



“Hello, Two Forks tower! Two Forks Tower, this is Thorofare Tower, come in.”

Firewatch was released on February 9th, 2016, which feels like simultaneously yesterday and four thousand years ago. Later, on September 21st, the game was updated to add a brand-new mode: the **Firewatch Audio Tour**.

At the start of this mode, in the prologue’s garage, Henry was provided with a Walkman and some headphones, and his world became dotted with audio tour stations. The stations dispensed an unlimited supply of cassette tapes, each of them revealing the stories behind Firewatch’s development. Some of the stations even had connected exhibits — signs and monitors showing concept art and tests. It was really cool.

Due to time and technical constraints, though, the Firewatch Audio Tour could not have subtitles, limiting its accessibility and worldwide audience. **So, over the course of a few years, I’ve gradually transcribed all of the Firewatch Audio Tour tracks, and they are all collected within, for you.** (My apologies in advance: there will almost certainly be typos and errors as I steamrolled towards the finish line.)

Reading these words and listening to the voices of these incredibly talented people teleports me directly back to the intense, exciting, and emotional time of making Firewatch. And we were just the publisher! If I’m being honest, I miss working with these friends, but, as Firewatch itself made so incredibly clear, nothing is forever. It’s time to move on.

It’s sure nice to have these memories, though.

Happy 5th Anniversary, Firewatch. Thanks for everything.

—Cabel Sasser, Panic, February 9th 2021

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Firewatch Audio Tour: Welcome



Rich: Hello there, welcome to the Firewatch audio tour. My name is Rich Sommer. I voiced the character of Henry — the guy that you're currently controlling with those buttons there — and I'll be chatting with you in a little bit. Thanks for checking it out.

1. Designing the Firewatch Prologue



Sean: Hi, I'm Sean Vanaman. I wrote the bulk of a hundred percent of this game.

Jake: Hey, I'm Jake Rodkin. I did a lot of level design, UI design and worked with everyone on the story for Firewatch.

Sean: The game has this weird structure that Chris and I talk about in another tape. This is the first thing I wrote was this opening of the game that jumps between Henry's life and the trip out to the woods. And I used a little product called Twine to do that which you can download and use. It's just a very simple, choose your own adventure tool. The simplest way to program a video game that one can then share with friends and play.

Jake: Um, I think we were worried that the team would sort of perceive Henry as a blank slate as sort of a generic game player-protagonist. And we wanted to make sure are we wanted to get everyone and everyone's mindset. You're playing as a specific guy with a specific life.

Sean: Yeah. There's a reason when you play video games and a lot of your protagonist have amnesia because it's really difficult when you're driving a character around, ah, who knows things about their life or his or her life that you, who you who ostensibly are that person, don't know. So yeah. Um, we kept trying to write an opening of the game that happened sort of like weeks into

Henry's experience and then quickly realized that it was like, well, why would he not be able to say X? Well, because his relationship with his wife is why. But the player doesn't know that. And this was the quickest way to get everybody on board, was to just take the thing that I wrote — to answer to the question, I think for Jane and you at the beginning, which was like, who is Henry? And I would write these character profiles that were really bad. And then I went, wow, what if I just let you play a thing? And then you can figure out who he is. And we held onto that until we had the idea to put it into the game!

Jake: It means that when you're playing Firewatch and Henry and Delilah start talking about Henry's wife, you don't have to learn it through his dialogue because you made the choices that brought him where he is today.

2. The Prologue's Interactive Music



Jake: Hi, it's Jake again.

Chris: Hey, I'm Chris Remo.

Jake: Oh, hey Chris.

Chris: Hi there. I was a game designer and the music composer on Firewatch.

Jake: Nice.

Chris: So, you're hearing now the first piece of interactive music that went into Firewatch, the first piece of music that actually...

Jake: ...responds to what you're doing in the game?

Chris: Exactly. Yeah. So this is a piece of music that's divided into, um, technically six parts and what's happening is as you're playing through this introductory sequence, when you hit certain points in the narrative, it sends a signal to Wwise, which is the name of the audio middleware we're using, and then when Wwise gets that signal, it waits until the next sort of musically appropriate transition point and then when it hits that it smoothly transitions into the next section of music and so it creates the effect that you're just listening to one big

long piece of music that just happens to be timed very nicely to your play through.

Jake: It just happens to get sadder and sadder at the exact rate that your life gets sadder and sadder.

Chris: Exactly. This was a challenging process, both because I had no idea what the music should sound like, and also because it was the first interactive piece of music in the game, so that the technical sort of just “how does this work?” was also a part of it. But as it turned out, this music was changed — Jake, you may remember this — this music changed relatively little over the course of development in comparison to a lot of the other music.

