

The Shapeshifting Detective (PS4) Review

by Rob Pitt

FMV games were the 'future of gaming' back in the 1990's with the advent of the Mega CD, although those games never got very far due to their 'Full-motion video' very rarely being 'full-screen'! PC Gaming took it a step further with games that incorporated FMV with CGI, such as Toon Struck, Harvester, Darkseed and Tex Murphy – a nice balance between the realistic and the fantastical to offer impossible events whilst you're in control of realistic characters. FMV games slowly trickled off as CGI got more realistic and cheaper to produce, however, there are a bunch of indie developers out there who remain loyal to this genre and continue to put out quality FMV interactive experiences.

One such developer is **D'Avekki Studios**. They released their first FMV 'whodunnit', [The Infectious Madness of Doctor Dekker](#), a few years back on PC and earlier this year on all modern consoles. Today marks the release of *The Shapeshifting Detective*, a more simple approach to the genre yet with just as many twists, outcomes, pathways, and possibilities as the 'type-your-own-questions' game previously. So, with the help of **Wales Interactive**, we have yet another random 'whodunnit' to solve, this time it's a lovely redhead who has met her untimely end – can you, our mysterious and voyeuristic detective, solve the case or are you going to end up the same as Mr. Hedges?!



Awww, but it was fun abusing him – in more ways than one.

You know why you're here, don't you? Humour me, the dead girl. Darota Shaw, young, beautiful, talented, redhead... Strangled in a crime of passion, opportunity, jealousy, hate, or was it over who gets the last Rolo? That's up to you to find out, Sam. Well, today you go by the name Sam, tomorrow, who knows as you have a strange and other-worldly ability which allows you to shapeshift into any person you've recently come into contact with. Now, I suspect this process involves the reconstructing of your various muscles under your skin in order to readjust your facial structure, just like in the X-Files, rather than you grabbing a wig and slapping a bit of lipstick on your face!

You've been hired by the local chief of police, Chief Dupont (who isn't French), based on your solid track record of getting the job done – he doesn't know about your strange abilities, only that if you help him solve this confusing and evidence-less murder then he can make things from your past disappear without any traces as well. It's an offer you literally can't refuse. If you've ever played or seen [The Psychic Detective](#), it's a bit like that, only instead of leaving your body and jumping into others whilst listening in on conversations and events to tie people to the murder, you change your form into the various suspects and have one to one conversations with each of the others to see what they'll be willing to tell each other but not you, the detective.

In *The Shapeshifting Detective*, just like [The Infectious Madness of Doctor Dekker](#), the killer is random. Once you start a new game, a new murderer is chosen and this results in slight alterations of the conversations and interactions you have later on in the game. I wasn't very lucky as my first three playthroughs resulted in the same killer – he really had it in for me! – but the fourth led to a new outcome, one which I wasn't expecting. Even though you've been hired to basically prove that the Tarot Readers are the ones behind this, anyone could be the murderer and Darota isn't the last victim in their sight. See if you can survive the night and catch the Traveller before it's too late.



