

Toribash 3.1



Beating up strangers is now socially acceptable, so **Alex Cox** tenses his limbs, relaxes his neck, and leaps headlong into the weird world of turn-based combat.

In brief...

» A physics-infused fighting game where the player is given control of the whole body as opposed to a set of predefined moves. As far as we know, this is the only game of its kind

Toribash is odd. On the outside it's ostensibly a fighting game; two men face off, one man emerges victorious. On the inside it's more like a turn-based physics game starring a pair of poseable artist's dolls. Dolls that bleed copiously and seem determined to detach each other's heads.

It's simple to install – the tarball available on the *Toribash* website contains binaries compiled for Ubuntu and Fedora – and it's a simple concept to get hold of. Each combatant has a number of joints, which you click on to set them into different states. Click on the knees until they're set to 'contracting', and your doll will scrunch up his legs; set the chest to 'right rotating' and he'll do a little spin with it. Raise the arms and extend the ankles, and you'll jump straight up. Space out these movements over many of the game's turns, and you can perform much more complex manoeuvres. A translucent ghost character traces the move that your currently selected joints will have you make, but doesn't (usually) show the result that this will have on your opponent, meaning you'll need to experiment to get the best results.

So playing *Toribash* is simple. But mastering *Toribash*? That's another matter altogether. The single player mode, for



» No, this isn't *Strictly Come Avatar Dancing* – if two players grab hold of each other's hands, a game of *Toribash* turns into a twisting, turning wrestling match.

“Detached limbs are never quite as useful as connected ones.”

Features at a glance



Get in the ring

In game types which use restricted dojos, you need to be careful to keep your limbs within the lines.

Easy modding

Tired of being skinny? Fiddle with a text file and you can change any aspect of the game at will.

example, isn't so much a game as a toy; any credible opposition for your protagonist is provided by your own hand, as you manipulate both combatants at once. Naturally this can lead to some fairly spectacular moves, and you'll be able to put a lot more thought into the single player game than the more free-form multiplayer encounters. The openness of single player play is outrageously addictive, even if it's little more than a time-killing amusement.

Play it again

Once you've completed your flailing combat opus, you'll get a replay; interrupt this at any time with the E key and you can edit your move from this point. This is all but essential if you're going for quality, since the single player section seems solely devoted to creating the most ludicrous moves possible to share with the rest of the *Toribash* community. Witness the thousands of replays included with the game and the countless others that litter the official forums if you're sceptical; all manner of decapitations, throws, kicks and punches seem to have been tried, but it's unlikely you'll pull off your intended manoeuvre first time.

You might imagine this rather limited gameplay would get old very quickly, but its

requirement for persistence and clever thinking keeps it feeling fresh.

The online mode is a vast departure from the almost sedate atmosphere of single player combat. There's a timer countdown for each turn, which means that elaborate, considered opening gambits are rarely possible, and sadly practice in the single player mode will only take you so far. Fling a wild right hand in your opponent's direction one too many times and the result is unlikely to be pretty, but changing your opening move on the fly is by no means straightforward – prepare to have your head kicked clean off the first few times you play online.

Sticky red stuff

Ah, yes. The gore. *Toribash*'s schlock gruesomeness is one of its trademarks; thick, 3D-rendered globules of blood seem to spurt out of dismembered limbs with alarming regularity. Each joint has a threshold at which it will come loose – you're just as likely to do yourself damage with an over-hard punch as you are your opponent, and detached limbs are never quite as useful as connected ones. There's also support for fracturing, a relatively recent addition to *Toribash*, where the bones between joints can break, making their associated joints unuseable.



