

There's a saying... "too much of a good thing is bad for you."

A maxim that had completely passed Kieros by, judging by the extraordinary amount of time she was spending in front of the television, gazing at the screen through the eyeholes of her mask. Hour after hour of non-stop gaming, hands never leaving the controller. The name of the game? Puyo Puyo Tetris 2.

That the first one was produced, a crossover between two iconic puzzle franchises that nobody could ever have seen coming, was already something; for it to get a sequel was even more so. It was that first game that had caused Kieros to fall down the metaphorical rabbit hole and become invested in the series and its characters. Gosh, those characters! Such personality! Such fashion! But it was the puzzle action that was the real draw for Kieros; the perfect fusion of two storied series into one robust package, one that the sequel would build upon, taking everything from the foundation set before it and building upon it with a brand new story that reunited the cast of the first to put them up against new threats. And in front of that sequel Kieros did sit.

She'd sit for hours on end, resting her back on a bean bag as she devoted all her focus to the action on the screen. The game demanded her mind to work lightning fast, to craft the best outcome out of what was to come. She had made a vow to herself: to achieve the maximum ranking on every last stage of the single player mode. Multiplayer ranking was fleeting, but stars were permanent and testament.

This one was turning into quite the marathon session. Stopping only for relief, turning away only briefly to drink from the mound of water bottles to one side of her and set aside any empties on her other for recycling later. But she didn't want to end here. Not now. Not when she was getting so close to absolute perfection. Her striving voyage had taken her through worlds, and into the space beyond worlds. All in the name of a perfect completion percentage of 219%. Yeah, this game was like that.

The closing stages of the tale. The true nemesis had been revealed; Squares, a joyless sort who failed to see the meaning of fun, seeking to establish order in the worlds he watched over. A harsh arbiter of the rules, Squares was as close to a deity as one could get in these worlds; unfortunately, being one of such power, he was prone to abusing that power and erasing those who did not see eye to eye with him from existence. Such was his pursuit of order. This game was a tale of fun and free will vs order and instruction, and things were coming to a head.

Of course, Kieros had already experienced the tale a few times already, but she was fine with experiencing it again. The story scenes acted as a breather, allowing her to collect herself between arduous puzzles that demanded her all. A time to relax the mind and recover, maybe hydrate.

By now she'd perfected so much; aside from the postgame extras, just this one last stage remained. The final battle of fun against order. As was befitting of his name, Squares preferred Tetris as his mode of battle, but at least he offered Kieros a choice when it came to fighting back in this last test of skill. Which character, which allies, and which puzzle. Kieros pondered, wondering which setup was best to defeat Squares in the minimum amount of time the game was asking of her. This was a brutal foe; even though this final Skill Battle let Kieros take up to three allies with her to lend her

their power, Squares fought with his power alone. He didn't have time for friends, nor necessity, such was his omnipotence.

The decision was made. Despite feeling she was better at Tetris, Kieros plumped for Puyo. Even though she was gunning for glory throughout her marathon session, she couldn't help herself from making such a thematic choice. She found Puyo more fun, and the online community had just made Tetris feel... unfun to her. If Squares sought to oppose fun, then why not shove some fun right in his face?

The battle began. Squares acted with lightning speed, moving as one who lords over puzzles would. But Kieros had to move just as fast if she wanted to succeed as greatly as possible; the game demanded Squares be vanquished as soon as possible.

Try after try, attempt after attempt... sometimes she'd be seconds too slow, sometimes she wouldn't win at all. But Kieros wouldn't falter. She wouldn't succumb to the temptation of Tetris, the easy way out. Fun would prevail. It had to, in the face of the embodiment of stifling order...

Again, and again, until... finally... four star victory!

Kieros collapsed, falling backwards onto her beanbag. She'd done it. The ultimate victory over squares.

"Hmm... impressive."

Kieros blinked. A cutscene? She could hear Squares smirking... and a voice line she hadn't heard before. Come to think of it, had she pressed the button to skip past the results screen? She picked herself up to look upon her nemesis.

