

# Adventure Lantern

**ISSUE #38**  
**JANUARY 2013**



## **REVIEWS:**

- A New Beginning
- Final Cut
- Alpha Polaris
- Afrika
- Cryostasis

# EDITORIAL

Happy New Year from Adventure Lantern. It was January of 2006, well before my time, when Adventure Lantern published its first issue; Which is exactly seven years ago this month, not that we have been publishing constantly in the interim.

This month we are bringing you reviews of the new A New Beginning: Final Cut, Alpha Polaris, Cryostasis, and Afrika. A New Beginning and Alpha Polaris are both adventure games, but Cryostasis is a psychological horror and Afrika is a photographic simulator, compared quite regularly to Pokemon Snap.

– Jonathon Wisnoski



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• A New Beginning  
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• Afrika  
• Cryostasis

**Cover Image:**  
**ALPHA POLARIS**

**ADVENTURE LANTERN**  
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This year has had a pretty slow start in the area of adventure gaming, but there are a few interesting pieces of news. What excited me the most this month is learning about *The Rabbit's Apprentice*; The upcoming game from the guy behind the *What Makes you Tick* adventure game series, which I simply adored. So far the screenshots released look absolutely amazing, with hand drawn graphics, and the story sounds like a completely charming fantastical magic filled fairy tale.

This last month also saw the release of the previously mentioned *ASA: A Space Adventure and The Cave*, the latest Double Fine game. *ASA* is so interesting because it is based on a short novel and film that the developer wrote and published himself. We also got to see the very first demo release from the *Starry Expanse Project*, a 3D fan remake of *Riven*, and the remastered *Riven* for iPad.

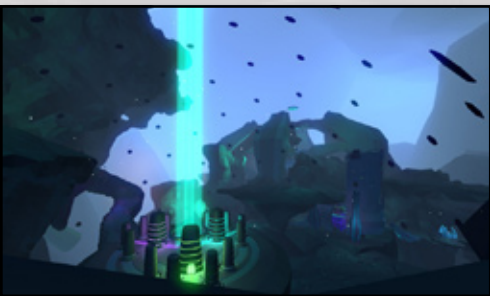
– Jonathon Wisnoski

### Steve Ince Interview

Adventure Gamers has posted a new interview with Steve Ince, the genius behind the *Broken Sword* series and *So Blond*. It is a big three page interview covering pretty much everything, including the upcoming *Caroline's Secret*.



## Announcements



### Fract OSC

Fract apparently started life as a university project, but is now on schedule for a early 2013 commercial release for Mac and Windows. With its stylized comic graphics, Fract allows you to explore, rebuild, and create in this musical in this first-person puzzle adventure. Fract is being developed by the indie team Phosfiend Systems, based in Montreal.

### Upcoming CBE Game

CBE has announced that they are partnering with Ed Venture Studios to bring you a 3rd person point and click adventure game set in the "roaring" 1920s; In which, the player will assume the role of a charismatic con-artist.



THE RABBIT'S APPRENTICE

# IM • BANN • DES ZAROFF

### The Rabbit's Apprentice

The company behind one of the very best modern adventure game series, What Makes you Tick, has announced a new project. In collaboration with Daedalic Entertainment they are producing The Rabbit's Apprentice, a fantasy magical adventure scheduled for a second quarter of 2013 release.





### The Way of Love: Sub Zero

An upcoming adventure by RSK Entertainment, with a release date of April 2013. The Way of Love is set in the 1980s conflict

between Iran and Iraq. The game will apparently be a third-person 2.5D adventure coupled with graphic novel style cinematics.

### Jazzpunk

A upcoming game from the two man indie team Necrophone Games, Jazzpunk is described as: "A Retro-Cyberpunk Comedy Adventure". A teaser trailer is already available and shows an open-world, first-person, 3D adventure with cartoon style graphics.



### Cold Case Summer: A Carol Reed Mystery

The ninth Carol Reed Mystery by the Swedish MDNA Games; Cold Case Summer is an adventure game with distinctive photographic graphics, with filters and extra content added. The team is worked towards a February release date, but a demo should be available sometime in the meantime.



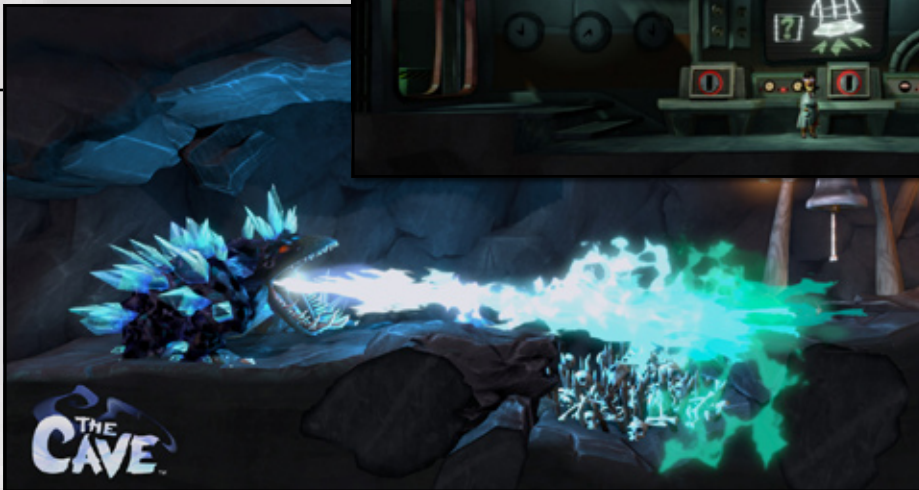
### Doorways

Doorways is a first-person horror adventure from the indie Argentinian developer Saibot Studios. It is a hallucination filled abstract journey through twisted nightmare worlds. Doorways promises to include psychological horror and jump scares, as well as mind and agility based puzzles. It is supposed to be released in an episodic fashion, starting with the first episode this March. Until then there are trailers as well as a Greenlight campaign.

## Upcoming Releases

### The Cave

The latest game from Double Fine Productions, The Cave, can be pre-purchased in advance of the January 23rd release for the price of \$15.



**Dead Cyborg: Episode 2**

The development of episode 2, of this donation based old school

sci-fi adventure, is complete, and we are just waiting on the translation and testing.

**Gomo**

The interesting upcoming game Gomo, that we have mentioned before, has gotten itself a proper homepage. Check it out at [www.playgomo.com](http://www.playgomo.com).

**The Dream Machine: Chapter 4**

Chapter 4 of the Dream Machine is still in development, but its release is getting closer every day. As a teaser for this upcoming adventure, Cockroach Inc. has released a single screenshot.

**Astroloco: Worst Contact**

A upcoming comedy point and click adventure from Hungry Planet Games, the makers of Subatomic and Plan M (both winners of the Ludum Dare Humor category). A Greenlight campaign, trailers, as well as a playable demo is already available. But you will have to wait till the 31st to get the full game.

**ASTROLOCO**  
~~• FIRST CONTACT •~~  
**worst**





### Wretcher

I have not heard anything specific or important about this upcoming release in awhile, but its homepage has sure filled out since it first come online. It is worth a peruse, but before that I will leave you with the developers own description of the game:

“Wretcher is a horror point-and-click adventure game that strives to follow the old ways. Its style is heavily influenced by Clock Tower, the first horror adventure game of its kind (and still one the best), but also by Alone in the Dark and Silent Hill.

