

# G String: weird gameplay for a weird world



*Disclaimer: I experienced the game on my own and could be misrepresenting some aspects of it due to my personal biases and advise you to do so yourself if you feel like I'm misrepresenting the game. I'm also touching on the more intricate aspects of the game that aren't related to it as a part of a interactive system and my opinion is subjective and based purely on my own media literacy level.*

**gameplay: poor**

**visuals: quite good, impressive at times**

**sound: good**

**story: it's complicated**

**... as a piece of electronic entertainment**

I don't like calling myself a gamer. I might be a fairly capable player but I lack the dedication to experience some times of games and some can lose me altogether based purely on specific tropes. Even with the questionable state of the industry as a whole video games are a dynamic medium with constantly shifting design philosophies and priorities. Gone are the days of maze-like levels with only an idea of what those environments are. Even though 90s fps level design tropes now feel archaic by modern standards we found ways to make them have less impact on the gameplay flow. Early to mid 2000s marked the beginning of an era where the levels look a lot more like places that could be inhabited by real people while at the same being fairly linear and purely molded around the gameplay flow.

G String exists in a state of limbo where it tries to reinvent how the environments in levels are experienced and in turn establishes what made 90s fps levels infuriating to navigate. As the main developer Eyaura claims many concepts for the levels were first designed as gmod maps or architectural studies and its perfectly noticeable during gameplay. G String's strongest moments are quiet urbex sections where you're left one on one with its' beautifully handcrafted world.

Despite later stages looking a lot blockier and less polished you can expect it to change for the better in the nearest future as Eyaura is constantly working on increasing the overall fidelity of the game. G String also features a nice sound design that contributes to the immersion in the world and a decent soundtrack, that while not always fitting the context of the game, works as its own thing.

I got introduced to G String a couple of years ago through its' 2013 sourcmod beta release. Much jankier, less polished levels (compared to 2020 steam release) that don't telegraph any sense of where you should go next and the absolute mess of a gameplay quickly lost me. I didn't freshen up my memory on any of its betas before writing this article but it's safe to say that the standalone release is suffering from all of the same problems and perhaps even more so. It's really hard for me to talk about G String's level design. My comparison of its' levels to the likes of Doom and Build engine games comes from maze-like structure, which I'm assuming is a consequence of building the gameplay around the levels. The game barely ever conveys or straight up misleads you regarding the location of your next waypoint required to progress and features plenty of optional areas and dead-ends. You're not likely to get lost but sidetracking into a dead end drain pipe for the Nth time quickly becomes old. Even though exploration is encouraged by the game's gunplay (we'll get back to that in a bit) and rewarded with health and ammo pickups it doesn't feel as satisfying as finding a secret in hl2 would. The levels often establish and break rules on the fly which feels cheap and amateurish: a hole in the ground that might've killed you a couple of minutes ago is now crucial to progress; a futuristic looking door that is similar to the motion sensor ones a few levels ago now requires interaction. While not it's thematic focus, some praise the game for its execution of horror which I found offbeat and mediocre even when the game threw hallucinatory sequences at you. The game does its' best to ground players in its world and then immediately breaks the immersion by having a very video-game-y button puzzle (credit where credit's due, it has a few decent physics based puzzles) akin to Doom or by scattering numerous medkits and ammo boxes in every single septic tank and crackden room. It becomes really hard to appreciate the game's world when you're spending 60% of your time performing tightrope platforming across massive spills of ~~eastern-european~~ ~~euisine~~ toxic sewage or crawling through vents. As much as I don't mind either of those it started to severely wear down on me by the second third of the game. Coupled with mostly dim and drab lighting, I was actively looking for ways to traverse the game as quickly as possible by the level 40 (of 70 something!!!).

Another serious issue with the game is its' gunplay. It uses all of the hl2's arsenal without much alteration and adds a pyrokinesis ability (a small ball that you can pick up and punt with your ~~gravity~~ ~~gun~~ telekinetic ability) which rarely ever comes into play and is accompanied by a prompt when it's required to progress. The enemies are much tankier than their hl2 counterparts and seemingly lack headshot damage multiplier so the combat sections one too many enemies turn into one sided dps exchange slapfights.

Most weapons have significantly less punch but make up for it with a seemingly lower spread, higher rpm and satisfying enemy gibbing - a stream of fire from an smg can shred an enemy into pieces which feels appropriate oddly enough. Considering all of the issues listed so far and how the difficulty settings work in hl2 sourcemods, it's really not worth your time playing on anything other than the easy difficulty. To be fair, the enemy placement was fairly solid even though the flow reminded me of Mystery Combat Man 3 at times.

The game advertises itself as having ways to avoid firefights altogether, though I rarely ever saw the opportunity to do so; perhaps all of the issues listed above were created on purpose to encourage non-violent approach but either way it doesn't seem to work in the game's favor.

