

# Adventure Lantern

ISSUE #35 OCTOBER 2012



## REVIEWS:

- Anna
- Ghost in the Sheet
- Pathologic
- The Five Cores
- The Walking Dead  
Episode 4: Around Every Corner
- Erie
- Slender

# EDITORIAL

The survival horror/horror genre is inexorably linked to adventure games. The game widely considered to be the first survival horror game, *Alone in the Dark*, was not much more than an adventure game with a horror plot and the inclusion of a few horror inducing gameplay elements. And many years latter the most widely known survival horror franchise, *Resident Evil*, has a history of puzzle heavy gameplay, though it has been getting away from this in a huge way in its more recent titles (which somewhat shadows the genre as a whole).

Adventure Lantern has a history of Halloween themed issues, which provided us a great excuse to review a few of these horror games. And while this is only the second one I have been involved with, I think we have done a great job of honoring this tradition. Last year, I finished my countdown to Halloween by reviewing the last entry in the *Dracula trilogy*, the previous two being reviewed the two prior months. This year I hope to do something just as interesting; To this design I have personally written reviews of three horror adventure games. Each one the debut game of their perspective developer, and strangely each happens to be an indie game from a small independent European developer.

*Anna* is the very first game released by *Dreampainters*, an Italy based team. It is a horror adventure that promised a lot in the form of adaptive gameplay and multiple endings, and a detailed world to play in with physics. Not a single one of these features got fully implemented; they seem to have rushed finishing the the game and let the technical aspects and gameplay suffer to a huge extent. If I had to guess, I would say the game feels only about half done, and it is surprising that the game is as playable as it is (which is barely at times). What *Anna* does not skimp on is visuals and particularly story; So while it has many flaws, it is still a powerful experience.

Conversely, *The Five Cores* put all of its efforts into puzzles and gameplay to the detriment of the story. The gameplay of *The Five Cores* have its bugs but it is the focus of the game, and the complex puzzles are the reason to play it. It has some sort of horror plot, that is very briefly mentioned at the very start of the game. It also has some nice visuals, but they are generic fantasy visuals for the most part, as devoid of plot as the rest of the game. *The Five Cores* is the debut game of the indie, single man, studio *Neebla Games*, based in France; And was rushed through development ridiculously fast, I am again surprised that it is as playable as it is.

Which brings us the the third and final game, *Ghost in the Sheet*. *Ghost in the Sheet* is the debut game of the indie Czech Republic studio, which was a two man team at that time. It is a paranormal, comedy, adventure in a horror setting. Its gameplay, visuals, and story are all without blemish, complex, and terrific. There is not a single error I noticed or any lack of polish to any aspect, no matter how insignificant.

So there you have it, three games that start out in very similar circumstances, but end completely differently. They are almost completely alike, on the one hand, and completely dissimilar, on the other. We have the completely puzzle oriented, the story driven, and the balance between the two; Each has their own charm and reason to love.

But I am not the only writing in this Halloween issue, and Nick produced some even better articles. In addition to continuing our *The Walking Dead series* with *Episode 4*, He also reviews the recent horror games *Erie* and *Slender*. But most interestingly we also get a review of *Pathologic*, the 2005 game that almost completely defies all attempts to categorize and describe it.

– Jonathon Wisnoski



Cover Image:  
**PATHOLOGIC**

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A lot of things to be interested in this month. Both returning classics, completely new IPs, and even a few sequels to critically acclaimed series. We got an announcement about the two upcoming sequels to *The Lost Crown*; The announcement of the sequel to *Beneath a Steel Sky*; And the *Runaway* series even got a new title. Zojoi have also been hard at work revitalizing some old adventure games, with both *Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective* released and *Shadowgate* gearing up for a KS crowdfunding campaign. For new IP we have a rash of terrific looking AGS titles; Including *Anna's Quest*, the upcoming *Primordia*, and the surprise title *Where No Fear Was*.

– Jonathon Wisnoski



#### Indie Dev Grant: Maia

Simon Roth's space colony game *Maia* has won the Deep Space bundle Indie Dev Grant and will thus be receiving \$695 for continued development.



#### AdventureX

AdventureX, the first and only UK adventure game gathering for game fans, developers & those just curious, is returning to London on December 15th and 16th. Where there will be a selection of special guest talks, game showcasing (including playable examples), competitions, short game design masterclasses, and other fun features. But if they are to do this, you have to help them raise \$2200 through their IndieGoGo campaign, which will allow them to offer all of this completely free of charge to the public.

The event will feature speakers like Dave Gilbert (Wadjet Eye Games), Alex Warren (Quest), and John Ingold (Inkle Studios); And exhibits and showcase games including: *Primordia* (Wadjet Eye Games), *Heroine's Quest* (Crystal Shard), *Quest For Infamy* (Infamous Quests), all of Screen7's current projects, and *Johnny Hurricane & The Pirates of the Third Reich* (James Dearden).

And fear not if you do not live in London and cannot get there, AdventureX will be providing newsletters, videos and a web stream during the event.

## Announcements

### Devil's Cove

It is describe as a classic point and click adventure game, but it looks very much like a casual hidden object game. I will go out on a limb here, and guess that it will be some combination of the two.

It looks rather interesting and the Kickstarter champaign, that is looking for \$185,000, is obviously professional and had a lot of work put into it. It is obviously going to fail this champaign at this point, but this is not the first game developed by Anarchy Enterprises, so we still might see more of this game in the future.



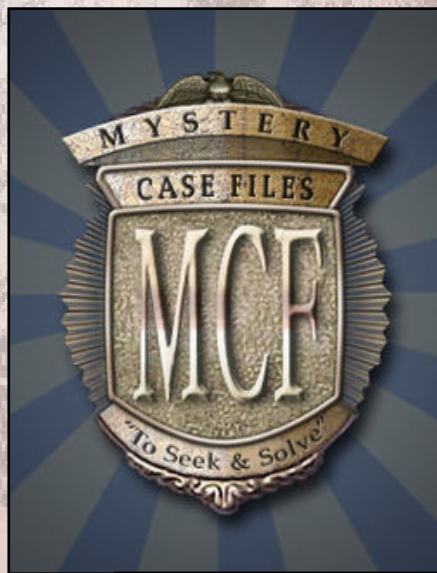
### Dear Esther Stalker-like

The artist behind *Dear Esther's* beautiful island have announced that he is starting on a one-man project that he describes as a *Stalker-like* game, with a huge open world, but without any weapons.

### The Samaritan Paradox

A low-res point and click adventure. It is set in Sweden in the 80's. Ord Salamon has agreed to help Sara Bergwall find the book her father, Jonatan Bergwall, wrote before he died. During the course of this treasure hunt, he learns that Jonatan was investigating the weapons industry, and more specifically some covert affairs with foreign dictatorships.

But more questions arise. What is the book about, and why does Sara want Ord to find it for her? Did her Alzheimer's-stricken mother know the secret before she grew too demented to share it? And how did Jonatan actually die?



### Mystery Case Files: Shadow Lake

This ninth game in Big Fish's critically acclaimed, and likely most successful, hidden object

franchise had been announced with a November 22 release date and a \$20 price.



## Upcoming Releases



# BENEATH A STEEL SKY

*a Steel Sky 2*, has inspired them to go ahead with *BaSS2*. Development will start as soon as they release their new *Broken Sword* adventure.

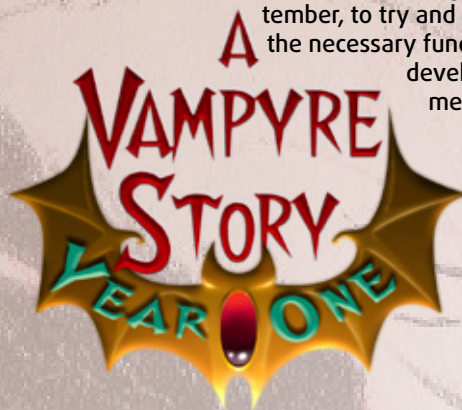
### Beneath a Steel Sky 2

Last month the Kickstarter campaign for the *Broken Sword* sequel announced a particularly interesting stretch goal, a sequel to *Beneath a Steel Sky*. This stretch goal was set at \$1,000,000, over double the original asked for goal. Unfortunately, that much was not raised, even counting the, post Kickstarter, Paypal campaign. The campaign did eventually raise over \$800,000 all included, and reached its second highest stretch goal, allowing them to realize their "wildest ambitions for *Serpent's Curse*".

Despite falling well short, revolution software has announced that the huge success of the campaign as a whole, as well as the huge amount of interest they encountered for *Beneath*

### A Vampyre Story: Year One

The developers behind *A Vampyre Story* have announced that they plan on putting its sequel, *Year One*, on Kickstarter, starting September, to try and raise the necessary funds for development.

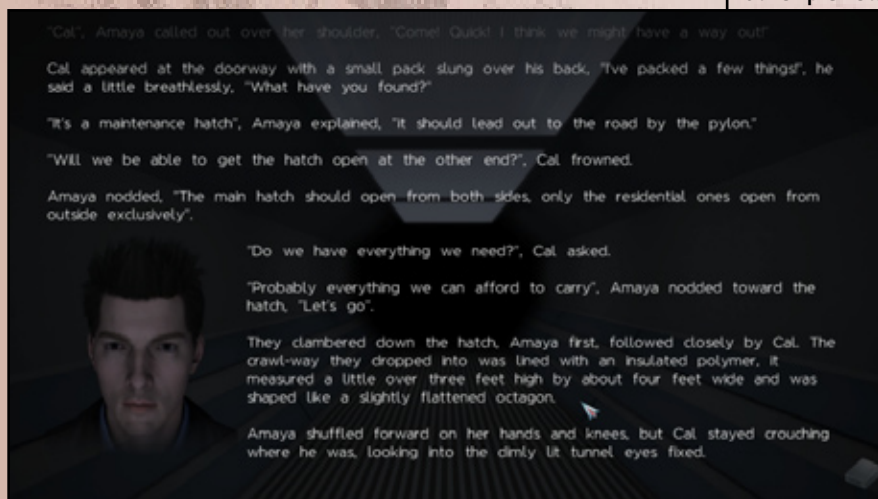


### Dark Recall

*Dark Recall* is a hybrid text/graphic adventure game combining elements of classic text adventures with more modern graphic adventure games.

In the year 2176 as mankind's resources dwindled, they began desperately reaching out to the stars in order to find a new home. Rapid advances in star-drive technology opened the way to the settlement and colonisation of other planets. Hundreds of worlds were identified as being able to support human life and, as the technology to do so became ever more common place, more and more ordinary people began heading out into the void to find another home for themselves amidst distant stars. It seemed like the perfect place to start over, but colonisation of distant worlds is not without its hazards.

*Dark Recall* is still in the beta phase and is expected to be released later this year, priced at \$9.50.



# THE LAST CROWN

## Haunting of Hallowed Isle

### The Two Sequels of The Lost Crown

Iceberg Interactive have teamed up with the Jonathan Boakes to produce two sequels to his 2008 adventure, *The Lost Crown*. *The Lost Crown* released to fantastic reviews and receiving a few awards, although we gave it a far worse review ourselves. In a nutshell, *The Lost Crown* is a horror themed adventure set in a black and white world with just small hints of stylized color.

Written and created by Jonathan Boakes, 'The Last Crown - Haunting of Hallowed Isle' is a direct sequel to the indie-hit *The Lost Crown*. Set vividly on England's windswept coast, the game is shot and filmed on location, in the author's home county of Cornwall. Presented in crisp black and white, with vivid splashes of colour, the 'Crown' games explore British myths, folklore and ghost stories, providing a classic supernatural experience.

"The Last Crown definitely has a sea-faring queasy feel, as Nigel and Lucy attempt to navigate a fishing boat out to Hallowed Isle", says creator Jonathan Boakes. "It's spooky, fun, traditional fare, with plenty of new adventures for Nigel Danvers and his ghost-hunting partner, Lucy Reubans."

