

Katamari Damacy: The most screwed-up video game ever

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As I already noted, I went down to Los Angeles a few days before the PDC to spend time with friends and relatives. I stayed with a cousin who works for a major video game manufacturer, and his boss gave him a homework assignment: He was told to go home and play a specific video game. (Unfortunately, it wasn't a particularly good video game, but his boss didn't want him to admire the gameplay. He wanted him to pay attention to the visual design.)

Tell this to a teenager and they will think my cousin has a dream job. "He plays video games and gets paid for it!" But of course, we all know that there's a difference between playing video games for fun (where you can choose which game to play and how long to play it) and playing it for work.

Anyway, when he was taking a break from his video game homework, I turned on the Playstation and popped in Katamari Damacy (塊魂), by far the most screwed-up video game ever. In a good way.

I won't bother explaining the game; there are plenty of other sites that do a better job of it than I can, perhaps the most poetic of which is Namco's own site. (They obviously got a professional translator to do the site rather than relying on the bizarro-English used in the game itself!)

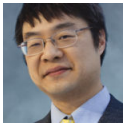
Featuring ball-rolling and object-collecting gameplay mechanics of mesmerizing fluidity, reduced to Pac-Man simplicity, through pure absurdity. Dimensions change drastically as your clump grows from a fraction of an inch to a monstrous freak of nature.

I was indeed mesmerised by the utter simplicity of the gameplay, the intuitiveness of the controls, and the sense of total glee when you realize that you can pick up an ocean liner. The way the game changes scale in the span of twenty minutes adds to the overall magic. What was at the start of the game a wall you merely accepted as part of the landscape becomes, after you grow your katamari for a while, an obstacle you have to avoid, and later still, an item you can roll up, or, if you neglect it long enough, something you pick up off the ground purely incidentally like a piece of gum stuck to your shoe.

I remember on the last level, realizing that I had just picked up the park where the level started. The entire park.

One thing I found myself doing was standing up as my katamari grew larger. I would start out the level sitting down, and by the time I reached 200 meters, I would be standing up and leaning left and right as my huge ball of junk became more and more unwieldy.

Anyway, there wasn't much of a point to this entry. I just wanted to rave about this completely messed-up game. (I'm hardly the only fan of this game. [This particular fan club](#) deserves special mention for their wonderful "Your katamari is as big as <n> comments" link. And then there's the unbelievable [katamari cake](#) complete with prince.)



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