

Video Game Review: 'I Am Alive' Finds Atmosphere in Genre Often Dominated by Action

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 19, 2012 - 9:40am

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CHICAGO – What would you do if you were one of the few survivors on Earth? You're trying to get home. You're low on supplies. Potential enemies who want to take the little that you have are probably around the next corner. And then you stumble upon a man who needs painkillers more than you do. Would you give them to him? Knowing you might need a similar helping hand soon? "I Am Alive," now available as a downloadable title for Xbox 360 and PS3, dares to ask questions that aren't usually even considered in post-apocalyptic action games. It's not a complete artistic success due to some annoying gameplay decisions but it is one of the most thematically memorable games of the year to date, and further proof that we're all going to be downloading games soon and not buying them on-disc. Especially if they're this good.



Video Game Rating: **4.0/5.0**

"I Am Alive" is a post-apocalyptic game that removes most of the components common in the genre. We've ALL played games in which we're one of the few survivors against hordes of undead enemies, space creatures, or other fantasy-driven enemies. But what if civilization collapsed and people didn't start rising from their graves or forging alliances with our alien overlords? This daring, clever premise is the foundation of "I Am Alive," a game in which survival is the key but it's against the elements, human enemies, and your own fallibility. Most of the times that you die in "I Am Alive" (and you will die), it's because of your own failing stamina or a poor decision made in the heat of the moment. It's hard to call a game in which 99% of the world's population is dead "realistic," but this may be the closest video games have come to capturing what would matter in a future in which civilization has been reduced to rubble.



I Am Alive

Photo credit: Ubisoft

And there's a LOT of rubble. As you try to get back to your loved ones over the course of "I Am Alive," the fallout of a cataclysmic event will make that consistently difficult to do. Abandoned cars, train tracks to nowhere, fallen buildings — "I Am Alive" shows you how difficult it would be just to get around in this nightmarish landscape. And so most of the game centers around trying just to get from point A to point B. You'll climb poles on the side of buildings, jump ravines, and hang off the edge of what looks like a bottomless pit. Every time that you're not on two feet, a stamina bar depletes. If it empties, you fall and die. There are items like food and pitons that can be used, but it's mostly a timed experience. So you better choose the right path up the side of the building. Choose the wrong one and there's no going back.



I Am Alive

Photo credit: Ubisoft

There is, however, a “Retry” system that takes you back to a checkpoint. You have limited retries and if you run out of them, you go back to the beginning of the episode, often quite a ways back. You can earn more retries by being kind to strangers — giving victims your painkillers. Since SO much of “I Am Alive” is based on memorizing — can’t go that way, have to go this way — and picking the right path through the maze, the retry system feels misguided. It’s meant to add weight to the game, making your decisions even more important, but the first time that I ran out of retries and had to go over ground again for which I had merely memorized the best path, I felt like I was playing a game and not experiencing the storytelling. It’s a clever idea that nonetheless doesn’t enhance the game.

What does enhance the game is the strong visuals. “I Am Alive” looks better than most on-disc games released so far in 2012. I loved the sense of isolation. You are often the only person in sight. And when you’re not it’s time to worry. There will be people in this world who want you dead. Choosing whether or not use your gun (which often has a lone bullet) or run or even surprise kill with your machete offers some of the most variety in the game (although it often feels like there’s only one possible path out of enemy encounters, much like the memorization inherent in the climbing sections).

I often found myself just taking in the world of “I Am Alive,” enjoying the sense of dread and accomplished atmosphere more than the enemy encounters or “Uncharted”-esque climbing segments. How many post-apocalyptic games can you say that about? That the environment was more interesting than the action? It’s the end of the world and this game is fine.

“I Am Alive” was developed by Ubisoft Shanghai and released by Ubisoft on the PlayStation Network on April 4, 2012.



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