The first sequel, *The Last Crown: Haunting of Hallowed Isle*, due out next year, is a direct continuation of the story from *The Lost Crown*. In it Nigel Danvers and Lucy Reubans have traveled to the Hallowed Isle, which lies just off the coast of Saxton. The third and final game in the trilogy will be titled *The First Crown*, and has yet to get any release date or specifics announced about it.





### Gorogoa

Still a work in progress, *Gorogoa* is a lovingly hand-illustrated world suspended inside of a unique puzzle. To solve the puzzle, the player rearranges a few tiles on a simple grid, placing them next to or on top of one another. But each tile is also a window into a different part of the game world--or perhaps into a different world--and each window plays like its own little game. Even so, the key to progressing never lies within one tile, but in the connections between tiles.

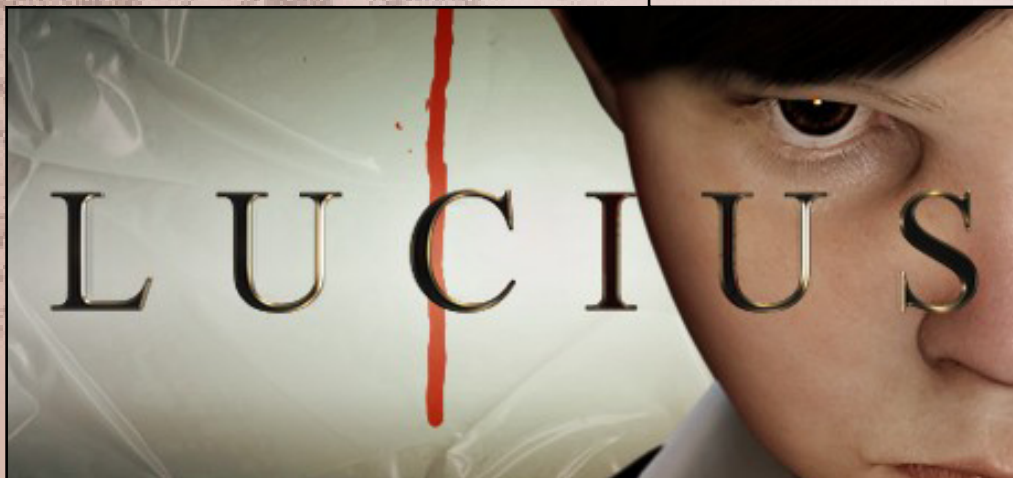
The game is tentatively targeted for release in late 2013, initially on PC and Mac, subsequently on mobile platforms, but a windows only demo is already available.

### Gomo

The upcoming charming adventure by Fishcow studio has gotten its first trailer.

### Lucius

This upcoming horror adventure is due out October 26th, 2012, on all major digital distributors for \$24.99 (15% off if pre-ordered or bought early). It has you play as a demon in the guise of a child and sets you the task of killing off the other characters in the house in a series of gruesome and inventive ways.





### Stasis

Disoriented, drowsy and in pain, John Maracheck opens his eyes. There is nothing to greet him but the static of a nearby monitor and a cold steel floor. Thick, green liquid covers the floor and then his body, leading to trail to a nearby, steaming stasis-pod. He slowly gets to his feet, trying to take in his surroundings. Where is his wife? His daughter? What the hell is going on?

*Stasis* is an adventure game that puts you in control of John Maracheck, a man searching for his family in a seemingly abandoned research facility. Going back to classic adventure game mechanics, you are required to solve puzzles and use objects around you to progress and to find Maracheck's family.

Graphically, *Stasis* is fairly unique in the adventure game genre, opting for highly detailed isometric graphics, as opposed to the more classic 'side on' views of other adventure games. Richly detailed rooms and fluid animations create an immersive environment for the player to explore, with danger lurking in every shadow.

The stasis-plug suit gives you direct access to an Emergency Medical Kit. This is a piece of equipment that has the ability to break down any object of a certain weight and size into its base elements and store it for future use. While normally used to store small medical supplies, Maracheck uses it as an easy way to keep and transport object he has found. Objects can be stored, accessed, combined and brought back into the 'real' world at any moment.



### Lume 2

State of Play has released a new series of images showing some of the current state of the game's scenes. So far it is looking quite interesting.



### Kentucky Route Zero

Described as "a magic realist adventure game about a secret highway in Kentucky and the

mysterious folks who travel it", *Route Zero* is a 3D animated point and click adventure with a heavy emphasis on story telling. Since their

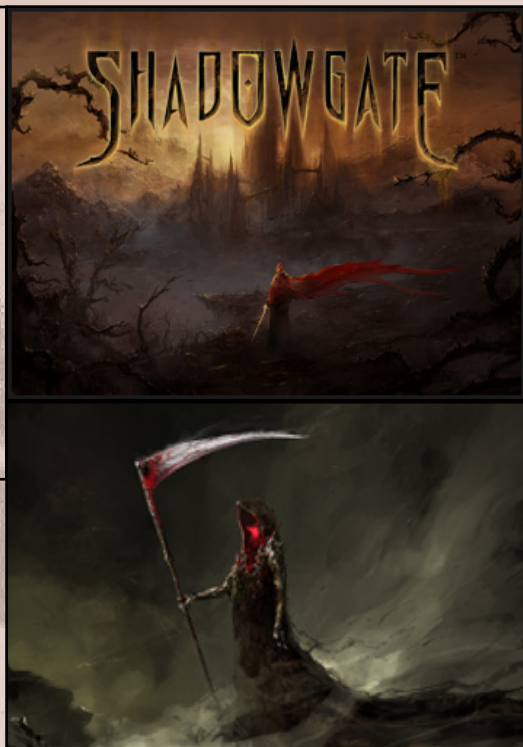
successful 2011 Kickstarter campaign they have been working hard, and can now announce that the digital release of the first episode will be coming in December (with the remaining four to follow during 2013).



### Shadowgate

Zojoi has been hard at work reimagining old adventure classics for a while now, and just flush out of the release of the first three *Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective* cases they have announced that they will be launching a new Kickstarter campaign for the remake of *Shadowgate* that they have been working on the last few months.

*Shadowgate* is an old point and click adventure, just barely older than I am. It is of the first true generation of graphical adventures, without any command line, but with obvious roots still in the text adventure genre. In *Shadowgate* you explore a monster filled castle in your quest to defeat a evil warlock. At its release it was praised as a fantastic adventure receiving many perfect scores, and eventually got ported to many consoles and got a few sequels.



### Papier

The interesting looking paper adventure game has completely failed its Kickstarter campaign, only raising \$13,000 of the \$140,000 asked for. But undeterred they are supposedly continuing development.

### Nicolas Eymerich, Inquisitor

A release date of sometime around the fifteenth of November has been announced.

*Nicolas Eymerich: Inquisitor* is an episodic adventure game which puts you in the shoes of Nicalas Eymerich a, real-life, historical Italian inquisitor, and the main character in Valerio Evangelisti's science fiction series. In production these last three years, *Nicalas Eymerich, Inquisitor* is scheduled for released in November; with a deluxe edition containing the first four episodes: *The Inquisitor, The Village, The Demon, The Abbey*; coming in 2013.



**Cognition: An Erica Reed Thriller**

*Cognition* has gotten a playable demo and before this article is posted it will likely already be released, with its release date of October 30. It is pre-orderable as right now for \$25, no idea if this is a sale that ends when it is released or not.

*Cognition* is a chilling point-and-click adventure that follows Erica Reed, a Boston-based FBI agent, haunted by the unsolved case of a serial killer who took her brother's life. Taking a turn for the strange, Erica unravels her cases with the help of her post-cognition abilities – seeing an object's past with a touch. But things

take a dangerous twist as it becomes clear that someone knows Erica's secret. Who are they? How do they know what she can, and what do they want from her?



## New Releases

**Harvey's New Eyes**

*Edna & Harvey: Harvey's New Eyes* is now available as a download for PC and Mac on both Steam and GOG for \$19.99. A flash demo is available for those interested in trying it out before they purchase.

In *Harvey's New Eyes*, players return to the world of adventure game hit *Edna & Harvey: The Breakout*. Be prepared to meet many old friends and discover many new hand-made cartoon locations, realized in

full HD glory! Lilli, a young girl at a convent school, is the main character of *Harvey's New Eyes*. Seemingly the best-behaved little girl in the world, she executes all her chores in a diligent manner, no matter how unfair they may be. Her innocent, imperturbable way of carrying out the orders of others has something both tragic and eerie about it. Any angry thoughts, any childlike disobedience is buried deep beneath a seemingly impenetrable surface of sweetness. But how long will these feelings stay hidden? And where do the friendly little gnomes come from that paint over everything unpleasant in Lilli's vicinity with a pleasant pink color? Are they real or just a product of her subconscious?

### Haunting at Cliffhouse

Cindy Pondillo's third adventure offering, *Haunting at Cliffhouse*, is a blend of casual and traditional point and click gameplay, with a fully voiced cast and a first-person perspective. It is available for \$14.95 + shipping

Your husband is dead in a tragic accident.

Your life seems pointless and without direction. Lost in your sadness, you find an invitation to Cliffhouse Bed and Breakfast, a sanctuary of peace and serenity in your time of grief. It seems like an idyllic retreat from the world. A place to unwind, relax and let go of the misery that haunts you. But from the moment you ring the check-in bell, you are thrown into a world of mystery, family secrets and tragic history that will take you through time to unravel the buried scandals of the long-dead family dynasty who shaped the very coastline on which you stay. Logging and love, mythology and magic, art and artifice; all conspire to turn your dream into a nightmare.



### Kairo

Enter the lost world of *Kairo*. Explore vast abandoned monuments. Bring strange and ancient machinery back to life. Slowly uncover the true purpose of *Kairo* and fulfill a great destiny.

*Kairo* is an atmospheric 3D exploration and puzzle solving game. Developed by Richard Perrin the creator of the white chamber with music by Wounds (Bartosz Szturgiewicz).

The full game is available to buy for around \$8 for Windows and OSX. Linux and iOS versions due late 2012.



### Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective

The first three *Consulting Detective* cases have been released and are available for approximately \$4.00 each.

Each mystery features at least 30 minutes of original video footage that features Sherlock Holmes, his case companion, Dr. Watson, and over 20 characters (both trustworthy and unscrupulous). You can search the



Windibank's body was found in the mummy's case.

London Times for clues pertaining to the case, peruse Holmes' personal files, scour through the London Directory and receive hints from Watson himself. Most importantly, you can follow Holmes and the good doctor on their journey (with or without subtitles), gather facts, ignore red-herrings and finally present your findings to the Queen's magistrate - learning how you did against the master detective himself.



### The British Intelligence Officers Exam

A James Bond 007 text adventure, that has been said to be wonderfully authentic to the franchise. It got exuberant mention by RPS, and not many text adventures even get so far as to get mentioned.

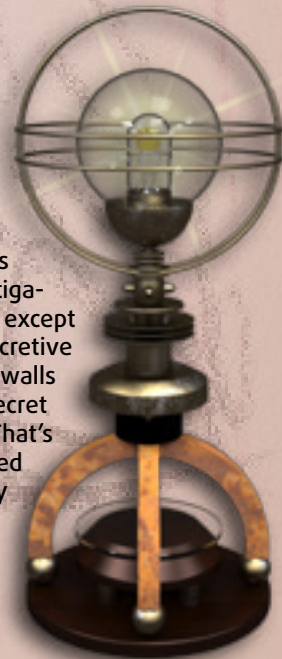


### Nancy Drew:

#### The Deadly Device

This, the latest *Nancy Drew* adventure has been released and is available for \$19.99.

Fear lingers in a remote laboratory after a physicist's suspicious demise. A police investigation resulted in nothing except a case as cold as the secretive personalities and steel walls that enshroud a top-secret Tesla-inspired facility. That's why the lab owner asked you, as Detective Nancy Drew, to expose the terrifying truth about *The Deadly Device!*



### The Testament of Sherlock Holmes

*The Testament of Sherlock Holmes* has gotten itself a worldwide launch.

