The Game Boy's extensive library of games contains a whole host of renowned classics that have forever changed the medium (*The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening,* *Tetris* and *Pokémon*, for example), but for every fondly remembered gem, there's at least two or three games that have been forgotten by the vagaries of time. This is especially the case for games that were only ever released in Japan.

Be it due to licensing/copyright issues (the first two *Super Robot Wars* games), being part of a really obscure-at-the-time genre (Konami's *Cave Noire*, a prototypical rougelike), being too Japanese (*Kaeru no Tame ni Kane wa Naru*, or *“The Frog For Whom The Bell Tolls”*, the engine of which was re-used for *Link's Awakening*), some games were just deemed unmarketable for release anywhere beyond the Land of the Rising Sun.

One such casualty was *Noobow*, a 1992 licensed game based on a Japanese chocolate mascot so obscure that not even the internet can supply any reliable information beyond a couple of short animated videos. It's actually quite an enormous shame, because *Noobow* is a pretty good game that just about anyone can get into and enjoy.

Developed by Irem, the folks behind 8-bit cult classics like *R-Type*, *Metal Storm* and *Spelunker*, *Noobow* is a puzzle-platformer where you take control of a heartbreakingly adorable yellow blob of the same name. The story, as far as I can gather from the cutscenes considering I don't speak Japanese, is that the sun and rain are having a dust-up. This is causing everyone to suffer extreme cold or heat, and it's up to Noobow to resolve this mess by helping them out.

It should be mentioned that the cutscenes and level title cards are the only parts of the game that contain any text; the rest of the game is completely visual, so there’s no need to worry about needing to know Japanese to enjoy the game.

*Noobow* is a puzzle-platformer that can best be compared to the *Dizzy* adventure games by CodeMasters, in so far as you control an anthropomorphized thing that goes around solving puzzles by picking up items and using them where they are needed (for instance, picking up a bucket, collecting water from a waterfall and throwing the water at a sweating mole to cool him down). You walk around the world and have two buttons on hand: one button to pick up/put down an item, and the other to use the item at a very specific location.

The difference between *Noobow* and *Dizzy*, however, is that the former is much easier in terms of its puzzles. When you find an item, what it’s needed for isn't much further than a screen or two away, at the very most. You only have to carry one item at a time, so there's no worry about wondering which items to bring along with you. And when said item is used, it will immediately disappear to let you know that you're good to pick up whatever else you need along the way.

*Noobow* is an easy game, to the point where it's arguably too easy. It's a game that's nothing but 'sticking the really obvious key into the really obvious door to progress' puzzles. However, this will only really be the case if you're an avid puzzle fan that loves dealing with practical puzzles. If you're a younger player or someone new to puzzle games, the puzzles on offer will tax your brain enough to be enjoyable without being frustrating or obtuse.

They're good puzzles, too. The solutions are usually quite intuitive and obvious for most people to grasp. There's a variety of different puzzles involving spatial awareness, memorizing the layouts of ladders in a maze, considering what order certain items will need to be used in, and more. Often times, they will take a simple idea like using square blocks as a set of stairs, and then expand them into an interesting direction like using those same blocks to navigate a gap between two cliff faces. Sometimes, a good idea will only be used once and then never revisited, but the puzzles are overall quite well made and fun to play.

If *Noobow* does suffer from anything, it's being too short. The game's seven levels can be beaten in just under an hour, and there's nothing else to uncover. No secret areas, no alternate routes, no bonus ending; just the seven levels. And this isn't the kind of game that's short yet can takes ages to get to grips with, like *PaRappa the Rapper* or *NiGHTS into Dreams...* It's a game that's easy for just about anyone to figure out and play through, for better and worse.

When it comes to the presentation, it's pretty much what you'd expect from this game - simple, but done quite well. Though the graphics for the levels can get a bit samey, and there's basically no backgrounds, it still manages to establish a personality through its litany of endearing character designs, from the cute squirrels in level 2 to the sweating moles underground to the smiling naiveté of Noobow himself.

Meanwhile, the music's got some good melodies that are easy to hum along to (partially due to what I suspect is something of a recurring motif or melodical structure in the songs), even if the fairly short loops can mean it can get very slightly grating. On a far less pleasant note, some of the sound effects used; namely, the cry Noobow makes when falling and the blowing wind from the snow clouds; are loud and high-pitched to the point of being physically painful to hear for anywhere beyond two seconds.

*Noobow* is a game that can best be summed as short, but sweet. It won't take long to blow through the game, and it will be a bit too easy for experienced puzzle solvers, but it's a good game for everyone else to enjoy for about an hour. Enjoyable puzzles, coupled with very simple gameplay mechanics and the cutest characters in gaming this side of *Klonoa*, make for an obscure romp worth checking out.