

Review: Dark Nights with Poe and Munro (Sony PlayStation 4)

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Review by Lindsay M.

If you have read any of my FMV game reviews of the past few years, you know I will always reference either *The Infectious Madness of Doctor Dekker* and *The Shapeshifting Detective*, the first two titles from a developer that I have come to whole-heartedly love and support. *Dark Nights with Poe and Munro* is the developer's third title, and it's another supernatural mystery FMV. This time, it seems more rooted in moral or practical choices rather than digging for information (although there is some of that, too). I had high hopes on that basis. Thankfully, it has met my expectations.

Dark Nights with Poe and Munro is developed by D'Avekki Studios, arguably the best developer within the FMV game niche right now. You don't need to play its previous games to understand *Dark Nights with Poe and Munro*, but there is a common thread between the three titles. The first, [The Infectious Madness of Doctor Dekker](#), is inspired by Lovecraft tales. It's about a psychiatrist who is filling in for a colleague, following them through several conversations with each of several patients, digging into the patient's past and usually finding something bizarre or supernatural. Four years post-launch, it still holds the Guinness World Record for the [most FMV footage in a single game](#) (seven hours, 11 minutes, 58 seconds). The second title is [The Shapeshifting Detective](#), another supernatural mystery. This one is about a shapeshifting detective trying to solve the murder of a young girl in August that was predicted by a trio of tarot readers. *Dark Nights with Poe and Munro* has nods to each, but it is set between the other two titles. It is mostly related due to taking place in August and expanding on the small roles of Poe and Munro in *The Shapeshifting Detective*; however, since it happens prior to *The Shapeshifting Detective*, it really doesn't matter which order they are played. The thread is clearly there for fans that have played the trio of titles, but you're not missing a whole lot if you haven't – unless you're extremely upset by a minuscule offhanded comments taking a dig at August's chief of police. That being said, if this is your first D'Avekki title and you enjoyed it, I highly recommend playing *The Infectious Madness of Doctor Dekker* and *The Shapeshifting Detective* afterwards, to get the full context.

The game puts the player in control of two radio hosts' exploits. John Pope, AKA Poe, is super dark and dramatic. Ellis Munro appears soft, sweet, and innocent. They each remind me of classic fiction stereotypes: the female, doe-eyed and flirty, and the man, a gruff womaniser. At one point Munro literally says, "I'm just sitting here looking pretty." As we learned in *The Shapeshifting Detective*, they've been having an affair. Poe plays so innocent, like he's not married. It's kind of... gross, at least in a moral sense. It adds to the story and atmosphere, just in a real-life we-all-know-one kind of way. It suits the character and the narrative perfectly, it just gets sketchy at times.

There are six chapters, each putting Poe and Munro in new, precarious, absurd situations. Death and the supernatural are often involved, and sometimes there's

violence, but there is always a mystery afoot. The mysteries are spurred by something relating to the radio show, whether it be a caller or a stunt the hosts have thought up to bring in more listeners (such as partnering with a local museum for a prize giveaway). Dreams are a running theme: nightmares, dreams-within-dreams, dissociation (life feeling like a dream). For the player, the situations often feel surreal in a dream-like way.

The beginning of each chapter features this image of moving colour, like ink or paint being slowly swirled together. I'm not 100 per cent certain if this is the correct reference point, but it reminds me of the Mercury Deck of tarot cards in *The Shapeshifting Detective*. And both the introductions and the tarot deck remind me of Andres Serrano, also known as the artist behind *The Piss Christ*. He has an entire series titled [Bodily Fluids](#) (content warning!), and while artwork like this isn't uncommon (although normally not with blood or other human fluids), the relationship was immediate in my mind.

I'd place the characters and the narrative background in the noir fiction genre: right and wrong don't exist, life is just a massive grey area. Or, as you could say, all mixed up... like the colours in the chapter introductions. Every scenario is basically lose-lose. The protagonists are self-destructive (through Poe having an extramarital affair and Munro choosing to be intimate with a married man). *Dark Nights with Poe and Munro* isn't all contained on the dark side, there is also some great comedy happening here. For me, anyway. One character, a school principal, states, "I'm eccentric, can't you tell?" The statement instantly reminded me of John Cleese in *Rat Race* (the 2001 version) – "I can do whatever I want. I'm eccentric. Grr!"