"You... are a quandary."

Another blink. She definitely didn't press anything to prompt Squares to continue his spiel. And the screen... it was just Squares, alone, facing her. No other characters on the sideline conversing with him, demanding he change his stubborn ways.

"Yes, you. You who would rather play Puyo despite your Tetris talents."

Was he... talking to her?

"To be better at Tetris yet prefer to play Puyo. Such cannot stand. Such a convoluted paradox. An aberration in worlds that should be kept in order."

Yep, definitely talking to her. And in his voice too. What was going on? Square's VA couldn't have specifically recorded voice lines just for her? Maybe the game was keeping track of her playing habits, determining the course of a secret ending?

"I could delete you here and now. Remove you from existence, and restore order that way. But... I can do better. Why delete you when I can... organise you?" Squares spoke in a voice that split the difference between excitement, boredom, and no emotion at all. Enigmatic in the way he spoke and the words he spoke. The image on screen shifted, showing Squares' left arm outstretched, palm open, facing upward, above which hovered a cube. Kieros recognised that cube as a conduit for Squares' reality-altering power. Its edges glowed pink, and within cubes within cubes grew and spread, releasing cubes of light as they touched the surface. Flashes of magenta radiated from the device, pulsing in a controlled, unwavering rhythm. The intense

brightness of the pink, the way it washed across the screen in all directions... it was too hard to look away.

"Complete control. Just how I like it", lorded Squares with a smirk, inflicting his hypnosis upon Kieros. From mind to cube, from screen to the real world, he made his moves. Angular cracks formed in Kieros' mask, breaking out squares of material; particular care was made to reshape the eyeholes from round to square, revealing the state of Kieros' eyes, flooded with squared off spirals, an angular twist on a classic sign of hypnosis.

"Into the mind of dichotomy," said Squares, stating his intent to himself. From one world to another, he had penetrated Kieros' mind. "You shall bring order to this chaotic world you live in. For now, you are merely my puppet. Soon, though, you will become my disciple, and eventually, you shall be a perfect copy of yours truly." The words fell on deaf ears yet were heard loud and clear in Kieros' mind; Squares had inserted a part of his consciousness that was relaying his words to that which was listening: Kieros' subconscious.

"You shall be made orderly, so that you can bring order to this world." Squares could reach into the deepest recesses of Kieros' mind. Such a convoluted place it was; it gave Squares the shivers. No wonder he felt the need to restructure it to match his own. As he went about purging Kieros' chaotic urges, more square chunks of mask chipped away, a low resolution dissolution of what made Kieros herself.

"If one is to be orderly, one must dress orderly. These bright colours speak the language of chaos." Squares laid his credo down; that rules and instructions were made to be followed. That would ensure she would follow the orders of her superior unwaveringly. As the Squares of the mind erased Kieros' perceived faults, that behind the screen channeled his willpower through his cube, broadcasting instructions to rewrite reality. Not majorly. Just an adjustment to Kieros and her clothes.

That top with its complex weave of fibres. Crissing and crossing. It had to be refined into something simpler and smoother. Befitting of her outcome. Squares' will forced it to compress, flattening those fibres and combining them into one sculptured sheet. Electric blue dimmed to a shade not unlike the night sky as the garment reshaped, tightening against Kieros' chest. The material was tugged at the wrists, pulling over her hands and sealing them completely in its grasp. Kieros flexed her hands lazily, uncaring if this was fabric surrounding them or something else. As she did, a tiny cube started to grow above an open palm.

As one cube flashed, acting as a transmitter, the other received, growing as it did so. Around Kieros' wrists, more of that material was starting to generate, phasing into existence square by square to form white cuffs that surrounded her wrists without touching them, detailed with perfect square wave patterns. A similarly-patterned garment was forming around her neck as Squares' command altered her scarf to match his own neckwear; that scarf, so long and flexible, too wild for him to bear. It had to be reformed into something more static, more... him. White, indigo, and a hint of pink, a single square of bright colour upon it. Nothing overstated, like his victim's former wardrobe was.