This latest adventure from Frogware has the greatest of all detectives as a prime suspect in a jewel forgery. It is built around a new engine that allows both third person and first exploration, as well as using a new control scheme from previous Sherlock adventures.

# THE TESTAMENT OF SHERLOCK HOLMES™



### Hidden Runaway

For the 10th anniversary of the classic adventure, *Runaway: a Road Adventure*, Pendulo Studios has released *Hidden Runaway*, a brand-new game starring Brian and Gina for iOS.

Our two heroes no longer live together; In fact, they hate each other. but they have to tell the story of their first adventure, from the very first time they met, to a producer who wants to make a Hollywood blockbuster out of it.

*Hidden Runaway* is a hidden object adventure that mixes hidden object searches, casual puzzles adapted and simplified from their point n' click predecessor with special mini-games and narrative cut-scenes.

### Pledge Quest II: Noodle Shop of Horrors

The team of *Space Quest* fans of the who put out the first *Pledge Quest* are back with *Pledge Quest II: Noodle Shop of Horrors*. And like how the original *Pledge Quest* was to promote the *SpaceVenture* Kickstarter, *Pledge Quest 2* was created to promote the Paypal stretch goals of *SpaceVenture*.

*PQ2* is over three times as long as the original *Pledge Quest*, with three rooms instead of the original one. Additionally, it also features animated cutscenes and 3D-rendering.

# PLEDGE QUEST



### The Last Express

15 years after its initial release, the preminent adventure game title has gotten a port to iOS.

With the same amazing story, art style, and unique real-time feature *The Last Express* is supposedly as good as ever, and available for \$4.99 for iPhone, iPad touch, and iPad.

### The Five Cores

The *Myst*-like adventure from Neebla Games has been released, and is available for approximately \$9 from the developers website.

This issue of Adventure Lantern features a review of *The Five Cores*.



### The Walking Dead, Episode 4: Around Every Corner

The latest episode of Telltales *The Walking Dead* adventure game is available for download for PC, MAC, Playstation 3, and Xbox 360.



## Updated Releases



### Tony Tough and the Night of Roasted Moths

*Tony Tough*, a 1997 graphical adventure, has been added to the DotEmu catalog with a \$9.99 price point (20% off, \$7.99, till the end of the October). Along with this, they helped to bring the game to ScummVM, and it is now playable using their engine.

### Alpha Polaris

On August 31st 2012, over a year since its digital release, *Alpha Polaris* is getting a retail release by Merge Games. Developed by Turmoil Games, *Alpha Polaris* is a point and click, psychological horror, adventure.

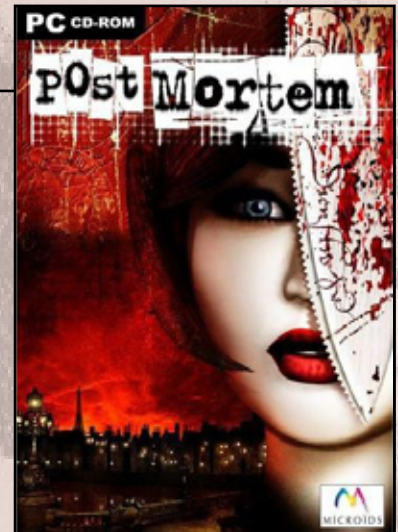
In the midst of the snowfields of Greenland lies *Alpha Polaris*, an American oil research station. High above, the ion storm of the century is gathering, bringing about a strange intermixing of reality and night terrors. It is up to Rune Knudsen, a Norwegian biologist, to take on a desperate struggle against fear and death, and to face the primordial force lurking beyond the veiled sky.

### Post Mortem

The dark and unsettling thriller/noir adventure game set in 1920s Paris, *Post Mortem*, is now available on GOG.com for only \$9.99.

*Post Mortem* is a first person perspective adventure game following a private eye on a case of brutal murders. The classic point-and-click interface makes searching for clues in Paris of the 1920s as enjoyable as it can get. The ominous story takes some unexpected turns as it gets even darker with each solved puzzle.

The pre-rendered cinematic cutscenes present the unknown, morbid, and sinister face of the city of love and the open dialogs impact the development of the events on the screen. The dark tone, the intriguing mystery, and the original setting make it a must-play for all the adventure, horror, and mystery fans alike.



### ScummVM: Dreamweb

Thanks to the generosity of Creative Reality and Matthew Seldon, the ScummVM team has been able to announce the freeware release of *Dreamweb*.

This game was originally released in 1994 and is set in a cyberpunk dystopian city where a bartender named Ryan has been having some disturbing dreams. You can find the freeware release for English, French and Spanish on our downloads page.





## News From the Big Blue Cup

**Anna's Quest, Volume 1: Winfreide's Tower**

*Anna's Quest* is a fable-driven, black comedy point and click adventure game that is inspired by The Brothers Grimm & Hans Christian Andersen, with a sci-fi twist. The story follows Anna, a young girl who, in the search of a cure for her ailing Grandpa, has been captured and kept under lock and key in a tower deep in the dark wood by an evil old witch. The witch has plans – plans that involve large, mysterious machines and cruel experiments with Anna. What the witch doesn't count on, however, are the powerful telekinetic forces brought up within Anna, and Anna's own plans of escape...

It is available right now for only \$5, and has a demo as well as a trailer, and a Steam Greenlight account.

**Primordia**

The upcoming dystopian cyberpunk adventure being published by Wadjet Eye Games has gotten a lot of press lately, and it is definitely getting

closer to release; which is now expected to be December 5th. Here is a preview, if you want to learn more.

**Nerdy Quest****Plan M**



Where No Fear Was



Jonah's Place



The Cat Lady



**Plan M (Murray Lewis and David Blake)** - The arbitrarily evil Dr. M uses a nefarious machine to devolve everyone into apes, so he and Senor Banana can become supreme masters! Fortunately for the human race, he didn't count on Detectives Vandall and Hopkirk.

Plan M is a full length, comedic, point and click adventure, that was made in 72 hour for Ludum Dare 24.

**Jonah's Place (Kasander)** - See that poor little girl in pink dress? She found herself trapped, all alone, in this strange, unfamiliar place. A place most unsuitable for little girls... Can you help her find a way out?

**Nerdy Quest (Pelle Nilsson & Linus Lundberg)** - The game is an adventure about a geek who is tired of his boring life as "office rat".

The game features classic problem solving but it also contains some cool action parts such as escaping the police while driving a motorbike, poker playing with Nazis and shooting down aliens with an airplane.

**The Cat Lady [demo](Harvester Games and Screen7)** - Susan Ashworth, known in her neighborhood as the crazy Cat Lady, is a lonely 40-year old on the verge of suicide. She has no family, no friends and no hope for a better future.

One day she discovers that five strangers will come along and change everything... But those five, "The Parasites", are also the most ruthless, deranged and cold-blooded bunch of psychopaths the city has ever known. They will stop at nothing to hurt Susan.

Unless, she hurts them first...



**The Lost Prince Of Lorden: Part 1**

**Where No Fear Was (Pink Party Glasses)** - "Where No Fear Was" is a free traditional point and click adventure game set in a dark, strange yet also familiar world, filled with unique characters. Follow one woman's path of revenge, through fear, uncertainty and disappointment. Befriend grumpy trees, outsmart thieving raccoons and confront the man responsible for a great tragedy.

Follow one woman's path of revenge, through fear, uncertainty and disappointment. Befriend grumpy trees, outsmart thieving raccoons and confront a man responsible for a great tragedy.

"Where No Fear Was" was created over the course of one week by a team of 3 friends during a short vacation in a mountain cabin. Their experiences there was the inspiration for the story and overall design.

**The Lost Prince of Lorden: Part 1 (RetroJay)** - You are on your way to Bridgetown, a large and prosperous village on the northern shores of Lorden. There are four villages in all. One to the north, east, south and west points of the Isle. You have traveled South, from The Lore Lands across the river Yeatham, to hold council with Good King Aarion in his castle. He and his daughter, Princess Petal, command the four villages and the Isle of Lorden.

Reaching the castle gate your trusty steed becomes suddenly spooked, obviously by a feeling only it can sense, and throws you, unceremoniously, from its back. You awake to find that you have no idea as to where you are or how you even ended up in this predicament.

**E.L.F. [demo](slasher)** - As the bravest elf in the elf community you have been chosen to save the world from total darkness that is being summoned by an evil, demented witch!

**E.L.F.**



# Anna



Genre: adventure Developer/publisher: Dreampainters

Release date: July 18, 2012 Platform: Windows

Website: <http://dreampainters-anna.blogspot.ca/>



*Anna* is a psychological horror adventure created as the debut game of the independent Italian studio *Dreampainters*. It promises much in the form of three endings based on your physiological state, real-life like physics, and gameplay that analyzes and reacts to player behavior. The following review will try to demonstrate how it does not live up to any of these promises. But not all is a total failure, the story and atmosphere by themselves may be enough to satisfy the more hearty horror lovers and adventurers. Depending on how often and how long you get stuck, or how often you use a walkthrough, the game runs at about two-six hours; With around three-four being what I would expect, or at least hope.

## Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

The story of *Anna* is beautifully told, let out grudgingly piece by piece, subjective by its very nature, and never fully revealed. It hits that sweet spot with enough

revealed to give you an abstract idea of what happened as well as encourage thought and theories about more specific events. This story is primarily told through hallucinated or remembered whispers, narrated memories, and

guessed from gameplay. *Anna* boasts three endings, and as least during development said that this would multiply the game's length by three times for those interesting in replaying it. It is also stated that these endings are based on your



**"Horror often involves being chased, or made to feel so, but in Anna it is found through pursuit, investigation and discovery. What is frightening lies ahead, not behind"**

**Adam Smith, RPS->Responsive: Anna Update Addresses Feedback**

physiological state and how you play the game. These statements are both beyond misleading. The two alternative endings happen respectively at about one third and two thirds of the way through the game, so at absolute best would add about an hour to the game; But if you were saving all the way through and know where the alternative endings are, they will only add about two minutes each; As they are not branching plots, but only early endings. And what about this much mentioned psychological state? Well that basically just comes down to the earlier you end the game (i.e. the three endings at the three consecutive points) the more sane the ending seems. Another interesting aspect of the game is that it faithfully recreates the real world location of D'Ayas Valley, in Valle d'Aosta, an Alpine region in north-western Italy; And is based

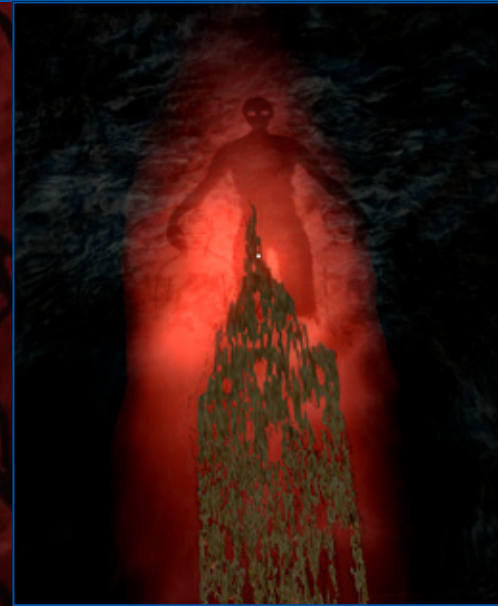
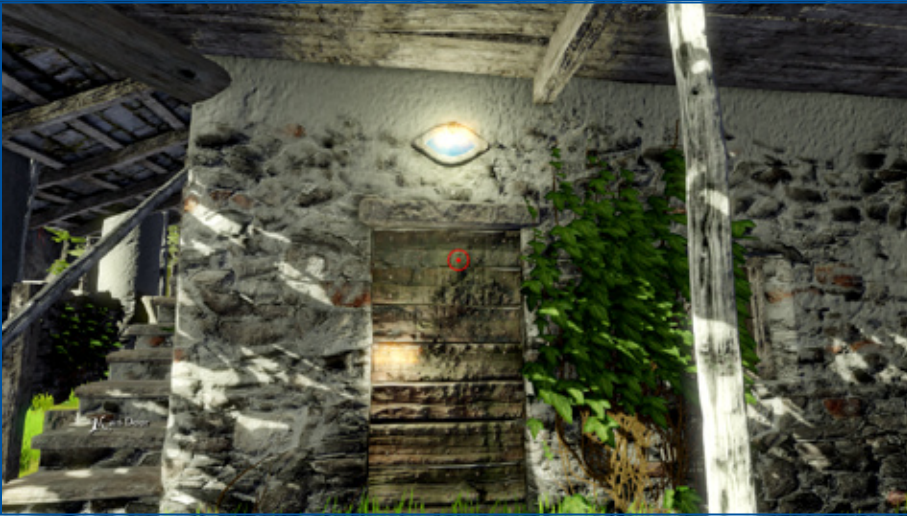
on an authentic folklore tale from that location.