Jake: I think it started off as maybe three pieces and it expanded out to five over development, but other than that it’s, yeah, one of the first things dropped in that shipped. Get ready to hear about that a lot on this commentary.

3. The Ins and Outs of Lookout Towers



Nels: I'm Nels Anderson and I was a designer and game play programmer on Firewatch.

Jane: I am Jane Ng and I worked on the 3D environment art in Firewatch.

Nels: So, you're likely standing at the base of your home away from home. Your home in the wilderness for all intents and purposes, more or less. This is basically just a real straight up tower like they existed out in the woods, right.

Jane: I think in Portland... there's somebody in Portland who was very good about archiving, a lot of, you know, blueprints about various types of fire lookouts of the state. And we got some. And so we, that's how we started off building the Firewatch. I mean the lookout tower, just by looking through how they were actually built.

Nels: It's slightly taller than a real one, right.

Jane: We had to make quite a bit of adjustments because for example, the stairway you see here, normally fire lookout stairways are not on the outside, but you know, for more interesting gameplay and views for the player. We opted to change that. But you know, ultimately, we still wanted the tower, to feel like a real tower. So, we have to figure stuff like, hey, how does the plumbing actually

work, how do they get water, you know, stuff like that. It actually is very important for a real tower.

Nels: If you look around the base of the tower, you'll actually see a big old plastic cistern.

Jane: We're not a survival game of any sort, but it is important to make sure that like all that stuff is actually thought out. So, the space feels realistic.

Nels: You don't, you don't want someone to play the game being like, wait a minute, there's no... how does this guy drink? How is he not dead?

Jane: When I normally play video games, I'm always interested in stuff like, hey, where's the bathroom? So, you know, here we have the outhouse, and you can go anywhere. But stuff like water is very important. So, in a real, in a real fire lookout situation, what they do is they will use um, like a cistern and, and will capture rainwater from the roof and you will actually see that we actually have a little pipe down from the roof and we even have what they call a first flush filter being there, which is actually what they use.

Nels: That's my favorite kind of filter, really.

Jane: I had to look up. what, like, what do they do? Because once you go OK, you collect roof rainwater from the roof, I want to be all nasty and then, oh hey, somebody's already to figure that out on how to collect rainwater. What do you know?

Nels: We actually visited um, a number of different lookout towers, as we were researching the game, and it was always very satisfying to see elements of things we saw in the real world and make their way back into the game and vice versa.

Jane: So, we also made sure to have a tap here, like a little faucet where you can actually get water from the cistern.

Nels: if you click on it, it will play an animation of a hand gripping a knob and water comes out for two seconds. Doesn't do anything. Yeah. But it's there.

Jane: I think for a while we actually were thinking like, should we just let the player turn on the water? Then what happens if the water just runs out? And then James had a very good idea of just going like, oh, just make one animation that

you turn on the faucet and turn it off immediately, just so that you know, hey, there's water in here and you won't die. That's Henry.

4. Going Off the Beaten Path



Chris: Hey, it's Chris again.

Jake: It's Jake.

Chris: So, if you're listening to this right now, it's because you went off the beaten path really early in the game. Obviously, you probably did that because the commentary map told you to, but...

Jake: You don't need a map to tell you to go here. You could just go here.

Chris: One of the biggest challenges in this game was throughout the entire narrative, keeping in mind that really players can pretty much go anywhere that they've unlocked on the map, at any time. And sometimes that's actually really inconvenient for the narrative of the game. We had to come up with a lot of excuses for why you couldn't go to certain places at certain times, or if we couldn't think of an excuse...

Jake: ...some, some call it an excuse, others call it a thrilling narrative event, right?

Chris: So, for instance, where you are right now, if you keep walking in that direction, you will sort of cross the river but then be unable to go any further, um, because it's a lot of dense underbrush. And then about halfway through the game, when

a big fire happens, that area is burned out and you can walk past it into a Cottonwood Creek and, and Pork Pond, et cetera. And all those areas. Yeah, it was really, really hard to think of justifications like that, that weren't completely implausible. And so, we actually have relatively few cases of that in the game.

Jake: If we couldn't come up with a good way to keep a player out of a space, we instead flip to the other direction and went, well, what can we do to support it and make it interesting on, on this day before the story that started. Not a whole lot, but we thought it was fun to point out that you can wander a lot more of the map then you might even think at the very, very, very start of the game

Chris: And then especially once you get ropes, that increases a lot more. You know, so just as you get these items that allow you to explore more of the world, we had to face these increasingly complicated and frustrating design challenges of how does the whole game not break all the time now? It was, it was interesting and difficult, but also cool.

