

Dark Nights with Poe and Munro | Review

August sure is a strange and uncertain town. What's not uncertain? That this game is a wonderful time.

It is often the case that stories involving mystery, horror, and the supernatural risk forgetting the humanity of its characters. *Dark Nights with Poe and Munro* from [D'Avekki Studios](#) does not make this mistake. Quite the contrary: This is an interactive FMV experience that, while presenting opportunities for improvements to its mechanics and could benefit from more investigation and mystery-solving, presents a world and a cast of characters that easily earn their time on screen and would be more than welcome to return for future adventures.

Dark Nights is a stand-alone experience that exists in a broader universe of other games set in the town of August. The other games may provide some context for the characters and the location, but they don't appear to be a serious prerequisite for getting into this title. At the heart of everything that happens during the game's six episodes is a genuine human story where the relationship between Poe and Munro, and what they really mean to each other, can be as intriguing and thought-provoking as any of the bizarre happenings that occur in the strange little town of August.

Leah Cunard and Klemens Koehring deliver this performance in an entertaining and believable way that easily draws in and keeps the player's attention. Not without intrigue and perhaps dark secrets of their own, Poe and Munro are an endearing duo and a wonderful pair of protagonists brought to life with some great acting. They perfectly complement each other through the adventures the game has to offer.



Poe and Munro immediately bring to mind a “Mulder and Scully” or “Bones and Booth” vibe, while still having their own unique flavor that feels organic to the game's setting. More than just a mystery-solving pair, they also come off as star-crossed lovers who are just trying to understand themselves and each other in the middle of some amusing and mystifying scenarios. They're funny, instantly charming, and demand way more screen time than any single entry could possibly afford. I genuinely want to see more of these two in the future.

While the game presents a variety of puzzles navigated through timed button prompts, the real puzzle I found myself coming back was trying to piece together exactly *who* Ellis Munro and John Pope really are and what the situations they seem to find themselves say about their relationship. Each episode presents great material for interpretation, from the metaphorical to the literal. This, I think, is one of *Dark Night's* greatest accomplishments; it plays with the supernatural and the mysterious by never seeming to take itself too seriously while still dealing with some very real and serious themes: Human desire for friendship, love, intimacy, and connection is as important and central here as exploring the supernatural and the unknown is.

I found myself caught between seeing the events of *Dark Nights* as a set of eccentric mystery stories *and* as metaphors for the protagonists' immediate situations. There's some great material here for contemplation: Is it frightening enough to watch two people imprisoned by a wish-granting demonic force? Or is it perhaps scarier, and more relatable, that two people who desperately need to have an honest conversation about their feelings for one another just never seem to find the right moment to do so, perpetually “trapped” in their roles as “hosts” on the air? Is it beyond belief that we may be connected with a past life from before we were born, that we were once someone else, and were reborn in this life as someone new? Or is it through a desire to change, to move on from traumatic events and situations, that we experience a kind of “second birth” from moving through this one life? Is it possible to become someone new? To reinvent oneself? These are stories where the supernatural and the fantastic easily allow for greater contemplation of very real and relatable situations, all set in a narrative that oscillates somewhere between *Scooby-Doo* and *The X-Files*. It's good fun and with plenty to think about.

So much of *Dark Nights* is an open book for the mind to wander while still being entertained by a wonderful cast; it presents an opportunity for creative thought and interpretation while still managing to be an interactive story with multiple outcomes—interactions and outcomes that the narrative sometimes itself seems to be aware of, almost as if the strange nature of August could be the result of its characters knowing that a game is being played—but that might be a bit *too* meta than is really intended here; still, the fact that the dialogue and narrative presents a space for thought like this is wonderful.



Though *Dark Nights* does allow for metaphorical and literal contemplation of some heavier material, and even toys with the concept of “choice” and different outcomes in a way gestures to the fourth wall, it does so in a space of joviality and humility that makes it approachable and easy to lose yourself in. This is an honest game that isn’t reaching for any kind of emotional spaces it hasn’t earned—and much of this is because the narrative is grounded within the context of a radio show—itsself a quirky, if not absurd, space where the two hosts must adopt a persona that is at once a simulacrum of who these characters are *and* a place that reveals much of their own personalities and desires. This is, of course, one of the great mysteries *Dark Nights* asks its players: when do we become ourselves? When do we stop performing for others? The radio show is perhaps the eye of the storm, surrounded by bizarre mysteries and turbulent emotions between Poe and Munro and it might be the only way they get answers for themselves, and the town of August. This is solid writing that knows how to frame its characters in a way that fits the overall narrative presentation.