The interface is incredibly chunky and non-intuitive. In *Anna* you move around in the open 3D environment using the standard WASD controls and aim with the mouse. Left Click selects objects, which allows the choice of "Use", "Pick Up", and "Examine". Right Click allows the manipulation of the few physics based objects in the game. Which leaves Middle Click for opening and closing the inventory. The inventory

is what I had the most trouble with; It is just made in a very cumbersome fashion that makes using items a huge chore. Add to that small hotspots, the inventory refusing to open when text is being shown (regardless of how irreverent the text is), and overused repetitive failed interaction responses. Another huge problem with the game is the physics, it is hardly even used and implemented horribly. It works OK for the few doors and drawers, but the one time you are asked to use it on objects in the actual environment it completely fails, and just acts very weak and buggy (making one puzzle significantly troublesome).

The puzzles are the most inexcusable aspect of *Anna*. In many situations they are simply illogical, and you have absolutely no reason to try the correct solution. Another failing is that while the game was still a work in progress, they promised that the world would be filled with manipulatable and pickup-able objects, many that





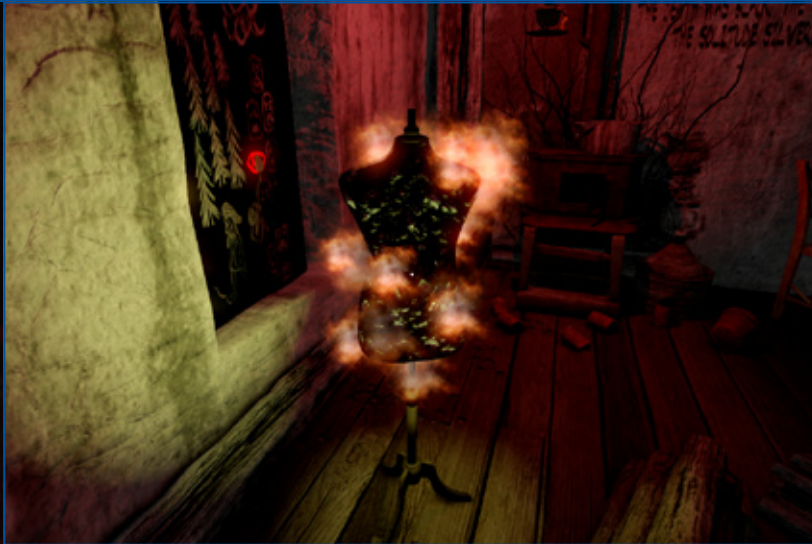
you would not need to manipulate or pick up. This was pretty much completely forgotten in the game, with only a single pile of multiple dried pine cones to act as items you do not have to pick up but can (you do need one of them); And not a single manipulatable world object exists that you do not need to manipulate. For the most part, the puzzles in *Anna* are all abstract and have nothing to do with real goals; You simply see something you can interact with, so you know that you should interact with it in some specific undefined way, and the game will likely progress after you do so. This is absolutely bad is

a technical puzzle sense, but works for the story/setting as this is a physiological horror. So while the game is rather short, the only thing that makes it take longer than half an hour is these impenetrable puzzles, that and the clunky interface that is.

*Anna's* best feature, which is irrefutably well done, is its presentation. Starting off, *Anna* simply has nice realistic graphics, there are a few areas starting off in the outside that are not that pretty to look at, but more that are. *Anna* really shines in the darkness, and as

soon as you enter the sawmill, where you will spend most of the game, it is strikingly noticeable. The shadows and sparsely placed candles of the interior of the sawmill are great at setting a spooky atmosphere and are a great environment for some creepy gameplay. This gameworld is quite small, and of this world most of the gameplay is in one location. It is set in only four small sized «rooms», with only one of these rooms taking





most part, the particularly scary aspects of *Anna* are just the visuals, be them the creepy atmosphere or the disturbing hallucinations; We also get a lot of deeply disturbing actions that the player must take, and the way that the story is told through remembered whispers and narrated reminiscences is rather poignant. The story, or at least the small chunks of remembered, or possibly hallucinated, memories are deeply disturbing, and how the game allows your imagination to fill in the blanks is far more powerful than it could of possibly been if it were fully told or shown to you.

*Anna* is technically horrible, but having played the game, and particularly looking back at the experience, I cannot say that I agree that the game is bad. The game, as a story, is very well told and I would not warn anyone away from giving it a try; But instead simply warn you about what not to expect. Also, I would recommend playing the game with a walkthrough, the puzzles are absolutely not worth the time they will take to solve; And if you use a text walkthrough you will not be spoiling any of the story. ●



because *Anna* is still a very short game, but it makes it more of a personal journey.

*Anna* is absolutely a horror game, so it does try to scare you on more than one occasion. But more than that, it goes for a creepy atmosphere, with disturbing images. Nothing ever jumps out at you, but I for one way always afraid that something would; You know that the game is being successfully scary when you keep turning around to make sure that nothing is behind you. For the

up the lions share of the gameplay, and for the alternative early endings you only get to even see two or three of these locations. So yes, this is absolutely a negative mark on *Anna's* credentials, but it also serves to make the environment almost intimate. I would not say that this means that you get to fully explore the building in depth,

### BRIGHT MOMENTS:

Anna is creepy and downright scary in many situations.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

Horrible interface, and just ridiculously illogical random puzzle solutions.

### VERDICT:

Anna succeeds in creating a great atmosphere, with an interesting story, but completely fails at the technical aspects of interface and puzzles.



# Ghost in the Sheet



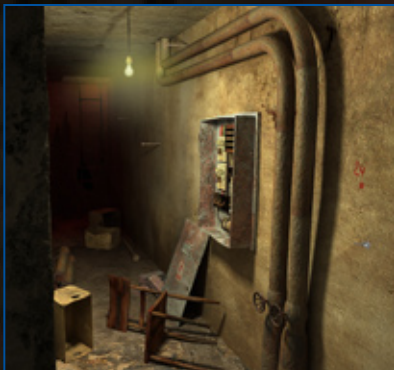
Genre: adventure Developer: CBE Entertainment Publisher: Tri Synergy

Release date: November 12, 2007 Platform: Windows

Website: [http://www.cbe-software.com/?page\\_id=69](http://www.cbe-software.com/?page_id=69)



*Ghost in the Sheet*, or *GitS* for short, is a slideshow based adventure, written using the *Wintermute Engine* and released late 2007. It uses a horror setting, mystery storyline, and witty comedic writing. Additionally, *GitS* completely reinvents the conventional point and click interface, coming up with a totally unique and different approach. *GitS* was written by CBE (*Cardboard Box Entertainment*), the developers of the more recent *JULIA*, and was the very first game they developed. Overall, its witty humor and style was rather reminiscent of another adventure game, where you travel in a land filled with the dead, *Grim Fandango*.



## Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

*Ghost in the Sheet* is about a newly made ghost who is sent to investigate the strange happenings at the mysterious factory, Sector Omega. Prior to your investigation you are minimally briefed by your new scary looking boss, who told you about your new existence and a minimal amount about your objectives. You are a ghost

in a sheet, and you are told that if you take your sheet off, or it gets damaged, you will lose your cohesion and blow apart in the wind. Sector Omega is where you will be spending the entire game, and it is quite an interesting place. It is located on top of a mountain and only reachable using a cable car. The factory itself is in a horrible state of almost post-apocalyptic disrepair, and is filled with monsters

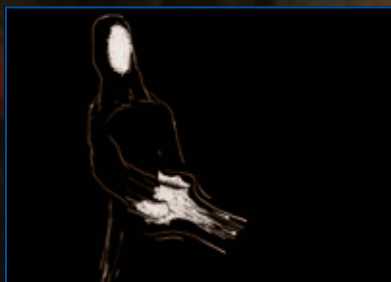
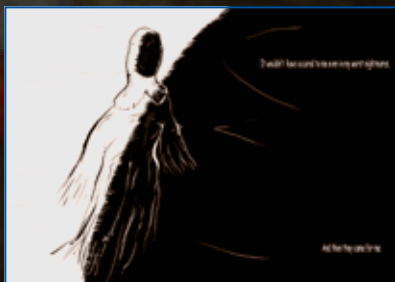




observations, are all narrated and voiced, with many good voice actors; But that does leave lots of reading, in the form of the multitude of memos and other writings. The writing is particularly witty and comedic in style, without the usual forced nature you find in comedic scripts. It is all entertaining stuff, very well written and humorous.

The most unique feature of *GitS* is its action-adventure style skill system. Starting from Telekinesis, you slowly build up an arsenal of astral powers for any situation. These powers range from the starting Telekinesis; which you can use to move small light objects short distances; And Electric Surge, which has a variety of inventive uses; To more specific skills like Scary Sound or Wind. These powers are your only way to interact with the game-world, that is if you do not count simple observation and dialog. This system is very well done and enjoyable, and it is simply nice to try something different.

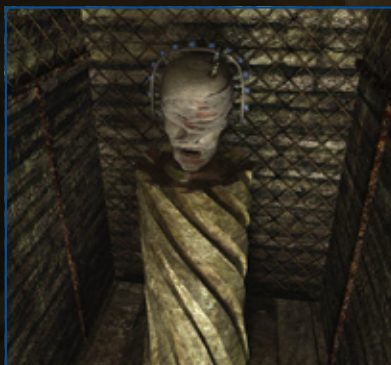
Surprisingly, *GitS* has pretty classical gameplay; While the powers do change a lot of the specifics, the general gameplay does not change all that much. We still have dialog puzzles, a few arcade sequences, logic puzzles, and even inventory style challenges. The logic puzzles



and ghosts of every variety, with a somewhat Cthulian style.

In Sector Omega you will investigate what happened to the factory and what they were doing

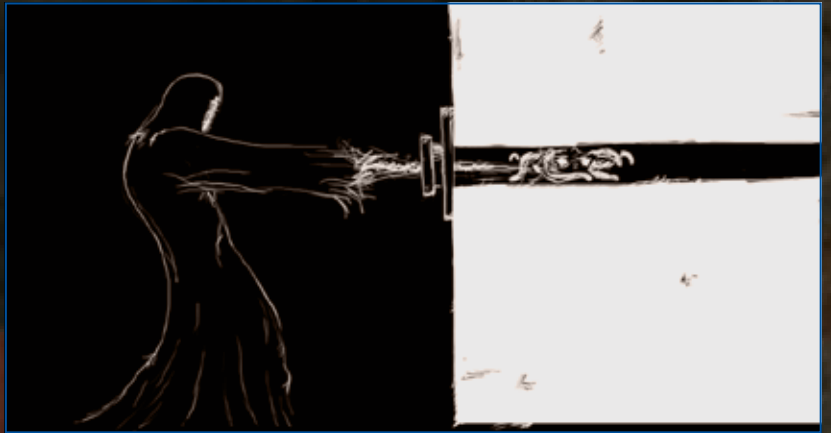
there; You will talk to employees, read memos, and explore the factory (fixing and reactivating many of its machines as you go). These discussions, and the



are mostly based on using the factory's machines and control panels, as well as figuring out a couple passwords; For this, you must observe your environment and carefully read all text and diagrams that you find. The meat

of the game is its inventory style puzzles, which is rather strange to say, because as a ghost you cannot carry any objects around with you. Your telekinesis does let you move small light objects around any given screen, but does not let

you bring them from far away; So all objects that you use must be on the scene they are needed, or you need to get them there using different (more inventive) methods. Additionally, the individual powers themselves often act exactly like





matter thrown in a few of the scenes, as well as a few tidbits in the story.