### **... as a work of fiction**

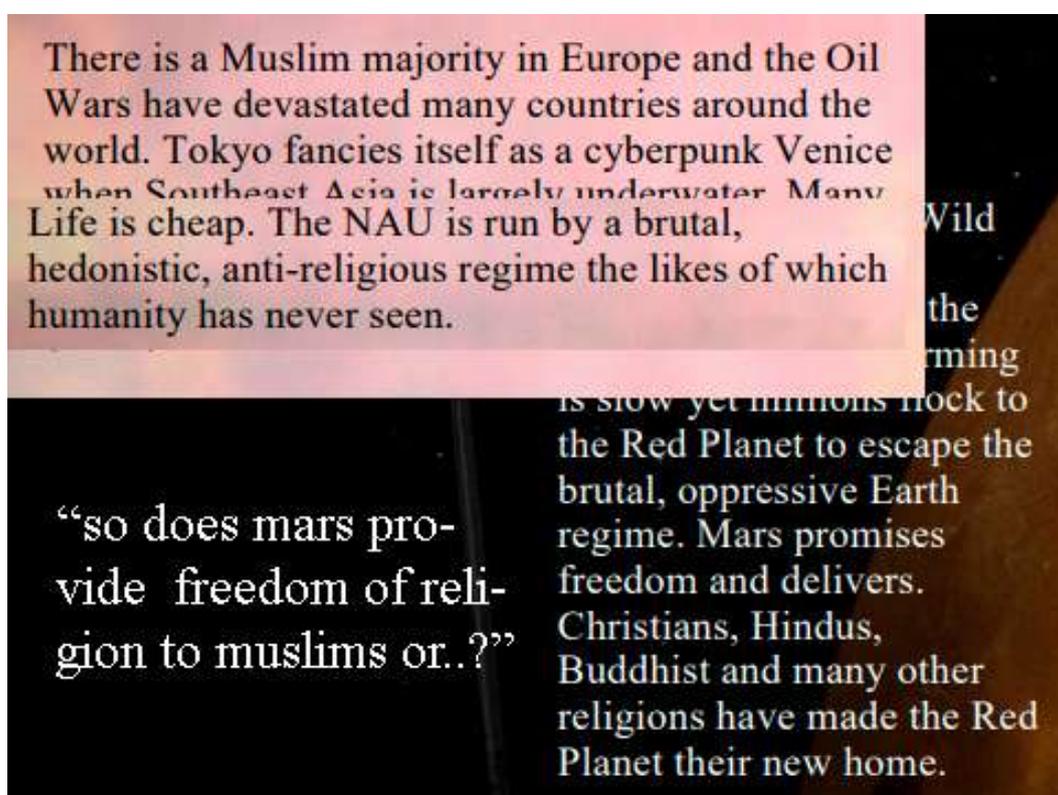
While extremely underwhelming as a piece of entertainment software G String is also a mess as a storytelling mechanism that is hard to talk about. I initially planned to give the game a pass on how shallowly it utilizes the dystopian themes or fails to say anything cohesive. Not every game must be a lecture on why capitalism is bad or whatever but I consider cyberpunk a very political theme by default despite newer works of fiction only being cyberpunk aesthetically. First of all, I should address that I could be one of the least qualified people when it comes to talking about narratives in video games. Second, most of the lore is contained in the game's official manual/design doc. I interpreted the story as existing on several layers: the surface plot, the symbolism and the implied politics.

The core events of the game are conveyed quite badly. Myo Hyori is a silent protagonist and her seeking revenge on Bortz Bioengineering is about all you could infer based on the game's intro. However that seemingly never comes into play as she miraculously finds herself at a doorstep of an AI management lab or an air purification facility solely by traversing sewers and slums, advancing what little of plot there is. In the second third of the game we encounter Riley Verge, a disembodied voice of a hacker working with The Underground and his sole purpose is to clue us in on what's currently happening in the game as it can't be conveyed through intercom announcements or graffities. We as players we might know who Cyd Scoble or Ted Murdock is but Myo has never seen them or heard them talk until the later half of the game so it doesn't make much sense why she would go such lengths to sabotage their operation. Given the lack of any supporting characters her actions seem almost random and inconsequential.

Now, I'm not that well versed in theology but interpreted the game as ~~having a religious~~ ~~subtext~~ "Christian Cyberpunk". Myo, just like Gordon Freeman, is a messianic figure, existing to bring change to the world, acting out the will of a god. This theory of mine is supported by constant mentions of bans on religion, an underground church setpiece, The Undergrounds "logo" literally saying "god is all" etc. I'm very much an annoying /r/atheism type of person so this take on cyberpunk formula came off to me as cringe but it's definitely an unique take.

The world of G String is corrupt and godless and can only be cleansed by total annihilation - the game ends with Myori meeting her parents in the purgatory(?) and the city being destroyed with a fade to white shortly after with presumably everyone being judged for their actions(perhaps a stand-in for rapture?). The final sequence could be interpreted as the beginning of a new cycle of life for the humanity on Mars, not burdened by the corruption of Earth.

G String also comes burdened with a baggage of questionable politics. It's hard to tell if the developer holds any of the beliefs portrayed in the game as Eyaura stated that anything depicted is up to personal interpretation. The most in-your-face theme in the game is the commodification of femininity: local replacements for zombies are sexbots and sexualized nannies, vending machines for crusty lingerie, walls being plastered with pin-ups and advertisements of beautiful women. I expected the game to elaborate on this concept or at least explain why but most of the problems in the world boil down to "things are not the way they're supposed to be compared to some sort of status quo" and what's happening is personal responsibility of the humanity as a collective. The game seemingly believes that the advancements in automation made people prioritize hedonism and paints transhumanism in a negative light. G String is a dying world which sometimes thematically preoccupies itself with the destruction of the family unit seemingly putting the blame on the perversion of men. The Underground appears to be opposing "monetary system in its' current form" and "digital currency" at the same time but their goals or whether they want a moneyless society is never stated. The game's manual vaguely addresses all of these points in a rather colorful language:



Overall, G String came off to me as a conservative take on the cyberpunk formula, and while it's a unique result of a labor of love I consider it a MAJOR waste of time.