



The lighting gameplay mechanics in *Alan Wake* turns menial third-person shooting into a gleaming combat system, characterized by its uniqueness.

Alan Wake is a game developed by Remedy Entertainment, and published by Microsoft Game Studios, originally released in 2010. This psychological action thriller is about a writer named Alan Wake, who's been stuck with writer's block for two years. Alan and his wife, Alice, take a vacation in a remote town, where an evil presence uses his stories to take over the town.

The use of lighting in *Alan Wake* is a basic representation of good and bad. Light is used in a lot of ways to benefit the player, and darkness is the enemy the player must fight against.

The "Dark Presence" that has emerged has gained control of people and objects in the town. These people, called the Taken, are what Alan fights throughout the game. The Taken are impervious to bullets and physical attacks. The Darkness that surrounds them seems to be a layer of armor, but this armor can be broken using light.



A Taken, with the Dark Presence surrounding them

Alan Wake's flashlight is his most important asset. Without it, he is helpless against the darkness. The light can be pointed at enemies to wear down the Dark Presence attached to them. Once the Darkness is removed, the enemy resembles a normal person, but it still attacks the player. At this point, it is possible to kill the enemy using a gun.

The player is able to understand the combat by visual and audio cues. When a player shines the flashlight on an enemy, a ring appears around the beam of light, like a reflection bouncing off the enemy. As the Darkness is worn away, the ring gets smaller and smaller, as if there is less



Darkness to reflect off of. To better indicate the amount of Darkness left, there is a soft crescendo that gets higher in pitch the longer the player holds the beam on the enemy. Eventually this hum turns into a screeching, as if the Dark Presence is in agony. When the ring closes and the Darkness is finally worn away, a flash of light bursts from the enemy and a quick sound plays, resembling the crack of a flashbulb on an old camera. On this cue, it is very apparent that the player can now shoot and kill the enemy.

There is an assortment of ways that the Darkness can be removed using light. Along the way, the player is able to pick up other useful supplies, like Flares, Flashbangs, and a Flare gun.

When a flare is lit and held, enemies will back away from you. When an enemy is close to the player, Darkness will be slowly worn away. When holding the flare and walking, the player can work their way through a crowd of enemies. If a flare is dropped on the ground, the player can use this short stun period to their advantage by wearing down the rest of the Darkness with the flashlight and killing the enemies.



Flashbangs are harder to find than flares, but pack a bigger punch. By tossing a flashbang near enemies, the bright flash of light will instantly kill all enemies in a small radius, *even if* they are still covered in Darkness. Similarly, the Flare Gun instantly kills the enemy you shoot it with, and that flare will stay lit for a short period of time.

Street lights are found between combat segments. These act as safe havens; enemies will not go towards them, and if the player is standing in the light, health is quickly regenerated. Flood lights can be found in large combat sequences. These upright lights can be turned on for a short period of time, and shine light in a certain direction. This is useful for when the player is running low on flashlight batteries; they can stand behind the flood light and kill enemies that become vulnerable from the light.



The simple idea of a third-person shooter becomes more advanced when playing *Alan Wake*. The flashlight changes the pace of combat and exploration. When normally walking around, Alan looks around with the flashlight wherever the camera points. The beam is always centered in the middle of the screen. The soft beam illuminates the dark environment, which helps the player search for collectible items and places to explore. Sometimes there are yellow writings on walls or objects. These can only be seen by pointing light at them, and they are sometimes hard to find. If the player explores the environment enough, they may be rewarded; some of the writings may be arrows that point to hidden caches of supplies.

When enemies appear, the flashlight becomes the key tool. It can be plainly pointed at an enemy to slowly drain the Dark Presence. If the player aims in their weapon, the flashlight beam focuses and becomes more powerful. This wears down the Dark Presence much faster. Once the Darkness is gone, the player then uses the end of the light beam as the reticle to aim and shoot. If the player sees the light shining on a vulnerable enemy, they know that they pull must the trigger.



The player knows that they cannot kill the enemies unless they rid them of the Dark Presence first. Therefore, it is important for

players to keep their distance from enemies. If enemies get too close, they can be blinded by the flashlight and will back off, allowing for an escape or time to reload.

Another factor that plays into combat is the use of flashlight batteries. Focusing the flashlight beam by aiming a weapon causes the flashlight to use battery. The player can only boost the flashlight for a certain amount of time, until the battery runs out. When there is no battery power left, the flashlight can't be used anymore. Other flashlights can be obtained throughout the game, but the player can only use one at a time. Heavy Duty flashlights and Lanterns allow for a more powerful beam of light and longer battery life.

At any point, the player can press a button to instantly load a new battery into the flashlight to give it more power. Batteries can be found around the game environment. A meter at the top of the screen shows how much battery power is left. The flashlight slowly gains power when it is at rest. This mechanic keeps the player on their toes. To be successful in combat, the player must be able to keep track of how much ammo and battery power they have left. Getting caught with low battery power is a fatal mistake.

Overall, the combat system in *Alan Wake* is engaging, fun, and satisfying. Remedy Entertainment even developed a standalone game that focuses on the combat system. *Alan Wake's American Nightmare* is a spin-off of *Alan Wake* that includes a larger assortment of weapons.

It even includes an arcade mode that lets players fight against waves of enemies, which goes to show how unique and cool the combat mechanics are.

Unfortunately, by the end of *Alan Wake*, combat becomes more of a chore than an intuitive experience. Between every minor gameplay point is a group of enemies that shows up to terrorize the player. Every time the enemies show up, the player has to do the exact same thing. Even though the combat is awesome, the façade eventually wears off and the player may become annoyed. If new combat mechanics were introduced as the player progresses, it may keep players attached and willing to finish the interesting storyline.

At one point, the sheriff of the town uses the search light of a helicopter to kill a flock of Taken crows. Being able to control the helicopter or the searchlight would be a good change of pace. It could be controlled to provide support for Alan Wake as he makes his way through a level, like a tower defense game.

Different enemy types could also spice up the game. A possible new enemy could be one that can only be effected if light is shone at their head. Utilizing the use of mirrors and reflections would allow for more dynamic combat. Shining a light towards a set of mirrors would bounce light around the area to effect multiple enemies at once. Another mechanic that could be used would be different colored lights.

Using colors like blue or red could make the Dark Presence freeze or be set on fire.

There are a lot of possibilities to play around with when it comes to light and how it effects combat in *Alan Wake*. In its current state, the game gets somewhat boring. Tossing in a curveball every so often would keep the player invested in trying to figure out new combat strategies against new enemies in new situations. A lot of effort was put into making lighting such a strong force, but there wasn't enough put into *using* the light to fight a strong enemy. The lighting combat mechanic is amazing, but it would be even better if the darkness mechanic was just as fleshed out.

Links/References

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Wake

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Wake%27s_American_Nightmare

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2hIEFTcwtyI&ab_channel=P.B.HorrorGaming

<http://bloody-disgusting.com/news/3342006/10-best-worst-enemies-alan-wake/2/>

<http://www.megabearsfan.net/post/2011/05/27/Alan-Wake-is-a-short-but-sweet-campfire-story.aspx>

<http://firsthour.net/full-review/alan-wake>

<http://www.ign.com/faqs/2010/alan-wake-walkthrough-1092902>

<http://www.xblafans.com/Alan-Wakes-American-Nightmare-review>