baddie with a flame thrower? Try bouncing on their head. Better yet, hit Dash while in the air to roll into a ball and torpedo diagonally towards them. Using your limited reserves of water you can douse flames or if they are high enough, you can just dash slide underneath them. A well placed butt slam will flip enemies with spikes onto their backs, allowing you to smash them with ease. And of course there is the advantage of holding down the jump button resulting in Tembo kicking his legs to float like Yoshi, to give him a few more seconds to reach a far off ledge.



The environments themselves also encourage you to be cautiously slow as you progress through the game. Tucked away behind massive walls and in secret areas are humans that need rescuing. As you free them from their prisons, they'll each ride on Tembo's back through the remainder of the level. Also, taking one of these secret detours might result in more peanuts collected. Once three hundred have been obtained Tembo is awarded an extra life. Then there are the water coolers that replenish his reserves and hearts that grant him health. Lastly there are the enemies scattered all over, though I'll explain their significance later. The idea though is that there is more to the levels than just getting to the end unscathed as your successful efforts will be tallied up for record's sake (at least, that was the case with the build I played).

What I enjoyed the most about Tembo was how well designed the levels were. The platforming was challenging but not to the point of frustration and a lot of the puzzles/gameplay centered on you being an elephant. One of the boss fights features a dragon tank-like machine that tries to bump you off of a platform. You of course push back by ramming its chest, all while dodging fireballs and giant bombs. Another enemy will lob bombs and other items at you from the background. Using Tembo's trunk, you can swing upwards, knocking the projectiles back at him. There are puzzles that require you to use water (projected from your trunk), either to put out fires or to inflate platforms. Sometimes you'll have to do both in quick succession; dashing while holding the Spray button will engulf Tembo in water, making it easier to stay at top speed and deal with flammable objects.



The one thing that I didn't enjoy was the enemy quota. You see, each zone is made up of five levels. The first three are open from the start while the fourth one is locked. The only way to unlock it is to dispatch a set number of enemies in the previous three levels. If you don't hit meet the quota before reaching the fourth level, you'll have to replay the others. Even worse, you can't just defeat the same enemies; each specific enemy is only counted once. You'll actually have to search for new ones you didn't encounter the first time through. And since they all make a return each time you start a level, it can be hard to identify which ones you've dispatched before.

Forcing the player to revisit old levels before being able to move on is a pet peeve of mine and can be considered as a sign of poor game design. Good platformers might require you to revisit levels to collect certain items – chaos emeralds to become Super Sonic, Lums to unlock bonus stages in Rayman, etc. – but they allow you to proceed even if those things are missed. Instead of seeing something new, you're retreading old ground to hit an arbitrary number. Honestly, it seems like a flawed way to extend a game's length.



Fortunately, Tembo the Badass Elephant is otherwise a good experience. Besides a control issue stemming from the Dash button being used to run and smash enemies when in the air, resulting in the wrong maneuver utilized during tricky jumps, everything works as expected. The tried and true mechanics from past games feel fresh here and the over-the-top shenanigans are akin to LEGO's being toppled by a toddler; it's just fun to see and do. For this preview, I was only allowed to play the first two Zones. There seems to be four (shown by a map of the city) which could mean the game is fairly short. Then again, more areas could unlock as you go along. Whatever the case, Game Freak's newest IP is shaping up to be something worth keeping our eye on. Even amongst this year's triple A offerings!

*Tembo the Badass Elephant is coming to the Xbox One, PS4, and PC later this year.*

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