Jake: Yep. Bye.

5. The Actual Life of a Lookout



Sean: Nels it feels like you on the team did the most sort of digging about what the real job is like, what is in the actual space and then checked us against reality when we kind of went off the reservation.

Nels: In general, I really like doing research. I've kind of, that's sort of a thing I've enjoyed on all the projects I've worked on. So, for this, a bunch of folks on the team read this great book called *Fire Season* by Philip Connors was just kind of like a memoir-ish thing from this dude who is still is an active fire lookout even today. But I also just, I called up the, the Ministry of Forests and Natural Resources here in British Columbia and got redirected to like three increasingly small ministry of forest offices until someone just gave me literally the phone number of this cool old lady who had once been a fire lookout. So, I just kind of chatted with her for like an hour and a half just about what doing the job was like. The reason why the game is not a simulation of being a fire lookout is because what's everyone talks about is that the number one challenge with the job is that it is incredibly impossibly boring.

Sean: Because you can't like read a book. You can't like be doing other things. Right?

Nels: Like not really. At the end of Day 3, we're Delilah mentions, Henry's like, well what do I do the rest of the summer? She was like, you sit in that chair and you look out the window. That is actually what fire lookouts really do. So, all the

folks I talked to said like figuring out ways to combat boredom is the number one thing. The lady I talked to, she said she did a whole lot of needlepoint, and cross stitch, because you can do that without looking at your hands very much. Obviously, lookouts are also responsible for doing, you know, maintenance on their towers. But again, it's like not maintenance because some crazy yahoo smashed up your tire. It's maintenance. Like "oh the paint is kind of flaking off, better paint it, or these trees have grown too tall, so I need to chop them down", not I'm chopping down trees to form a weird log bridge.

Sean: The main takeaway from it or whenever we would talk to someone who had done this job is why would you make a game about that? That is the most boring time of my entire life. So hopefully we showed them how.

Nels: It feels like people who do this job like fall into two camps right, the people who think they can do it and can't hack it and bail after like a month or two, people like Jack Kerouac who tried to do this and wrote about it in *Desolation Angels* and then he, he went crazy from a lack of cigarettes and then left, or the people who kind of enjoy the solitude and then figure out ways to deal with it. But you know, we do have like a lot of the window dressing for the stuff people use. Like other folks I've talked to, it's like, what do you do? Well, we read a lot of books and we like trade the books between the different lookouts through rangers and stuff like that. So of course, *Firewatch* has a crap ton of weird books in it, stuff like that.

6. Building Two Forks Lookout



Jake: Hey, it's Jake again

Jane: And it's Jane again.

Jake: All right, let's talk about Two Forks Lookout, I mean we could just talk about lookout towers in general in video games. Um, well you built it. You want to talk about it?

Jane: Yes. So, lookout towers have standard sizes actually and I think most of these are either 14 feet by 14 feet on the inside or something like seven.

Jake: Like, tiny, wow!

Jane: There's actually a standard... the cabins have standard sizes and the ones that you have a bed and stay in or the 14 foot ones. And um, we realized just through a few experiments that if you make a space, that's actually 14 feet in the game, it would be too tiny.

Jake: Yeah. I remember you've found a lookout tower enthusiast website that had posted the actual blueprints that the state parks and forest service used. So, we're like, we're doing this, we're building it to scale, it's tiny, you can't move around.

Jane: It's tiny. And then basically the camera just has no room to maneuver at all.

Jake: Yeah, and you just feel like a fat guy, like I can't fit between your desk and the fire finder.

Jane: It feels like you're just in a shoe box. So, we did a few experiments. I was like, OK, how about was twice as big and when it's twice as big and then it's just like, no, it looks wrong, and then like outside the silhouette of the, of the space also looks wrong, so we ended up with I think something like one and a half size bigger than real life and it feels like a real fire lookout

Jake: Over the course of the game, as things change, there's a bunch of variants of the tower too, right, simple stuff like the broken window but then also we move furniture around, Henry gets moved in...

Jane: There are different states of the interior and we achieved that by actually swapping out the whole interior set like seven or eight times. I think as the game moves on, then more and more of this stuff starts showing up and then Henry is a slob and so his undies are everywhere and...

Jake: Window gets broken, window gets fixed, conspiracy board goes up, and dirty socks get all over the place. Just tell the story of some slobby dude up here.

