Hey there, Taizen Chisou back at it again with the Bullet Hell Artistry appraisals.

This time around, the theme doesn’t lend well to my usual scoring rubric, so I’ve had to switch things up a bit. I apologise deeply to anyone that was expecting reviews for each pattern in your scripts; it doesn’t feel right when it doesn’t work for everyone.

To wit:

* Scoring of Overall Difficulty and Progression is largely unchanged
  + Difficulty: Make the game reasonable *and* not a snoozefest
  + Progression: Make sure the pacing and escalation is well-thought-out
  + Overly-difficult, inconsistently spiky, or random “nothing” segments of gameplay will hurt your scores in these categories
  + 200 out of 400 points
* Prettiness is a composite score based on your entry’s aesthetic cohesion (NOT strictly the quality of your graphics), sound design, presentation, and quality assurance. This also is affected EXTREMELY SLIGHTLY by literally what your bullet patterns look like.
  + Aesthetic Cohesion: Please avoid giving off the vibe that “graphic design” was an afterthought in your product. Make it all work together
  + Sound Design: BGM and SFX that fits in terms of the way they sound, to the general gamefeel of the rest of the game. Also: mixing/balancing
  + Presentation: You know, like, just general polish all around. Does it have character? Does it stand out? Etc
  + Quality Assurance: Your game has to run. If bugs get in the way of a smooth user experience, your score will suffer immensely
  + 50 out of 400 points
* Fun Factor is exactly what it sounds like. Make your game enjoyable. If I’m having fun playing your game, generally speaking, I’ll be nice about it
  + 100 out of 400 points
* Theme Execution - also what it says on the tin. A brand-new category for my rubrics, one that was previously reserved for the Adjustments category.
  + On *Otherworldly Machinations:* High marks will be awarded to entries that bring together bullet hell gameplay with game design / mechanics typically found OUT of the bullet hell genre in a fashion that is seamless, extensible, and interesting
  + Entries that do not integrate said mechanics with bullet hell gameplay directly and immediately will suffer in this category
  + 50 out of 400 points
* Adjustments are arbitrarily-assigned extra points for anything outside of the scope of all of the above that I liked about your entry that I wanted to shout out
  + Up to 25 points

## 

## Bunny Trigger

By Kevin Minh

| Feedback |  | I remain as ever, a fan of these quintessentially “Kevin” experiences. You really wear your inspirations on your sleeve, and it shows. That said… while I applaud your overall output, having done two game jams simultaneously to bring us this entry, it *does* suffer a little bit as a result. Good game, with that in mind. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Difficulty | 60/100 | There’s definitely a sense that much of the game was designed around being able to slow bullets - in fact, before I knew to use it for that purpose, my first run of the game was pretty rough. That said, I don’t think it does enough to *counter* that. The game becomes amusingly straightforward and easy with the mechanic, save for a few annoying bits where elite enemies will get tired and leave the screen by way of flying right through the player. |
| Progression | 60/100 | The rank accelerates at a good clip and it seems to be reflected in patterns well. However! Difficult to say that it ends well if you can 100-0 the end boss with a single hyper, however. |
| Prettiness | 30/50 | The pixel art is competently assembled for how rushed a lot of it is. The vfx/particles are fine, there’s just not a lot of animation or sprite states and the fact that iframes are in Huge Number format is, ehh |
| Fun Factor | 70/100 | Avoid pacing pitfalls with caravan formats, yes yes. Hard to go wrong on that one, to be honest. |
| Theme Execution | 20/50 | Drill Dozer, huh? I think I can see it but comparisons to ZeroRanger kept coming up in my stream. “Alt fire that does,” honestly, “kinda standard shmup stuff” isn’t super far-flung, so I find it difficult to award higher marks on this one. |
| Adjustment | 8 | (+8) Strictly for the “I’m doing what I want” energy associated with putting Kouda and Master Chief in bunny ears. |
| Total Score | 248 | / 400 (62.0) *Victimised yet again by crunch time* |

