Twitter Thread by Jim Stormdancer



Jim Stormdancer
@mogwai_poet

Playing a bit of Tower of Druaga, in the Namco Museum collection. Splatterhouse is in there too, and it makes a good comparison, because you know how Splatterhouse's only draw is the hyper-detailed violence? Druaga is like that except the only draw is the hyper-obscure secrets.

But the secrets made it a huge hit in Japan in 1984. This is supposedly the game that created the Japanese arcade culture of players sharing notes, because the only path to success was approaching the game as a community.

Tower of Druaga clearly draws inspiration from Pac-Man (it's a maze chase) and Rogue (the maze isn't randomized, but everything *in it* is, plus you bump into enemies to attack them) and Wizardry/D&D (theming and upgrades).

To advance past each floor, you need to find the key and the exit, dodging monsters. You can also find a secret item on each floor. These "optional" items are crucial, some are literally required to proceed, and the processes you need to guess at to unlock them are *ridiculous*.

A sampling:
- Kill 3 slimes.
- Touch the left and right dungeon walls.
- Don't touch the outside walls for 12 seconds.
- Swing your sword while standing on the exit.
- Press 1P start.
- Kill 6 colored slimes in a specific order.
- Step on 3 unmarked tiles in a specific order.

Some items are highly useful -- pickax, speed boots. Others, like the gauntlets, seem like they'd increase your survivability, but you don't have health or armor in this game; everything is an arcade-style one-hit kill. These items are often merely prerequisites for future items.

One of the most obscure items has the sole purpose of making the final boss appear. Imagine if Atari 2600 Adventure had dozens of its famous easter egg, all of them necessary, to a greater or lesser degree, to finish the game.

It's nearly impossible nowadays to have the communal Tower of Druaga experience that players had in 1984. The closest thing in modern times was probably playing Demon's Souls or Dark Souls at launch, and being part of an active forum. Maybe you could do it with a book club.

Namco Museum just tells you the secret thing you have to do on each floor if you hit the hint button, so all that's left is executing it. Even with save states, that's incredibly hard and not particularly fun. I got to floor 20 and it was *exhausting*.

It's interesting to look at Tower of Druaga's legacy. Games obsessed with ultra-obscure secrets, like Milon's Secret Castle, Bubble Bobble, and Castlevania 2, can be traced back here. Games with bump combat, like Ys and Hydlide, owe it a debt as well.

I feel the influence of Tower of Druaga on Zelda 1, too. The shield that drops when you use your sword feels like it came from here. Zelda's Wizzrobes, who appear, shoot a projectile, and vanish, are clearly based on a common Druaga enemy.

The movement locked into rows and columns, where if you try to move one one axis you'll often slide into a lane on the other axis first, made it into Zelda. Though since Druaga is derived from Pac-Man, you always, infuriatingly, move forward rather than towards the closest lane.

Unfortunately, it's hard to find english-language information on Tower of Druaga, but I liked @rodneylives's Game Design Essentials entry: https://t.co/nVoZxhcw86

And @gamespite's Game Boy Works video: https://t.co/Pd6Be15wap

I had to play Tower of Druaga because of its focus on secrets and its historical significance, but you don't have to make the same mistakes I did. Save yourselves!