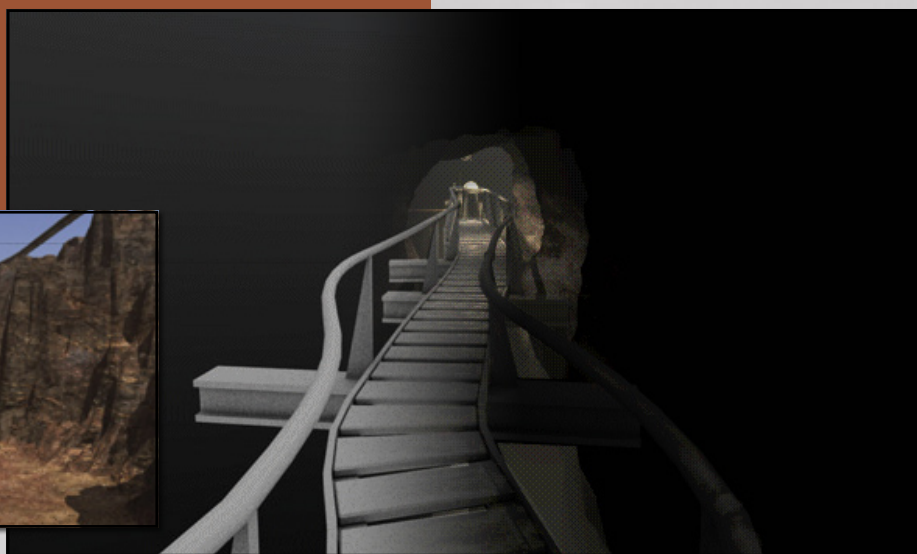


The player will soon find himself immersed in a nightmare, constantly hiding from monsters and struggling to survive in order to put an end to the madness.

Alas, the game is still in the making but, in the meanwhile, you may find a short gameplay demo in the Download section that shows off the atmosphere.”

### The Starry Expanse Project

I just heard about an ongoing project that has released its very first set of demos. This project, The Starry Expanse Project, is an ongoing effort by a bunch of volunteers to create realRiven, or more specifically an open-world, 3D remake of Riven; Faithfully recreated by studying the original game.



## Asylum

This upcoming adventure from the mind behind Scratches has gotten itself Greenlit and the word is that a Kickstarter campaign is in the works as well.



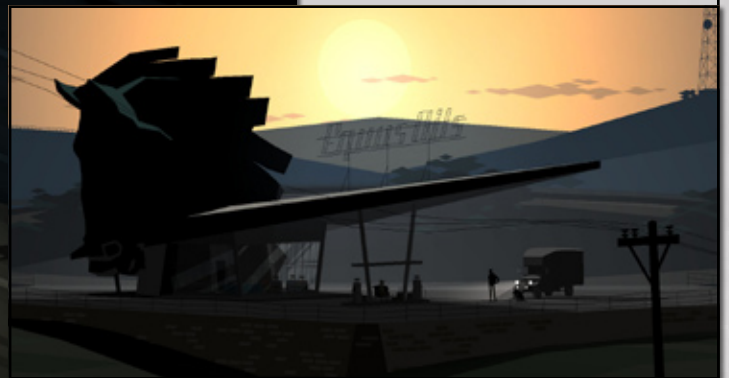
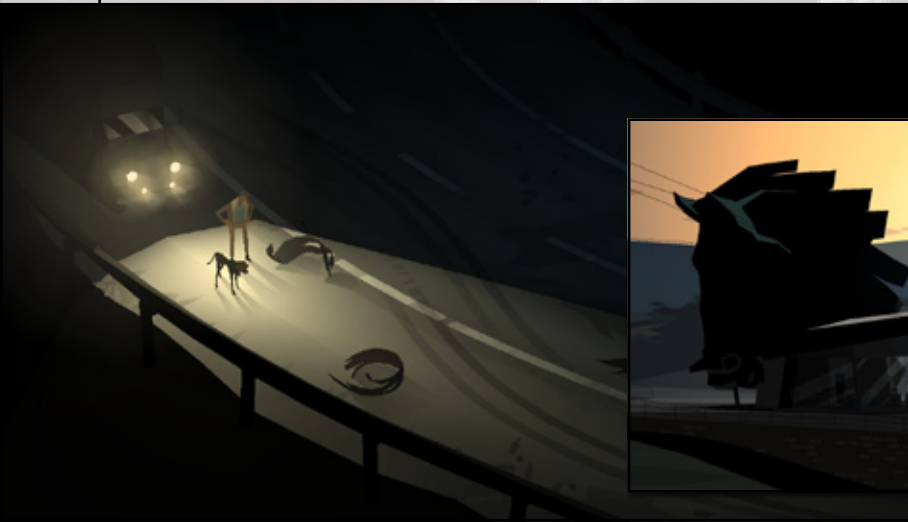
## New Releases

### 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; They have now released the first episode as a DRM-free download for Windows and Mac, with a Linux version on the way.



**ASA: A Space Adventure**

A space Myst-like based on the developers self-published short film and novel. It has been realized and is purchasable for \$8, though at the time of this writing its homepage (and the only current way to buy it) is down.



**Updated Releases**

**The Journey Down:  
Chapter One**

The Journey Down has made it onto



**Riven for iPad**

The remastered and improved Riven: The Sequel to Myst has made it to iPad, literally as "Riven for iPad". This is distinct and separate from the earlier released "Riven" for iPhone, iPod touch, and iPad; Which is simply a port of the original game. This release is a sort of Riven: Masterpiece Edition; With completely remastered images, video, and sound; Most notably featuring higher resolution game screens.





## News From the Big Blue Cup



**The Cat Lady (Harvester Games)** - Susan Ashworth, known in her neighbourhood 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 psychopats the city has ever known. They will stop at nothing to hurt Susan. Unless, she hurts them first...

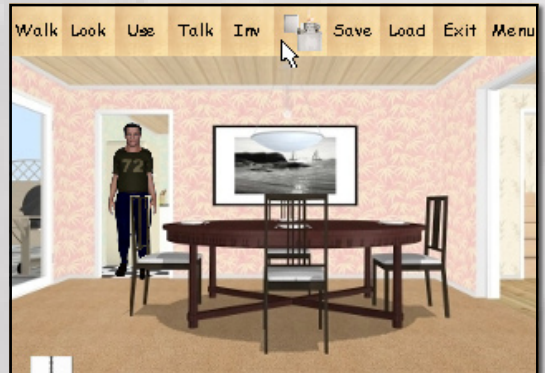
**Mechanismo (DrSlash & Gexo Galls)** - Post-apocalyptic future. Humanity became extinct, the Earth populated with robots. Just like people they live, produce more of their own kind and die. Only one thing differs from humans - they don't have a soul. And because of that they all go to hell. Robot Hell.

You are playing as a robot, who wants to escape Hell.



**Gone, My Angel, Gone (Tildy)** - You play as a young HVAC professional sent in to figure out what's up with a homeowner's furnace. You arrive to discover the owner is away, and there's something a little off about the place...

**The Old Man and the Sea (TheBitPriest)** - A rendition of Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea" made for the November 2012 MAGS. The game follows the book fairly closely.



**The Adventures of Stanley "Frankfurter" Jones (MUFFINinc)** - Special Agent Stanley "Frankfurter" Jones works for a special super-secret branch of the FBI. You're better off not knowing which one. The theft of a pair of F. Scott Fitzgerald's overalls from the local historical society draws the attention of his superiors, and he is sent to investigate. The trail leads him to a small town in Ohio, and the home of the McCullogh family, where he uncovers an insidious plot so horrifying, you wouldn't believe it if I explained it to you. In fact, you probably won't even believe it after you play the game.

Enter a diabolical world of sex, intrigue, violence, the occult, and maybe a tasteful amount of bestiality as well. Your pathetic life will never be complete unless you play The Adventures of Stanley "Frankfurter" Jones.

**Pub Master Quest: The Adventure of 2 (icy games) [mags]** - The Dawn Sword has transformed into a magical clone of Dave, together the two must take down the Troll Lord in this spin-off quest.

## AGS Awards 2012 Nominations

The nominations for the 2012 awards are ongoing (at the time of this writing) and will continue until January 28th. During this time anyone can nominate any of the submitted AGS games for best game/character/artwork/sound of any one of the numerous awards.



