

A mansion has many rooms... and stories

ZOHEB MASHIUR

What Remains of Edith Finch is a game by Giant Sparrow about what death does to a family.

The titular character is a young woman returning to her ancestral home after many years. The house is tall and ramshackle, clearly having been added to repeatedly since its first construction. Edith is the only one there. Through the rest of the game you discover why.

The Finch clan arrived in America from Norway three generations ago. The family tradition is that each Finch has their own room, and no room is ever reused. A dead Finch has their room shut off and barred, an untouched sort of shrine to the person they were. And there are a lot of shut rooms. The Finches tend to die, and die young. A lot.

Using a series of clever passageways and little tunnels built-in the walls and crawlspaces of the old house, Edith bypasses the locked doors and enters into the rooms of her departed relatives. Each one is beautiful, carefully-designed by the art team to tell you everything you need to know about all these people. It's a sprawling clan but thanks to sheer love and care, every Finch stands out as a distinct mem-



ber of the cast, even if you only see them briefly.

And you do see them. Each room holds something – a diary entry, a poem in memoriam, a letter from a psychiatrist – that sheds light into how the person died. As Edith reads, the first person perspective changes and suddenly you see through the relevant Finch's eyes. It's a simple conceit, but powerful as Giant Sparrow finds ways of using the first person experience in entirely novel ways, and even abandoning it when the context calls for it.

Everything available is used in the service of the story-telling: the first person

perspective becomes the camera in a series of snapshots of a camping trip, simply holding down the mouse causes a picture book to flick through a fantastical story, and – in a sequence that steals the show – the dual-nature of mouse-and-keyboard controls comes into play when a character begins to daydream at work. The mechanics of the stories are occasionally a little frustrating but never enough to overcome the wonder of experiencing them. The “walking simulator” genre is often derided for limited interactivity, the character often just moving around and stumbling across plot. While low-interactivity is not neces-

sarily a bad thing, *What Remains of Edith Finch* is by far the gold standard that shows what is possible to achieve when stories are genuinely designed to be experienced through active manipulation.

Each story – as with the characters and mechanics – is its own little microcosm of genre and tone. One story is brilliantly told via the panels of a shlocky horror comic designed to provide the reader with violent pleasure – except, of course, it tells the story of someone who really died. The contrast works, and even the most mechanically simple stories have this level of emotional complexity and contrast. Take the story of Gregory Finch. Moving a child's bath toys as if by magic, making them sing and dance would in any other story be delightful and frivolous; when you know how it ends and what it does to the other tragic characters you have met and known, it's heartbreaking.

It takes courage and skill to write tragedy like this. It takes a tremendous understanding of games to present stories this way. The result deserves to be experienced.

Zoheb Mashiur is a prematurely balding man with bad facial hair and so does his best to avoid people. Ruin his efforts by writing to zoheb.mashiur@gmail.com

Spiderman: First Impressions

FARDEEN ZAREEF

When Sony first announced the new exclusive for the PS4, a lot of people were perplexed. Why Spiderman? It isn't usual for an exclusive to be based on a licensed product and maybe that is the master stroke Sony has been planning to deliver.

There have been countless Sony games to date. Some are classics like *Ultimate Spiderman* and *Spiderman 2*. And then there are the botched ones like *Edge of Time*. But leaving the development to the exciting Insomniac Games was a bold move, and the curiosity within the community increased with each reveal.

But it was at E3 where Sony showed exactly why they have been invested in making the Spiderman franchise a new trademark exclusive for their console line. Ending E3 with an exclusive first look of the game, Sony simply delivered a bombshell.

First off, the game feels fresh. The whole concept of the game seems to rely on why people wanted to play as Spiderman in the first place. An open environment with the ability to swing,

albeit in a bit more realistic manner when compared to the countless predecessors, makes for a fun situation. This is a Spiderman who has both the funny and the superhero side

to the iconic character. A few quips here and there from Spidey never go wrong. And the ability to play as Peter Parker already gives the game a never seen before factor to it.

Graphics wise, the game looks stellar. A beautiful look into New York City, if there are side quests, then gamers can expect to spend hours swinging across New York and get absorbed in a clinical gaming experience. Another interesting thing that came to play from the E3 reveal was how Insomniac focused on a lesser known character such as Mister Negative.

The gameplay also seems very fluid. With the web swinging system now more realistic and needs you to accurately target and not just randomly press a button to do it. The fighting mechanism involves an environment-based system akin to the Arkham series of Batman. But

with Spidey, expect fast fights.

Being a lifelong Spiderman fan, I am genuinely interested in how Insomniac's version will play out. It feels fresh, looks good and seems like it is hitting the right notes. With the way Sony invested in this project, the game has an all out vibe to it. But can Sony and Insomniac succeed in their endeavour? Only time can tell.

Fardeen Zareef has a knack for jokes. For example, he is gonna start working out from tomorrow.