*Ghost in the Sheet* is an absolutely terrific point and click adventure, and it is no coincidence that I compared it to one of the best adventure games of all time. It is the closest game in mood/ atmosphere to *Grim Fandango* that I have yet to play, and, in my honest opinion, does not do that horribly in any comparison. It does need a sequel, too much is left unexplained, and it is simply too good of a franchise to gather dust. But I am probably singing its praises too strongly, it is possibly not quite as amazing as you might imply from the rest of this article. ●

inventory items would have, and take the place of an inventory system. This gameplay is fantastic, with a decent level of challenge and no real problems. The one minor issue I did have was with finding scene hotspots, not that *GitS* does anything special in this regard; But a hotspot viewer feature is not included and a few of the hotspots are quite small, with out any indicating graphics to draw your eye.

The graphics are neither particularly praiseworthy nor condemnable, but simply a rather ordinary, slightly retro, quality. It is neither high resolution, not low, but a decent inbetween. *GitS* also has a photo-realistic style, that is somewhat dated. The cutscenes are done in a comic style, with simple black and white graphics; These come off as decent, nothing to complain about; They work well at portraying the story, but were

obviously used because of how easy and quick they would be to make. Most of these graphics are of a rather rundown factory; A pretty decent horror location, but done in a rather bland fashion, that I do not think even tries to be truly scary. But we also do get a little bit of hardcore macabre subject

### BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The witty humor and unique world interaction.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

The small, hard to find, hotspots and really bad grammar.

### VERDICT:

A completely fantastic and incredibly unique adventure.



# Pathologic



Genre: survival horror adventure Developer: Ice-Pick Lodge  
Publisher: Meridian 4, Buka Entertainment Release date: June 9, 2005  
Platform: Windows Website: <http://www.pathologic-game.com/>



*Pathologic* may be the most unique and remarkable game I've ever played. Developed by the Russian studio *Ice-Pick Lodge* in 2005, *Pathologic* plays kind of like a cross between *Silent Hill* and *Morrowind*. It takes elements from different genres (FPS, RPG, adventure, survival-horror) and blends them all into a uniquely weird, disturbing, glorious, compelling, brilliant, horrifying, surreal experience. Whereas most games strive to create bustling, life-like cities and locations, *Pathologic* instead offers a dying city.

## Review by Nick Burgener

You play as one of three possible main characters arriving in town just before a deadly plague breaks out. As the town falls into a quarantine state and the plague kills more and more people every day, your mission is to find a cure to the disease and escape with your life. You have 12 days to accomplish this, with each day bringing about new tasks and challenges that threaten your survival.

It's a wonderfully original premise that's also fleshed out with intelligent gameplay mechanics. The face of the city constantly changes as the plague sweeps through different districts and as people fall further into decay and madness.

Your survival hangs on your ability to manipulate a brutally harsh economy while micromanaging limited resources. Staving off infection is not your only concern, however, as death can come just as easily at the hand of a madmen or from simple starvation.

The atmosphere this creates is simply phenomenal, with you really feeling (and seeing) the effects of the plague as you try to get by in this hellish scenario. I've never felt more vulnerable in even the most renowned of survival-horror games, and even the story offers a lot of intrigue and philosophical depth, if you can understand all that happens in this weird, twisted place.

Like every reviewer before me who's ever attempted to describe

*Pathologic*, I find myself struggling to do the game justice through mere words. *Pathologic* defies a number of video game conventions, which makes it difficult to describe in terms of the conventions with which we're all familiar. Trying to compare it to other games or





their own business and even interacting with you as necessary. Each character plays radically different from the next and has their own unique story and quests, making it feel like there are three different full-length games all happening in the same setting.

With three distinct playable characters, a single playthrough only grants you a single angle on the overall story. Each character focuses on different aspects of the plague (and of the town itself), befriending different critical NPCs, which leads to all kinds of unique insights when playing as different characters. You hear about something as one character, and it

defining it by some kind of genre is just a crude bastardization that doesn't nearly capture the essence of what Pathologic is. It's just something you have to experience for yourself, and that's how you know it's something truly special.

When you start a new game, you find yourself in a theater with three people talking on a stage, and with you in full control of your perspective. The three speakers are the playable characters, discussing the disease and whose methodology is best for solving it. It's a preamble that literally sets the stage for the rest of the game, establishing the characters, the central premise, and perhaps most importantly, the running theme of each playable character being an actor on a stage. When their conversation is over, they agree to go their separate ways, walk off stage, and freeze in place as the lights dim, with you still in control of your perspective as you head towards the exit.

It's only then that the character selection screen pops up,

presenting your three character options: Daniel Dankovsky (aka «The Bachelor»), a traditional med school doctor; Artemiy Burakh (aka «The Haruspicus»), a kind of folk shaman; and Klara (aka «The Devotress»), a sort of semi-divine mystic. Each is a healer of sorts brought to the town for their own reasons, before becoming caught up in the plague. Whomever you choose, the other two will be present in your game going about



remains an intriguing, unexplained mystery, but then playing as another character, it becomes clear. Practically speaking, you wouldn't really want to play the game three times to get the whole story, but it adds a lot more depth to the experience when you know that everything isn't always as it seems, and that there's more to the story that you aren't being told.

The narrative deals primarily with uncovering facts about the town's sordid history and all of its weird idiosyncrasies. From the moment you first arrive, it's pretty clear that this is a bizarre and otherworldly place. The architecture of all the buildings has a gothic flair to it, with many of the designs looking downright creepy at times. Everything is a washed-out shade of brown and gray earthtones, seemingly devoid of life. You've got all kinds of drunks shambling around the streets with demented smiles on their faces, and children running around claiming no parents. When people start dying, suspicions immediately arise that it's the work of a demon, shebnak-

adyr, «the clay cannibaless», and everyone goes on a witch hunt.

As you talk to people, you learn that the town was basically founded on the meat industry. The eastern side of the town houses the massive Abattoir, the slaughterhouse where all of the meat is produced. You don't know what goes on in there, other than rumors, and common townsfolk are generally scared of the beast-like butchers and treat them almost like outcasts. Two rivers run through the city, but everyone says not to trust the water because it's contaminated from all the blood of the slaughtered cows. At the start of the game, when news of the infection hits, the Abattoir gets locked up and meat production comes to halt with all of the workers still inside, the giant, bloody sacks of meat left out to dry and rot on the pulley system leading out from the town.

Extending off from the Abattoir is the Apiary, a tall, mammoth structure with barred, irregularly-placed windows. The Apiary is basically where the outcasts and



mad men get sent to live. Like the other notable structures, it too has been closed off from the public by the time you arrive. All you know of it is that the butchers, the Odonghe (strange-looking humanoid creatures, colloquially referred to as «worms»), and the bull worshippers live there, and they've been trapped inside since the outbreak. Dead bodies get sent through the Apiary, but you have no idea as to why.

Other places, like the Polyhedron, defy physics or logical explanation. It's a massive structure that stands on basically nothing; it really should fall and crumble under its own



weight, but it stays upright for some unknown reason. People tell you it was built with very particular physics from the mind of a genius architect (responsible for other impossible architecture, like the «stairways to heaven» that decorate the town). And yet, further investigation seems to suggest more mystical properties that even the creator can't explain clearly. Perhaps even more bizarre is how all of the town's children have taken residence there, forming an exclusive society within the impossible walls of the Polyhedron.

Each character explores one of these places in-depth and becomes familiar with how it relates to the town and to the plague, while learning about the other two in rudimentary description from the other playable characters. This creates quite a lot of intrigue as the game presents you with such monumental structures and then restricts your access to them. Being told that you can't go in only makes you more curious about them, while they serve as critical mysteries in the developing plot.

Some of the first characters you meet serve as the tutorial, explaining how the game mechanics work. But they're not talking to your character, they're talking to you -- the player. They specifically reference that «Our dialogue is very important! It is connected with the rules of the game!» and your character responds with baffled confusion «What game, Man in a Mask? I am no actor!» They explain this to you because «it is a tradition to tell the actor what to do, when he comes out onto the stage, otherwise he'll fall off of it.» Just like with the theater introduction, this tutorial clues you in from the



very beginning that this is going to be an oddly surreal experience.

Each day in *Pathologic* usually begins with you receiving a letter from a notable NPC who requests your assistance with some issue, or has some information that might prove useful in your mission

to stop the plague. These are your daily «main quests» that you have to complete to progress to the next day. Each day also brings several optional side quests that offer more insight into the town and its residents while (usually) giving you opportunities for extra rewards.



You don't have to complete them, but if you haven't finished them by the end of the day, then they remain unresolved for the rest of the game, being replaced the next day with a new batch of quests.

And so, every day brings with it a time limit to complete the daily missions while doing all of the tasks necessary to keep yourself alive. If you find yourself close to death, then you might have to spend an entire afternoon digging through trashcans, looking for junk to trade for some medicine, or scrounging up enough money to buy it from a shop, which then gives you less time to finish the daily missions. How you manage your time becomes one of the most important aspects of the game.

Your survival in *Pathologic* depends on several statistical meters. You have to eat, and so a meter fills up the longer you go

without food. You have to sleep, and so a meter fills up the longer you go without sleep. You have to watch your health, which takes damage from ordinary combat and depletes over time while you're infected. You have to keep your immunity to the disease up by taking medicines, and when you're infected, you have to treat your infection level with various types of antibiotics. On top of all of this, you have to maintain your reputation with the town, which is affected by your actions.

The brilliant thing about this survival system is that literally everything you do in the game has some kind of consequence to those meters. These meters constantly lurk in the background, always changing no matter what you're doing. You can't escape them. The other great thing is that doing something to alleviate one meter almost always

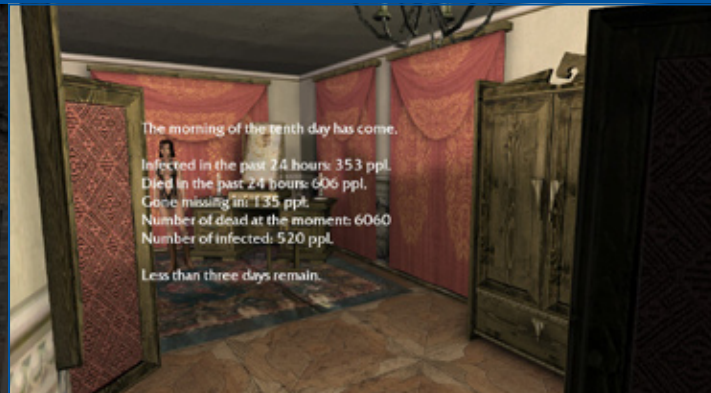
has a negative effect on another meter. Many of the healing items raise your exhaustion, and are thus best taken at the end of the day. Most of the medicine you can take to treat your infection or to boost your immune system also damage your health. Going to sleep reduces your exhaustion, but raises your hunger.

So to stay alive, you have to acquire all sorts of things to maintain your meters. Different foods, all kinds of different medicines, weapons to defend yourself, clothes to protect against the disease or to defend against attacks, and money to buy and repair these goods (they deteriorate over time or with use). None of this is particularly easy to acquire, since the economy in a quarantined town gets thrown to hell. On day 2, the price of food increases by 1000%. You can trade numerous things with local townsfolk, but the longer the plague goes on, the fewer citizens are left alive to trade with. And all of the best equipment costs so much money that you have to sell a few kidneys for it (figuratively, of course, unless you're the Haruspicus).