**The Cat Lady**  
(Harvester Games)



**Old Man and the Sea**  
(TheBitPriest)



**Pub Master Quest: The Adventure of 2** (icy games)

# A New Beginning

## Final Cut



Genre: adventure Developer: Daedalic Entertainment Publisher: Lace Mamba Global

Release date: June 3, 2011 Platform: Microsoft Windows

Website: <http://www.anewbeginning-game.de/>



*A New Beginning* was first released during 2011 and was *Daedalic Entertainment's* second big release that they themselves developed, coming not long after *The Whispered World*; And featuring their distinctive hand drawn graphics as a major feature. The *Final Cut* edition is a December 2012 re-release which corresponds with the game finally getting on Steam.

### Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

The *Final Cut* edition is advertised as a better version of *A New Beginning* with "lot[s] of bugs and errors" removed. Honestly I do not remember this many bugs the first time I played through the original game. The *Final Cut* edition is filled with small mistakes, bugs, errors, and quality issues. Most of these are not something that gets in the way of the game, but they all serve to feature how poorly some of the technical details were handled. The most





common issue I encountered was quality issues with the voice acting. There are just lots of little problems with it, I heard a few pip sounds and a few of the lines were cut off. Also I thought that being asked to overwrite empty save slots was wrong and a few of the in-game hotspots where in what looked like Russian text.

*A New Beginning* is all about environmentalism and climate change. The game's opening cinematic starts out in the far future with the human species facing immediate extinction because of Man made climate change. These survivors send an expedition

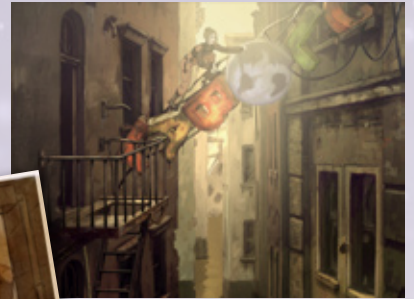
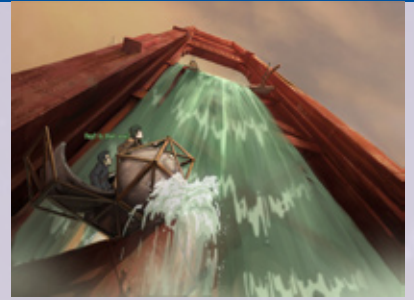
to the past to try to avert a climate catastrophe. In this expedition you play Fay, a young woman with the rank of radio operator, who takes it upon herself to contact and work with Bent Svensson, who you also control for the other half of the game, to try and promote his Blue-Green Algae as the power source of the future.

I am not really sure what to think of this story. While the general message is good I am not sure if it is an enjoyable story or if they really even get their facts right. They specifically mention that future Earth only has a few more weeks to live because of the degradation of the Earth's magnetic field. But the Earth's magnetic field is not something make up of plants, blue skies, and happy feelings. The magnetic field is created by vast currents of molten iron in the earth's outer core, for the most part, and while the surface and sky have some effects these are both minimal and nothing to do with a life sustaining climate. Also, humanity lives in bunkers underground, where both the magnetic field is far stronger and there is theoretically miles of earth and stone to protect the inhabitants from harmful radiation

and solar activity. And then what particular area of the climate damage do they choose to vilify, but nuclear power. The main villain is none other than a CEO of a major nuclear power supplier with the main objective of the game being to beat him and shut down his plants. Nuclear power has a lot of issues, and it is far from perfect, but one thing it cannot be accused of is producing pollution or any climate changing chemicals. In fact, I would bet that they have a smaller total carbon footprint than most alternative green energy technologies. So the story makes little to no sense as far as I can tell, and on a purely enjoyability level is not that great.

The biggest problem I found is that Fay, the radio operator from the future sent with a crack team of professionals to save the world, never paid any attention to any of the mission briefings or lectures; Something she admits to. She has no idea how to operate a radio and says this on numerous occasions. She is also rather slow, useless, has a deep disrespect for authority and everyone else's opinions, and is willing to endanger the mission and everyone's lives to get her way. The fate of the





world is hanging in the balance, something she states on numerous occasions, but the radio operator was not willing to pay attention to the briefing on how to set up or operate the radio; Or anything else for that matter, because she has absolutely no skills or special knowledge. One has to think, why

out of hundreds of individuals you could send on a critical mission you would choose Fay? Ignoring this and the other many inconsistencies with reality, it is not a bad story. If you can suspend your disbelief and natural dislike for honestly most of the characters, it is an enjoyable experience and it really is not as bad as my rant might make it seem. It is absolutely decent as game stores go, and the themes are at least unique and enjoyable.

The graphics of *A New Beginning* are all hand-drawn, both the backgrounds and the animated cutscenes. These are very nice graphics, but coming from *The Whispered World* I could not help but be a little disappointed. They are not terrific, not quite at *The Whispered World* level in my opinion, but they are still great. And there is a wide range of environments and many graphical novel style cutscenes. The music is also decent, and for the most part the voice acting is good. I am not a huge fan of the interface; Which uses a press and hold to



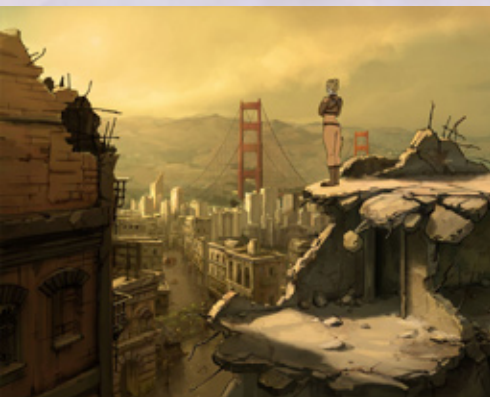
get a disk of specific options style, but it works; I am just not sure if it adds anything to the right/left click to examine/use interface, in this instance, except for a delay.

The gameplay of *A New Beginning* is decent. It is comprised of inventory based puzzles mixed in with the occasional logic puzzle minigame. The logic puzzles are nothing special, but are skippable if you are so inclined. The inventory puzzles are similarly decent but I doubt anyone is going to praise their enjoyability, uniqueness, or ingenuity. These puzzles are all fine, average puzzles, they are just not any better than average. During the gameplay you switch back and forth between the two playable characters (and specific times), Fay and Bent. They each have the same abilities and play styles, and are simply different perspectives on the story. All in all you are looking at a minimum of about ten hours gameplay.



*A New Beginning* is an average adventure. More precisely, I think it is a very good adventure with a lot of little and medium sized problems. There is still a lot to like about the game, and

arguably I am being somewhat too hard on it; But I think a story that makes some kind of realistic sense is important, and *A New Beginning* just does not deliver in that regard. ●



**BRIGHT MOMENTS:**

The hand-drawn graphics and uniqueness of the story.

**FUMBLES IN THE DARK:**

The technical bugs, and believability/accuracy of the story.

**VERDICT:**

An average adventure.



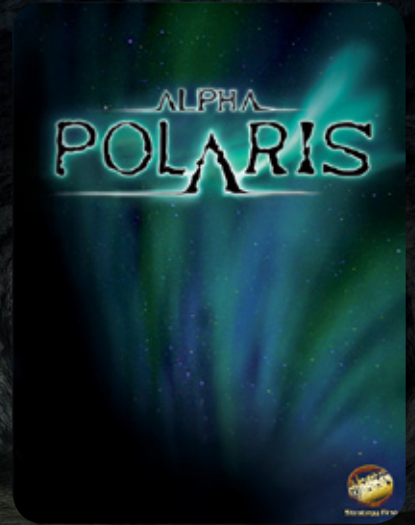
# Alpha Polaris



Genre: adventure Developer: Turmoil Games Publisher: Just A Game, Strategy First

Release date: June 24, 2011 Platform: Microsoft Windows

Website: <http://www.turmoilgames.com/>



There is something about the *Wintermute* adventure game engine that I like. I have played a few great games that used it in the past and this game has not been an exception to this trend. *Alpha Polaris: A Horror Adventure Game* was developed by *Turmoil Games* and released in 2011. *Turmoil Games* being an independent Finnish game studio, whose first and only game so far is *Alpha Polaris*.



## Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

*Alpha Polaris* is not a "AAA" game, but neither does it skimp on much. It has a cast of good voice actors, a nice musical score, and decent graphics and effects. The graphics are detailed if also somewhat bland. The music is great accompaniment to the game and the voices are spot on and portray the stress and emotion of the scenes well. In addition, the cutscenes are well done and there are some pretty nice graphical effects. The biggest indicator of the budget nature of the adventure is how small the gameworld is. 95% of the game is one small research facility with a bare minimum of space. Not that this is bad to a large extent, The story demands a small environment. So while the game is in no way long, with an approximately 5 hour length, you will see most of the scenes over and over again during a single playthrough.

The gameplay of *Alpha Polaris* is quite good. It is not completely linear and contains at least a few interesting puzzles. In particular, there are some pretty interesting text puzzles that in some instances act quite like those found in interactive fiction.

The story of *Alpha Polaris* is its main attraction. It is a horror filled psychological thriller set in the frozen wastes of Greenland on an American oil research station. It is expertly described by the developers as restrained horror, emphasizing human themes like paranoia, friendship, and isolation. There is not any great amount of tension or the fear that something monstrous will jump out at you for the majority of the game, simply a slowly building fear that something is not right at this research station, an evil lurking

in the dark. The horror aspect of *Alpha Polaris* is inspired by Native American legends of Wendigo. Wendigo being an evil spirit of cold, hunger and cannibalism; Who drives men mad with the need to consume human flesh.

*Alpha Polaris* is a great, short, charming adventure. It mixes classic elements with some unique and new elements and comes out quite nice and very enjoyable. It is purchasable, among other places, directly from the developer for \$9.95. ●



### BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The restrained horror of the game's story.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

The small repetitive environment.

### VERDICT:

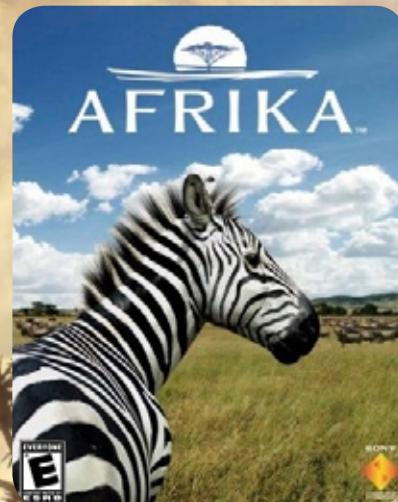
A great little adventure with lots of charm.



# Afrika

PS3

Genre: photography simulation Developer: Rhino Studios Publisher: Natsume  
Release date: October 6, 2009 Platform: PS3 Website: none



Back in 1999, *Pokemon Snap* proved that games about photography can be just as engaging as an action-packed shooter, yet ever since then, games with photography as the central gameplay mechanic have been few and far between. Some games like *Dead Rising* have featured elements of photography, but *Afrika* (a PS3 exclusive released in 2009) is the only other game I know of where photography is the main and only point of the game.

## Review by Nick Burgener

In *Afrika*, you play as one of two photojournalists sent to photograph and document wildlife in an African conservation. Each day begins in your tent at base camp, checking your email and conducting any preliminary business before setting out on safari. Email is the source of your missions, with various clients requesting photographs of certain animals, sometimes in specific poses



or in a particular setting. You're then free to roam about the African wilderness sandbox-style, taking pictures and completing missions at your leisure. At first you're limited to the nearby steppe region, but as you advance through the main missions, you gain access to a swampland, a large lake, a rocky canyon, and a green plains region.

Photographs submitted for missions are graded based on technique, and your pay is based on the picture's grade. The money that you earn can be spent buying new tools and equipment (such as a portable tent so you can spend the night in the field, instead of having to return to base camp at sundown), as well as upgrading your camera body and lenses for better pictures. Missions are split between sandbox-style side missions where you observe the wildlife in real time, and important main missions where you watch a more dramatic, scripted cutscene (such as a fight between a lion and an elephant) and take pictures of critical moments.

The photography in *Afrika* is rather satisfying, thanks to the breadth of options for getting the right shot as well as the game's emphasis on emulating real photography. For instance, you can unlock eight different lenses, and

some are more suited for certain kinds of shots than others, and you have to worry about settings like depth of field, aperture, and shutter speed (among other things). While the photography aspect is great fun, there are, unfortunately, a number of really annoying things about the game's design that feel like noticeable blemishes on a great formula. Still, there aren't many photography games out there, so *Afrika* is easy to recommend if you're interested in that style of gameplay.

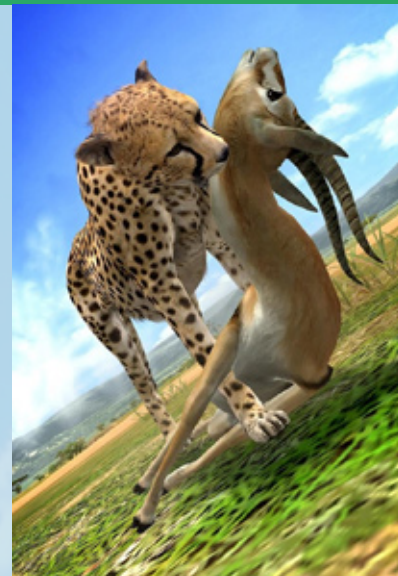
The two playable characters consist of Eric, a 27-year old journalist from France who likes to wear a beanie hat in the middle of Africa, and Anna, a 24-year old American zoologist. Character selection doesn't seem to play a big role in anything; no matter whom you select, the other character will still be present in your game as an idle companion character, helping you on your safaris. Your decision is basically just whomever you want to see yourself as in the third-person camera.

Gameplay starts out at its most basic and then expands as you progress through the game. At the start, you use the simplest possible camera, you're limited to exploring the immediate area around your base camp (in the Duma Steppe), and someone else drives the SUV for you. As you complete missions, you gain the ability to drive the SUV wherever you want, you gain access to new areas of exploration, and you unlock better equipment for your camera. The main missions also introduce entirely new gameplay mechanics along the way, such as using a trap cam to take remote photos, using an RC car for low-angle shots, and using a gun mic to

record audio, which become part of your regular equipment.

The purpose of all of these mechanics is for you to be able to get the best possible shot of a certain animal for certain missions. Some animals are skittish and run away if you get too close, making it difficult to take a close-up shot; with the trap cam, you can set it up near their habitat, observe from a distance, and snap a photograph. These mechanics are particularly





fun because they give you a sense of accomplishment and progression, making you feel like you're improving as a photographer, while giving you new ways to explore and interact with the environment since each new upgrade unlocks a whole new world of possibilities for you.

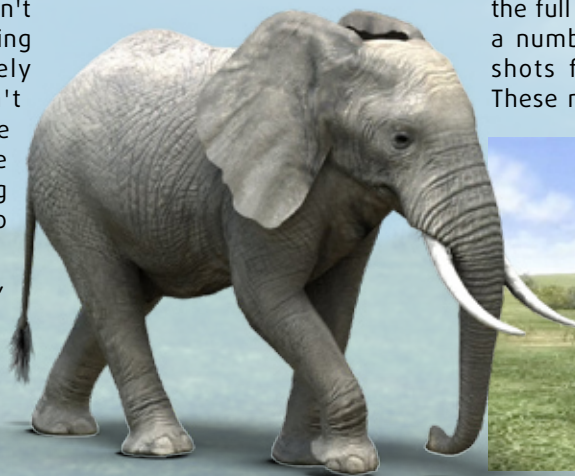
There are about 60 different animal species to photograph in *Afrika*, and your very first mission (which remains active throughout the entire game) is to photograph each new animal species you encounter. Some animals aren't present every day, only showing up randomly, some are purely nocturnal, and others aren't introduced until later in the game through story missions, so a large part of the thrill is in discovering a new animal and trying to collect 'em all, so to speak.