7. Conceiving and Designing the Radio System



Sean: The radio went on a real evolutionary journey. I don't know if you remember back at the very beginning when we all got together to make the game. We got together in December the first week of December and we said, well, we're definitely going to take Christmas break, but what can you make in two weeks with this crew in Unity, an engine we've never used before? And we started just starting with the radio mechanic and I quickly wrote like a mystery about FBI agent looking for a kidnapper in the woods and then you had like a dispatcher who is like, go to this place and look for this. Oh, I think he left. And I think that's when we sort of proved out that looking at things and pointing at them the way you would like in a shooter, but then getting options to talk about them was the thing we were going to do.

Nels: That's kind of where the radio mechanic is so different from most conversations systems in games. Right. Because most game conversations were like, oh, you're standing next to this guy so you can talk to him now and you will be able to talk about things that have recently happened to you, but since it's a radio, it's like you could be anywhere, anytime, talking about whatever you're looking at. So even as we started to do that initial prototyping, we started realizing like, oh, that's very interesting. Also, this is really complicated and very different from how most games do dialogue.

Sean: Yeah. When you're standing in front of a character, you just sort of have the like very like binary rule of I am standing in front of a character in an adventure game. I can talk. I walk away, I can't. When you change that up and you can talk about things wherever, because the proximity of that character is no longer relevant... you start to find really weird cases, like, what do you do when you want to talk about an idea, or a sound you just heard? A smell? So, then we had to sort of like bring the radio mechanic into the realm of like the intangible. And I don't think that really came on until much later.

Nels: We got like, I think during that prototype we got the very initial vestiges of it. But in that, in that initial prototype, it was so simple where it's like, oh, if you're looking at this weird stone head, you can like push the one button to play this crappy audio top of "Oh, hi Mark!" from Tommy Wiseau's *The Room*. Or you can push two to say, "Oh, hi Denny!" instead.

Sean: That was the darkest time of development for me.

Nels: It was the most wonderful time.

Sean: Because that movie gives me real physical illness and when you could map the radio mechanic to two lines from *The Room*... I was, I was in a bad way about that.

Nels: I enjoyed it greatly.

Sean: I know you did, Nels.

8. The Cache Box: Land of Firsts and Secrets



Jake: Hi there, it's Jake

Chris: And Chris again.

Jake: Hey, so here we are in the cache box clearing, or at least, I guess that's what we call it. There's a lot of cache boxes in Firewatch, but this was the first one that we placed into the game?

Chris: For a long time, this was the cache box.

Jake: It was THE cache box. Um, even though we knew we wanted to have more. This area was actually one of the first areas that we built out to any degree that looks like a piece of the world. It was a really good proving ground for us, like when me and Nels Anderson were gray boxing the world at the very beginning, we tried a million different things, like maybe this was on the edge of a cliff or maybe it was a secret that you had to find and I think it was Sean who suggested that he really wanted it to feel like a warm, sort of enclosed space. Like you've stumbled onto a little glen and you wanted to stay there for a while, which I think makes sense because we wanted people to actually stop and poke around and have it not feel like the woods.

Chris: This was an area with a lot of firsts. I remember this really ended up looking a lot like Olly's concept art in a way. I think that felt like an accomplishment when it all got built out. It was also the first audio I implemented in the entire game, I believe.

Jake: The foley on the locks on the lid? This was also the cache box was also our proving ground for a detailed object interaction with Henry animating the lock and also there is an exit out if you back up and turn left. That was the first time I prototyped one way drops and also any sort of secret paths because the way that you crossed the canyon also showed up here and I didn't tell anyone on the team about it for like months and people only noticed it once they started playing the back half of the game. And it was very fulfilling for me. Nice cache box.

Chris: Land of firsts and secrets.

Jake: That's the state flag of cache boxes.

9. Firewatch's Dynamic Map, Or, "The Widowmaker"



Sean: Jake!

Jake: Oh, hey Sean.

Sean: You did a neat thing here in the game that I like a lot, which is when you make a dialogue choice with Delilah, about what this, this dangerous hill should be called, it shows up on your map and I like that a lot.

Jake: Yeah. When we were putting the map system together — well actually the map weirdly was one of the latest things. One of the final things to come into the game as a fully fleshed out piece. But an upside of that is we built a map using a lot of tools we already had. For instance, the system that checks which things you have and haven't talked about, which things you have and haven't, haven't found in the game, use the same variable list as our speech system. So, when I was putting this together, I realized, oh, not only can I put a mark down on the map when Henry finds it, and talks about it, but I can totally look at the same tools we use for dialogue and figure out what the player said and put it on the map. And the end result felt really natural. I actually wished we'd gone a little deeper on it in the game, but I'm really happy with what's in there right now. Also, please name this "Shitty Boss Is Gonna Get Me Killed" because that's objectively the best name for the hill.

