

Platform: PlayStation 4 / Switch **Genre:** Metroidvania

Developer: WayForward

Initial Release Date: April 19, 2016 [PS4] March 20, 2018 [Switch]

Limited Run Release Date: Oct. 28, 2016 [PS4] Dec 7, 2018 [Switch]

Limited Run Quantity: 6,000 [PS4] 12,100 [Switch standard] 2,900 [Switch CE]

Initially released for Nintendo 3DS but published on disc for PlayStation 4 through Limited Run the same day as *Risky's Revenge*, *Shantae and the Pirate's Curse* carries forward the direct through line of game design and mechanics that began way back in the original *Shantae* for GBC more a decade and a half earlier. At the same time, this is no mere reprise of what had come before. Not only does it look markedly different, with detailed, painterly backgrounds and higher-resolution visuals, but *Shantae* herself makes use of completely new play mechanics in order to navigate a world whose structure represents a conscious break from the contiguous design of her first two adventures.

Lacking her genie magic, Shantae can no longer transform or cast spells in *The Pirate's Curse*. Instead, she's forced to rely on the skills she gains by acquiring Risky's lost pirate relics: Her hat, sword, and yes, her boots. If Shantae's previous adventures played like the more ambitious entries in Sega's *Wonder Boy* series, relying on form-changing and spell-casting for advancement, *The Pirate's Curse* takes a page from Nintendo's *Metroid* series by emphasizing the use of tools that prove essential for both navigation and combat. Risky's hat allows Shantae to turn her leaps into long glides to reach new areas, while the saber that formerly belonged to the fallen pirate queen confers the ability to shatter the ground and bounce off enemies with downward thrusts.

This change in Shantae's skill set turns *The Pirate's Curse* into a much faster-paced game than either *Shantae*

or *Risky's Revenge*, further sanding away the franchise's friction between action and mechanics. Rather than activating a separate dance mode in order to access her powers, Shantae now simply activates them with the press of a button: Holding the shoulder button will cause her to deploy her hat-sail, pressing down while in mid-air will cause her to brandish her blade, and so forth. The enemies you encounter along the way reflect these changes, too. They tend to be less of the damage sponges you faced in the previous games—especially bosses—but they can hit a lot harder now. Overall, *The Pirate's Curse* is a speedier game that emphasizes evasion and efficiency over hammering the attack button, to the point where Shantae now has a back-step button to allow her to quickly dodge out of the way of bad guys. It creates more of an arcade feel without losing its exploratory charm.



PS4™



WayForward

“ Overall, *Shantae and the Pirate's Curse* is a much speedier game than either of its predecessors, emphasizing evasion and efficiency over simply hammering the attack button, creating a classic arcade vibe without losing the series' exploratory charm.

The new world structure helps speed things along, too. There's no longer a connective overworld to navigate; instead, you select from more than half a dozen different standalone areas by hopping aboard Risky's boat. For her part, Risky—who, having also lost many of her powers here, begrudgingly eats a slice of humble pie and becomes Shantae's partner for the journey—drops you off at the entrance to each area, but doesn't actually participate in Shantae's adventures beyond the shore.

In this sense, *The Pirate's Curse* seems to draw its greatest design inspiration from mid-2000s portable action games like *Metroid Fusion* and *Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin*. Each of the standalone areas here has a nonlinear, puzzle-like design, and you gain access to the bulk of each region in the form of a dungeon that has to be uncovered by gaining new powers or completing some sort of task first.

Although the loss of the interconnected world does change the overall feel of the game, the upshot is that this is by far the largest *Shantae* adventure to date. There's plenty of reason to revisit completed areas, whether to hunt for collectibles, check for new character dialogue and side quests, or perform mission-critical tasks that allow you to advance in other areas.

