

In Bloom

By Chris Suellentrop

1 I recently decided to spend more than \$400 because I wanted to play a \$10 game. I bought a PlayStation®3 so that I could download Flower, a marvel of a game that casts the player as a series of petals floating in the wind.



2 What's remarkable about Flower is the sensation it creates, from start to finish: simple, almost indescribable joy. Kellee Santiago, the president and co-founder of Thatgamecompany (TGC), the game's publisher, says in an accompanying behind-the-scenes video that Flower is "the video game version of a poem" and that its purpose is to create "an emotion" in those who play it. Flower, which at least for now is exclusively for sale on the PlayStation Network of downloadable games, is not unique in that ability — other games successfully create fear, or nervousness, or exhilaration (or controller-hurling anger) — but it is the only game I've played that made me feel relaxed, peaceful, and happy. What's the point of it? Only that. Which is plenty.

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6 Not everything in the game works. The musical score is less effective — and less affecting — than the game-play, and sometimes the imagery goes too far into rainbows and doves and other decorative elements you might find on the walls of a sixth-grade girl's bedroom. (Thankfully, there are no unicorns.)

7 But it is hard to be cynical about the game's small flaws. Overall, Flower is a delight. The PlayStation®3's motion-sensitive controller adds to the game's airy quality. Flower asks those who play it to turn the controller elegantly through space, rather than forcefully thumb around joysticks and mash buttons. What the game asks the player to do physically complements what it wants the player to experience emotionally. This isn't a game that's willing to relinquish control to the all-important you. Flower demands that you relinquish control to the game and its designers, and it's all the better for asking its players to surrender themselves to it.

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