

## Never Alone: An Adventure in Storytelling & Cultural Preservation

Anyone who has been following this blog since its inception will know that I strongly believe that video games can serve an educational purpose, that they can inspire people to learn more about the world around them. And Upper One Games and E-Line Media's upcoming puzzle-platformer *Never Alone* is a perfect example of a game that has the potential to prove, for once and for all, that video games can be used as a force for good.

*Never Alone*, or *Kisima Injitchuᅇa*, is the first commercial game to be developed in partnership with an indigenous organization – in this case, the Cook Inlet Tribal Council - and is an environment-based puzzle-platformer which combines buddy-based game mechanics with imagery and themes drawn from traditional Iñupiaq culture, folklore, and values.

Based on the Iñupiaq story *Kunuksaayuka* and narrated in the Iñupiaq language (with English subtitles), the game follows Nuna, a young Iñupiaq girl, and her pet Arctic fox as they embark on a dangerous journey across the Arctic tundra, ice floes, forests, and villages to save her people from an eternal blizzard.



The game emphasises cooperation and interdependence, skills which are highly valued by – and essential to the survival of – the indigenous hunter-gatherer peoples of Alaska and northern Canada. Players can switch between the two protagonists at any given time in order to solve the environment-based puzzles and navigate through the game's eight chapters. Along the way, players will come across characters from traditional Iñupiaq folklore – such as the Sky People, Manslayer, and Blizzard Man – and will be able to unlock interviews and video clips on Arctic wildlife and Iñupiaq culture, adding extra context to the characters and challenges that the players encounter throughout the course of the game.

Aside from its stunning graphics and immersive gameplay, the most striking aspect of *Never Alone* is the developers' commitment to promoting Iñupiaq culture and preserving their traditions, stories, and language for future generations. Over 30 Iñupiaq elders, artists, linguists, and historians assisted in the game's development and were involved in crafting the game's narrative, character designs, and in-game environments.



In a world where indigenous languages and ways of life are dying out at an alarming rate, Upper One Games has taken it upon itself to use twenty-first-century technology as a means of sharing Alaska's native culture with the world. Upper One Games President and CEO Gloria O'Neill is herself a member of the Cook Inlet Tribal Council and stated in a press release earlier this year that "We'd like to think we're creating one of the most authentic – and fun – games of the year. Video games are powerful tools for making the history, tradition and culture of indigenous peoples relevant to both the next generation of Native people and the rest of the world".

Time will tell if Upper One Games and E-Line Media's joint endeavour will lead to similar projects in the years to come but one thing is for certain: *Never Alone* is set to become one of the most ambitious and original games of 2014.



*Never Alone* will be released for the PS4, Xbox One, and PC in mid-November 2014. If you would like to learn more about this game and its development, please visit the official *Never Alone* website or check out their YouTube channel.

*All screenshots and concept art used above are copyright of Upper One Games and E-Line Media. All rights reserved.*

**(Originally published on The Archaeology of Tomb Raider on 28 September 2014)**