



“The Lake House” is a brilliant return to the survival-horror instincts of *Alan Wake II*, but its gone before you’ve even had the chance to welcome it.

Its taken a long time for Remedy to get their flowers, but *Alan Wake II* seems to have heralded that time. The original *Alan Wake* may not have been a gameplay powerhouse, but its Lynchian third-person action-adventure game by way of Stephen King, likely would have endured a lot more long-time success had it not released 4 days before Rockstar’s critically acclaimed *Red Dead Redemption*.

2019’s new-weird experience *Control* was a unique take on the third person shooter genre, but was somewhat overshadowed by *Borderlands 3*, Hideo Kojima’s excellent *Death Stranding*, EA’s *Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order* and CAPCOM’s superb remake of *Resident Evil 2*.

So despite releasing alongside the likes of *Baldur’s Gate 3*, *Spider-Man 2* and the remakes of *Resident Evil 4* and *Dead Space*, *Alan Wake II* seems to have brought an industry-wide love for the studio and their fresh and unique take on storytelling.

When the game was initially announced, it was revealed that it would be supported by two DLCs: “Night Springs” and “The Lake House”. Night Springs was an all-too-short experience that seemed to simultaneously wet the whistle of *Alan Wake* fans, and equally leave the audience itching for more. That itch may well be scratched by the game’s final DLC expansion, “The Lake House”.

As with “Night Springs”, players will not be in control of either the titular Wake or his co-protagonist Saga Anderson in “The Lake House”. This time, players will see themselves in control of Kiran Estevez, special agent in the Federal Bureau of Control (FBC), narrating the events of the story to Anderson.

Following Alan Wake's surprise re-appearance in Bright Falls after a mysterious 13 year disappearance, the tightly-wound Estevez is seconded to the FBC's Bright Falls outpost to begin an investigation into an Altered-World Event (AWE) in the area, likely triggered by his re-appearance.

Arriving with a team of fellow FBC agents, Estevez is surprised at the lack of a welcome party. Just a seemingly empty building with an elevator in the middle that has the strange habit of disappearing. Just another day in Bright Falls. But even with that in mind, something is clearly wrong, as Estevez herself says: "As soon as I got in the elevator, my bad news detector started going nuts."



I won't go into story spoilers here, but "The Lake House" DLC is far more in-line with what players have come to expect from *Alan Wake II*. While "Night Springs" was a fairly light-hearted look at the supporting cast of the Remedy Connected Universe (RCU), "The Lake House" is a return to the game's survival-horror instincts.

While it won't perhaps live up to the standards of the base game, fans of *Control* and those hotly anticipating its in-development sequel will definitely find a home here.

In *Control*, players took charge of Jesse Faden, as she navigated The Oldest House just after a critical incursion at the hands of a supernatural entity called the Hiss. Walking around the brutalist, shape-shifting skyscraper amidst the detritus of the Hiss invasion, reading inter-departmental emails and memos about the mundane day-to-day operations of the FBC while the narrative gradually unfolds around them, which is definitely the vibe Remedy are going for here too.

However, *Control* was able to do this with a lot more time. *Control* was a tight 9/10 hour experience, which was supported by two excellent DLC expansions of its own - "The Lake House" does not have that luxury and that is, arguably, to its detriment.

The narrative of "The Lake House" unfurls far too quickly for the game to be able to handle. There are plenty of secrets to uncover in the Lake House, but the narrative is moving far too quickly to facilitate any potential world-building Remedy might want you to enjoy and by the time you've begun to enjoy what you're seeing, it's all over and done with, clocking in at just over 90 minutes.

On the gameplay side, it's more or less the same that players have experienced up to this point: flash your torch at an enemy to remove their darkness shield and then unload your clip into their frustratingly spongy bodies. Though enemies take an absolute age to eventually kill, the combat is still satisfying enough to keep you engaged, especially when coupled with the arrival of a new weapon, the Black Rock Launcher, which is particularly useful against the game's new enemy type, the Painted: long *Dark Skies*-esque gangly enemies who are immune to normal gunfire. Though the new enemies present a challenge in combat, and pack a far meaner punch than other enemy type, they're disappointingly infrequent in the game world and you'll only encounter at most 5 or 6 in your playthrough.

The main hook of the story here, is Remedy's incredible ability to write utterly captivating and delightfully kooky characters. "The Lake House" is no different, with Dr. Jules and Diana Marmont, the husband-and-wife team charged with running the facility. Their rivalry and growing bitterness and dislike of one-another is played out in a series of interesting and often hilarious live-action videos that can be found throughout the game world.



Sadly, these are a little few and far between. While the videos do an excellent job of scene-setting, the story involving the two is resolved alarmingly quickly and it's a shame to see two extremely interesting and fleshed out characters effectively evaporate before we've gotten to know them.

The visual presentation on show here is, once again, masterful. *Alan Wake II* was already a benchmark for good-looking games this console generation and "The Lake House" is certainly doing its bit to maintain the standards Remedy have set.

The Lake House is shrouded in darkness for the most part, owing to the state of lockdown the facility finds itself in, but despite this, the visual presentation and art direction are utterly mesmerizing. For reasons I won't go into here, paintings play a pretty huge role here too and the flecks of paint adorning the walls of some of the facility's floors create a real sense of horror and awe as you walk about.

Even Estevez, herself no stranger to the weird ongoing of almost any facility the FBC finds themselves navigating is a little freaked out here.

Perhaps the main criticism of "The Lake House" is that it feels less an expansion to the game it's attached to, and more like an advert for another. Development of *Control 2* is well under way at this point, and the DLC has plenty of *Control*-esque easter eggs for people to find, including a

secret teaser for the game hidden in the depths of the facility with a returning familiar face. The DLC feels like it probably should have released as a DLC in that game, rather than a DLC in this one.

That isn't to say that there's nothing at all to enjoy. It's integration into the main campaign (players can find it from the main menu or as an addendum to the in-game Saga mission "Scratch") is well done and the audio and visual presentation on show is once again stunning.



The performances from the likes of Janina Gavankar, Philippe Spall, Helene Maksoud and Jonathan Harden are all excellent, as is the returning score from Petri Alanko and a very welcome new song from the elusive Poe.

The release of the DLC has also seen Remedy deploy "the anniversary update". This is an update that has seen some of the quality of life improvements that appeared in *Control* too, such as player cheats including infinite ammo, unlimited health and the ability to one-shot all enemies and bosses. There's also the return of Alan's patched, frayed and dirty original suit from the 2010 game. Lovely.

"The Lake House" brings an end to Remedy's time with *Alan Wake II*. As a DLC its a very welcome excuse to jump back into the weird and wonderful world of *Alan Wake II* and the RCU, but as an expansion of the game, it's pretty thin.

It's short run time means it doesn't really tell enough of a story in the allotted time to allow you to enjoy your return for too long.

The broader message Remedy has in the DLC about works of art and their own commentary on AI-generated content in general is compelling and welcome, but again, will likely fly over most users who find the credits rolling before they've had time to process it.

It does an excellent job of bridging the gap between the world of *Alan Wake* and *Control 2*, but it still feels as though its missing some of the slice of magic that made the base game so charming.

To call it a “must-play” is definitely a stretch, but fans of *Alan Wake II* are sure to find something to love here and those who are itching to get their hands on *Control 2* when that comes out, will definitely find a home here.