The developers, *Rhino Studios*, collaborated closely with *National Geographic* to make sure all of the animals looked and behaved as realistically as possible. The animals look truly photorealistic,

and their behavior feels natural and authentic. I've never been on an African safari, but this is fairly close to how I imagine one might be in real life. The collaboration with *National Geographic* also means *Afrika* is a very educational and informative game. Even if you don't bother reading through the detailed field guide on each animal, you still learn a lot about specific animals through necessity of completing missions, such as how to differentiate a white

rhino from a black rhino (hint: their color isn't indicative).

While your characters are at the Manyanga Conservation primarily for the purpose of research, you receive a number of requests from nature magazines, artists, travel companies, and so on. Typically the client wants a specific picture (such as a meerkat standing up on its hind legs, or an elephant spraying itself with water). In the case of magazines, you actually get to see your picture published in the full context -- and you receive a number of requests for cover shots for *National Geographic*. These requests make up the bulk





of the side-missions, which come in through your email periodically and can be completed at your own leisure.

As you complete missions you get important, main story missions that either advance you to a new area or feature a "big game hunt." Big game hunts are special encounters, rare and dramatic events that have you taking pictures of a pre-scripted cutscene. Your first big game hunt, for example, is to witness a cheetah hunt and snap pictures as it makes the kill. Your next big game hunt is to get a picture of an elephant mother nurturing her young, and you witness elephants crossing the swamp and take pictures as the mother helps the infant climb over a slippery ledge. These are fun because you never know what's going to happen, and you have to be ready to catch the

critical moment on film because it can be over in an instant.

One thing that bothers me about the big game hunts, however, is that the game immediately tells you which picture was your best shot. A large part of the fun of the photography stems from evaluating your own photos and deciding which one you like best, weighing the different qualities to make a decision for yourself. It would have been nice, therefore, if you could've submitted your top three favorite shots and then let the client choose between those, but as it stands, submitting the photo is a boring, straightforward matter.

The game grades your photographs based on viewing angle of the target, the size of the target in the frame, whether you had the shot properly focused, and so on -- pretty straightforward metrics. The real trouble with the grading system, however, is that the money rewards are pretty much worthless. The idea is to reward you for taking good pictures so that you can buy newer and better equipment to take even better shots, but as long as you put even a halfway decent effort into your shots, you'll be swimming



in money, able to buy every new item the moment it shows up in the store with tons of left-over cash. I feel this aspect of the game would've been better if they paid you less for each photograph so that you actually had to manage your money, thus making it more important to get good shots.

Eventually you unlock the ability to go on nighttime safaris to capture shots of the nocturnal wildlife, but these safaris aren't nearly as interesting. For starters, you can't drive the vehicle yourself, so you're limited to exploring wherever your partner happens to drive, and even if you get out of the car to walk around you're not allowed to stray too far from the vehicle. Besides that, there are only a handful of unique nocturnal animals to photograph, so nighttime safaris don't feel especially satisfying or rewarding.





The biggest complaint I have regarding *Afrika* is how much of your time it needlessly wastes. Yes, it can be annoying sitting there waiting for an animal to strike a certain pose, but that's not what I'm talking about. That stuff is all part of being a photojournalist, and the anticipation of waiting is a large part of what makes getting the perfect shot so satisfying. What's inexcusable are the long, boring car rides to and from locations until you're able to drive the vehicle yourself. You're stuck passively observing your surroundings while your companion takes the least efficient route to your destination and makes clunky, awkward stops at every slight turn or change in

But the game isn't just about photographing animals. Every so often the game gives you a unique objective to mix things up. A couple of missions have you taking photographs of landscapes and notable landmarks; some missions have you recording audio samples of animal noises; a few missions have you collecting animal skulls for study; one mission has you track a lioness with a GPS device attached to a camera strung around its neck. While only playing a minor part in the actual gameplay, these kinds of missions go a long way in keeping the gameplay varied and interesting.

Partway through the game an over-arching storyline develops that has you investigating the possible existence of a presumed-extinct animal. Mysterious signs suggest a large, carnivorous, unknown animal has been living in the Manyanga Conservation Area, but no one's been able to spot it; you're periodically sent to collect evidence of its existence and to

report that evidence back to the research HQ. Over the course of the game, they send you the results of their studies, and the final stretch of the game builds towards a dramatic, climactic encounter with this mysterious creature. It's a particularly fun questline because of the mystique and the fact that it's a multi-stage, recurring mission.





incline. Once you've taken your picture, you have to sit through this long, boring process again on the return trip back to base camp.

It gets better once you're able to drive the SUV yourself, because then you're actively doing something and controlling the game, and when you're ready to return to base camp, you can just select "End Safari" from the menu and instantly return to your tent. But even then, a lot of time is spent each morning just traversing the map to reach your destination (the mission structure of "wake up,

check email, drive to destination, take picture, return to base camp, upload photo, go to sleep" gets a little repetitive after a while), and even more time is spent aimlessly wandering around looking for an animal that might not even have "spawned" that particular day, or being misled by obtuse objectives that don't follow logic.

One mission requested that I take a picture of elephant tracks, so I drove out to the swamp and checked around all of the areas elephants were known to frequent. I even found a group

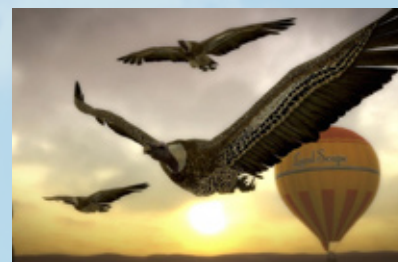


hanging out in one particular area, but after spending nearly ten minutes carefully searching the area for tracks, I couldn't find any. Frustrated and concerned that I



wouldn't find a logical conclusion to this mission, I checked a guide, and found out the elephant tracks I was expected to photograph were in a completely different spot where I'd never seen elephants before. How was I supposed to know to find elephant tracks there? Did the game just expect me to scour every square foot of this swamp searching for tracks?

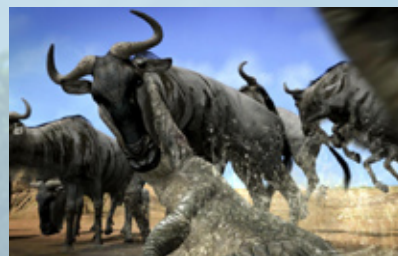
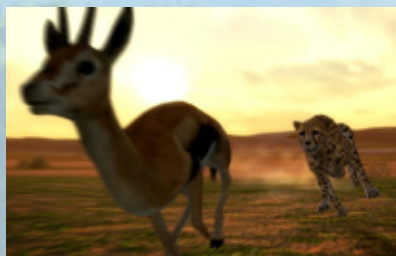
Likewise, you need to use the trap cam for various missions, but you can only place the tripod in highly specific, preset areas. This wouldn't be such a big deal if the icon for these trap cam spots showed up at a reasonable distance, but it doesn't appear until you're about five feet from the location, which often means walking around a 1000 square-foot region knowing you're in the right place to take a picture, simply unable to find the spot for the trap cam. Then you've got the various requests for a picture of an animal against the sunset. These are the biggest wastes of time in the game, because there's no option to



rest until late in the afternoon. You have to wake up at the crack of dawn, drive to your destination, and leave the game running for about 20 minutes before you can get the shot.

And of course, a review of *Afrika* wouldn't be complete without the inevitable comparison to *Pokemon Snap*. Both games are all about photography, but they go about it differently. *Pokemon Snap* is a pure "rail shooter" with preset "levels," whereas *Afrika* is more of a free-roaming sandbox game. Having the freedom to move around and explore is a big part of what makes *Afrika* such an immersing game, but the creatures of *Afrika* are a little mundane and boring compared to pokémon -- I can't help but think *Afrika* would be more exciting if it were set in Jurassic Park or something. The other thing *Pokemon Snap* has over *Afrika* is that you could interact with the pokémon, sort of manipulating the environment to create fun new poses and scenarios, all thanks to the apples, pester balls, and the





poke flute -- there's nothing quite like that in *Afrika*.