## Lunatic Difficult

By Jackie Matthews

Standard Mode

| Feedback |  | There’s a lot of content here! I legitimately needed like 45 minutes to do the whole thing. Couple that with the unique backgrounds, animated sprites, and the variety of patterns, and the amount of work that went into this in just 2 months is quite impressive. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Difficulty | 80/100 | Who the hell would ever willingly play this with pointdevice mode on? Could not be any less my cup of tea. With that turned off, the patterns themselves are, on average, actually pretty good! I liked *most* of them, which given my prior experiences playing Jackie’s work is somewhat of a surprise. He’s really getting better at this whole “inclusive design” thing as time goes on. |
| Progression | 80/100 | With the exception of a middle arc that’s more tedious and agitating rather than engagingly difficult, the game is pretty good at raising the stakes as things go on. Almost amusingly, given the contrast between the tutorial and the very first stage– and then the stage right afterward having nearly 60 crystals. Real shame that the 9th level wasn’t actually complete, and had to be left out of scoring. |
| Prettiness | 30/50 | The aesthetic cohesion is certainly there. Alas, I will personally never award full marks to patterns that make use of fully color blended bullets. This whole game variously suffers in the readability and eye strain/contrast department basically throughout. |
| Fun Factor | 65/100 | The Mokou and Yoshika stages really made me want to drop the game. It’s crazy how hard the game rebounds back into being more fair and interesting immediately afterward. Don’t freaking put the weak points in the middle of a cloud of bullet spawns- I don’t think I’ve groaned so loudly and irritatedly in my life. Also, the “puck” patterns stink. They seem to exclusively exist to obfuscate how long it is until you can damage the boss again. Don’t know who finds that sort of thing fun. It should really speak to how well I find just about everything else in the gameplay that none of all that ruins it for me. |
| Theme Execution | 30/50 | Easily would’ve been near 100% in this category if instead of “clean all the crystals to deal damage,” the player charges an ultimate attack like in Dustforce, the source material, that actually damages the enemy. But alas! Settling for an “it’s ok” implementation. |
| Adjustment | 5 | (+5) Insert 100 Yen. Would’ve liked for there to be more dialogue |
| Total Score | 285 | / 400 (71.3) *A solid entry with a few questionable demands* |

## MAKUTAWARE

By Makuta Matara

Easy, then Normal Mode

| Feedback |  | Aha. Here we have the entry that indicated to me that my usual scoring rubric should not be used for BHA7. Honestly, I find it difficult to talk too much about this, because I don’t have a lot of criticisms? It knows what it tries to do and it executes on them well. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Difficulty | 80/100 | Now, I did only play it on the first two difficulties, because I know better than to attempt a higher label on anything by Makuta. That said, they both were really well-assembled. |
| Progression | 80/100 | The increasing rank is well-tuned?? The lower difficulty variations themselves are also not immediately overbearing? What’s going on here? It’s great. |
| Prettiness | 35/50 | Makuta has a pretty defined visual style now, yeah? If you’ve played their works before, you should know what to expect. It’s pretty, ah, basic? Overtly ULTRAKILL? But not bad, that’s for sure. |
| Fun Factor | 90/100 | Alright so, any entry where I find myself smiling and laughing throughout my whole time playing deserves a good score here. No notes. |
| Theme Execution | 40/50 | The WarioWare / bullet hell mix is inspired, and just fun to do? The whole experience is seamless, which is equally impressive. |
| Adjustment | 10 | (+10) I launched Sisyphus Rock Climbing and Falling Down at rank 50 and everyone in my stream chat was rolling. Thanks for the experience lmao |
| Total Score | 335 | / 400 (83.8) *Would only be improved with more content* |