Sean: Is that your handwriting?

Jake: Yeah, you've got to write it all. We've got to cram that in there, but it's still readable.

10. Designing and Building Teen Party Zone



Olly: Hi, this is Olly Moss, and I was the art director on Firewatch.

Jane: I'm Jane. Let's talk about...

Olly: Let's talk about the teen zone. The teen zone is one of the first areas that we, that we used as a sort of art test to see how we would go about building the rest of the game.

Jane: We knew pretty early on that like on Day One you will start from the tower and you will have to head down to the lake and somewhere in between you will see some teens and they're partying. And so, we call this the teen zone because this is where all the teens stuff is.

Olly: It was important to us, to the reveal that it was a group of teens was communicated through the level design. So, the idea was that you just kind of like walk through some trees and burst out into the scene where a campfire was still burning.

Jane: And you had a pretty strong idea of what it was, what you wanted it to look like.

Olly: Yeah. I just wanted to put some big angular rocks in there, which is basically my modus operandi for the entire game, but we wanted to have a big angular sort

of rock, which became known as pride rock because it looks so much like the rock from the Lion King.

Jane: That rock does surface a very strong landmark, pretty new in the game and it kinda does point the player in the right direction.

Olly: Should we will talk a little bit about our process for designing these areas?

Jane: In the beginning when, we just have like no concept art we, will just mark it out with just gray, literally just gray boxes and the gray terrain. And then, we will take screenshots and give it to Olly to be, like, please pretty this up, Olly!

Olly: Well first of all I will do a terrible, terrible garbage sketch and pitch it to the team. And if people like the gist of it, then I will go away and do a bit more detail, more of a detailed drawing and then you would go and...

Jane: Add some more shapes. And then we just keep going back and forth with paint overs from Olly...

Olly: And then it's just a sort of tennis really just back and forth between the two of us until everyone's happy with what we have.

11. The Complexities of The Teen Encounter



Patrick: My name is Patrick Ewing. I worked on tools and gameplay programming.

Sean: The teens, Patrick.

Patrick: Let's open some old wounds here.

Sean: This is a real, this is like going back to like an old battle ground and being "on these hallowed grounds, bad things happened". I died on this hill.

Patrick: Yeah, I mean it's one of the most complex interactions in the game, if not the most. Right? And it, it was in the game from the very first vertical slice we did and then I think we kind of added to it as we played through it and saw like, oh, we should be able to throw the boombox in the lake, obviously right. OK, the, the teens need to react to the boombox being in the lake. Oh, but then they should also react to you putting it down.

Sean: What you should do if you're making a video game is build relatively iron clad, predictable AI and systems, that react to inputs. But instead, we built a series of relatively flimsy state machines that were like, if this, if this, if this, but not when. And also, if. And we were able to create this scene as designed. And Patrick was sort of the, the shepherd of the scene, so whenever anything would break, if you were to throw the boombox and the teens were not to respond, or you

leave with a boombox and they would talk about something else, it was Patrick's job to ferret into the state machine and figure out what was going on.

Patrick: Yeah. I'm happy with how it turned out. There are so many different ways that this scene can play out now. And depending on what you choose to do, do you throw the fireworks at them, do you talk to them and then start messing up their stuff and throwing it in. And it ends up being pretty... believable. They feel like real characters. it's just such a crazy spaghetti code in the, in the back end that I'm always terrified when I see someone play through it, that there's some interaction that we didn't think about.

Sean: ...you're still afraid that right now the player is interacting with the teens in a way that is completely not by the book, and beads of sweat are building on your brow...

Patrick: Yeah. I think it's just a PTSD response at this point. We would see the bug reports if this was actually still breakable.

12. The Teens Speak



Erin: Hello, my name is Erin Yvette and I'm the voice of Chelsea.

Nikki: Hi, my name is Nikki Rapp and I'm the voice of Lily!

Erin: And we're the drunk teens in the lake.

Nikki: The obnoxious, skinny dipping, drunk, firework-blasting teens.

Erin: This isn't the first time that you've played a Lily, though!

Nikki: It is not. It's actually the third time I've played a Lily! My first Lily was Lili Zanotto in Psychonauts, and then I played the lovable Lilly in The Walking Dead from Telltale, and now I'm a Lily in Campo Santo's amazing game Firewatch.

Erin: I'm pretty sure in the backstory behind my character's name is that it's Sean Vanaman's girlfriend's name. But she's a cool person in real life, so I was fine. Although I wouldn't say that this character is based off of her, because this character is... uh... I guess I always pictured her changing majors constantly in college because she can't decide what she wants to do. Like she's gone through like psychology and sociology and like and just constantly flunking out of everything. Switching until something sticks.

