

Based on the game by Johan Peitz

Your ship has crashed on a strange alien planet. You wake up completely alone, with nothing more than your human body. There is nothing useful in your pod. A glowing sphere hovers a short distance away. What will you do?

Welcome to Ascent, a micro metroidvania designed for the Pico-8 fantasy console, and available to play here. It takes less than half an hour to complete 100%, even when you start out not knowing anything about what you are doing. For you, however, it is not a game. It is instead very, very real.

You will traverse through a strange world, traversing a jungle and cliffs and a desert and more, guided by voices from these strange glowing orbs you can collect, which will hint at a terrible tragedy that befell the planet, leaving these orbs as the souls of the only survivors. They will urge you to gather all eight of the wandering souls, and bring them to a mysterious ‘core’ under the surface of the planet. During your journey, you will find strange shrines that can grant you additional powers. Some will strengthen your arms, others allow you to ground-pound or dash, and one will even grant you the ability to control vines. With each shrine, your body shifts, becoming more plantlike, and a deep aching grows with each transformation. But even if you should die, you will find yourself awaking by one of the strange burning lamps dotted throughout the landscape. You must finish your task if you want to have any hope of escape.

You begin with **+0 CP**. Good luck.

(Note: As this is a Gauntlet, failure here will not end your Chain, but will simply send you on your way, without any prizes or any of the purchases you’ve made here.)

Drawbacks

If you wish to make purchases, you will need CP to spend. Thus, you will need to add some challenges for you to face to gain that CP.

Pixel Vision [+100 CP] - Your vision is somehow extremely pixelated, rendering everything you see as grainy blocks of color.

Shifting Landscape [+100 CP] - The landscape of this world is not static, but instead will shift and change over time, with new paths opening while olds ones close.

Fly Free Spirit [+100 CP] - Any significant impact will jar one of the souls you've collected loose, causing them to fly off somewhere in the local area. Dying and reviving will send up to three souls flying off for you to recollect.

Collectathon [+100 CP] - The number of souls you have to collect has expanded from eight to eighty. This also raises the bar for achieving the minimum prize from one soul to ten.

Grave Injury [+200 CP] - Your crash landing has given you a serious and lasting injury to one of your arms or legs. It will remain a problem for you throughout your journey here.

Pain Shrines [+200 CP] - While the use of the shrines is somewhat painful ordinarily, as your body is partially rebuilt each time, now the pain is excruciating, leaving you debilitated for several hours each time to recuperate. You will be safe from dangers while doing so, but it will get even worse with each shrine. You will also experience lesser, but still terrible pain each time you revive from death at a lantern.

Echoes of Calamity [+200 CP] - The blue-white spheres are not the only remnants of the world's previous civilization. Strange purple-black spheres are also floating around, remnants of those that died in the calamity. If you make the mistake of touching one, it will try to take over your body, forcing you to match your will against it to drive it out. If you fail, you fail this Gauntlet.

Oh, My Lungs [+300 CP] - Alien spores in the atmosphere have infected your lungs, slowly killing you over time, and weakening you as they do so. Using a shrine will push the spores back and earn you more time, but your lifespan will likely be measured in days, at most, and if the spores kill you, the lamps won't revive you. Instead, you will fail this Gauntlet.

Predation [+300 CP] - Something is hunting you. A strange, glitching thing, full of malice and teeth. It likes to stalk you, basking in your fear, so you have a chance to escape it, and it may give up the chase temporarily if you evade it long enough, but if it catches you, the Gauntlet will be over for you.

Perks

Shrine Upgrades [FREE] - As mentioned in the intro, you will find shrines here that will empower you. This Perk allows you to keep those empowerments when you leave here, and will integrate them into your Body Mod. The other Perks below can unlock these upgrades from the start for you, and will also provide additional benefits that won't be integrated into your Body Mod.

Strong Grip [100 CP] - Your upper body, especially your arms and hands, have been strengthened several times over, to the point where you can stab your fingers into substances as hard as stone or iron. Unlocks both grip upgrades (ledges and wall climbing) from the start.

Ground Pound [100 CP] - When falling, you can charge up to either cause yourself to bounce on impact, or release a shockwave with comparable force to the speed of your fall. Unlocks the ground pound upgrade from the start.

Dash [200 CP] - When you are moving at a running speed or higher, you can cause yourself to flicker, allowing you to pass through thin obstacles such as walls. Unlocks the dash upgrade from the start.

Vine Control [300 CP] - You are able to actively communicate with plants, and can vastly amplify their growth and manipulate their movements. Unlocks the vine passage upgrade from the start.

Items

PICO-8 Player [FREE] - A small retro-style gaming device, loaded with the PICO-8 engine and several games, including Ascent, Celeste, and a handful more. Perfect for keeping you entertained for a bit. Can be summoned and dismissed from your hands at will.

World Map [100 CP] - A simple paper map, which automatically records where you've been, albeit in a rather pixelated manner. Can zoom in and out, and rotate the view to look at things vertically as well as horizontally.

Bouncy Mushroom Spores [100 CP] - A bag with three large squishy spheres in them. Each sphere, when planted, will grow into a large mushroom you can bounce on within minutes. These mushrooms can also provide the nutrition of a full meal when eaten. Uneaten mushrooms will vanish, and new spheres will appear in the bag, within a day after planting.

Glowing Orb [200 CP] - A floating blue-white sphere that only you can see or hear. It can give you general advice about your situation, and can also be used to communicate with any of your Companions, whether they are imported into a given Jump or not. This orb can be integrated into your Body Mod, allowing it to accompany you in future Gauntlets.

Revival Lantern [300 CP] - A lantern with a blue flame that you can summon and deploy at will. During this Gauntlet, this lantern will function exactly like the other revival lanterns you would encounter throughout the world, and it will vanish if you activate a different lantern. In future Jumps, it can still revive you from death, but it will vanish if unused an hour after being deployed, requiring it be deployed again, and the flame will extinguish after reviving you for one month, rendering the lantern unusable until it reignites.

Prizes

If you gave up before reaching the core, died or failed due to a drawback, or arrived at the core without a single soul (or without ten souls if you took Collectathon), you will leave here with nothing.

If you arrived at the core with at least one soul (or with at least ten souls if you took Collectathon), you will be able to keep all of your purchases. You will also be able to keep the plant-like form that you have gained during your trek as an alt-form. This form is very durable, can photosynthesize, and can allow you to enter a dormant state to rapidly heal yourself.

If you escaped with all eight souls (or with all eighty souls if you took Collectathon), you gain the prior set of prizes, as well as the ability to transform yourself into an intangible sphere of energy. In this form, you can move at superluminal speeds, allowing you to travel between planets and stars in mere minutes.

Notes

I hope you enjoyed this micro Gauntlet, and checked out the game.

Changelog

V1.0 - Created