But most of all, the modular world design allows each island you explore to feature its own vibe, as well as its own distinct self-contained narrative and challenges. These range from an auto-run dash to carry Shantae's zombie frenemy Rotty Tops to safety through a haunted graveyard to sneaking through a desert palace in a slinky costume after being mistaken for its princess. Many of the areas revolve around unique mechanics, and a great deal of the backtracking requires players to recognize elements they spotted in previous zones and return to them once Shantae acquires the means to overcome or utilize them.

The humor here can be ribald, to say the least—it's big on gross-out jokes, scantily clad ladies, and sometimes the intersection between the two—but *The Pirate's*

Curse offers some of the most satisfying metroidvania-style gameplay to be found on any platform. It feels like the point at which the series truly came into its own; a maturing, of sorts, despite all the gleeful immaturity on display. The game works best for those who have already spent a fair amount of time with the previous games; the entire supporting cast of the first two *Shantae* adventures put in an appearance here, and there are plenty of references to the events of those earlier games. At the same time, they largely amount to window dressing. *The Pirate's Curse* stands on its own merits, and it's an easy enough game for a total novice to pick up and jump into immediately.

Limited Run released both *Risky's Revenge* and *The Pirate's Curse* for PlayStation 4 in October of 2016. *The Pirate's Curse* appeared on Switch a little more than two years later, in December 2018, as both a standard and a limited edition that included a soundtrack CD, a non-working *The Pirate's Curse* Game Boy Color cartridge (complete in a faithful-looking “replica” box!), a poster and art cards in an oversized box. *Risky's Revenge* would follow suit after another two years, making its way to Switch in September of 2020 with an equally elaborate limited edition containing an enamel pin, soundtrack CD, and other collectibles—alongside a Switch and Game Boy Color reissue of the scarce and highly sought-after original *Shantae*.

In short, *Shantae's* early appearance under the Limited Run label in 2016 would begin a long and fruitful relationship between the company and WayForward, which continues to this day with recent releases such as *Shantae and the Seven Sirens*, the fifth chapter in the series. It her a while to find traction, but *Shantae* has become a fixture of video gaming. It's not hard to see why when she has timeless classics like these two excellent metroidvania platformers under her belt.

Not that she wears a belt, of course. Especially in *The Pirate's Curse*, where she wears less than ever much of the time. Genies!



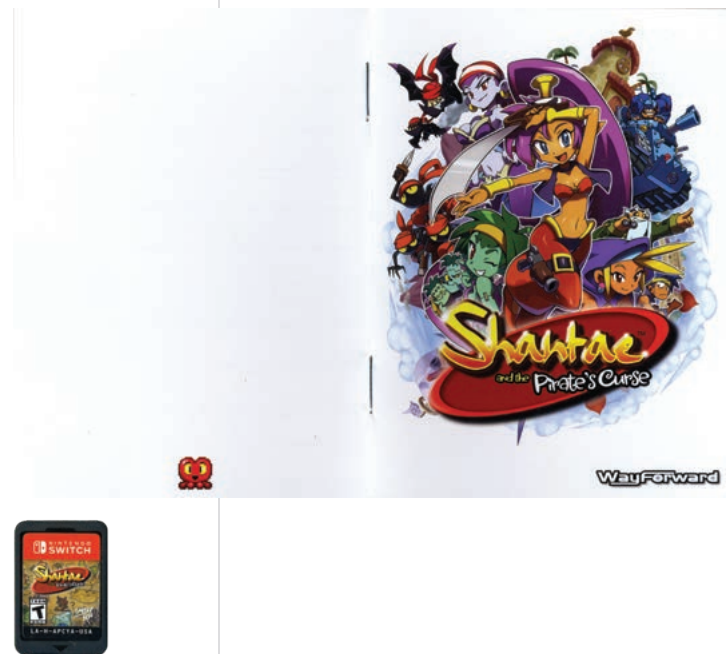




Opposite page, clockwise from top left
Switch collector's box front; Switch collector's box back; illustrated cards x3

This page, clockwise from top left
Replica Game Boy Color box front; replica Game Boy Color box back; soundtrack CD sleeve front; soundtrack disc;
soundtrack CD sleeve back; replica Game Boy Color cartridge stand (base and acrylic supports); replica Game Boy
Color cartridge (non-working)

