

Review: Daemon_9

The pensioner of tomorrow will no longer gossip on the garden fence or lurk 24/7 at the peephole. No. He or she will snoop around on the computers of his neighbors, if necessary with the help of hacking tools. But what does this have to do with Curio Productions' Daemon_9?

Quite simply: The FMV horror game lets you train today for a fulfilling retirement in the tradition of Miss Marple by completely and unabashedly placing someone else's hard drive under the magnifying glass. What's more, it takes you to areas of the Internet where no decent human being has gone before. But is it really as exciting as it sounds? This test will show.

Daemon_9: A true story?

Daemon_9 follows the (partially) missing Morgan Shane, a 19-year-old college student from California. And one thing right away: the developers have done an outstanding job of blurring the lines between reality and fiction. Because Daemon_9 not only takes place in a simulated desktop environment, but also in the vastness of the (real) WWW.

But first things first. It begins, as so many modern horror stories begin, with a YouTube video posted by one of Morgan's friends, who quickly makes it clear that there's a lot more to Shane's case than just a missing persons file. First of all, the seemingly good girl murdered her once best friend, Anna Hendricks, which at first glance might still be classified as an everyday crime in the US. But then the person seeking help shows a police tape on which Morgan's last sighting was recorded — and this sighting changes everything.

Because the disappearance of Miss Shane seems to be less a case for the police than for John Sinclair*, since she has not only acquired a lot of Asian charm, but also grandiose beam skills and superhuman strength — as the filming law enforcement officers would surely report if they weren't chewed up and hanging in the front window of their squad car. What happened to Morgan Shane?

Help me I'm obsessed!

Morgan's friend is asking the YouTube public (and therefore you, too) for help with exactly this question, since he himself had to go into hiding, his life and limb threatened. To do this, you now use a hard disk backup provided by him, which contains all the evidence he has collected; mainly in the form of photos, videos, text documents and bookmarks. The order in which you poke around in Anna and Morgan's lives is entirely up to you — only the bottom folder of the main directory is password-protected.

Now *Daemon_9* doesn't let you click around in the so-called "Disk Wrangler Interface" completely uneventfully. That Morgan has an obsession problem, she tells you personally — and with stylistic nods to Sadako Yamamura (*The Ring*). Furthermore, some visual effects ensure that you never feel alone during your found footage session.

Horror on the pulse of time

Personally, what I found most entertaining was the fact that every website linked in *Daemon_9* actually exists, such as the (according to the game) crowdsourced info page savemorganshane.org. In addition, we are not talking about carelessly slapped-together imitations, but **quite extensive and lavishly designed websites**, which may have fooled many an inexperienced visitor admirably.

With that in mind, I naturally wondered whether the in-game YouTube videos might be streamed directly from YouTube, but that's not the case. It certainly could have, given that some (maybe all) of the game's video content is actually on YouTube; uploaded by clearly anonymous users under clearly ambiguous titles.

And so it is that *Daemon_9*'s conspiracy story about a college girl and an evil computer virus **scores particularly well on the immersion side**. To be precise, **I have never come across a game or feature film like this**. It seems that filmmaker Jeffrey Jackson and colleagues knew that found-footage horror only achieves its desired effect when it is freed from its media corset. And the ultimate proof of that is that **for days I've been wondering if Morgan Shane's story could be at least partially true...**

Conclusion: The future of found footage?

Horror flicks like *Paranormal Activity* and *Grave Encounters* may well be meant, but ***Daemon_9* shows where the basic idea of realistic horror feels most comfortable: in a cross-media video game**. Basically, Curio Productions presents us with a **consistent further development of the found footage film**, which, measured by the rather modest price tag of 8.19 euros (Steam), is particularly surprising in terms of quality.

If you've enjoyed FMV games like *Her Story*, you really can't go wrong here.

**John Sinclair is the protagonist of a popular German horror detective fiction series.*