Nikki: That's good. You had ambition. I don't think my character really either. She just was a kind of drunk, cutting class...

Erin: This isn't the first time that they've done something like this.

Nikki: Not at all. I think they were professionals at it. They were good. They were good at getting people to buy them booze, you know, totally that kind of thing. Let's go stand outside of 7-11...

Erin: Whenever people ask me like, "Oh, who did you play in Firewatch?" It's like, oh, remember that time on Day One where you saw these silhouettes of like gyrating women? I was one of those! I probably called you a fuckin' asshole! That was me!

Nikki: That's a dubious honor, but it's still an honor.

Erin: Totally. Yeah. Little little tiny bit of a really cool game.

13. Building a Continuous, Streaming World



Ben: Hi everyone, this is a Ben Burbank, I'm a programmer at Campo Santo, predominantly doing graphics work and performance stuff. And I'm here with Jane.

Jane: Hi! I'm back.

Ben: And we're going to talk a little bit about in general, how the world sort of streams in. This is a big open world game. There are like what? Tens of thousands of trees, somewhere in there?

Jane: Yeah, and we have how many chunks of the world that we stream in and out?

Ben: There are 100 plus... over a hundred and twenty. One of the big challenges with that was we have to remove parts of it when you're not looking at it because video game consoles and computers don't like to draw things that aren't seen.

Jane: Especially not a lot of trees.

Ben: Yeah, it's a lot, a lot of work for that little graphics card to do, to try and draw all those, that big forest. So, um, the canyon is one of the spots where we have like obvious occlusion where you can't see most of the world. So, we unload like the

tower hub, the tower that you see in the canyon is fake, it's a small fake version, which is a common trick.

Jane: Yeah, it's like a very low-cost version of what would actually be there.

Ben: One of the biggest challenges for Jane and people building the levels was figuring out line of sight. So how far can you see, like if you have a point where you can see entirely across the map, we had to be very careful about what is actually loaded and what's actually drawing

Jane: Even though the Canyon is pretty much a straight corridor. We have to put in some kinks in there. So, you know, I'm like right in the middle, there's a little area where you have to go around a rock... this is so that we could make sure you won't be looking at the lake when we, um, basically deleted out the world.

Ben: The game also, you know, it's, it's sort of non-linear, like there's a linear story going on, but there's the ability for the player to just go backwards. So, we also had to keep in mind reverse line of sight and things like that, which is a little different than a traditional action game or something.

Jane: Kinda like a little puzzle game almost to figure out when we stream in and out things. So hopefully you don't notice any of it because if you do, that's not... that's actually us not doing a great job.

Ben: You probably will notice it though sometimes. I'm sorry about that.

14. Caves: They're Complicated



Jane: Hi, I'm Jane, we're back.

Olly: And I'm Olly.

Jane: Let's talk about this cave Olly.

Olly: Oh, let's not.

Jane: This cave really gave us all quite a bit of headache. Actually. I was actually kind of having a mini panic attack because one of the hardest things to light in games actually is, um, any area that's sort of half indoor, half outdoor, and this, a cave is a pain in the butt to light

Olly: it is well having, um, we thought you'd be an old pro at this having worked on a game called The Cave. But it was, it caused a lot of problems in terms of the logic gating of, the environment switches because every time the time-of-day changes in the game, it has to, it then sets that time of day...

Jane: There's no doorway, really.

Olly: ...so the way the cave is lit, it actually just changes the time of day in the whole game. So, like when you hit the trigger, if you could somehow magically

transport yourself back outside the cave, you'd see like the sun spinning through the sky, the sky changing, um, and it was a real, it was really hard to make that process and visible to the player and make it feel natural.

Jane: Not to mention that when you're inside the cave, everything also has to look really dark. And um, we use a method called image-based lighting throughout the game and that basically means that all the objects, like all the trees and rocks just look out to the sky to see what their lighting should be. And so, in the cave, we actually had to do a sort of like a fake sky for anything inside that is just pure black, so the lighting inside would be appropriately dark.

Olly: But still navigable to a player without a flashlight.

Jane: And so, and also to be able to, um, have a smooth transition when you're going from the, um, know brightly lit outside to the really dark inside and coming back out again and having the, all the appropriate logic for the time of day like Olly said... it was just a real pain in the butt.

