

Monotony

Review of Paolo Pedercini's *Every Day the Same Dream*

It is simple to argue that life is a mere series of repeating steps. Every day, we wake up, go to work or school, return home, and go to sleep, with various activities crammed into our free time. Some people are unable to tolerate this kind of repetition and actively seek adventure in all aspects of their lives - but for the majority of us, this is unfortunately not true. We sink into monotony without a second thought, performing the same actions day in and day out.

Every Day the Same Dream highlights this tedium in our daily lives with an appropriate lack of gameplay mechanisms and a minimalistic moveset of size two. The game world is also largely monochromatic, and it is unclear to players whether the character is part of a black and white dream world or if this is a disheartening representation of his everyday life. The title seems to imply that it could be both.

The game is linear, quite literally - the character can only move left and right, a stark contrast from the massive open-world video games of the present. In fact, the flow of the game pushes the character firmly to the right and it is not immediately apparent to the player that they *can* move to the left. Furthermore, moving is one of only two actions that the character can perform - he can walk forwards and backwards and he can interact with some in-world objects. At first, the player might think that they have very little in-game agency. This is justified; we are used to exploring giant open worlds and having a massive inventory of actions in modern video games. But if we think about it, is our moveset in the real world actually that much different from the character's? We tend to gravitate towards games that provide us with experiences that we cannot find in our own world - with the click of a button, we can cast magic, execute a flashy

sword trick, or gun down terrorists. *Every Day the Same Dream* gives us none of these things. Instead, we see the banality of our own everyday routines reflected back at us, and we are posed a question: how are we different from this unfortunate character? We cannot cast magic or wield swords, but we can move forwards and backwards and interact with other objects in our lives.

With this in mind, we ask ourselves: is our fate as bleak as the character's? It depends on how we interpret the ending of the game. Perhaps the character is watching himself escape from this horrible dream into a new one. Or perhaps he is seeing what will happen to him if he does not break out of the endless cycle of his life, and by extension, the players are seeing this as well. There are likely multiple interpretations of the ending, but I would argue that there is no one ending that is completely correct. *Every Day the Same Dream* is a representation of life - a blunt one, but just as in life, the ending is not necessarily as important as the lessons we learn along the way.

The final question, then, comes naturally to us: what *is* the lesson that we can take away from *Every Day the Same Dream*? It is likely the one delivered by the old lady in the elevator: "Five more steps and you will be a new person". Despite the limits placed on the character's agency, we as players helped him complete his transformation by making him deviate from his everyday monotony and forcing him to stop and smell the flowers once in a while. Perhaps it is time to do the same for ourselves.