When I was told we would start covering indie games here at *Orange Lounge Radio* after the site relaunch, I immediately knew which game would kick off these articles.



LA-MULANA
Developed by GR3/NIGORO
1 Player
Genre: Metroid-vania action/adventure exploration with RPG elements

First before I start I'll have to give a shout-out, listener PkerUNO actually wrote on Twitter about this game... he was watching a series of videos starting with the game's bonus dungeon (Which I will be talking about later on in this writeup!) and that's when I decided to download this game and check it out for myself.

Imagine, if you will a game with a world as vast and varied as *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* , only with 8-bit MSX style graphics (as this game is a nod to that ancient computer system and its games, primarily all the Konami ones.) The story stars a young man by the name of Lemeza Kosugi, archaeologist and MSX enthusiast extrodinaire, as he explores the ruins of La-Mulana.

His quest is to find the treasure of La-Mulana before his dad Shorn does. Sounds alot like a particular line of movies, doesn't it? The similarities to Indiana Jones don't stop there either, as Lemeza also wields a whip. So it's easy to see what the developers' inspirations were when developing this epic adventure game. (*Ironically enough one of the items collected later on in*

the game is a Crystal Skull)

The visuals and the music, as I mentioned earlier are designed to emulate games that appeared on the MSX computer system. The game scrolls one screen at a time, much like many of the older games on the MSX (even ports of arcade games that had scrolling, due to the hardware limitations of some games.)

The soundtrack comes in two flavors, the original 'MSX'-sounding version, and a jazzed-up MIDI rearrangement. For a while I preferred the MIDI arranged version, but the MSX original version started to grow on me. The soundtrack is available for download HERE (*MSX Chiptune version*) and HERE (*MIDI Arranged version*), which features all the MSX chiptunes of the games epic soundtrack.

Of course, the game could have great visuals and music, but fall flat on its face in the gameplay department, but that isn't the case with La-Mulana. A word of warning though, the game starts off rather difficult, as only a few hits from overworld enemies will turn Lemeza into minced meat (At least early on, up until you start collecting powerups and life-up jewels) so don't be afraid to use one of many online guides for the game, there are a couple of youtube playthroughs of the game (although only one of them covers the *entire* game)

But as hard as the game is, I gotta give NIGORO credit for the rather interesting power-up system. As mentioned earlier Lemeza is a fan of the MSX computer system, and brings one with him at the start of the adventure. Scattered around the world of La-Mulana are MSX roms, 84 in total strewn about the landscape in shops or randomly lying around the ruins. (Don't ask me why the skeleton corpses of deceased adventurers are carrying a copy of *Yie-Ar Kung Fu* with them, I have no idea.)

Starting off, you can only 'equip' one ROM at a time, but later on you have the opportunity to purchase an MSX2, which enables you to equip two ROMs at a time. By themselves most ROMs don't do anything aside from the two *Game Master* carts which allow you to save your progress, and the two *Ruins RAM* carts -- the 8k version which is a basic map (assuming you have the actual map for the given area of the ruins) and the 16k version, which is more detailed. You can combine the two and it reveals the 'Ruins RAM 24K', which is the best map in the game.) There are dozens of other interesting ROM combinations, with varying effects! So experiment with the ROMs you find in

the ruins.

In addition to the myriad of MSX ROMs, Lemeza can also find various weapons, sub-weapons, and items in his journey. You can also get two more powerful whips, but it *IS* possible to screw up and lock yourself out of the weapon upgrades, so you have to be extremely careful when attempting to snag a new whip. (luckily you can reload your save, so assuming you didn't save after your first botched attempt, you can retry again later.)

So overall I can't recommend this game enough. If you're looking for a good indie game to check out, this one is well worth the download, as I got about 50+ hours of gameplay out of it.

You can download the game from the La-Mulana WIKI by clicking here and click on the 'download the game' link (as they don't allow hotlinking.)

Warning: *Bonus dungeon spoilers below! PROCEED AT YOUR OWN RISK!!!*

Ok, for those of you still here, when you *have* completed the game -- **You ain't seen nothing yet!** When you reach a certain point in the game (basically the point where you fight the final boss) the road to a second surprise opens up. This road is called.....
HELL TEMPLE.

Hell Temple is a bonus dungeon, which WILL make you ruin your controller (or keyboard, but I used my gamepad) in frustration. It is NOT for the faint of heart (or those short on patience) Basically everything you've ever hated about videogames in general (cheap hits, tricky jumps that require pin-point accuracy, and annoying teleporter rooms await those foolish enough to unlock this nightmare secret area. But, if you think you're up to the challenge, a very *very* 'special' treasure awaits those who can survive the hellish challenges.

So you have to ask yourself, 'Art thou a fool?'

Bonus trivia: Did you know? The name "La-Mulana" is derived from reversing the Japanese (effectively reversing the syllables) of the name of one of the developers, Naramura. And, if you know where to look, you can find 'laptops' for each of the game's developers, but you can only talk to them if you use a special ROM combination. Then, they'll impart an interesting behind-the-scenes development story!