If there were more photography games out there, *Afrika's* shortcomings might stand out as crucial problems warranting a mediocre review score. But since there are so few games about photography, it's hard to complain, especially when there isn't a single example of another game doing the same thing, only better. *Afrika* is not perfect, but its problems are easily excused if the prospect of a photography game intrigues you, because the photography element is absolutely worth it. ●

### BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The animals look and behave very realistically, and there's a ton of depth in the photography system.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

Some types of missions are deliberate time wasters.

### VERDICT:

*Afrika* can be a little frustrating and boring at times, but what it does well (photography and safari simulation), it does incredibly well.



# Cryostasis

## Sleep of Reason



Genre: psychological horror, FPS Developer: Action Forms

Publisher: Aspyr Release date: April 24, 2009

Platform: Microsoft Windows Website: none

*Cryostasis* is one of the more novel takes on horror that I've played in the last several years. Set in 1981, you play as Alexander Nesterov, a geologist working at a North Pole research facility, who stumbles upon a derelict nuclear icebreaker, the North Wind, which has been floating around the arctic circle since 1968. The ship is entirely frozen over, parts of it wrecked and destroyed, with no power running through it, and with seemingly all of its crew dead or missing. As you explore deeper into the vessel, the past manifests itself before your eyes, occasionally letting you relive past events leading up to the ship's untimely demise, all-the-while being stalked by murderous monstrosities coming out of the metalwork.

### Review by Nick Burgener

A unique ability called the "mental echo" gives you the power to take control of a deceased crew member's memories and change the events of the past to alter the condition of things in the present. A section of the ship is flooded with ice, a dead man lying near the surface;



touching him gives you a chance to succeed where he failed, to seal the emergency doors and prevent the flooding, thus clearing the way for you in the present. By using this ability, you're able to progress through the ship, piecing together the story of what happened and, should you succeed in your endeavors, alter the fate of the North Wind.

As a horror game, *Cryostasis* does a pretty good job of mounting tension and making you feel vulnerable. One of its unique twists is representing your health meter in the form of body heat, with the intense cold of the ship lowering your health to extremely low levels and forcing you to seek the scarce warmth of electric light

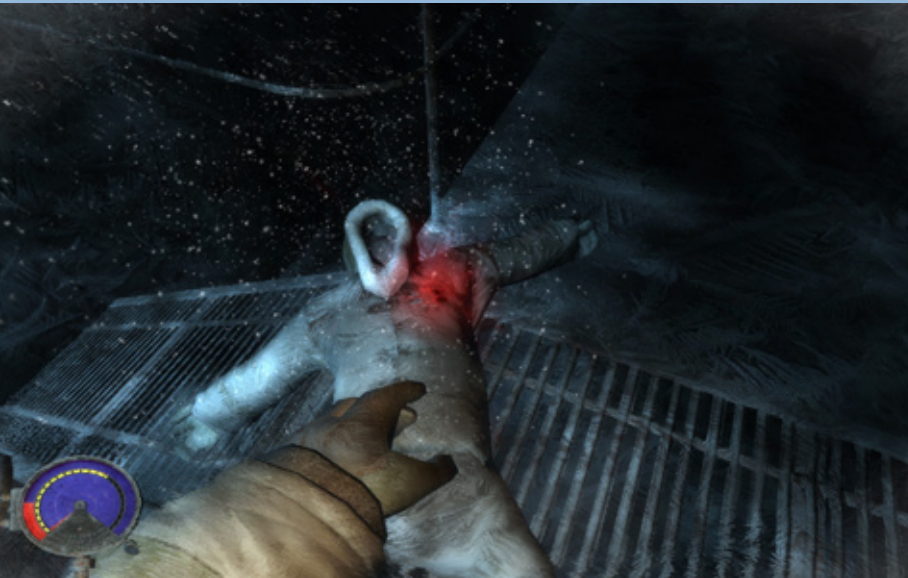
bulbs, steam valves, and turbines. The things attacking you can look pretty disturbing, and as an ordinary geologist you're stuck fighting them with improvised weapons (e.g., a loose pressure valve as a bludgeoning weapon) and antiquated firearms (like the bolt-action Mosin-Nagant 1891). Combined with the health system, this makes each encounter tense, as you try to survive on your way to the next heat source.

I hesitate to call *Cryostasis* a "great" game, however, because there are a number of flaws holding it back from true excellence. Glitches and performance issues aside, the game is almost detrimentally linear, there are too many instant

deaths resulting from unconscious errors, and some of the mental echo "puzzle sequences" rely a little too heavily on trial-and-error. There are valid reasons leading to the game's mixed reception, but what it does well, it does incredibly well. The story and atmosphere are absolutely top notch, and the unique premise lends it a lot of personality. Imperfect as it may be, it's a novel game worth experiencing.

*Cryostasis* plays like a more old-school survival-horror game. Everything is in first-person, and you shoot guns at enemies much like a typical FPS, but it emphasizes the survival element more than the action. You move very slowly, enemies are relatively few and far





between, you don't have access to a bunch of over-powered weapons, and you're often playing with limited health and ammunition. As an ordinary geologist in a deathly cold environment, you're vulnerable to most every threat the game can throw at you; death can come very easily if you're not careful.

The health system contributes a lot to the survival element of the game. Your health is represented in the form of body heat; one meter measures the temperature of the environment, and the other measures your internal body heat. When you're in an area that's colder than your current body heat, your health will slowly decrease to match the warmth of the environment. Since most of the ship is really, really cold, you spend most of the game constantly losing health or just walking around capped at 25% of your maximum. You replenish your health by warming your hands on heat sources, many of which you activate by restoring power to sections of the ship.

Besides your health, you also have a stamina gauge which depletes when sprinting or attacking with a melee weapon. The colder the environment, the quicker your stamina drains. Since you're losing health most any time you venture away from a heat source, you end up in a dilemma of "Do I sprint through the area to minimize my health loss, or do I conserve my stamina to defend myself against an enemy I might encounter?" So even when you're not being attacked by monsters, you're still fearful of the cold. Knowing that a monster could pop out at any moment, and that some areas are so cold they can outright kill you, it compels you to keep warm and not stray too far from the comfort of a heat source unless you have to.

As novel as the health system is, however, it's a little too easy to abuse the heat sources. The idea is to mount tension by making you more concerned about your health, to enhance the survival-horror element of the game. While

the heat sources are infrequently placed about the ship, much like green herbs might be infrequently found in *Resident Evil*, the heat sources in *Cryostasis* can be used infinitely, meaning that if you take heavy damage from one fight, you can easily backtrack a little bit and heal yourself right back up. Regardless of whether you backtracked, you can feel relatively safe and secure in the environment because the game tends to give you heat sources before any major fights; if you're low on health and you can't find any heat, you're





probably not going to run into any enemies, anyway.

*Cryostasis* boasts a remarkable atmosphere that pulls you into the experience, making it easy to feel immersed in its environments. The North Wind is wonderfully realized. Every surface is covered in a frosty glaze; icicles dangle from handrails and ceiling structures; snowflakes float about the air; when you reactivate power to a section of the ship, all of the ice and snow melts in real time. Icicles start dripping water, then snap off the ceiling, and shatter on the floor. Most of this happens via the particle physics of PhysX -- none of it's pre-programmed, so it lends a stronger feeling of authenticity to the experience.