01. Oh Snap, Something's Amiss	<p>{ Composed by }</p> <p>JAKE KAUFMAN</p> 
02. Trip through Sequin Land	
03. Scuttle Town	
04. We Love Burning Town	
05. Boss Battle	
06. On the Wide Open Waves (Sailing Theme)	
07. Streamworks (Saliva Island)	
08. Ancient Aquifers (Spittle Maze)	
09. Sly	
10. Rostytops	
11. Rave in the Grave (Zombie Island)	
12. Back to the Roots (Gackle Tower)	
13. The Tenacious Tentacled Terror	
14. Cult of Personality (Tan Line Temple)	
15. Scorching Dunes (Sunburn Island)	
16. The Pit (Lost Catacomb)	
17. The Nightmare Woods (Run Run Rostytops)	
18. Scuttle Town: Reinvention	
19. Bole	
20. Darkest Night (Village of Lost Souls)	
21. The Desolate Domain (Oublette of Suffering)	
22. The Floating Factory (Propeller Town)	
23. Arctic Justice (Frostbite Island)	
24. Beyond Permafrost (Abandoned Factory)	
25. Boss Battle (Final)	



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 Shantae and the Pirate's Curse Switch case liner; Shantae and the Pirate's Curse Switch manual; Shantae and the Pirate's Curse Switch cartridge; Shantae and the Pirate's Curse replica Game Boy Color cartridge; Shantae and the Pirate's Curse Switch case liner (reverse)





NINTENDO
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LIMITED
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026 STEALTH INC 027 | PSV A CLONE IN THE DARK

Platform: PlayStation 4 / PlayStation Vita Genre: Puzzle / Stealth
Developer: Curve Digital

Initial Release Date: March 18, 2014 [PS4] July 23, 2013 [Vita]

Limited Run Release Date: Nov. 25, 2016 [PS4 / Vita]

Limited Run Quantity: 3,600 [PS4] 3,600 [Vita]

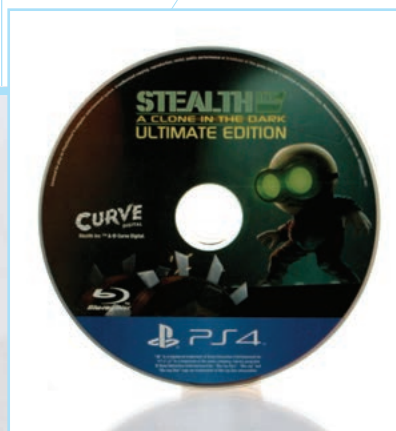
Originally released in 2011 as a freeware game called *Stealth Bastard: Tactical Espionage Arsehole*, Jonathan Biddle's tricky light-based puzzle platformer got a kid-friendlier title when it was remade as a commercial release for consoles and mobile devices. Limited Run's PlayStation 4 and Vita editions—catalog #026 and #027, respectively—shipped with the lengthy name *Stealth Inc: A Clone in the Dark Ultimate Edition* to denote that these were, indeed, the complete editions of the game before Biddle moved along to focus on the sequel. As with all Limited Run releases, *Stealth Inc* contains not only the most updated available version of the core game, but its add-on content, too.

That amounts to 100 stages of stealth gameplay, more than enough to tax even the sharpest mind. Like *Oddworld*, *Stealth Inc* approaches the problem of sneaking around and solving environmental puzzles from the direction of a side-scrolling 2D platform action game. However, it differs from *New 'n' Tasty* in some fairly significant ways beyond merely making use of a simpler visual style.