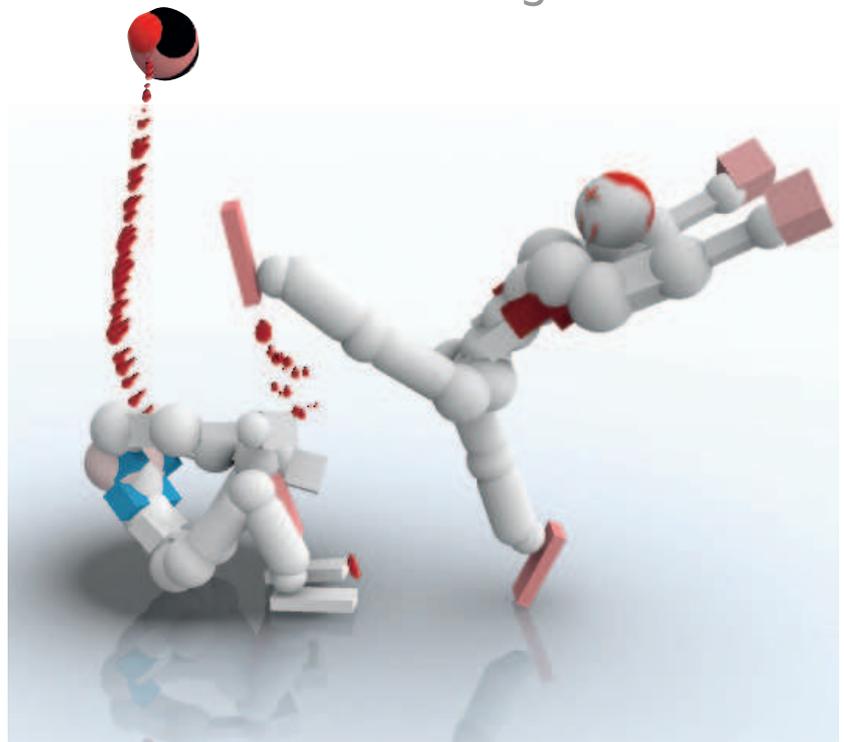
› Unless you're strong enough to stay on, you could be waiting half an hour for a game in the multiplayer lobbies.

These effects are most noticeable in the popular Twin Swords mod, which turns each avatar's hands into a pair of utterly deadly swords that can completely disassemble an opponent with a single well-placed swipe. But like most of *Toribash's* multitudinous mods, there's a catch. Players start too far away from each other to actually make a hit, and simply taking a step forward is not an easy task thanks to the sometimes overwrought physics. It's easy enough to make your own mod, either by editing a text file or with the Lua scripting language, and there are generally servers hosted online for many of the popular game types. Sambo, for example, makes combatants a little stronger than usual, starts them close together, and confines them to a tiny ring; one step (or more likely one limb) outside is a disqualification. Or how about Sumo, where players with inflated, fat joints face off inside a circular ring?

The more you play with the multiplayer mode, the more you'll see avatars that don't look normal. They'll have dirty green



› Keep an eye on the forces being applied to your joints – too much and there'll be blood everywhere.



› One well-placed kick is all it takes to set body parts flying. The sensation of knocking someone's head clean off is weirdly (and worryingly) satisfying.

limbs, glowing yellow joints, or acidic-looking blood. Perhaps they'll have a custom head, sporting a completely different mask from the usual design. All of these features (and many, many more) are available from the Torishop, the creator's cunning (read: Korean RPG inspired) method of making a little money from the game. You don't actually have to spend anything if you're cheap – you'll earn five points for every multiplayer win – but saving up for even the most basic item through points earned from play will take a long time. Purchase a Toribooster (between \$5 and \$100 per month) and you'll earn many more points per win, or just plunk down a wedge of cash and you can buy the points outright.

You've got the look

And that's only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to customisation. The default look of the game is pretty clean – white background, grey combatants – but the recently added support for shaders means that you can build an environment of your own. That is, if your graphics drivers are up to the challenge. Shader Model 2.0 support is required, as is support for OpenGL 2 or above. With the relevant technical requirements in place, a bit of text file editing is all that's required to craft pretty – or eye-bleedingly hideous – backgrounds for the action. Even if you choose to leave the background white, the added lighting effects that come into play when you switch shader support on are worth the effort.

Toribash is conceptually unique and brilliant fun, but we're not entirely enamoured with it. It literally sucks time from the universe, for a start. Waiting for a

spot to become free in a multiplayer game is agony, since each 10-second fighting manouvre takes seven or eight 20-second turns to complete, and the 'winner stays on' rule will make getting started doubly frustrating for beginners. And then comes the physics – they're gamey rather than real-world standard, and you'll either love them or loathe them. Different modes alter the level of forces applied to joints, which can make play feel utterly different in terms of control despite the consistent gravity between modes.

Toribash has that easy to play, lifetime to master feel of games ranging from *Desktop Tower Defense* to *Eve Online*; a nagging, begging feeling of 'one more hour' that permeates its every seam. There's a brilliant online community, a constant throng of opponents to play against, and enough mods and scripts to keep you entertained solidly for weeks. Weeks that you'll never, ever get back. Are you really prepared for that? **LXF**

LINUX **Verdict**
FORMAT

Toribash
Developer: Nabi Studios
Web: www.toribash.com
Price: Free under own licence

Features	9/10
Performance	9/10
Ease of use	7/10
Documentation	7/10

› A solid, addictive and beautiful game, but the learning curve can feel more like a learning cliff.

Rating 8/10