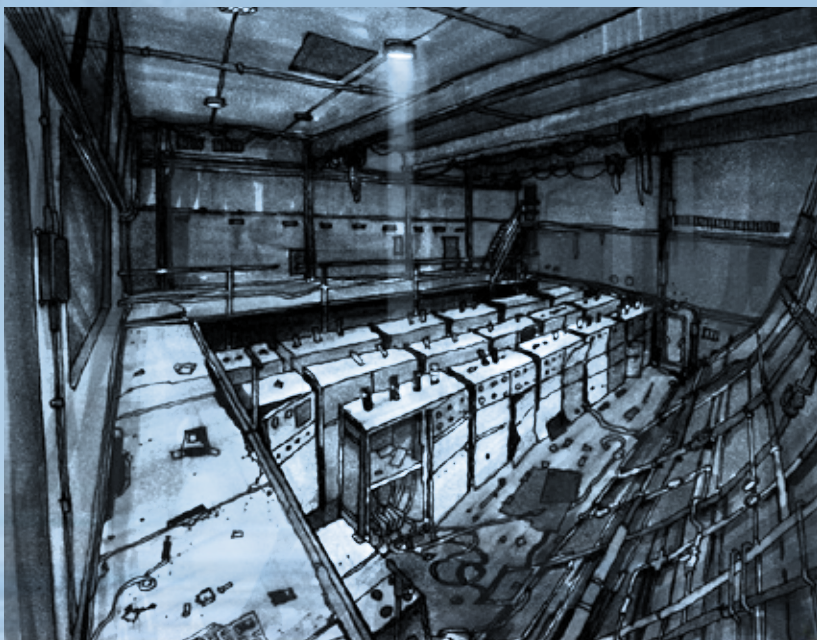
As you explore the ship, its lifeless, frozen steel makes it feel much like a genuine ghost ship. It's claustrophobic, spooky, and lonely. The hull sometimes creaks and groans, but for the most part the only sound you hear is your cold, heavy breathing, and your feet



crunching against the ice and clinking against the metal floors. Thanks to the health system, there's an air of tension everywhere you go, and the calm desolation presented with the ship's atmosphere puts you a little on edge as you progress through the ship, anxiously trying to anticipate

the next enemy that will jump out at you or the next piece of the ship that will break down in front of you.

The enemy encounters accentuate the tension fairly effectively. A lot of modern horror games undermine the horror by over-emphasizing the action



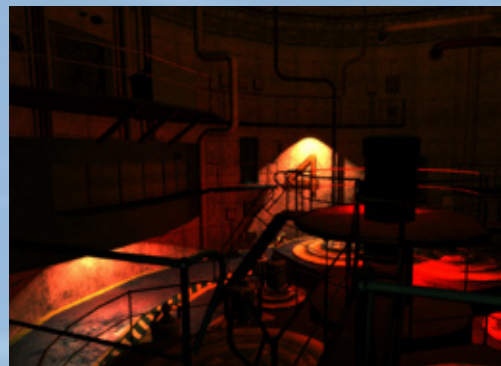
and making you a badass killing machine. Others make you so vulnerable that you're expected to hide from enemies and avoid confrontation completely. *Cryostasis* fits somewhere in-between those two ends of the spectrum. You're expected to fight (and kill) every enemy that presents itself to you, but it feels more like a mechanism for self-defense than a means just to kill things. The combat is functional and gets the job done, but it's not particularly fluid because it's not the main emphasis of the game.

When you get down to it, the combat is a bit clunky. You're a cold, freezing geologist using awkward melee weapons and old bolt-action rifles most of the time, against enemies that generally take four to six hits to put down. You have very limited mobility in the cramped corridors of the ship, and the camera makes pretty exaggerated movements when you attack with a melee weapon

or recoil from firing a gun (relative to mainstream FPSs). In the beginning it feels really laborious just to kill a single, basic enemy, and avoiding damage is often a challenge. As cool as the period firearms are, they're really just not that satisfying to use.

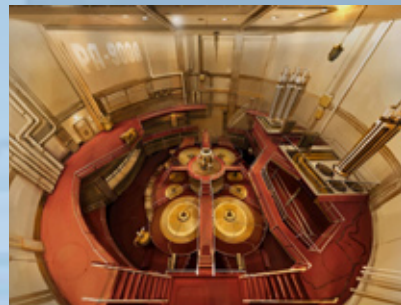
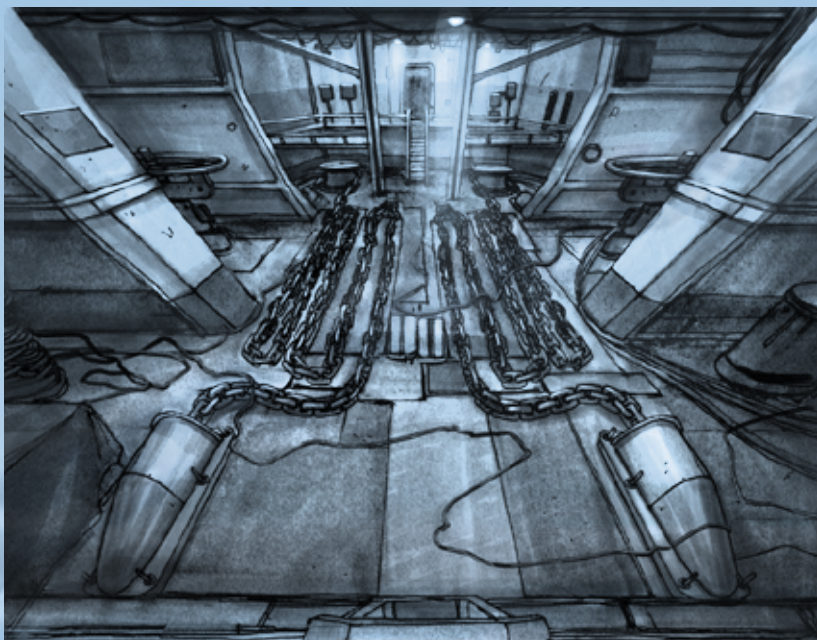
The combat certainly mounts the tension, though, because you're not an expert warrior with high-tech equipment. You're vulnerable and easily susceptible to death, which makes it incredibly gratifying when you manage to beat an axe-wielding brute to death with a lock-and-chain without taking any damage. And then usually some other enemy will get the jump on you and knock you right back down to low health.

The enemies all seem to be twisted, mutated personifications of the ship's former crew members. Whether these are the actual crew members transformed into these monstrosities or merely paranormal projections of a ghost ship is unclear, but some of them



are genuinely disturbing. Each enemy type is distinctly humanoid, with most of the basic enemies resembling icicle-like zombies, but later varieties become increasingly uncanny -- the kind of deal where they still look vaguely human, but are otherwise so bizarre that they're creepy or downright frightening because they're not just typical, stock horror monsters.

Occasionally you're treated to flashbacks, watching crew members having conversations and doing other things in the ship's pristine condition before the accident. These sequences are meant to give you the backstory of the North Wind, showing you what events transpired leading up to its accident, cluing you in to possible solutions to later puzzles, or just giving you an impression of how different areas were meant to function on the ship. Besides that, it's pretty cool just to see the contrast between the past







and the present, sort of filling in the gaps based on what you've seen of the two time states.

The story, therefore, develops in a fairly interesting way, albeit at a remarkably slow pace. It takes several hours to even begin getting a sense of what's going on, and even then you're still only getting snippets of the larger story. Sometimes you see different parts of one scene from two or three perspectives over the course of the game, so it's pretty fun to see how different perspectives all come together to form one whole representation of an event and how everything progressively builds towards the climax.

The story is really not that dramatic, apart from the very end when things start going completely off the rails. It's generally a very human story about characters who have different flaws and aspirations, and how the small moments between different characters ultimately clash to bring about the ship's demise. Your role in the story is not to do anything particularly grand or heroic, but merely to make small changes to people's behavior for the good of the entire crew, which resonates surprisingly well at the end of the game.

Besides the flashbacks and mental echoes, every now and

then you find pieces of paper that tell a completely different story -- excerpts from *Maxim Gorky's* short story *The Flaming Heart of Danko*. The game actually opens with a narrated introduction of this short story, before it even introduces Alexander or the North Wind. The events of the short story are meant to parallel what happened to the crew of the North Wind, so it gives you a little extra substance to wrap your brain around when you're interpreting the flashbacks. But honestly, the way you hear the story of Danko was a little too detached to stick with me, personally.

A bulk of the gameplay revolves around using the mental echo to alter past events in order to

produce some kind of effect in the present. Right-clicking on a dead crew member grants you access to his memories of a critical moment on the ship, and lets you take control of his perspective to do things differently. Usually it's a life or death situation, and you have to find a way to save the crew member's life. At other times, you have the option to perform a different task instead. Figuring out specifically what you need to do is typically the challenge -- this is how the game presents its puzzles.