Dark Nights with Poe and Munro plays like a lot of other FMV games: it's basically a film running, which then pauses at decisions for the player to choose the path forward before continuing on in that direction. The decisions are generally moral or practical, and some are just made randomly with no information about what may be lurking ahead. The decision-making is quite different for D'Avekki Studios' titles and something that really excites me when considering where it could go in future titles. Instead of being one video and text options, it's sometimes split-screen and the options are video/images (sometimes on an iPad, sometimes "live"). There's a map that pops up a few

times, which I quite liked. Sometimes there's even a little surprise, namely choice you make based on if you can mash a button enough in a small window of time. It's worth noting that, while there is an option to pause at choices (mainly for streamers but I use it because I'm sometimes two beats too slow), the button-mashing doesn't seem to function with this setting.

I feel the need to insert a bit of a ramble regarding *The Infectious Madness of Doctor Dekker* here. Quite frankly, I'm shocked this doesn't happen more often in my reviews. Anyway, the part of *Dark Nights with Poe and Munro* that made me the most intrigued was the segment involving a flashback to the infamous (well, to me) Doctor Dekker couch. A callback to where it all began, that for whatever reason was completely unexpected to me. And now I want to replay Doctor Dekker; I was working my way through achievements a couple years back but got distracted and never returned. Anyway, the Doctor Dekker scene's decisions are closer to how Doctor Dekker "said" things, just with pictograms rather than text. It's actually quite a clever way to combine the two visual styles of gameplay. This segment is remarkably violent without actually seeing violence. There's some violence in the rest of the game, but this is an entirely different level due to the description of a crime. Munro's connection to *that couch* is jaw-droppingly (no, it's not actually a word, but it's the best description of my physical reaction) awesome. I can't help but wonder if the creators knew this bit of the past while making *The Shapeshifting Detective*, or if they came up with it later. I like to think there's a bunch of facts and stories already written connecting the current games and providing ideas for future titles.

The acting is, reasonably, an integral part of whether or not an FMV game is successful. I'm not going to lie, the roles here are kind of cheesy, but the actors slide into them perfectly and with definite skill. The only characters on-screen in every chapter are Poe and Munro, so Klemens Koehring and Leah Cunard do pretty much all the heavy lifting. There is something about the way Koehring tilts his head to be almost spooky that is absolutely fascinating. Cunard successfully delivers a strong woman projecting an air of innocence, almost to the point of immaturity while thankfully not quite crossing that line. It's also worth mentioning that my favourite guesthouse hostess – Violet, played by the absolutely lovely Aislinn De'ath – is back for a brief and most welcomed appearance.



Before I wrap this review up, I'd like to write about something that has gone completely unmentioned in my reviews from the past six years: trophies. Trophy/achievement hunters, this game is for you! Trophies are kind of like a beacon to all the best parts that you may have missed the first time around because of different choices or missed opportunities. For example, if Munro and Poe live at a certain point, that's one achievement. If Munro, say, leaves Poe unconscious to save herself, that's a different achievement. You don't have to play the entire thing repeatedly, just individual chapters. I earned all of the trophies before writing this review, something I've actually never done before, because I felt an absolute need to experience everything.

So let's go through the list of all that is great about Dark Nights with Poe and Munro. It's a completely individual title that slides in nicely with what I shall, in the future, refer to as D'Avekki lore; it can be played alone, or it can be played before or after the other two titles in the "series," but any way you play it, it's a standalone experience. The noir feeling of the narrative means that choices aren't always delineated as "right" or "wrong", but, rather, a choice between bad and equally bad. The supernatural aspect somehow fits perfectly with the noir aspect. The gameplay is new yet familiar, with the developer mixing up how choices are made by going from text to video in a way that makes it perfectly clear how to play. Koehring and Cunard play off each other wonderfully, building off character stereotypes from past films and fiction when the men were "manly" men and the women were "dainty" ladies. Thanks to the trophies, it is relatively easy to explore all dark corners of the game. Basically, this is another D'Avekki hit game that I will probably never stop referencing or wanting to discuss.