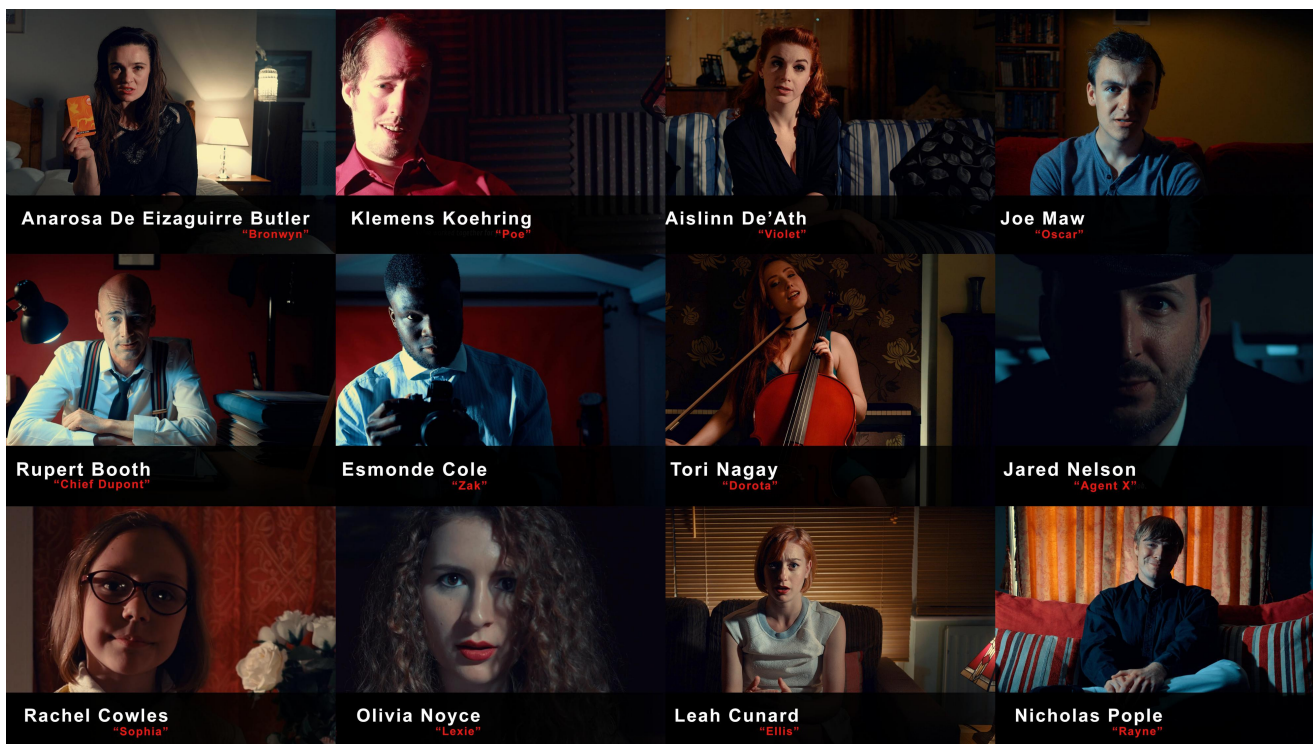
I'm clearly the boogeyman!

Do I need a keyboard?

One of the core gameplay mechanics of [The Infectious Madness of Doctor Dekker](#) was the fact you could literally type out any question you want – if you wanted to know what colour underwear someone had on you could freely type it, they may not tell you but you could technically ask... However, this mechanic has been scrapped in *The Shapeshifting Detective* and instead replaced with a seemingly simple looking multiple choice set of replies. You'll usually get between one and three responses which you can give to the suspects as well as a trashcan option. At first, I ignored the trash and just went ahead and asked everyone everything – then I realised that holding back from provoking people and pushing them can actually lead to getting more out of people sometimes.

So, at a glance, yeah, the 'gameplay' is more simple than [Doctor Dekker](#), yet there are just as many outcomes and routes as that game, only this time it's hidden behind a flow chart which I imagine is bigger than *Detroit: Become Human*!

As I mentioned above, I'm now on my fifth playthrough and even though the killer was the same on three of my playthroughs, how I got to the finale was different each time. In one playthrough I sexually abused the young vicar's son (which I strangely felt very happy about), I've seen the lovely violet die a rather comical yet sad death (or should that be De'Ath?), I've landed a big wet kiss on an unsuspecting male in the final curtain call, and I've even accepted a marriage proposal on behalf of someone who doesn't even know she was being asked. Each playthrough has offered new paths, conversations, outcomes, and events, just by saying different things or choosing to be the bigger man and leaving a conversation before I've pissed everyone off.



Lots of people!

Who can you shapeshift into?

Sadly, in *The Shapeshifting Detective* you can't shapeshift into an apple (or an owl looking at an apple), the space station, a monkey, penguin, egg, or a fly, but you can take on the form of anyone you've spoken to within your game (although there is still one more which I 'think' I can change into yet I've not been given the chance too yet!) Once you've progressed far enough, you'll have access to:

- **Chief Dupont** ([@RupertBooth](#)) – the most sarcastic and impatient man I've ever seen! Rupert Booth does an amazing job of being typecast as the policeman who basically hired you because he can't be arsed to lift a finger and do anything for himself! The conversations the various characters have with the chief are priceless – his facial expressions speak louder than words sometimes as well!
- **Violet** ([@AislinnDeAth](#)) – the very posh and reserved guesthouse manager. Violet may not open up to Sam but I'm sure she will happily talk about previous events with

those involved, including someone who may be closer to her than you initially think... Aislinn De'Ath does a great job of portraying this character with her mysterious past and strange alibi. In some ways, Violet and Mariana aren't a million miles apart yet I would say that Violet is a bit saner and tends to like wearing her clothes in *The Shapeshifting Detective*



