

Blasphemous  
James Moller  
Klutch Kitten Gaming Podcast  
02/21/20

## **Introduction:**

[upbeat intro music]

Hello and welcome everyone! This is James Moller, also known as Klutch Kitten, and I'm so glad that you're here for episode 68 of the show.

I don't have any pressing matters to mention as we start out, so let's jump right into our review!

[transition music]

## **Game Facts:**

Today we're going to be looking at Blasphemous, which is a souls-like metroidvania developed by The Game Kitchen. The Game Kitchen is based in Seville, Spain and was originally founded on June 18 of 2010; however, much like many of the studios we talk about, the building blocks of TGK were formed much earlier.

The founders began as amateurs who entered their prototypes into competitions under the name of Nivel21 Entertainment. After gaining enough confidence through their success at those competitions, they finally quit their full-time jobs to try their hand at professional game development.

After doing contract work for a couple years, TGK finally released The Last Door, which is a point-and-click horror adventure game. Since then, their second release was Blasphemous on September 10th of 2019.

Currently Blasphemous is available on PC, Switch, PS4 and Xbox 1 for \$24.99, and according to howlongtobeat.com, it takes anywhere from 13 to 22 hours to beat.

In terms of controls, since precise platforming is important in some areas, controller is probably the best way to go.

Let's shift our focus now to the narrative.

[transition music]

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**Narrative:**

[begin somber church music...]

My son, purge yourself of thy sins within lest ye be punished like those before! Nothing is to blame apart from their mutual blasphemy and inadequate worship. They have reaped their due suffering and only seek to show you thine. Oh Penitent One, thou will succumb to the pain of the Miracle in due time, finding only that chains and blood will suffice the church and the Mother of Mothers.

[...end somber church music]

Unlike some of the previous games we've looked at like Wandersong and Pikuniku, Blasphemous takes a uniquely dark and religious tone. Set in the decaying world of Orthodoxy, you play as a masked warrior, The Penitent One, whose purpose and goal is to fight his way to the Cradle of Affliction in order to fulfill his ultimate penance.

Right off the bat, you're given a glimpse into the twisted theme of this game as you watch a horrendous cut scene play out. The Penitent One slays a foe and then pours that monster's blood into his helmet and places it back on his head. Yea, it's pretty jacked up, yet that's a large part of what makes this game compelling.

We've seen games about nearly everything under the sun: space, cyberspace, fantasy, high fantasy, cyberpunk and so on, but I'd wager that you haven't played a game so steeped in religious dark fantasy like Blasphemous is. The imagery and iconography is stark, and it's clear where the developers garnered inspiration.

When it comes to the plot and how narrative threads are woven into the game, I'm of two minds. On one hand I personally wasn't all that interested in the story being told; however, The Game Kitchen still did an incredible job of infusing lore and story into the game. Nearly every collectable has background to read, and typically each time you defeat a boss, you're greeted with another cut scene to progress and add to the narrative.

Everything about the world of Orthodoxy is cohesive and tight. All of it is grim, gory, depressing, and oppressive, and

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although saying that you'll enjoy the world might be a stretch, I think you'll at least be able to appreciate the design that's exhibited.

[transition music]

### **Gameplay:**

Now that we know some about the narrative, what's the actual gameplay like? As I mentioned earlier, Blasphemous is a metroidvania that also pulls inspiration from the Souls games.

To break those genres down for you, it fits most closely with a metroidvania because it's a 2D non-linear action platformer. As the player you're able to travel through biomes relatively freely, but what limits progression are boss-gated abilities. This creates a loop which encourages exploration and eventually backtracking as your new abilities allow for further progression.

The Souls inspiration comes into play when you look at the difficulty and use of bonfire-type shrines. As of late "Soulslike" has become an overused term to describe tough games, but I think there's still merit to its use. In the case of Blasphemous, this game is not only bloody hard; there are also callbacks to From Software's iconic bonfires and flasks. Instead of resting at bonfires, you end up restoring your health and blood potions at Prie Dieu altars. Also, whenever you seek respite at those checkpoints, dead enemies respawn for you to mercilessly kill again.

There are plenty of parallels we can make between Blasphemous and other games, but as you're well aware, we can't merely judge a game by how well it emulates others. We need to evaluate how well it differentiates itself and elevates the genres it represents. As such, let's focus on its strengths and weaknesses.

Our first gameplay strength is how robust the combat system is. Every attack you make in Blasphemous feels intentional and weighty. Although you have an effective dodge and parry, when you choose to swing at an enemy, you need to be sure it's the right time. If it is, the hit will feel so satisfying. If it isn't, the game won't be shy about punishing your mistake. As you learn to master combat, you'll better understand how to read enemy patterns, time your parries precisely, and use your

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abilities to their greatest effect. Combat has a very challenging yet rewarding progression.

The second core strength of gameplay has to do with the enemy and boss designs. Let me be 100% clear: I swore more while playing this game than I've done in a long while, but despite being frustrated about the difficulty, I was still pleased with the quality of design. Not only do enemies look badass and grim, but nearly all of them require you to play in unique ways.