## Leafwhisper Ode to Blooming

By Ryann

| Feedback |  | Ahh, classic Ryann. Jumping on any opportunity to completely show the hell off and make entire games for contest entries. I see you.  This one is also pretty fleshed out, having multiple stages, a *sort of* metaprogression setup, fully kitted out graphics and such. It’s also bonkers that this was done in two months? It’s not perfect, though. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Difficulty | 55/100 | Bro, this game is so hard and for WHAT? Eventually I had to set down the second half of the game mechanics by upgrading my Earth plant to max level, then suiciding for the free full loadout so I could stop paying attention to the background layer. Not good. |
| Progression | 70/100 | That said, there is a Plot here (wow!) and multiple stages to do and the way things escalate and complicate — with regards to THE BULLET PATTERNS – is pretty on-point. Unfortunately, the back half of the game’s system doesn’t ever evolve or integrate with the front half in any more interesting ways as time goes on. |
| Prettiness | 48/50 | Actually? Probably the best-looking one this time around. All the game graphics are good (save for some really awkward scaling on background enemies), the portraits are some of the best I’ve seen from Ryann, and the custom music is excellent. Though I understand you had a lot of help in that department. |
| Fun Factor | 60/100 | Due to the above note about not *really* feeling like I’m playing two games at once, it’s hard not to see all the missed potential here. I thought to myself as I was playing that the moment-to-moment would be so much more cool and interesting if actually needing to rearrange your background lanes were required by way of unique spawns or other mechanics, but they’re Not Really. Just as well, the density of the game’s danmaku makes it unrealistic anyway. |
| Theme Execution | 20/50 | Putting PvZ style tower defense into a classical shmup setting sounds like something that would be fun and intuitive to play, but as they are presented… the halves don’t really mesh. The tragic thing is that they would, if things were tuned a little differently. |
| Adjustment | 8 | (+1) Scaly Admission.  (+8) For having an entire cast and giving them Interesting Patterns  (-1) I felt an inclination to play an earlier stage and *grind for currency*. I should not have to explain why this stinks |
| Total Score | 261 | / 400 (65.3) *Pretty presentation, pretty incongruous* |

## The Hunger of Yuyuko ~ Youmu’s Awakening

By Syoudre

| Feedback |  | Wow! What an entry. This one truly stands head and shoulders above the competition not only as an exploration of what’s achievable in a BHA, but basically just as a game in its own right. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Difficulty | 85/100 | The game slightly trends high in difficulty maybe, but it remains doable. I ended up dying a handful of times against each of the later bosses, but this is probably more attributable to how impatient I get in action games. |
| Progression | 93/100 | Youmu levels up, acquires new skills, and the bosses are designed around what your capabilities are when they’re fought. HP numbers are balanced, and the danmaku you have to dodge gets more and more intricate and threatening as the game progresses. There’s a pacing lull right next to the beginning because the game forces you to retread the first zone shortly after doing so JUST to kill 40 enemies, which comprises my sole complaint on the matter. |
| Prettiness | 41/50 | The aesthetics are cute and well-done! My points of criticism have to do with inconsistent pixel resolutions (scaling stuff instead of redrawing them larger/smaller) and the chiptune soundfont used on the BGM. There are just… ways to make this stuff sound better. |
| Fun Factor | 93/100 | I legitimately wanted to keep going and was constantly surprised that it wasn’t over like 2 or 3 times. None of the individual patterns overstayed their welcome - particularly not when I figured out how to attack them efficiently - and the exploration aspect was fresh and novel, until it wasn’t due to aforementioned forced grinding. |
| Theme Execution | 45/50 | The game is a masterfully executed marriage of top-down Zelda-like gameplay and the Touhou format. The sole exclusion from this union is any indication of dungeon puzzles, but the game is like, already an hour long as-is, so…? |
| Adjustment | 18 | (+15) It’s a bullet hell AND and ARPG and it’s *good* at *both* while being made *in DNH.* Honestly.  (+3) Manages to have an hour of content while keeping things mostly pretty fresh. The backtracking through the first zone made me a little antsy but after the path to the next zone opened everything just clicked. |
| Total Score | 375 | / 400 (93.8) *A full realisation of what I’d think possible in BHA* |