15. The Figure: A Creep, Or Just Some Guy?



Patrick: I love the little details in Firewatch's branching dialogue. Um, there are a lot of very subtle, hard to notice things that Sean put in a while writing it that you really couldn't notice without multiple playthroughs, but they add up to this feeling that you're talking to real people who, just like real people, kind of echo back things you said earlier, who continue in-jokes that have been established, et cetera, et cetera. And one of the subtlest that I don't think I noticed until I was rewiring the game midway through is the spooky figure who you meet towards the end of day one.

Sean: *Spoooooooky figure!* If the teens call you a creep, Henry calls the guy who's putting a flashlight in his face a creep. There's some guy out here creeping or something like, there's a creep out here, and she's like, a creep, Henry? Like there's a guy who spooking me out here and I don't like it. And I mean, I like doing stuff like that. I pay a lot of attention to the, sort of, infectiousness of language, especially in this office. Someone will start using a turn of phrase that then I'll be at lunch with someone later, I'll be out with Jake or whatever, and then I'll hear the phrase through them. You know, like if somebody was saying, "oh, there was a total creep outside at the bus stop", then it wouldn't be long, 18 hours later, it would be totally conceivable to hear Jake be like, "oh yeah, this guy. That guy's kind of a creep. I don't know if we should have him by" or whatever. And I'd be like, man, OK, like that word is now like bubbling along

the surface of our social network here and people are like that. People are weird sort of like passive, like non-participatory sponges sometimes, and I just like putting that stuff in the writing. And you can do that in games in a way that you can't do that in other media. If you do that in like a book or something, it's so double underlined. It feels like you're making a big point as an author. But in a game, because it's player driven, and it's passive, it just feels causal and the way the world works.

17. Firewatch's Day Structure



Chris: Hi, I'm Chris.

Sean: And I'm Sean and Day One ended abruptly. A lot of games don't do that. Structurally you sort of get to an end point. You touch a flag or you continue on infinitely with no cuts. Cuts are very rare in games that have sort of a...

Chris: ...first-person games, especially. The idea for that came from the movie Dallas Buyers Club. I remember so specifically seeing the first time that movie cuts to a day title card where you learn that the Matthew McConaughey character has been diagnosed with AIDS and essentially given 30 days to live and then it cuts and it says "day one" and it was such a....that was like a gut punch when you see that because of what it implies and I'm, I was like, oh man, our game is set in basically a limited amount of time and there's like this tense thing that happens that makes it, you know, it's not as though there's like a specific date that's coming up, but there is like tension now that exists. Also, we had to figure out just how to get around the fact that we had a big open world and needed to tell linear story and so I just came in the next day and pitched that idea based on that movie.

Sean: And we all just thought it was like stylish and interesting and solved so many problems. So, we did.

Chris: It ended up creating a lot more problems, but I think it worked overall.

18. Forrest Byrnes



Olly: Hey, it's Olly again.

Jake: And Jake. So, I feel that we're right now in close proximity to Forrest Byrnes.

Olly: I think the idea for Byrnes came around when we realized that Smokey the Bear was, it was not a public domain figure and we realized this... but also something that people associate really closely to the idea of a mascot with wilderness parks.

Jake: So what if, what if we created something far worse than Smokey the Bear!

Olly: What if we made something horrifying and strange. I think original idea was that as the game kind of built up, you'd find these Forrest Byrnes posters that would get gradually more sinister and be this sort of like externalization of Henry's inner paranoia sort of creeping in. But... that did not happen. We didn't do that. We just made a wacky character and stuck him in the game.

Jake: I think there's one of the Forrest Byrnes posters survives in a couple of places like Delilah's tower at the end has the, the Forrest Byrnes Can Dig It poster. But the one that says, "Snuff it out!" with him holding a match in the face of a child... that's out. I'm, yeah, I know even up until up until the moment that

Forrest Byrnes went into the game, I feel like there was a hesitance from the team to include him in the game...

Olly: ...but I went in and just put him in.

Jake: You like rogue modelled the Forrest Byrnes stand up. And then right before the GDC Demo I put them on the back of the outhouse and then it turns out that he was really fun. Um, fun Forrest Byrnes fact: for a while you could use him as a physics object and then we've discovered that you could surf Forrest Byrnes and use him to get to inaccessible areas. So, you can no longer do that. Unfortunately.

Olly: Much to my chagrin.

Jake: Surf Byrnes down the shale slide not allowed. Anyway, that's him. Enjoy him, use him well.

19. Overhearing Delilah's Radio Conversation



Chris: Hey, it's Chris again.

Sean: And Sean.

Chris: Hey, so the conversation that you may be hearing or maybe coming up soon, I'm has Delilah taking a call from another lookout, unbeknownst to her Henry can hear this all happening and when she finishes that call, use the player can choose to call her on it or not call her on it. And that was a very interesting piece of writing and design, I think.