Yea, I did want to throw my controller after being continually pelted by these creepy-ass boomerang dudes, but if I timed my attacks right, I could deflect their weapons! I also never wanted to see another motherfucker with a downward spear again, but it turns out that they're pretty much useless if you have the high ground. You might die two, three or ten times to a specific enemy, but the moment you figure out their weakness, parry their attack, and kill them with a sick animation -- that moment is incredible.

I want to briefly mention bosses as well. Whether you're fighting a giant, blindfolded baby, a trio of laser wielding ghosts, or some other unholy abomination, the boss fights are epic. In a similar way to the basic enemies but on a larger scale, the bosses are tough and push your mastery of combat and traversal to the limits.

The last strength of gameplay I want to mention is balance. This might come as a surprise given our discussion around difficulty, but the more I consider my experience, the more fair I feel the game is.

You're going to die a lot, but you never lose currency for upgrades. Bosses are tough, but if you want, there's a character who will aid you in those encounters. Enemies are punishing to fight, but parry windows are generous. Insta-kill spike pits are kill-joys, but -- well actually I just hate those. They can go to hell.

My point in bringing these examples up is to praise the way in which The Game Kitchen handled difficulty in Blasphemous. There's no doubt that it's a tough experience, but I never felt like it was unfair, which is about all I could ask for.

Although we could discuss more positive aspects of the game, such as weapon skills and collectibles, let's not get too

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lost in the minutia. Let's shift our gaze to the game's primary weakness, which is map traversal:

To be clear, I'm not talking about platforming. I'm referring to how difficult it is to revisit biomes. Given that you're expected to backtrack, it's surprisingly frustrating to do. Although there are fast travel points, they're few and far between, and they're so out of the way that they're often not even worth using!

To be completely frank, this weakness is killing my desire to return to the game. It takes the best parts of the experience and makes them tedious because you're forced to fight through rooms you might not be interested in tackling again. It's tough because in some ways this issue seems like it could be a simple fix, but it doesn't excuse the impact it had on my experience.

Let's move on now to the art and sound design.

[transition music]

### **Art & Sound Design:**

The visuals in Blasphemous are striking. Even with a color palette that's mostly limited to black, brown, grey and red, the artists were effectively able to set a grim tone with the pixel art. Bloody fights provide a gruesome contrast to the world, enemy designs instill fear, and animations flow beautifully. This isn't a game you'll want to show your mother, but it's sure as hell great to look at!

When it comes to the VO, it's passable overall. Some of the voices are spot on and others aren't, but given that you're not hearing dialogue all that often, it's not much of an issue. The soundtrack on the other hand supports the tone of the world excellently. Most of the tracks are somber and quiet; although, as you listen through the compilation, you'll pick up on some of the Spanish influences portrayed by the classical guitar. This isn't a soundtrack you'll throw on during a party, but it accomplishes its purpose for the game. It adds body to the tension and unease of Orthodoxy.

[transition music]

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**Summary:**

Now that we've talked about the narrative, gameplay, art and sound design, let's summarize with some positives and negatives:

First off on the positive side, the world that TKG created is incredibly unique and impactful. In some ways it's also an ode to Spain and the heavy influence Catholicism has had in that part of the world.

Second, combat is satisfying. At points it'll make you want to yell in frustration, but once you clear a room perfectly, you'll feel like a complete badass.

Third, the pixel art style is beautiful in its own right. Not only are the animations smooth and the character models designed well, but the heaviness of religious iconography adds to the visual weight of the game.

First off on the negative side, I struggled to connect with the story and writing. Maybe your experience will be different, but I personally found the writing to be so heavy handed with religious jargon, that it wasn't always easy to follow.

Second, the lack of traversal options in the world hurt my overall enjoyment. Instead of looking forward to further exploring areas I had already been to, I found myself dreading the process of returning.

[transition music]

**Verdict:**

We've made it now to the final boss! This is the part of the podcast where I let you know whether you should slay the game and buy it, flee the game and avoid it, or farm up and wait for a sale.

My verdict for Blasphemous is to farm up and wait for a sale. There are a lot of things to praise about this game, and I loved the unique theme TKG created, but it's not without its flaws. If you're someone who can appreciate a dark theme and are looking for a new metroidvania to play, Blasphemous will definitely scratch that itch; however, if you're new to the

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genre and tend to shy away from tough games, this is probably an experience to skip.

[transition music]

**Conclusion:**

As always, thank you all so much for taking the time to listen in! If you like the show, don't forget to give it a five star review on Apple Podcasts and to tell a friend!

You can reach me with your thoughts, questions, recommendations, and flame at [klutchkittengaming@gmail.com](mailto:klutchkittengaming@gmail.com), on Instagram and Facebook @klutchkittengaming, or on Twitter @kkgpodcast.

I hope you have a lovely rest of the day, and I'll see you in game!

[upbeat outro music]