## Highly Responsive to Thieves

By Fuzzbearplush

Normal Mode

| Feedback |  | Extremely pleased at the return of Fuzzbear and their PC-98 style (framework ? engine ?) For BHA7 they’ve brought on a 12-stage HRtP-like that also includes danmaku fights. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Difficulty | 70/100 | As far as the demands on the player go, it has the right balance of breakout to bullet hell, I think. Some of the difficulty is packed into getting the right angle to flip the tiles, but it’s a flavor of difficulty that feels more “haha, oh you” to try to execute instead of “why is this the worst thing in the world I could possibly be experiencing right now…” if that makes any sense. |
| Progression | 75/100 | As the game progresses, stages that include bullet patterns, terrain-type hazards, enemies to shoot down, or spinners that mess up ball trajectory crop up in number. It’s pretty comfy, actually. The boss encounters pick up in intensity and complexity quite well. |
| Prettiness | 35/50 | Well, we’ve been over how much I enjoy the PC-98 aesthetics. This much remains unchanged. The consistency in its delivery is particularly appreciated. |
| Fun Factor | 70/100 | Some of the later stages requiring you to dodge while you bat the ball have the good sense to automate some of the process by including the spinners that control where it goes, which frees the design space up somewhat to make for denser bullet patterns. The boss encounters are pretty good, I think. They’re simple, but PC-98 bosses are simple, and they’re made fun regardless of this because you gotta chase the ball around and smack them with it. |
| Theme Execution | 22/50 | Err… well, an HRtP is vaguely non-shmup, sure, but like. Barely. I’ll bump you up a bit slightly because the way the danmaku during breakout sessions worked out ended up being pretty fun |
| Adjustment | 8 | (+8) PC-98 representation in 2023, doesn’t include Mima. Points for boldness |
| Total Score | 290 | / 400 (72.5) *Trades “novel” for “nice”* |

## Dream Bridging Boundaries

By Akemi Yume

| Feedback |  | I refer to Akemi Yume as one of BHE’s “Most Improved Players,” as they’ve been around since– I think their first script?– BHA3. Indeed, the things they’re pulling off with DNH have been on the up and up, technically and presentationally speaking, consistently. Alas… |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Difficulty | 58/100 | Oh, man. So the fights in isolation aren’t the hardest thing ever, right? The only thing is, well, the game’s entire mechanic incentivises you to always be up in the bullets. And the immediate shift from being safe because you’re collecting, to being in danger because you’re suddenly full– not great. Unless the intention is to waste a star so you can immediately shift over to the *other* collection method? But then the entire collection experience feels wasted. |
| Progression | 78/100 | The individual fights are laid out fantastically, and the second fight feels like a natural and masterful escalation from the first. Pretty good interpretation of the character into danmaku as well, I think. There’s just one hiccup in the strange Pong minigame in the first fight that kind of just… exists? |
| Prettiness | 46/50 | Akemi’s handle on this engine’s rendering tricks and capabilities has never been on stronger display. The music, game graphics, portraits, everything is super congruous and well-executed. |
| Fun Factor | 55/100 | I’ll be the first to admit that I might just not see the vision. I’m not afraid to say outright when something isn’t for me, either. There certainly is *something* here, but over 10 runs later I’m just not seeing it. Reimu and Marisa’s teams are such NOTHING picks here because aiming the collection stick, frankly, sucks. It feels awful and unrewarding. The patterns are cool, but interacting with them isn’t, through no fault of their own. It's so unfortunate. |
| Theme Execution | 25/50 | Much as it isn’t jiving with me, preventing the player from shooting normally was the right call, as I otherwise would have completely ignored the deletion mechanics and just shot everything down. May have been improved slightly by including just the wholesale stars, like the source material? |
| Adjustment | 11 | (+11) All these custom assets, man. Where the heck are they coming from, the music in particular? I can’t find them anywhere on the internet. Are you really doing ALL of this yourself? Crazy |
| Total Score | 273 | / 400 (68.3) *Such effort, in service of a troubled execution* |