Where *Oddworld* sent its hero on a sprawling journey across a variety of natural landscapes, modern industrial structures, and ancient ruins, *Stealth Inc* takes place inside a corporate laboratory designed to test the skills of mass-manufactured clones. *Oddworld's* villains hoped to turn the Mudokon people into products; *Stealth Inc's* clones are the products, and your task is to test their viability. It's not the kind of test you want your clone to

fail, since it inevitably leads to their death, and the backgrounds are stained with the blood of failed earlier efforts. Each of the game's dozens of stages is a self-contained multi-phase death trap, with dynamic environmental hazards designed to trigger at unexpected times and catch your poor assembly-line human off guard. Not precisely the cheeriest premise.

Stealth Inc differs from *Oddworld* in another fundamental respect: It's a much faster and looser game. Rather than building on the precision platformer format pioneered by games like *The Prince of Persia*, *Stealth Inc* instead has a faster, looser feel akin to classic platform action games like *Super Mario Bros.* or, perhaps more appropriately, *Super Meat Boy*. Your clone is a limber little fellow with the ability to run, jump, grab ledges, crouch down to walk through low openings—all the capabilities you



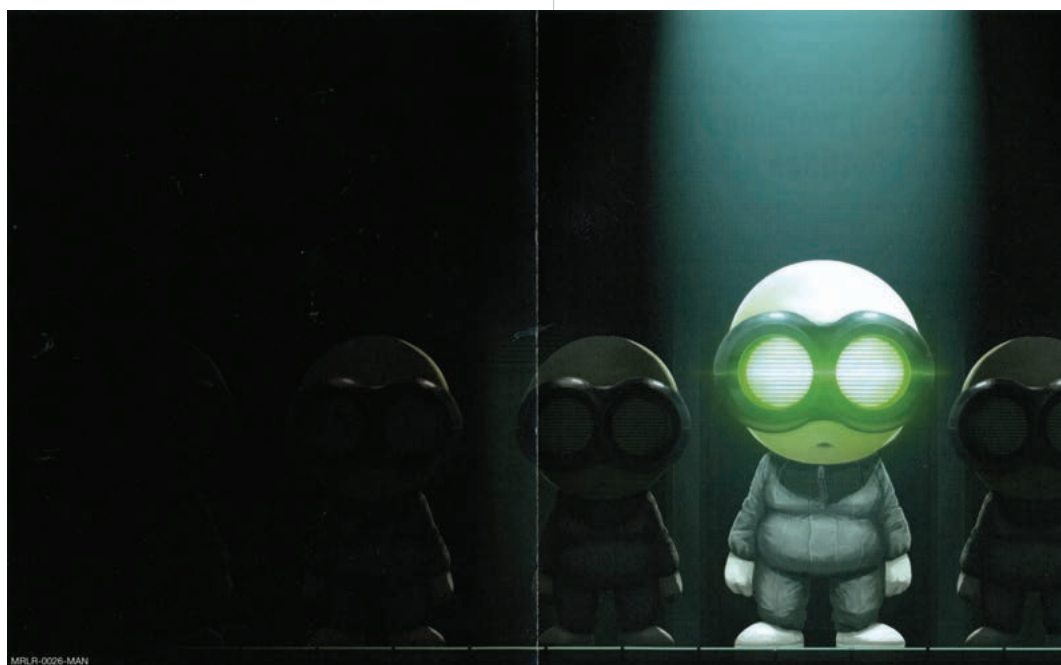
PS4

STEALTH INC.
A CLONE IN THE DARK
ULTIMATE EDITION



CURVE
DIGITAL

CURVE
DIGITAL



PlayStation 4 edition, clockwise from top left
PlayStation 4 cover liner; PlayStation 4 disc; PlayStation 4 manual

expect from a tiny man trapped in terrible circumstances in which life and death hinge upon his nimble athleticism. While you never get to haul ass over long open stretches classic platform heroes like the ones *Mega Man* and *Sonic* enjoy (because you're trapped in a *Portal*-like gauntlet of hell designed to murder you repeatedly), you always feel like you have total control over your tiny doomed avatar's movements.