The production of *Dark Nights* is another high point of the experience. It demands to be played on a large television if possible, with a game controller in hand, preferably at night. This would be a great game to have on a console, but a PC or Mac connected to a TV with a controller or good wireless mouse and keyboard setup works just as well. While I feel some scenes are visually a bit too dark, most of the production is a visual delight. Add to that a soundtrack that just feels *perfect*

for the setting and tone, complementing the dialogue and actions on screen organically, and this is beyond just a fun game to play; it's a great experience to watch and take in.

There's some great choice in visual composition here. Scenes are shot well, with some excellent lighting and color choices—and it marks perhaps one of the first times I've seen Dutch camera angles and didn't immediately have a negative reaction. I can go on all day about the wonderful metaphorical material here, or how fantastic the acting, set design, direction, and music is, but the fact that *Dark Nights* managed to shoot scenes with a tilted camera angle and not feel derivative or unwarranted is amazing.



The FMV game is a genre to itself. My own personal experience with these games isn't substantial enough to give a definitive answer as to "how good of an FMV" *Dark Nights* is, but I can say that its interactive nature and multiple story outcomes are enough to have prompted me to go through each episode twice, with still more to uncover at a later date. Playing this for a review is by no means my final trip to this world.

I do wish, however, that *Dark Nights* had more direct mysteries to solve in its plot—if for no other reason than because Poe and Munro work so well together on screen and I would like to see even more interaction with the strange folks of August. The cast is *excellent* and I wish there was more opportunity to interview and ask around town to uncover mysteries.



On-screen button prompts on screen are timed, though this feature can be turned off for more thoughtful selection—at the risk of losing, it would seem, certain outcomes that only occur by the time expiring. It’s these that I feel could use the most improvement in future games, both in terms of selection and design. While it is often the case that the button prompts stand out enough to be seen against the often-dark scenes on screen, I feel that the gray button and orange timer could do with a slightly different design that stands out or pops a bit more. Furthermore, it’s not always clear what certain selections really mean. Sometimes they are obvious when it comes to choosing one specific object over another, but it is often the case that placing the cursor over a particular character or location in a scene doesn’t immediately indicate what that selection will mean.



Some of this confusion is cleared up by post-episode wrap-ups that show what percentage of players chose certain outcomes—meaning that on a second play, you would presumably have a better idea whether a choice represents, for example, concepts such as “lust” or “vanity” than more obvious choices like “coffee” or “water.” I’m not sure if placing labels under these choices in the game would give too much away, but perhaps including the option to turn that on could’ve been a nice alternative for those who find some of the choices too vague.

As I indicated earlier, however, any excuse to spend more time with these characters is welcome; so, in the end, having to play through an episode more than once just to be clear about what a certain choice meant is not the *worst* thing in the world.



Dark Nights also isn't without its share of some software bumps. While I used a controller for my sessions, I still had to move the mouse off the screen. Yes, this is a perfectly innocent and minor thing; but, for an even better experience, it would be nice if controller input made the cursor disappear automatically; speaking of the cursor, I also would've liked to see a slightly different, more stylized one for play with a mouse. Finally, the game appears to get a little confused sometimes when switching between episodes out of chronological order. After my first playthrough, I jumped around a bit between the episodes and would, curiously, see the post-episode choices displayed for the wrong one; on at least one occasion the game sent me to an episode different from my choosing. These are brief things that don't detract from the wonderful experience overall but still could use some attention. I hesitate to even call them "issues," because they really aren't—just maybe some elements that could've used a bit more polish.

Dark Nights with Poe and Munro is an excellent narrative adventure with a delightful cast of characters. I played it on my own, but I could easily see sharing the experience with a friend or two on a couch, having fun conversations about which choice to take—this is where turning the timer off is a great bonus. But whether alone or together, *Dark Nights with Poe and Munro* is more than worth the price of admission and easily leaves a memorable impression. I genuinely hope we see more of these two, perhaps in a sequel or in future episodes because there is plenty more magic to get out of these characters and this setting.

Yes, Poe, we want more adventure, always.

Special thanks to the team at D'Avekki Studios for providing a review copy of the game.