

Video Game Review: Saga of 'Alan Wake' Concludes With 'The Writer'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 13, 2010 - 9:02pm

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CHICAGO – Alan Wake's continued nightmare is your gaming gain as the second installment of DLC for the Microsoft-exclusive title hit Xbox Live Arcade this week and we've endured the surreal episode and survived to give you the lowdown on what to expect.



And surreal is definitely the word. "Alan Wake: The Writer" is the most discombobulating episode in the entire series to date with moments where it's not only hard to tell where you're going but which way is up and which way is down. Judged as an episode, it's a definite success, mostly because it plays with the game's sometimes conventional structure and ends on a daring note. The problem with "Alan Wake: The Writer" is that this is probably the last time we'll ever go to Bright Falls.

Before we offer a brief preview of "The Writer," you might want to remind yourself of our opinion of "[Alan Wake](#) [16]" and its first expansion, "[Alan Wake: The Signal](#) [17]."



Alan Wake: The Writer

Photo credit: Microsoft Game Studios

I believe that "Alan Wake" will be remembered for several reasons and none more so than its structure, one that allowed for new episodes to be developed and released, creating a game that could be refreshing itself for years to come. (Sadly, that will not happen but the potential was there and this could still be the delivery model of the future.)

The only issue to be concerned about it is if developers for games like this in the future see the DLC expansions as afterthoughts, B-sides to the full game. That's absolutely not the feeling one gets from "The Signal" or "The Writer." These don't play like mere epilogues. In fact, they

arguably change the message and meaning of the full game. What you thought at the end of “Alan Wake” is likely to change as you play through the next two episodes. They are a true expansion instead of mere additions and, despite their ultimately feeling incomplete, the effort to expand the game instead of merely adding to it is commendable and the greatest accomplishment of the DLC episodes.



Alan Wake: The Writer

Photo credit: Microsoft Game Studios

Briefly, the nightmare continues for poor Alan. He may have found a guide in Thomas Zane, but he’s still haunted by axe-wielding demons in a world that’s constantly shifting. The idea at the end of “Alan Wake” that the writer was creating his own surreal visions is enhanced in this expansion as the player picks up manuscript pages that are no longer mere collectibles. With each page, new words pop up in the field of play, words like “Bridge,” “Rock,” and “Tools” and shining light on those words bring them to life.

That element of “The Signal” — the word-flashing if you will — has been amplified in “The Writer” by a number of enemy onslaughts in which timing the right word-flash could mean life or death. “Fireworks,” “Boom,” “Crumble,” and “Clear” — in “Alan Wake: The Writer,” our hero has started to realize that words can be used offensively instead of merely to create the nightmare.

“The Writer” feels more consistent and more expertly-developed than “The Signal,” which is a good sign for things to come in the sequel should it ever come to light (pun only slightly intended). And the final sequence will shock and entertain players who have devoted this much time to blinding lumberjacks and shooting flare guns at flocks of birds. It’s not thematically satisfying but it is an action-packed climax.

“Alan Wake: The Writer” plays like an episode of your favorite series that you would love in the middle of a season but hate if it was the finale of the year. This is it? Honestly, I had no idea that “Alan Wake: The Writer” concluded this landmark game until I did some research after I played through it. That’s how little I felt closure at its end. One could argue that it’s setting up for a sequel, but great season finales close one door while leaving enough open for another. There are elements of finality to the end of “The Writer” but nowhere near enough to sufficiently wrap up a game that I believe everyone involved hoped would continue for several more episodes. It feels like a group of writers planning a six-episode season being suddenly told that they’ll have to wrap it up in two. It just doesn’t feel quite right.

Check out this very brief teaser while you wait for the episode to download:

‘Alan Wake: The Writer’ was released by Microsoft Game Studios and developed by Remedy Entertainment. It is rated T (Teen). The game is exclusive to the Xbox 360 and available on Xbox Live Arcade on October 12th, 2010.



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [19]

Content Director

HollywoodChicago.com

brian@hollywoodchicago.com [18]**Source URL (retrieved on Apr 30 2024 - 7:59am):**<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/12126/video-game-review-saga-of-alan-wake-concludes-with-the-writer>**Links:**[1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/briantt>[2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/alan-wake>[3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/alan-wake-the-signal>[4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/alan-wake-the-writer>[5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/brian-tallerico>[6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>[7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/lost>[8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/microsoft-game-studios>[9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/remedy-entertainment>[10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/stephen-king>[11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-twilight-zone>

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- [18] <mailto:brian@hollywoodchicago.com>
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