The economy in *Pathologic* is really quite sophisticated for a video game, and proves to be one of the game's best aspects. As important as money may be for buying items from stores and for completing quests, a lot of your valuable resources come from garbage bins. Empty bottles, sewing needles, discarded razors, broken watches -- junk. But then you realize that you can fill empty bottles with water and then trade them to wandering drunks for bandages, and you can trade the needles to young girls for bullets,







and you can trade the razors to young boys for medicine.

Figuring out how to manipulate the economy is a real challenge at the start, and then it becomes a rewarding and integral component to your survival. The cost of goods changes from day to day, coinciding with the major events of the town, which then creates a dilemma of «Do I buy this medicine now, even though it might be cheaper tomorrow? The price might go up, so it might be better to buy it today. But then again, do I really need the medicine? My infection is still pretty low, so maybe I can get by for two days without any. But if I do that, then maybe I'll need to buy some extra morphine to take before bed.»

An early source of income is to fight the thieves and murderers that come out at night. You get

positive reputation for killing them, and they each carry a few hundred dollars around, along with razors that you can trade, and sometimes extra weapons. But doing so wears out your weapons (and clothing, if you get hit) even faster, which you'll just have to spend more money repairing, and will leave you more exhausted during the day, thus leaving you less time to finish your daily tasks. So no matter what you do, there's always some kind of trade-off, adding significant depth to every moment

of the experience. Taking time out to better your personal situation puts the fate of the town at risk, but what good are you to the town if you die from starvation?

Making it to the end of a day is a genuine accomplishment in this game, considering all the work you have to do to stay alive, and that the game really doesn't care if you live or die. It won't hold your hand to make sure you get through to the end; it's entirely possible to make it through 10 days and then back yourself into a corner where you



have absolutely no hope of survival, short of loading a save from a few (in-game) days ago. Or perhaps to save yourself the agony of replaying several hours of the game, you end up in terrifying, desperate scenarios where you have to sell your only weapon for a few scraps of bread, or murder a child for the medicine he's carrying while you're about to die from infection. That's true horror right there.

Each day, different districts of the town become infected. You can buy a map each day that marks the infected districts, but you can always tell you're about to enter one from the familiar, foreboding scarecrows setup around the border. Once you enter, the screen turns to a thick shade of green. Clouds of pestilence billow around you and blow through the streets. The houses become plastered with blood and filth. Rats scurry about, biting at your ankles, and droning plague-bearers try to latch on to you as you pass. The sick lie on the ground moaning in pain. And the guards attack any infected that try to leave.

It's a horrifying sight the first time you enter an infected district, and they just get worse over time. They're easily avoidable early on, except when a mission sends you directly into one, but towards the end of the game the disease is so pervasive that everywhere you go will have felt the effects of the plague. And the music that plays in these districts is equally creepy and haunting. (Most of the music is, in fact, extremely atmospheric, and adds a significant amount of character to this uniquely bizarre experience.)

It's inevitable that you'll eventually contract the disease, no matter how diligent you are about avoiding it, and when you do, you'll find yourself in a far more pressing dilemma than any other disease you ever contracted from other video games.

Once you have the disease, your infection meter progressively fills up over time, occasionally blurring your vision and causing damage to your health. The higher your infection level, the quicker it kills you. At first, you can't completely

cure it; your only way of dealing with the infection is to treat it with antibiotics. Some kill active bacteria in your system (lowering your infection level), while others slow the growth rate of new bacteria (how fast your infection level increases over time). Every antibiotic deals a certain amount of damage to your health, so if your infection is nearing max and threatening to kill you, taking the medicine might kill you just as quickly if you're all out of healing items and low on health.

When you're infected, you have to ration all of your supplies. Taking medicines early can prevent you from winding up in a bad situation later, but it's sometimes a gamble whether you can get more medicine later on, so maybe you might be better off hoarding a small amount of backup reserves for emergencies. Or maybe hoarding them isn't such a good idea, since your condition will only get worse and it'll be harder to treat later on. Every night I felt relief and gratification at having



survived to the end of another day. But then the dread always hit me as I looked at my available supplies and tried to budget how I should prepare for the next day.

Besides the main goal of finding a way to stop the plague, each character has an additional goal of keeping 10 critical NPCs (described as «adherents») alive to the end. These characters can also become infected, and you'll have to use your own supplies on them. As you progress through the 12 days, you eventually discover ways to cure individuals of the plague, but these curative items become a limited resource, and you have to wonder if you should use them on yourself (even though you might contract the disease again later), or save them for your adherents. So you not only have to micromanage resources to keep yourself alive, but you also have to make sure you have enough supplies to heal anyone else who might become sick.

The story continues with each character learning more about the plague and about the town, until the final conclusion on the twelfth day when the player has to decide what to do to «save» the town (provided you've kept all of your adherents alive). The final decision is a little forced, but you become so familiar with the town and its denizens that you can't help but feel some kind of moral attachment to one decision over another. I don't want to spoil anything, but let it be said that the final resolution makes all of the preceding stress and misery worth it, while the «secret ending» that you can get from saving two sets of adherents can be completely mind-blowing, while adding a lot of extra philosophical depth to the experience.



Perhaps even more fascinating than the plot development is how the town physically changes over the course of 12 days. When you first arrive, the town is typical, but on day 2, things start to change. Infected districts start cropping up around the city with pestilence sweeping through the streets and the infected moaning in pain. After the disease has run its course through these districts, they get closed down and become practically barren, with only violent looters braving the now-empty houses.

After a few days, a group of anarchists take to arms, lighting the city on fire by throwing molotovs at everything that moves. Murderers and thieves start to populate the city streets even during the day, and eventually there's just so much rampant chaos that you're utterly helpless to put a stop to it. You can kill every criminal and madman you

come across, but it gets to a point where you're just wasting valuable time and resources, and you might be better off to tuck your head and just allow the chaos to run its course.

An inquisitor is eventually sent to resolve the issue through diplomatic means, trying to get the three ruling families to come to an agreement. When that doesn't prove entirely successful, the military arrives to crack down on the chaos and solve the dilemma through brute force. Suddenly you've got armed guards patrolling the streets and shooting every criminal and plague-bearer that crosses their path. As the plague rages on and the death toll rises every morning, fewer and fewer people are left wandering the streets for you to trade with, all-the-while the prices in the economy fluctuate along with the daily changes.



It's simply amazing to watch the city change over the course of the game. You can really feel the effects of the plague, with people becoming more and more desperate and hopeless, while the dregs of society come out to thrive on the misery of others. The atmosphere is so thick that you almost choke on it, and I don't think I've ever seen such a dynamic setting in any video game before. Even while this town is slowly suffocating and dying,

it feels more alive than any other town I've visited in any other game.

That's not to say that *Pathologic* is a perfect game. Far from it. Practically speaking, *Pathologic* is actually a pretty bad video game. As brilliant as it is, it's riddled with problems that hold the game back and leave it noticeably flawed. For the most part, the game's strengths are so monumental that the flaws can almost be overlooked entirely, but if you're just starting out and have no idea what to expect, they can almost ruin the experience.

The main culprit is the wonky translation from Russian to English. Characters frequently talk in ways that fluctuate between being cryptically puzzling, comically bizarre, or strangely poetic. More often, it's just a problem of weird grammatical issues making it slightly more of a challenge to figure out what exactly a couple of sentences are getting at. And yet, this weird issue with the translation produces an uncanny effect of making every

character seem slightly demented, pushing the game further into the uncanny valley between reality and fantasy, where you're not quite sure if this is real or not.

The other thing you'll immediately notice is the dated graphics and animation quality. *Pathologic* was released in 2005, but looks (and feels) more like something from 2002. Character models look pretty bad by 2005 standards, and every type of NPC shares the same model as every other character in that category (merchants all look the same, guards all look the same, factory workers all look the same). Most animations look extremely clunky and awkward, textures and polygon counts are awfully low-quality, there's a really limited draw distance. And yet, the low draw distance produces an unsettling fog effect reminiscent of *Silent Hill*, while the overall artistic style and direction of the game remain fascinating and visually stimulating.

Combat is not very good at all. *Pathologic* isn't supposed to be a real shooter or action game, so expectations aren't especially high in the first place, but the combat just feels barely functional. With a firearm equipped, the crosshair feels like it moves around on a grid system that makes aiming feel really imprecise, while also demanding microscopic precision with your mouse. Melee combat has a really weird rhythm of clicking to attack with your knife, moving forward so that the one-second delay on the attack connects with the target, and backing up to avoid their attack while you prepare another hit. It feels more like a synchronized dance than a fight.

The interface is fairly counter-intuitive at first, with the trade window being one of the game's biggest challenges to figure out.

It doesn't look very sleek or appealing, either, with so much of the dialogue screens covered with black windows and those gray borders, and things aren't always explained very clearly once you're in the game. Sometimes your journal entries or map markers wind up being kind of vague and nondescript, which leaves you feeling directionless at times, not sure what to do.

On one occasion I was supposed to meet some characters at the «Rail Station» at 10pm. The rail station is a huge place and I didn't know where they specifically meant to meet. I made a hard save and went to the obvious spots, waited for people to show up, saw no one, then started trying to wander all around the premises with no luck finding anyone. After consulting a guide, I found out that I was supposed to be stood up and then confront them about it later. There I was stressing out thinking I'd done something wrong, when a journal entry never popped up to clue me in that they had stood me up.

Perhaps the worst part of the game, though, is your painfully slow movement speed, and the fact that every single quest sends you halfway across town, for whatever reason. You end up spending a majority of your time trudging around, slowly walking from place to place, and it can be pretty boring and tedious sometimes. And yet, this is an absolutely crucial component to the game, because this is where all of the survival aspects happen -- dodging the plague, defending yourself against criminals and madmen, scavenging through dumpsters looking for junk, and trading with random citizens you meet on the streets.

This is why you wouldn't feel immediately compelled to replay

the game as another character. Even though they each have their own radically different quests and unique playstyles, each providing a different angle on the story, a majority of the gameplay remains basically the same -- endlessly walking from place to place and micromanaging all of your statistical meters. This aspect of the game can literally be a chore at times, even though the survival mechanics (and economics) are so sophisticated.

*Pathologic* is a diamond in the rough. It has its noticeable problems, but its core concepts are so original that the game is absolutely worth playing, because there's just nothing else that really shows this kind of ambition. It's a monument in terms of design, that just happens to lack the necessary polish to be at its absolute best. *Pathologic* envisions a dying city, and as flawed as some of its execution may be, the underlying gameplay mechanics still manage to conjure genuine feelings of dread and desperation like no other game has ever achieved. It's a wonderfully surreal experience. Anyone with a bit of patience and a sincere appreciation for innovation should consider playing it. ●



### BRIGHT MOMENTS:

Sophisticated survival mechanics with great atmosphere, dynamic content, and an interesting story.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

The translation is pretty bad, combat is almost unbearable, and the UI isn't too good either.

### VERDICT:

*Pathologic* is a game like no other, which offers a brilliant experience if you have the patience for it.

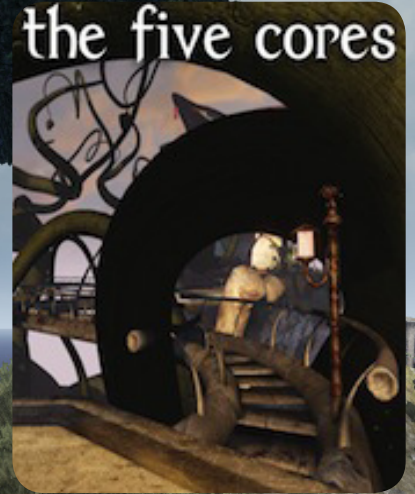


# The Five Cores

the five cores



Genre: adventure Developer/publisher: Neebla Games  
Release date: September 12, 2012 Platform: Windows  
Website: <http://neeblagames.com/>

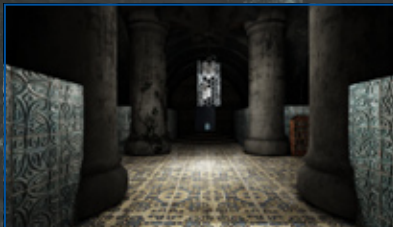


A 3D adventure game that is primarily a *Myst*-like; That, most of all, tries to copy the *Myst* aesthetic. The game seems to have started life in August of 2012 and was released September of that same year, only a little over a month latter. With the development of this game comes *Neebla Games*, who seem willing to continue development of adventure game titles, if this one goes well. For awhile *The Five Cores* was one of the early games on Steam Greenlight, and was probably the most interesting looking game on that service; And even though it did not work out, this served as its only real advertising, and the way in which I found the game.

## Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

Like I previously mentioned the development of *The Five Cores* was extremely rapid, and even if much of the game was developed before this one month period I am surprised it was finished in such a short timeframe; The environmental graphics themselves





look like they should take many multiplies of that development time. Regardless of exactly how long was taken to develop the game, its less than polished nature

does show. It contains a few bugs, for example, it is possible to fall off the edges of the paths in certain locations, when you run around you tend to get stuck, and there is

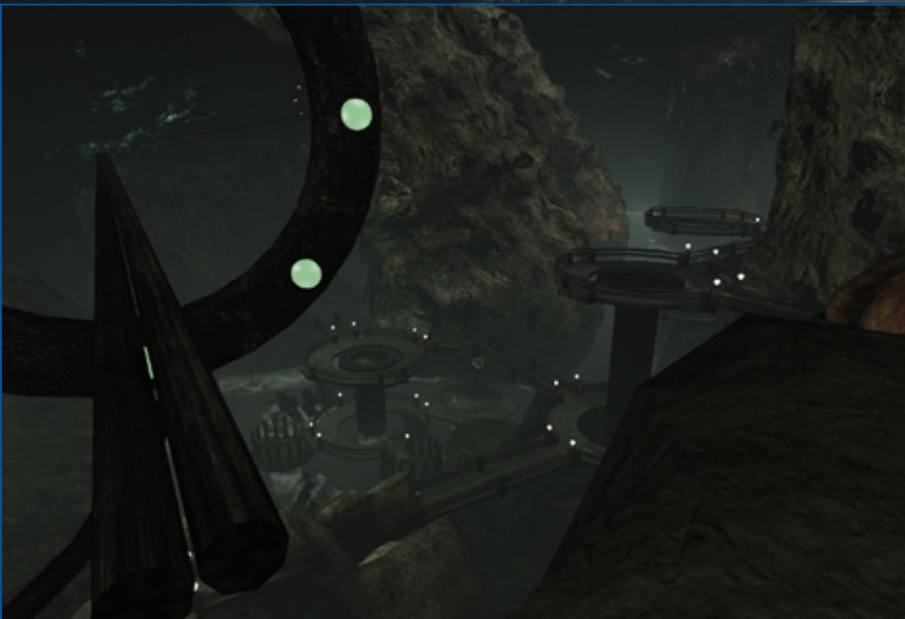
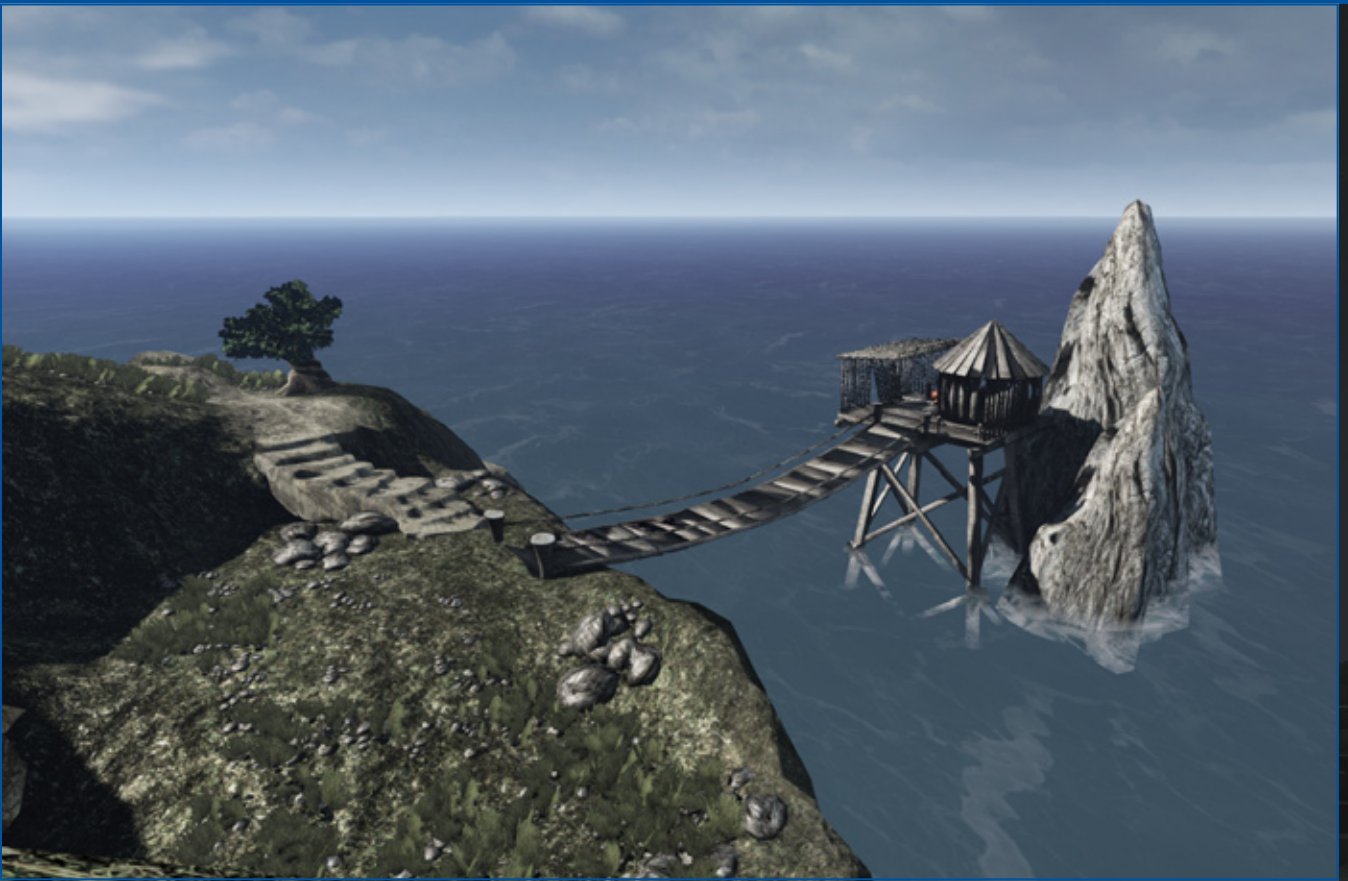
one major puzzle (to shunt power to an important device) that you do not even have to complete. Also, I am rather perplexed about the addition of physics in the form of barrels, they kept getting in my way and rolling around, it would of been a lot better to not include them.

Its main problem is that is does not only copy *Myst's* style but moreso it copies its specifics, sometimes even specifics that do not make sense in this context. There is a letter at the beginning of the game that explains the general situation, exactly like in *Myst*; But here it makes no sense because it is addressed to you, and you are a complete stranger, who has just randomly arrived on this deserted island. Also, nothing else is ever revealed storywise; That letter is the complete sum total of what we learn about the history of this place. And while many of the places you see look heavily inspired by *Myst*, its story is so strange and



**"The world in which you are standing is on the verge of collapse because of the child in the temple. Her dreams become real and cause death and destruction."**

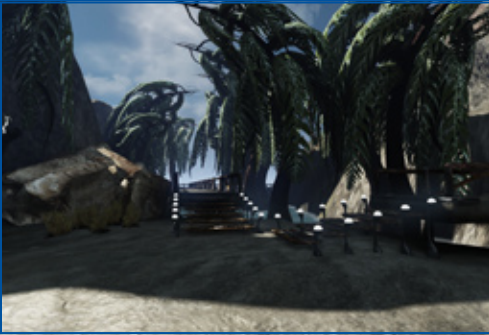
(Extract from the opening text of *The Five Cores*)



never explained, which is quite the opposite to *Myst*.

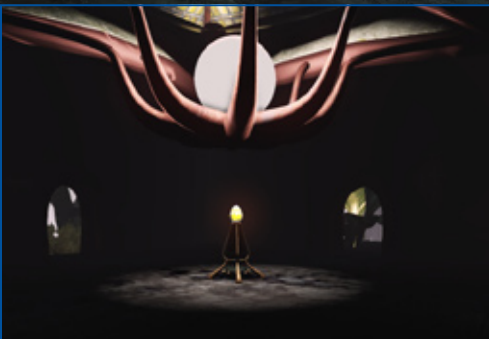
What the game does get right is exploration and experimentation. The game, just like *Myst*, is all about exploring this world you have stumbled upon; And while it does not do as good a job as *Myst* in this regard, the landscape is still very exotic and beautiful. In particular, I am talking about its lack of story, the islands and locations do not have any reason to be there and seem to only exist to hold the puzzle of that particular place. One thing it does do well, perhaps even better than *Myst* in some situations, is the experimental type puzzle solutions. Like *Myst*, *The Five Cores* uses challenge through





obfuscation; The puzzles and the devices are alien and unexplained, making much trial, error, and experimentation a necessity. These puzzles are completely logic based, with not a single inventory item to be found in the entire game.

Strangely, the game's story is actually rather horror based, with dreams of death and destruction apparently becoming real, and the entire world on the brink of collapse. Except you do not really see any of this; The game is rather



bright and cheerful all the way through, with maybe one small section of one level showing any damage at all.

The most important aspect of *The Five Cores*, and the reason to play it, is the alien and beautiful scenery. This gameworld is drawn in a fantasy style, with a little sci-fi thrown in. I would say that it does not quite live up to the still screenshots, and certainly lacks that certain stylish aspect that *Myst* has, but is still very nice in person. One thing done very well is the light bloom, and it really varies

the views at all locations. It is nice, but is not quite as astounding as I was hoping for.

*The Five Cores* is a good 3D adventure, and a rather interesting first effort by *Neebla Games*. It has nice graphics, interesting puzzles, but a rather shallow disjointed story. I have never seen a worse attempt at a plot, it seems to have been simply far too ambiguous for the development timeframe; And looks like it was simply released in an unfinished state, which is mirrored in all of the game's features to a lesser extent. ●



### BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The beautifully exotic landscape.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

There are a few bugs, even some major ones.

### VERDICT:

A very interesting, if unpolished, *Myst*-like.



# The Walking Dead

## Episode 4: Around Every Corner



Genre: adventure Developer/publisher: Telltale Games  
Release date: October 9, 2012 Platforms: Windows,  
Mac OS X, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, iOS  
Website: <http://www.telltalegames.com/walkingdead>



If you've been keeping up with *Telltale's The Walking Dead series*, either playing it for yourself or merely reading reviews, then you should have a pretty good idea of what to expect in *Episode Four: Around Every Corner*. The style of gameplay remains just the same as all of the previous episodes, so there's really not much for me to talk about on that front, and not much else has changed since the last episode except for the continuation of the story. Which, if you have been keeping up with the story, is the entire reason to get *Episode Four*.

## Review by Nick Burgener

After taking to the road in *Episode Three*, Lee Everett and his band of survivors arrive in Savannah, Georgia, hoping to find a boat, while the young Clementine hopes to find her presumed-dead parents. As the group searches for a salvageable boat, a mysterious voice contacts them over Clementine's walkie-talkie, a shadowy figure stalks them throughout the city, and they get a taste of the dire measures society has taken to survive in Savannah.