## Megaman AV - The Unknown Glitch Entity

By zack1258

Level 2

| Feedback |  | A surprise entry from someone I don’t think I’ve seen any prior works from?? Basically, what if Megaman’s power-absorbing schtick existed in a classic shmup format. I have to mention that I DO LIKE that the game’s patterns are designed with specific weapons in mind, but… |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Difficulty | 78/100 | The difficulty trends a little high, even when taking into account your ability to get hit 3-6 times before losing a “life.” I’d say that I’d have preferred the “Contest Mode” to have been at a lower level, but Level 0 and Level 2 don’t feel meaningfully different enough anyway, so. There aren’t any continues or practice modes, and thanks to that and due to some design decisions I’m not that keen on (see below), I haven’t beaten the final boss, so I gotta ding you a bit. |
| Progression | 90/100 | Each of the Robot Masters individually presents a nice one-two step in challenge, and then in a meta sense, the final boss is a natural escalation from them. The game also expands a bit in terms of player capabilities by giving you additional weapons. |
| Prettiness | 45/50 | The music and in-game graphics are really nice. The patterns are also interesting to look at and generally to play through as well. |
| Fun Factor | 78/100 | Actually playing the game is pretty cool and fun, but unfortunately, the endgame seems to punish you for relying on your obtained skills? If you enter the final boss with empty or near-empty ammunition in probably any *one* of your elemental weapons, then at least one of its attacks will become either unsustainably difficult or seemingly even impossible? Trying to get to the final with just the Mega Blaster will mean timing out Basically Everything, because the bosses have way too much HP compared to the damage they take from weapons they’re not actively weak to. |
| Theme Execution | 37/50 | Honestly, not that adventurous, given it’s just collecting new shottypes but it’s hard to get too upset about the earnest presentation. Plus points for the elemental damage modifiers– it feels very good to find places and times to counter a boss’s element, y’know, just like in the source material. |
| Adjustment | 9 | (+9) I gave bonus points in the past for entries that meaningfully implemented shottype swapping, so in the interest of being fair… |
| Total Score | 337 | / 400 (84.3) *Would only need the most minor adjustments* |

## Dreaming Memories

By Luna

| Feedback |  | Part BHA entry, part … tech demo? Luna brings us a taste of what her custom engine is capable of. It’s a fairly light adventure with one zone and one encounter. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Difficulty | 70/100 | The Suika fight feels like a pretty standard fight, honestly. Like, I don’t have a lot to say about how this fight is balanced, aside from the laser square survival card being annoying? The movement of both the square and the bullets is jerky and inorganic-feeling. |
| Progression | 70/100 | In a meta sense, going from overworld exploration, to fighting the shmup boss, is nice. Fighting the boss itself is also sorted alright, although the final is a little bit of a letdown. Would be improved somewhat by putting additional fights in the overworld between upgrades to sell a sense of improvement in the player’s arsenal. |
| Prettiness | 31/50 | The 2D and 3D art is very cute! I actually have to ding this category somewhat for all of the like, bugs? First, I was forced out of the level geometry by walking into the underside of the stairs, which rendered the entire game unplayable because I would always respawn falling into the void even after quitting to the menu. Then, you can restart Suika’s fight while she’s exploding to keep the slow mode on (and also completely break the survival card.) Finally, menus can be stacked on top of each other and manipulated at once SO readily. |
| Fun Factor | 55/100 | Er, so, there just isn’t a lot to do in the overworld, technically, so it’s kind of just a walking simulator, until you reach the one fight. The walking speed is slow, but at least the environment is pretty. The equipment system does add a little bit of replayability at least. Said fight… is like… alright. |
| Theme Execution | 25/50 | I really wanted to justify rating this highly, but alas. The integration of the RPG mechanics is more vestigial than anything else. If there were like, fight rewards, or branching dialogue options, or upgrades to equipment, or just really tiny superficial stuff like levels or damage numbers (even if they were fake) to sell the RPG-ness, it would totally rate higher, but alas, the framework just isn’t far enough along yet. |
| Adjustment | 13 | (+13) The whole PS1 graphics overworld thing is something that I’m a big fan of, actually. Bonus points for the custom engine as well. Additionally, fumo |
| Total Score | 264 | / 400 (66.0) *Hopefully just the start of something grander?* |