

I am concerned about the designer/writer/creative lead of *What Remains of Edith Finch*. If you (the developer) require assistance, or work/live under extreme distress, send a coded email with the phrase "The owl flies at midnight." I'll know to come rescue you from whatever circumstances prompted you to create a game simultaneously so serious yet so twistedly, sickeningly funny.

A game so focused on untimely death, with suicide, with psychosis would already set off numerous flags in the surveillance systems of those who watch. However, none of that is what concerns me. Instead, I'll provide an illustrative example.

One of the characters in the game is the great uncle of the protagonist. His name was Walter Finch, and he spent thirty years hiding in a bespoke bunker underneath the Finch family home. He had witnessed the murder of his older sister and could not deal with reality, or at least with the twisted reality that seems to pursue the Finch family. So, in a bid to hide from the monster, both real and imaginative, that claimed the life of his sister, he fled underground.

When Edith visits the bunker on her worldwide reunion tour of the Finch home, a model train set lies in partial assembly. It makes sense. The model train hobby requires serious commitment, both in precision and in time, and Walter had plenty of time to polish his precision to perfection. When I first saw that, I thought, "Huh, that's a neat touch. My first question when I found out there was someone hiding underneath the house was how did they spend their time, and bam, there's at least part of an answer." Once the player enters into Walter's "dream sequence" (I couldn't think of a better phrase for the interactive flashbacks, sorry), the trains take on several more unfortunate layers.

Walter's bunker lies underneath the local train line. Every day at the same time, the train passes overhead, and the roof and the floor and the walls rattle and shake while the iron titan crosses overhead. During the "dream sequence" (I hate writing it as much as you probably hate reading it), Walter repeats the same routine of opening a can of peaches while the train rides its path. He describes how the routines keep a person sane under these conditions, that living for the small things, that very day, the present, is what keeps him going.

This is a scared man. He (it is presumed) witnessed a horrific event and makes the radical decision to spend his life in a self-made iron cage under his family home. During the "dream sequence" (end me), he makes several references to a monster while the train rattles above his head. The monster is, of course, the person, thing, whatever, that killed his sister. Yet the monster is also much more. The monster is the world that produced whatever took her from him and made him watch. Additionally, given his dearth of stimuli in that concrete coffin, the overwhelming presence of the train presumably came to represent that monster, that outside world, that murderer. So when he has a model train set, he might have been trying to bring that monster down to a more manageable size. He desired to prove to himself that he could overcome the outside world, overcome his fear of it, and return a new man, because Walter did not want to remain in that bunker forever.

Eventually, after thirty years of living down in the bunker, he stopped hearing the train. Its routine halted for about a week before Walter decided that he had enough of bunker living, and he wanted to see what kind of living he could accomplish out in the real world. He grabbed a pick-axe (which simultaneously makes sense and doesn't make sense that it's there) and tunnels his way out of the bunker. Once through bedrock, he falls down onto the tracks and

smells the sweet island air. He says that he looks forward to living, no matter how many years, months, or weeks he has left. He looks forward to the food, most of all.

As he exits the tunnel, a light approaches at a speed too fast to dodge, and a train mauls him.

The newly reformed recluse, who tried to conquer his fear of the outside world, manifested by the loud clamor of the local train line, who had spent thirty years in an inertial limbo yet had now decided to break free and begin living, and who declared he would be happy with just one new day, is run over by the same fucking train who had terrorized him for thirty years and whose week-long absence had prompted this escape attempt. He didn't get a day. He didn't even get 2 minutes

There is an optimist reading of this sequence. "Those few minutes he did get after breaking out of the bunker must have been sublime. The sweet seaside air, the aromatic flora of a coastal island, the sun filtering in through the large trees. The joy he must have experienced is rarified air that few of us would ever understand." Sure, but I think he might have enjoyed just a *little* bit more time before being squashed by a coal powered beast.

Implying that his joy is so much more profound because he was about to die only makes sense from the viewer's standpoint. His own joy would not have diminished if he had continued to live on, because, of course, he could have no idea he was about to die. Though he spoke of appreciating any new time he would be granted, even just one more day, I doubt he meant that he would die before leaving the train tracks. He could not appreciate the difference in the high peak and bottomless valley he would next experience (or not, depending on your spiritual persuasion) in such rapid succession.

The optimist reading is, therefore, stained with the hindsight of an omnipresent viewer and does no justice to Walter's own experience. In my opinion, his is the saddest tale of the bunch, dead baby included. It felt more like the game developer trying to create a shockingly sad ending rather than giving a character his due. In a game whose portrayal of family resembles a murderous ouroboros rather than a tree, this is the story that stood out to me.

In conclusion, Jesus Christ, and what the fuck.