The puzzles in *Stealth Inc* may revolve around your clone's platforming capabilities, but sheer twitch skill doesn't count for much here. Even when the walls start closing in or you find yourself suddenly being pinned down by a plunging ceiling lined with deadly spikes, *Stealth Inc* is less about pure reflex and more about correctly recognizing patterns and maintaining your cool under pressure. The ever-changing levels are designed to throw you off your stride, but the layouts and environmental details both do a great job of leading your eye toward key objectives, highlighting survivable pathways, and making your goals clear in general.

Key to both this visual guidance and the puzzles that populate *Stealth Inc* is the mechanic alluded to in the game's subtitle: *A Clone in the Dark* represents the central design pillar of the entire adventure. The game's stealth is less about line of sight or slipping around without making excess noise than it is about staying out of the light. While *Stealth Inc* wears its influences on its sleeve—its subtitles variously reference *Metal Gear Solid*'s "Tactical Stealth Action" and the *Alone in the Dark* horror franchise—it probably owes its greatest debt to Ubisoft's *Splinter Cell* franchise, wherein protagonist Sam Fisher infiltrated hostile territory by sneaking around in the cover of darkness. Your clone's headgear, a pair of goggles that alternately glow neon green or stoplight red to denote your current state of visibility, is a direct homage to Sam Fisher's iconic night vision gear.

In *Stealth Inc*, you're basically invulnerable in the dark; enemy robots and surveillance gear can spot you the instant you step into the light, but duck into the shadows and they quickly lose sight of you. The challenge comes in making use of those pools of inky blackness to sneak around and hit the key objectives you need to clear in order to complete a stage, including activating the computer terminal that opens the exit to the next level.

As you'd expect, these goals are accessible and simple to begin with, but they quickly escalate in complexity.

The lighting effects in *Stealth Inc* aren't so-called "baked in" effects; they're dynamically generated from built-in light sources, and the shadows they cast shift realistically. As shadows move, your safe spaces do too. There are three states to your visibility in *Stealth Inc*: Fully visible, which means anything close enough to see you will instantly spot and most likely kill you; fully hidden, which means you're safe as long as you don't make direct physical contact with an active threat; and partially visible, which means anything that spots you will take a few seconds to confirm your presence before blasting you to shreds. By running along inside the penumbra of a moving shadow, you can slip from one location to another without being seen. By the same token, those moving shadows also mean that you can't always simply hunker down in a fixed spot and count on staying invisible.

Success in *Stealth Inc* often comes down to recognizing opportunities to create shadow. In classic puzzler style, the game contains movable objects that obey *Soukoben* rules: You can only push, not pull. These moving blocks take the form of small pillars roughly as wide as your clone but about twice as tall, and nudging them into critical locations is an essential skill. Movable blocks can be used as makeshift platforms and as handholds to grip as you leap to higher points. More importantly, they also double as light-occluding objects that generate their own pools of shadow based on their position relative to the nearest light source.

In other words, sometimes the light within a stage is fixed. Sometimes it shifts as platforms and other objects move around, alternating blocking and exposing it. Sometimes you have to take matters into your own hands and create your own shadows. And sometimes it's a combination of all three, as fixed light becomes dynamic once you trigger switches to activate moving stage elements even as you move rolling columns around to further alter the relationship between light and shadow.

The core of *Stealth Inc* consists of 64 stages across eight areas, with 16 additional levels that can be unlocked by hitting specific performance goals and perfecting your run through the basic levels. On top of that, the *Ultimate Edition* of *Stealth Inc* contains two additional

sets of bonus stages: *The Teleporter Chambers* and *The Lost Clones*. While much smaller than the main game, these expansions make up for their brevity by featuring larger, more challenging levels designed to vex players who have mastered the basic game.

The Teleporter Chambers segment makes the game's nods to Valve's *Portal* more overt by borrowing that game's teleportation mechanic. Vending machines scattered strategically through the levels dispense pairs of blue and orange teleportation pods, and the paired devices allow you to warp back and forth between them. There are a few limitations: You need to stand on or hold one device to teleport to its counterpart, you can only hold one pod at a time, and you target a teleportation destination by physically chucking one of the pods to wherever it is you want to go. However, you can hold one pod as you warp in order to carry it with you, and activating the teleport command doesn't necessarily teleport you; if something else (say, an enemy) happens to be standing on a pod when you activate the command, you'll make it warp instead, potentially moving it out of your way or even destroying it. The puzzles that emerge from this dynamic mechanic quickly escalate in complexity, making for a truly demanding game experience.