Half of the time the game gives you some pretty good clues about what to do, and the mental echoes become fairly satisfying to solve. At one point you enter a meat freezer



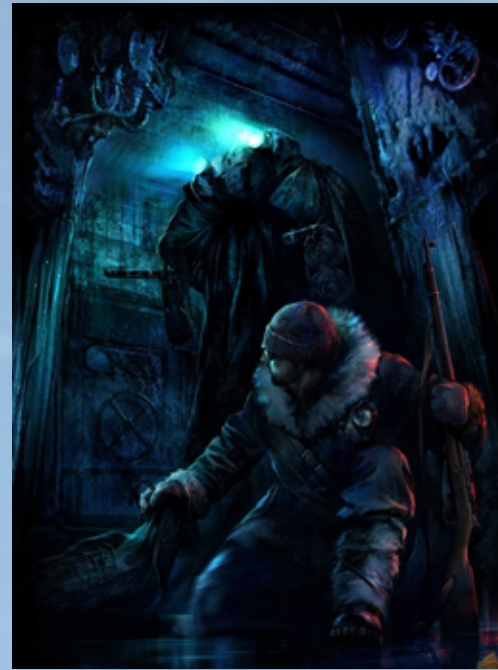
near the kitchen, seeing a bunch of cow carcasses dangling from meat hooks. One crew member lies dead in the freezer, trapped under a huge chunk of meat. When you access his mental echo, you find out he was the guy in charge of operating the conveyor belt that led the cattle into the slaughter house. If you activate the guillotine to kill the cows then he gets trapped under the carcass as usual, but if you instead open the gate and let the cattle run free, then they won't be around to get him killed later. It's a logical puzzle that gives you a proper set-up.

The other half of the time, the mental echoes offer zero clues whatsoever. They end up relying heavily on trial and error, where you have to fail a few times just to figure out what's going on in the scenario and what all of your options are, thus making some of them far more tedious and frustrating than they really ought to be. There's one sequence where a stuffed polar bear is blocking your path, and the mental echo gives you the chance to save the bear's life, thus getting it out of your way in the present. Accessing its memories puts you inside a cave with two crew members talking outside. After a short while, one crew member gets sent in to kill you.

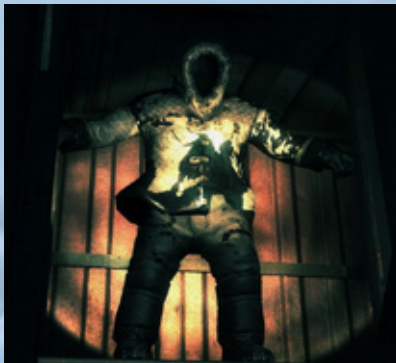
What you're supposed to do is go up onto a ledge and knock a

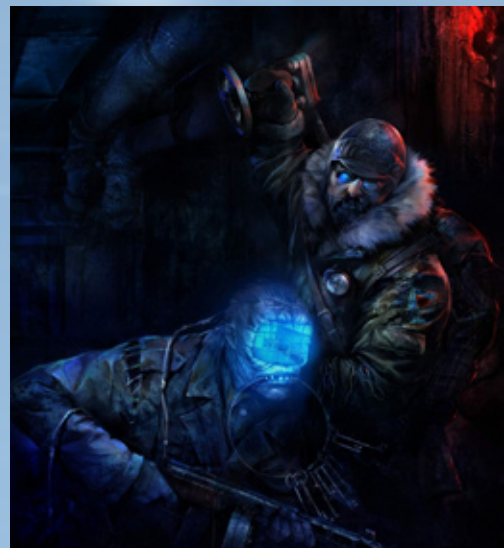
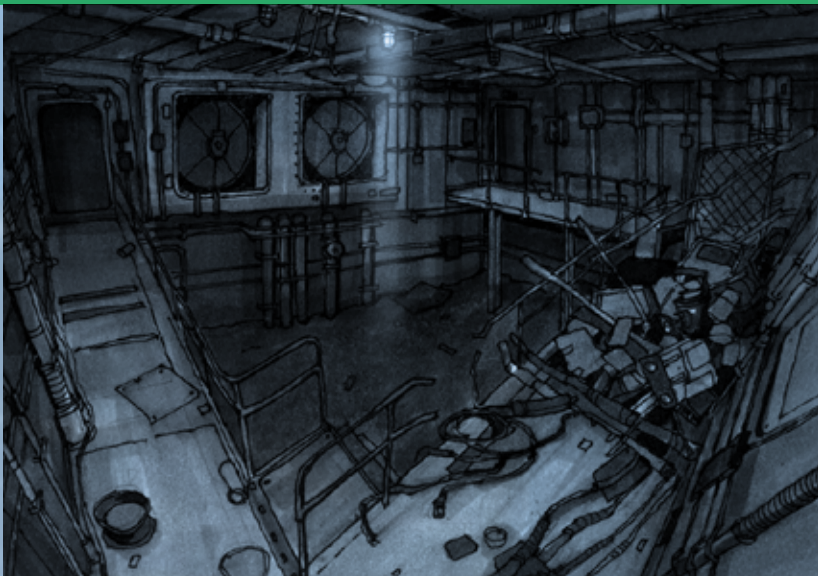
chunk of ice down, blocking the entrance and sealing the first guy inside, thus causing the second guy to panic and run away, allowing you to escape out a side exit. But if you knock the ice down too early, with the intention of preventing them from ever getting inside the cave in the first place, you fail the mental echo. If you try to crush the guy with the ice chunk, eliminating him as a threat and preventing the second guy from getting in, you fail the mental echo. And there are a handful of other seemingly logical solutions to this situation that all inexplicably cause you die. It can be really frustrating trying to figure out exactly what you have to do, as well as the proper order and timing.

While the mental echoes are sometimes hit or miss, exploration in the present can be a little mundane because it's so linear most of the time. Outside of enemy encounters, flashbacks, and mental echoes, a lot of the exploration consists of following extremely linear paths until you find the one,



single button or lever in the area. You have no idea what it does, but you can't go anywhere or do anything else, so you just press it to see what happens and follow the new path that opens up.





It's kind of like you're just passively going through the motions a lot of the times. There are rarely any clear objectives or things to motivate your actions, things to make you feel more actively involved in your progression through the ship, things that give you a sense of gratification for solving a challenge or getting past an obstacle. Moments like these do show up periodically throughout the game, but a majority of the time you're just mindlessly going forward for no other reason than to advance the game to the next stage, and there's not always an engaging sense of satisfaction from doing so.

You also encounter a lot of seemingly random and unpredictable one-hit kills. You'll be walking along a catwalk somewhere and then the floor will collapse and send you to your death. It's only then that you realize "Oh, I should've gone around the other way," but there's no way to know one path would kill you in advance. Sometimes an enemy will pop out at you suddenly, and if you don't dodge you get killed instantly. Sometimes there are environmental

hazards, like the floor being covered with an electrified puddle of water, and touching the floor kills you instantly if you happen to time your jump improperly. Inside some of the mental echoes, you can fail or die in a single instant and not understand why until several tries later.

The ultimate effect is that *Cryostasis* can be a little more stressful than a game really ought to be, even for survival-horror, just because some of the mechanics don't seem as well polished or

thought-out as they could've been. It's a classic case of having a great idea and then not executing it quite right. The game is very still very enjoyable, though, and it offers some really memorable experiences on top of a well-told story inside of a unique setting and premise. So if you like survival-horror, then you should definitely consider looking into *Cryostasis*. Just be warned that, even though it's a three year old game, you'll need a pretty good computer to run it comfortably. ●

### BRIGHT MOMENTS:

Rich atmosphere in a unique setting with a deep story and interesting survival-horror mechanics.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

Combat is a little clunky, the game is detrimentally linear, and there's a lot of frustrating trial-and-error.

### VERDICT:

A little rough around the edges, but a very unique and memorable experience nonetheless.



# Adventure Lantern