As the penultimate episode in this five-episode series, *Around Every Corner* succeeds in ramping the stakes up higher than they've ever been before. By now you might be wondering if *Telltale* have shown all their cards, but they continue to surprise me with unexpected twists in the story which demonstrate that literally no one is safe going into *Episode Five*. As such, this episode sets up for a very dramatic climax as I anxiously await the finale.

Gameplay-wise, the bulk of the experience is still comprised of making decisions in dialogue, but there are a few decent moments of problem-solving this time around which help lend some more interactivity to the experience. There's one stealth sequence, for example, where you have to get by a group of zombies without alerting them, and doing so requires you to think and explore different options, rather than simply clicking the one available



action. This sequence is somewhat reminiscent of navigating the motel parking lot from *Episode One*, though still not quite as good.

Also continuing a trend I noticed in the previous episode, *Episode Four* features a fair amount of active shooting sequences, the kind where you have to aim with the mouse and shoot down oncoming zombies much like a shooting gallery. This kind of gameplay is certainly appropriate for a zombie-survival game, but it feels like this is *Telltale's* way of responding to the lingering complaints regarding the series' relative lack of interactivity. Rather than being a proper solution to the issue, it feels more like a tacked-on distraction, but at least they haven't sold out and turned the whole game into a first-person shooter.

Meanwhile, the decisions still don't feel quite as branching as any of the decisions from the first two episodes. The further you get into a series, the harder it is for the developers to keep track of so many branching paths, so it's understandable that things are becoming a little more streamlines, but at the same time it feels like the decisions don't really have as much impact on the actual story. For the most part, they just seem to offer



different role-playing options -- and they do a fine job of that -- but unlike other episodes I felt little incentive to replay this episode to see the different outcomes because different outcomes didn't seem readily apparent.

But the whole reason to play *The Walking Dead* is for the story, and in that aspect, *Episode Four: Around Every Corner* certainly delivers. ●

### BRIGHT MOMENTS:

A few unexpected twists in the story prove that no one is safe, setting up for a great finale in episode five.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

Most of the decisions feel like they have much less impact on the nature of the story than many decisions from the first two episodes.

### VERDICT:

Episode Four raises the stakes higher than ever before, continuing the trend of a fascinating story and adventure.



# Erie



Genre: horror Developer/publisher: UGF Release date: October 10, 2012  
Platform: Windows Website: <http://www.eriegame.com/>



*Erie* is a free first-person horror game made by students of the University of Utah's *EAE Master Games Studio Program*, using the *Unreal Development Kit*. You play as Oliver Victor, a Red Cross investigator circa 1966, sent to search for missing workers after a nuclear power plant suffers a partial meltdown. Once in the facility, you become trapped and have to flee from the mutated horrors and escape with your life.

## Review by Nick Burgener

In terms of horror, *Erie* is competently designed at first, with effective (albeit somewhat crude) audio and visual effects contributing to the game's immersive atmosphere. For the first several minutes, that's basically all the game is: atmosphere. Your walk through plant provides a basic tutorial for controls, which should be perfectly familiar to anyone who's ever handled a

keyboard before, while providing a few atmospheric scares to put you just a little on edge. Bats fluttering out from a vent in the ceiling, a woman crying behind a locked door, sudden noises, monsters darting past a window, and so on.

Once you get far enough into the facility, a strange monster appears, pursuing you through the labyrinthine hallways as you try to shut down the power generators to release the lock on the emergency exit. The monster itself is fairly frightening the first time you encounter it, simply because you're not expecting it, but the effect wears off far too quickly. All it does is mindlessly try to get to you, following you wherever you go, not letting you stop to examine your surroundings. If it catches up to you, it's game over.

The monster ceases to be scary because it's so simple and predictable

that you never have a chance to feel tension or anxiety. There's hardly anything else going on in the environment while it's chasing you -- you're just supposed to be collecting keys scattered around the map while not getting killed by the monster. So the gameplay quickly devolves into a matter of "keep away", with the monster posing no intimidating threat because (1) you can sprint so much faster than it can move, (2) you pretty much always know where it is, and (3) as long as you keep moving, it won't ever catch up to you. After the first encounter, it becomes about as frightening as a friend following you around your house with a monster mask on his face.

Scattered throughout the plant are written notes which you can read to get the backstory of the research





that was going on there, but since the monster is constantly chasing you, you can't actually stop to read them. In fact, you can't really stop to do anything, which makes studying and learning the confusing hallways even more of an annoying chore. The idea, I think, was to simulate a more panicked feeling of horror, with certain death chasing you through twisting corridors while you worry about taking a wrong turn or getting lost. But once it becomes apparent that your only goal is to collect keys and return to the generators, the game becomes one-dimensional and the monster becomes just a nuisance to your progress.

The one really cool feature that helps you navigate is a can of spray paint, which lets you draw arrows or write messages on walls so that you know when you've reached familiar territory, or so that you can find your way back to a certain location. It's a pretty helpful tool that I can see being useful in lots of other games -- it's just a shame that you don't always have time to stop and draw proper signposts for yourself. I basically just spent most of the game aimlessly wandering around, trying to decipher my own arrows, and being bored with the thing chasing me.

The game has a few technical problems and oddities as well, given

that it's a student project being released to the public for free. For example, if you look straight up and jump, you can see your own character's head poke into view of the camera. Not a big deal, but it's certainly not supposed to happen. At one point I got the monster trapped in a three-sided pen, unable to escape because of his simplistic path-finding and behavior scripts, and he remained there for the rest of that playthrough.

Considering that *Erie* is a student project that's available for free, it's a fairly impressive endeavor and it's certainly worth playing. In the grand

scheme of things, however, it did not feel like an effective horror game to me. Your mileage may vary depending on how easily scared you are. ●

### BRIGHT MOMENTS:

Audio and visual effects create a pretty good atmosphere, and the usable can of spray paint is a really cool idea.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

The main monster that chases you just isn't scary, and the gameplay basically amounts to mindless key-fetching.

### VERDICT:

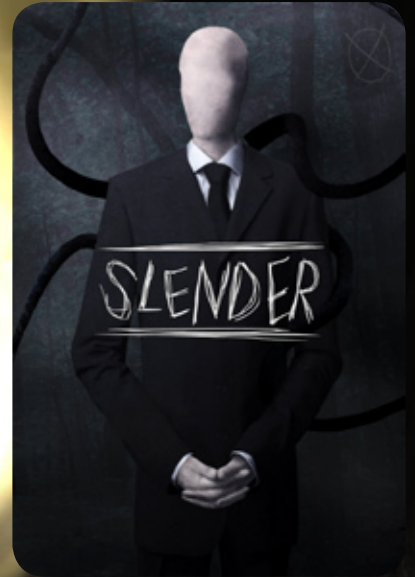
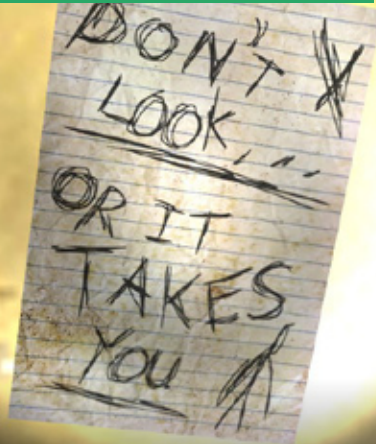
An impressive effort for a student project, but it could use some re-working to reach its full potential.



# Slender: The Eight Pages



Genre: horror Developer/publisher: Parsec Productions  
Release date: beta, June 2012 Platform: Windows, Mac OSX  
Website: <http://slendergame.com/game.php>



*Slender* is a free indie horror game based on the mythos of the slender man, an abnormally tall, faceless man in a dark suit and tie. Occasionally spotted in the background of photographs, people reportedly go missing and disappear in his presence. He is an entity of pure fear, silently stalking people until they go mad. And then he takes them.

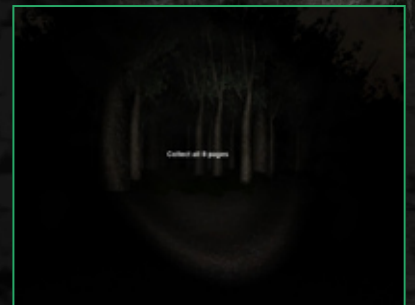
## Review by Nick Burgener

The premise of the game is pretty simple: you're alone in a pitch black wood with nothing but a flashlight at your disposal, tasked with collecting eight pages scattered about the woods. Who you are and why you're searching for these eight pages is never explained; it's just an arbitrary goal to give you something to do whilst being terrorized by the silent madness-inducing presence of the slender man.

What *Slender* gets right about horror is the steady build-up of tension; when you start the game there are no other sounds but your footsteps, the trees rustling in the wind, crickets chirping,

and owls hooting. Once you collect the first page, a distorted, echoing bass drum starts pounding in the background like a heartbeat; after a few more pages, some kind of metallic humming sound starts resonating over top. The soundtrack progressively builds, layering more things on top and changing tones altogether the closer you get to collecting all eight, and it's a large part of what makes the game effective.

The other thing *Slender* gets right is the unpredictability of when or where the slender man will appear. He doesn't even appear until you collect the first page, but once that bass drum starts reverberating in the background, you know he's out there. The developer



understands that too much exposure to a creepy monster ruins its effect, and so the slender man appears rather infrequently at first, giving you ample time to psych yourself up for the big scare, anxiously waiting and trying to anticipate when he'll show up. After he

makes an appearance, he disappears for a short while to let things settle down, to let the tension mount again so that his next appearance will be just as effective. Just as the soundtrack builds with each collected page, so does the frequency and proximity of the slender man's appearances.

*Slender* is ultimately a pretty simple game with very limited scare mechanics. The first playthrough is downright spooky with some effective startle moments, but once you figure out the slender man's tricks, the illusion kind of falls apart. Whenever the slender man «spawns» within the woods, it's supposed to be somewhere off-screen so that when you turn to look somewhere else, he's already there staring at you -- and it creeps you out because it's meant to appear that he was there the entire time. But so long as you just keep looking forward and don't make overly dramatic turns (or specifically look around searching for him) he won't really show up.

As good as the atmosphere is, what with the effective lighting and soundtrack, the slender man becomes much less foreboding and creepy with each subsequent run. Eventually you realize that he's no real threat to you as long as you don't look at him, and not looking at him is pretty easy once you understand his spawn behavior. He basically just does the same scare over and over and over again, so after



your first run through the game he's really not going to scare you unless he suddenly appears alarmingly close to you, and then it's just a quick startle because of the loud screeching sound effect that shatters the tension.

One minor thing that bothers me is the way the screen fills with static the longer you look at the slender man. The idea is that looking at the slender man for too long will drive you insane, and the static is the audio-visual cue, but it sometimes gives away the slender man's position before you even realize he's there. That is, there were a lot of times when I was looking around searching for more pages, and the screen started to fill up with static. I never even saw the slender man, but I knew to look away from that spot just because of the extraneous cues. I feel like that kind of took away from the potential spook-factor in a lot of instances.

Other than that, the premise is really too flimsy for the game to have much staying power. Arbitrarily collecting pages isn't a particularly exciting goal for the game, especially when those pages barely reveal anything about the nature of the slender man. The game is also inevitably apt to bog down to a slow, meandering pace until you start to memorize the layout of the woods to remember where all of the pages are. Just wandering around a pitch black wood looking for unique environmental setpieces can be pretty boring, even if you are being stalked by such a nefarious creature as the slender man.

*Slender* gets some crucial things right and misses the mark in a few other areas. It's pretty effective for what it is, especially considering how short and limited the experience actually is, but the horror itself is very fleeting and ultimately isn't as satisfying as some other games out there. ●

### BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The soundtrack does a phenomenal job of establishing the tone and tension of the game.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

The slender man's scripting becomes a little too predictable upon replaying the game; needs more going on than collecting random pages.

### VERDICT:

It's short and simple, yet surprisingly effective at eliciting scares during the first playthrough or two.



Adventure Lantern

РАТНОЛОГИС