- **Bronwyn** (@Anarosaeiza) – the 'older' Tarot Reader. Bron is a mysterious Irish lass. She goes where the cards (and Rayne) tells her to go and she's a very good liar. Her job, as the most suspicious of the pack, is to read the cards based on the Mercury pack. This is a deck of cards which not only gives you an answer, but also the question it relates too – a bit like Jeopardy.
- **Rayne** (@NickPoplei) – the 'baby-faced' Zac Efron Tarot Reader. Some may say he's the 'leader' of the pack (brum brum), yet they don't like that as it makes them sound like a cult. From the moment I first laid my eyes on Rayne, all I could think of was, "was that his hair at the time or did he just get modelled on Zac Efron?" Seriously, he's like a grown-up Zac, I was waiting for him to start singing about the troubles he's been having with the group and how everything will be better once he makes it through graduation day!
- **Lexie** (@olivianoyce) – the 'Dipsy' Tarot Reader. I love Lexie, and she loves me (supposedly). It was always a joy and a pleasure to get the chance to talk to Lexie as the various characters as she was so innocent yet oblivious of what's going on at the same time. At one point, you can listen to her ramble on and on about how the Ouija board works, or one of the options was to basically tell her you don't care as you're not bothered! I couldn't be mean to her though with her cute lisp and infatuation with Sam. Although, I did turn her down in one playthrough and it was heartbreaking – Sorry!
- **Oscar** (@Joe_Maw) – the rather timid boyfriend of the deceased girl. Oscar was a rather interesting character, as the son of the Vicar, he seems rather timid and all about forgiveness and making others happy more than himself – just ask why he likes hiding in the closet! However, the moment I, as a guy, was shapeshifting as a woman trying to force myself upon him and get him inside me, I feel I pushed him a little too far... He's a sweet boy and I felt like a ladyboy from Bangkok lying about my sexuality and gender in order to have a little fun – it was all very exciting!
- **Zak** (Esmonde Cole) – the creepily sleazy photographer who I may or may not have posed for... Zak is an interesting character as there is much more there than you may first imagine. However, it's up to you to discover all of his dirty little secrets. What I will say is, he has a rather interesting video collection, should you choose to take a look...
- **Ellis Munroe** (@LeahCunard) – half of the local radio duo 'Poe and Munroe'. We don't get to see a lot of Ellis, not as much as I would have hoped, although her scenes are all rather dramatic and eventful. Who would have guessed that she was a redhead! She most certainly sounds like a blonde woman as you listen to her hourly updates on the radio before you move onto the next time block! If Violet turns me down, maybe I could try my luck with redhead number two?
- **Poe** (@KlemensKoehring) – basically Terry Wogan, but not Welsh. I know the saying is always "you have the face for radio", but in Poe's case, he "has the voice for radio" – it fits perfectly with it's deep, slow, and well-spoken tone which is both soothing and rather seductive at the same time. Even when he's talking about puppies and murder, I felt a tingle when I was inside of the female bodies! Surprisingly, he's the other half of the Poe and Munroe duo.
- **Sophia** (Rachel Cowles) – have you ever seen the shining... To be honest, I don't actually know if Sophia is real or a figment of my imagination, I've not gone down that path yet. As such, all I can say is that to her, I'm the boogeyman and she has a haunting laugh!



TBH, everything we say whilst shifting is a lie Violet

Who can't you shapeshift into:

- **Darota Shaw** (Tori Nagay) – our talented cellist who's taken her final bow... I imagine we can't change into Darota because it would be quite upsetting and possibly disturbing to see the deceased walking around as if nothing happened – this isn't Jonathan Creek or the Walking Dead! As time goes on, we learn more and more about our seductive redhead – the quest at the moment is, how do we get Oscar to send us all his 'photos' of her off his phone? If only Oscar was as co-operative as certain other members of the cast!

- **Agent X** (@JTNameliss) – I have no idea. This guy is as mysterious as the informants in the X-Files such as Deepthroat and that other guy. He appears to be our 'handler' of sorts, giving us our cases and ensuring we don't get caught or exposed for being a shapeshifter. He also doesn't like it if you do the opposite of what he says. I found the initial choice of the game to be rather amusing. We'll meet again Agent X, for the fifth time soon, and this time I will pass your tests!

Pop on the wireless:

In a rather unusual and exciting turn of events, the developers asked fans of their games to submit their own short stories to be read out within *The Shapeshifting Detective* via the 'Dekker' radios which are scattered throughout the game. You'll mainly hear these in the Taxi and whilst choosing who's room to invade at the guesthouse. Then, by yet another fun turn of events, instead of having Poe and Munroe read them, although Poe would sound rather soothing reading them out I imagine, they got in some big names to read them such as Jesse Cox, Lacey Finley, and even Tex Murphy... Yes, the real Tex Murphy reads one of the stories out.