"Now, disciple, awaken, and look around you," commanded Squares. "Identify that which should not be, and be rid of it." As Kieros idly explored the feelings of gloved (in

a way) hands, the cube moved around it, growing as it orbited. But then a sudden bolt of focus hit Kieros, and her hand went rigid. Purge that which should not be. She looked at the pile of empty bottles piled up on the carpet. What a mess. Unbearable clutter. It had to be removed. She faced her palm at the pile, letting the cube face it. It emitted a blinding flash, and in an instant, there was no evidence that there ever was a building mound of garbage.

What else? Hmm, a game console. A medium of fun. Life wasn't about fun. It had to be removed. The cube's power increased further, Kieros motioned for it to be banished from reality, removing all traces of it and all associated accessories. The television screen went blank as it lost the connection to the console. Even though she had severed the link between Squares and her world, there was now so much of Squares in her mind that it didn't really matter. The hypnosis was over, but Kieros was following a new free will.

"Good. You are perfectly set to become my copy," Square's voice advised. The signals that recrafted Kieros' clothes to match its source's were now beaming directly from that wedge of Squares embedded in her mind, one that sought to expand its influence and fill the willing vessel. Her green trousers were bleached white as they were struck by signals now stronger than ever before, material altering into the otherworldly substance worn above the waist. That garment was spreading its expanse downwards, square by square, forming a warped grid that flared out into something approximating a skirt. Some squares hovered, undetached yet remaining firmly a part of that curved array, flared out to such an extent one could see the hot pink undersides. Through the windows formed by the gaps in that gravity-defying growth of a garment, one could see the white material that now surrounded Kieros' slender legs stretching up beyond the waist, as if it was reaching underneath the top to fully coat her flat chest, totally compressed and fully robbed of signs of femininity, despite the skirt-like extension of her (his?) top.

Kieros flexed her right hand as her left kept a non-physical grip on the cube. As her grip tightened, so too did she let her identity as a notail slip. Why would *he* want to be something so weak and mortal? The grip closed, causing a wave of realisation that he was indeed, the true Squares, to rush through his entire body, obliterating every last physical and mental drop of Kieros still extant, overtaking the signal from what he could only describe as a virtual doppelganger of himself, existing only as a facsimile. The last remnants of Kieros' mask cracked into a cloud of square dust, exposing the face of an omnipotent force. Yellow eyes, piercing yet perfectly round, the only thing that contrasted against the right angles predominant across his form. Indigo hair that formed wide bands, stretching to waist level, accented only by a wisp of cyan that stuck up from his forehead like an apple stem.

The rush of energy sank into Squares' feet, altering their shape as the leather of Kieros' shoes bounded inwards, seeming to coalesce with skin and trouser ankle alike. The combination was as if Squares was wearing incredibly high boots, or that his trousers had built in footwear. Either way, the toes of those... whatever they were... were squared off. Angular. Perfectly cuboid. Just a slight curve close to a pair of equally cuboid heels.

Squares looked down upon himself, confirming that he had fully made the transfer to this new world. He rubbed his hands across himself, affirming his solidity, before

looking around this place. Rather unimpressive, compared against his standards. This place would certainly need some work done, but his ideas of renovation weren't out of his reach. Nothing was, really.

He strode through the rooms, a look of perpetual dissatisfaction at the relative squalor of this abode. Definitely the first thing he'd fix. But what next? He happened upon the resident's computer; perhaps this held the key. Able to access it with ease, hacking through his reality shifting skills, he was able to ingest news from all the world over. And it troubled him. Everywhere he looked, every word he read, terrified him. The chaos in this world was too much for him to bear. But he could fix it. He was Squares, watcher of worlds... and soon this world would be watched. One step at a time... order would be restored.