

# FUTURE**S**?ACK



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The future.. in a bag.. in a blog...



Dec 5, 2012    **Reviews**    Posted by: Nufafitc



### Indie Games Week 2012 Day 5: Primordia (PC)

Brain hurting from too much figuring out which characters to use and what to store in the limited short/long-term-inventory in **Resonance**? Don't worry as it can get even more cerebral with fewer characters...

Woodworm Studios' *Primordia* is a prime example that old-school graphics and gameplay can still fascinate and offer memorable characters and a strange world both strange and irresistible to leave.

#### Primordia

(USA 2012, developer: Wormwood Studios, publisher: **Wadjet Eye Games**, platform: PC)



In a world without human beings, inhabited by artificial intelligence beings, a robot and his droid companion only want to find a power core to get off the planet, but discover something much more sinister in Metropolis, a city controlled by an A.I. system out of control.

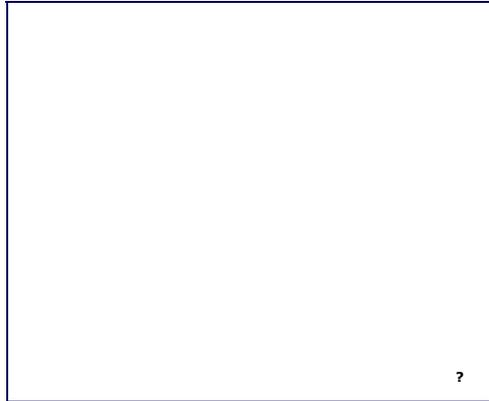
#### Steam punk alive again with the power of two

It has been quite some time since *Beneath a Steel Sky* from Revolution Software has been released, and even if the story and characters are different, the influence can still be seen. Especially since the main character's sidekick is a robot who makes sarcastic remarks. Still the world and atmosphere can stand on their own and create the feeling of another world.



Humor is as dry as the world the robots inhabit, and it works to the game's credit. Unlike so many recent comic adventures, it never feels flat and doesn't force laughter out of the player. Each robot has its own personality, and in a world deprived of human beings, that's quite an achievement, considering how players have become used to human interaction. Actually many characters share attributes which could also be found in the real world, like one selling overpriced and often faulty goods, two disputing over the ownership of another robot etc.. Some don't even have to say very much and are put into the gaming world to

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**Which Sci-Fi invention do you wish was real?**

Matter Transporter

- Lightsaber
- Hover boards
- Intelligent Robots
- All of the above

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make the player make up his own mind. Like a robot who is waiting for a bus to arrive, and the sign post with the time schedule has been updated many times with "running every half hour, every hour, etc.", creating one of many memorable scenes.

#### **Grumpy old robots in a derelict world**

Of course most conversations are done by Horatio Nullbuilt (the main protagonist) and his droid companion Crispin. These are usually quite funny as the small robot doesn't necessarily do all the things the player wants him to do, commenting on his master's (even if that term isn't that applicable in this case) actions or feelings. This creates a close relationship to the characters and offers an alternative way of looking at the human-forsaken world.



The most impressive thing about the game is how the world is fleshed out. Even a bible can be read in order to understand what happened to the world before the robots took over. Dialogues are usually well-written, even if some are a bit too long and dwell too much on philosophical questions. But of course that's what the game is mainly about: individuality and personality in A.I., the danger of human technology gone wrong and governmental structures in a robot/human society.

#### **Slow building up of story falling down**

Long conversations about social structures, technological problems and morality are interesting to read and listen to only as long as they don't feel detrimental to the storytelling. Unfortunately this is where the game doesn't deliver. Only a few

cutscenes and dramatic scenes hint at the potential of suspense the story could have. It's all good and well to be thrown into a dilapidated robot city and society on the verge of breaking down, but if the main protagonist's only goal is to find a power cell and then overthrow an A.I. which goes berserk, it's not the most thrilling way to wow an audience. It's not that the game needs any action scenes, but the pacing could have been handled a bit better. The main character is also not the most sympathetic character and it's not that easy to identify with and bear with him throughout the game.

#### **Mr. Robotic puzzle master 2012 2.0**

Puzzles are usually aimed at advanced players as the tasks are quite tricky and it's not always obvious what to do. Despite the lack of a hotspot key (something Wadjet Eye Games seem to never include), there is still some sort of help system when Crispin comments on the current situation and gives hints on what to do next. Unfortunately this is usually only one sentence, the rest sarcastic remarks. As some hints are rather cryptic, as are some of the solutions to the puzzles, getting stuck can happen quite frequently. Also the overuse of finding the correct codes to operate machines or open doors doesn't show a lot of originality in game design. Better handled are some of the dialogue puzzles in which Horatio has to persuade NPCs to give him something or to open up a new branch of questions. Some puzzles can also be skipped by going an alternative route, which makes the game less linear. Overall it's nice to have different goals at the same time, something more adventure games should offer, as it gives the player an opportunity to try his hand somewhere else and come back later (and of course trying out different things in a second playthrough).



At some points Crispin has to be used to get out-of-reach objects or perform other actions Horatio is not able to do. This is probably nothing new to players accustomed to *Beneath a Steel Sky* (even if the player can't control the droid directly), and there are certainly games with more original puzzles, like the underrated *Puzzle Bots*, but it still adds to a more varied gaming experience.

#### **Old and new presentation**

Graphics are, like most Wadjet Eye Games, stuck in the 90ies, this time a bit more pixelated than usual. Character animations, especially the slow protagonist's walking movements, are disappointing and items can be overlooked easily in the environment. Still the background visuals are nice and give a sense of place, otherness to the gaming world.





Music is excellent, and so is the voice acting. Even if some dialogues are drawn out and a bit overdramatic, the delivery of the lines are always spot on, with voices fitting the characters. Definitely one of the best indie game sound design which even surpasses Dave Gilbert's own *Blackwell* games.

**Not a candidate for adventure game of the year, but close enough**

*Primordia* is one of those adventure games which might not be the most original in puzzle design or show an overabundance of references to genres which have been trod on time and again, but playing it feels like being lost in a fascinating world. A world which steps over from the threshold of a computer into the real world as it's inhabited with memorable characters, a beautiful (if pixelated) setting, an atmospheric soundtrack and very good voice acting. So it doesn't really matter that the story itself isn't that exciting and it often falls into the trap of philosophizing too much. Wadjet Eye Games did it again and published a small indie adventure which fuses lateral thinking, dry laughter and mature storytelling.

**Rating: 8/10**

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