Meanwhile, *The Lost Clones* is a sort of super-expert-level what-if alternate take on the game. It follows the tale of the clone that is unceremoniously squashed to death in the opening stage, exploring the outcome of what might have happened if it had somehow rigged the deathtrap to fail. The answer to this question, it turns out, is that it would have been forced to make its way through some of the most daunting challenges in the game—though not on its own. From time to time, the *other* clone from the opening sequence that isn't depicted throughout the main game shows up to solve puzzles in tandem with its fellow survivor.

All told, *Stealth Inc* is a challenging game that combines a wide range of established stealth and puzzle gameplay concepts into a clever new creation all its own. On top of that, it also includes its own level editor, allowing players to attempt to design their own merciless stealth challenges complete with all the moving platforms and triggers seen in the pre-made stages. It's a tough but entertaining adventure.

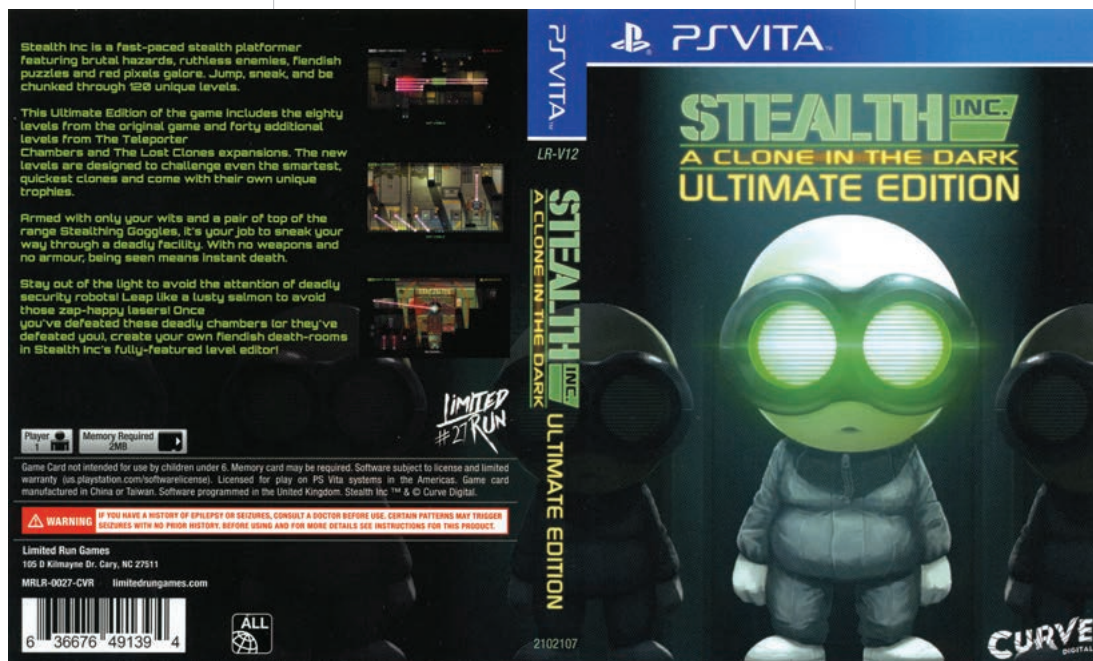
PS VITA™

STEALTH INC.
A CLONE IN THE DARK
ULTIMATE EDITION



CURVE
DIGITAL

CURVE
DIGITAL



PlayStation Vita edition, clockwise from top left:
PlayStation Vita cover liner; PlayStation Vita cartridge
Note: This release did not include a manual or cover liner