For a full list of all of the radio narrators and shows, as well as all of the recent interviews which **D'Avekki Studios** have posted on their YouTube channel, check out the 'Preview' post I did yesterday, which you can find [HERE](#).

Also, on your first playthrough, you can't pick the radio station, it will just loop as time goes on. However, once you beat the game, if you goto the radio again, you can now pick which story you wish to listen too.



That dastardly Owl trying to abuse poor Oscar!

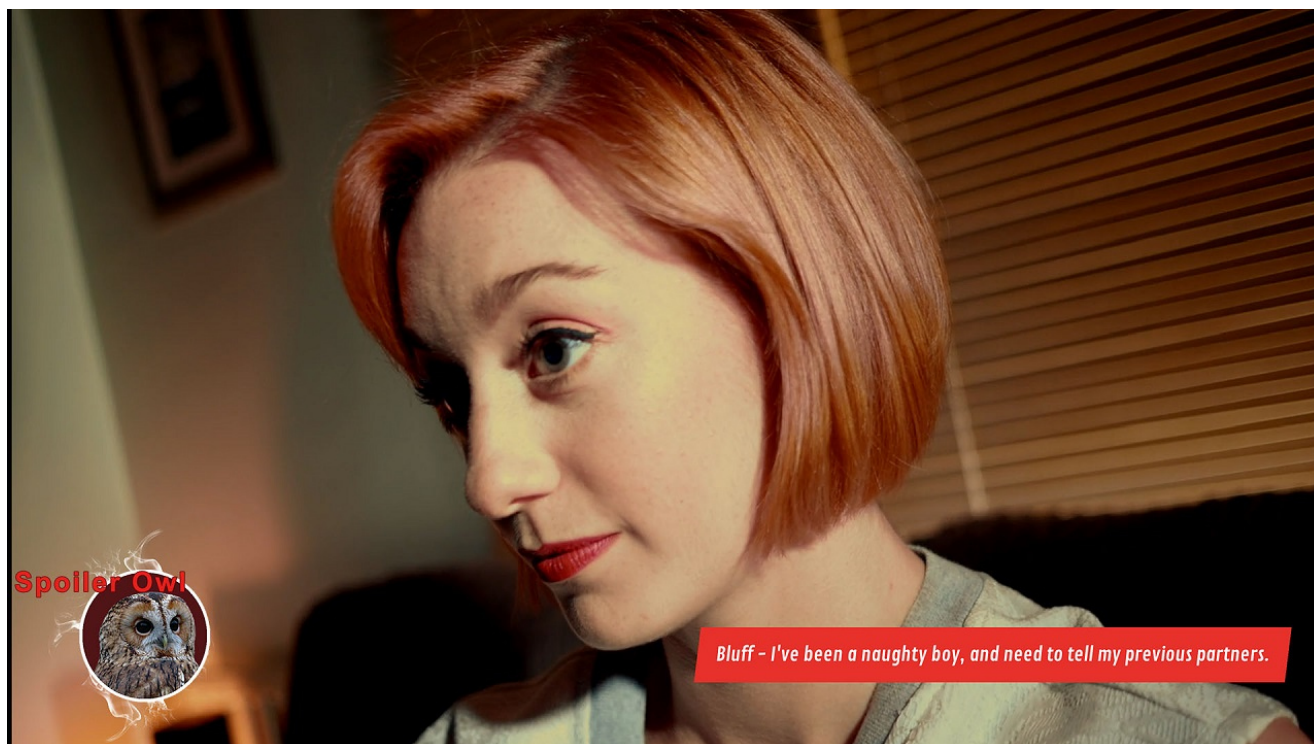
Technical:

The 'graphics' in *The Shapeshifting Detective* are amazing – it's so realistic and almost life-life... Seriously though, the scenes are really well produced, directed, lit, and audio recorded. Just like in [Doctor Dekker](#), if you are mid-conversation and picking an answer, you'll see a slow-motion version of the character fiddling around behind the choices and there are supposedly over 1600 video clips within this adventure as well! Also, the main complaint a lot of people had about [Doctor Dekker](#), the fact it was filmed in one

room, has been addressed and resolved within *The Shapeshifting Detective*. You'll be in a cab, in a bunch of various bedrooms, the radio studio and even a few of the characters houses. Although, none of the couches looks as pretty as the green mesmerising one in the Doctors office!

Sound-wise, there was only one instance of an alteration in the quality – the hallway with Violet and Sophia. As they are in a tall, empty hallway, there was a bit of reverb and echo on their voices – as you'd expect in an empty room. Other than that though, everyone else sounds clear and crisp. I also like the ye olde radio effect they put on the stories you can listen to from the 'Dekker' radios (nice name drop there guys!), but I do wish there was an option to disable that effect if you wanted too. I didn't have that many issues understanding what people were saying, but I imagine some people may have some difficulties as you can't display subtitles for the shows, not even if you sit by the radio and choose which one to play.

I think the biggest imaginary award has to go to the actors and the scriptwriters though. I imagine it must have been difficult for the actors to record all of these scenes as they talked to the camera. Some of the actors were pretty much suffering from rapid mood swings as depending on the choices you make they can get very angry or happy with you as well as aggressive or open. The choice of actors also seemed to fit perfectly as I can't imagine any of them playing a different role, although I would have loved seeing Rupert Booth play the sexy redheaded Violet...



Looks like Oscar wasn't the owls only 'companion'...

Personal Opinion:

The Shapeshifting Detective is a great example of how an interactive movie can and is created. With two FMV powerhouses working together, **D'Avakki Studios** and **Wales Interactive**, we were bound to get a game which was at least on par with [Doctor Dekker](#). However, I personally think *The Shapeshifting Detective* goes above and beyond, even though you have less conversational options and 'seemingly' fewer choices. In practice, you actually have a more diverse experience as you're not fishing for phrases, you're making choices that uncover new pathways. As I said earlier, each of my four playthroughs so far had a very similar first three or four time zones, so I talked to the same people and experienced the same things even though I purposely didn't talk about certain things or I acted like a dick to everyone (except Lexie). However, once you get to the later times, that's when the choices you made start opening up new options. It made replaying the 2.5 to 3 hour story more enjoyable and entertaining.

The only thing I didn't like within *The Shapeshifting Detective* is the choice of how you progress to the next time zone and the inability to skip segments (I know, that's sacrilege in an FMV game, but hear me out). First of all, progressing. As long as you're Sam, if you hit the minimum criteria to move on (talking to a new key suspect), then if you enter the cab you'll hear Poe and Munroe with their hourly update (which can't be skipped) and given the choice to move on or carry on investigating. If you haven't even shapeshifted or investigated yet, you need to move back, do that and then listen to the radio show again in order to move on. It's only about 30 seconds or so, but the auto-progression was a bit annoying. At one point, when I first met Oscar, it actually had me skip a whole hour period, twice, because I didn't realise I hadn't talked to everyone when the "do you wish to move on" message popped up.

It's more irritating and confusing than an issue, but one where I would have liked the 'Move on' option to appear when in the cab rather than automatically choosing that option once it becomes available for me.

The second point, skipping scenes, relates to the same thing. I love the Poe and Munroe segments, but I'm on my fifth playthrough, I know what's going to be said. You can't skip the 'James Bond' intro or credits either from what I recall. Again, these are more me being picky than anything else, but it's something I would have liked to do, especially in my subsequent playthroughs – I agree with having it disabled for the first play.

Official Trailer:

Final Conclusion:

The Shapeshifting Detective is yet another really fun and innovative whodunit from **D'Avakki Studios**. At a glance, you may think it looks like a simplified FMV adventure based on their previous game due to the fewer number of questions you can ask and the removal of the manual questioning mechanic. However, the removal of that has allowed the developers to create many more branches and outcomes as they know the choices you can make and plan accordingly. My advice, play the game through to the end about three or four times, make different choices, refuse to talk about certain things, and be a complete nob to everyone instead of being nice, you'll end up with a few new and often hilarious dialogues.

If you do play nice and everyone loves you, make sure you hug and kiss everyone at the end. EVERYONE. It's rather amusing! If you're a fan of [The Infectious Madness of Doctor Dekker](#), any other **Wales Interactive** FMV game such as *The Bunker* and *Late Shift*, or a fan of this genre in general, you need to pick up *The Shapeshifting Detective* today!

Don't forget, head on over [HERE](#) if you want to see all of the cast members interview videos.

A copy of the game was kindly provided for review purposes

The Shapeshifting Detective

£9.99



The Good:

- Brilliant acting across the board along with very amusing and entertaining dialogue
- Lots of subtle alterations to the conversations, attitudes, outcomes and story to uncover
- Random Killer upon starting a new game
- You can sexually abuse an innocent guy, kick someone in the balls, break a few peoples hearts, and make out with one of the Tarot Readers...
- The radio shows are a neat extra which I've listened to a few times

The Bad:

- No subtitles for the radio shows
- Like Doctor Dekker, the killer wont show their true colours until closer to the end of the game
- Unskippable segments you've already seen
- The automated 'time to move on' radio show should really be an option, not a forced mechanic