Sean: Yeah, I really loved the idea we had here, and I love the way it is performed, but I feel like I especially would add something to it if I were to go back into the game and a noodle around. Um, it was kind of, this is a kind of a confusing call for people and I'm sure if it was for you, you'll understand why, which is that people get really hung up on the fact that Delilah takes this mysterious call. And then it's never sort of like overtly explained that it's, she's just doing her job. She's just literally just talking to someone else. And the lens of what you hear it is 100 percent is Henry's paranoia. But I feel like that could've been underscored here way more had I let you, the player, like find a nuanced middle ground and sort of pry at her about what that call was without freaking out. If you call her on it, Henry gets very, very defensive. And while I think that goes to illustrate the fact that Henry doesn't have a lot of capacity for nuance and

middle ground because he's so damaged and bummed to be in the situation he's in, I feel like you kind of did the players a disservice by not letting them feel out the relationship in a potential mystery early on.

Chris: I think that dated from a, an earlier revision of the game in which, we were, we were barreling towards more of a heartbreak between Henry and Delilah. And this was maybe just one thing that didn't quite get that last tweak.

Sean: But I still liked the scene. Yeah.

20. Hawk's Rest



Sean: Hi Olly, it's nice that we're doing a tape together.

Olly: I know. Is this the first one?

Sean: It's our first and only one.

Olly: Oh, that's a shame.

Sean: I feel like we've done so much together. Not on tape. At least not recorded in a way that you know about. And here we are talking about Hawk's Rest, you conceived this area...

Olly: The idea was that it would seem from the outside, a sort of innocuous little house on the cliff much your own lookout, but when you open the door you get the surprise that it's been burnt away, and you just see the rush of wind as you open the door and I thought that would be a really fun reveal to the player.

Sean: Yeah, and I, I sort of, screwed it up when I first wrote this scene because all these sort-of like Hawk's Rest dialog, and all the stuff about Raccoon Carter was, as you were walking up the hill, you could report the cabin, which was a lookout tower, at the top of the hill, and then get into this story about its former inhabitant as you were approaching it. And then it sort of buried the moment in

a way. So, we took all that stuff out and I made it, I hacked in — very inelegantly I think — that Delilah just doesn't answer you when you ask her about what the house at the top of the hill is. And then you get to experience it alone, before getting the story about Raccoon Carter. And I'm really happy with the way that worked out. Also...

Olly: There's a secret!

Sean: ...the raccoon that lives in the stove you may or may not know about, is only there on certain days because of a myriad of design reasons. But if you're here on any day, that isn't day two and you open that stove, there's a little critter in there! And that was animated by James, textured by Olly, drawn by Olly. I really liked that raccoon, Oliver. You did a very nice job on that raccoon. Also, you did a very nice job on the rest of the game, and I'm only going to tell you that on the Hawk's Rest tape. I'm actually going to edit this out. I don't want anyone hearing me ever compliment you in the record, but because this is our only tape together... yeah, I really love the way this area came together.

Olly: Lovely. Lovely the way it is. Very nice. Well done.

21. The Visual Effects of Firewatch



Jake: Hey, it's Jake again.

Mark: And Mark's here.

Jake: So is there anything a style wise that you had to consider on this game as opposed to doing work in like a, I don't know, a lot of the other stuff you've done is probably more triple-a in scope.

Mark: In my previous work I've done a lot more ridiculous over the top Hollywood type, blood squibs and explosions and laser beams and that kind of jazz. So, it was neat to just sort of like stop and think about what the relevant effects to walking around a national park would be. Just sort of ambient, natural, secondary motion that you would want in the world, without being obnoxiously overpowered as most things you would do for a triple a...

Jake: Actually, again, you know, the world, the entire world looks hazy and covered in smoke as the fire gets closer and closer. And um, obviously we couldn't just fill the entire world with smoking because everyone's, a graphics card would melt, and it would also look like a big pile of garbage. So, it seems like you and Paolo, who helped, who did a lot of these sort of programming side of this, ended up inventing this thing that the team called the "Henry Smoke Barfer"?

Mark: I do think Nels coined that one, but...

Jake: It was probably Nels. Yeah. Henry at this point in the game is wandering around with basically a Pig Pen cloud around him. But when you see the sparks flying around on Day 79 or the sort of lingering haze on Day 77 and 78, that's actually Henry's body emitting those. Then leaving them behind in the trail.

Mark: I made up a group of emitters that rotate around the watchtower, that if you look real closely, you could probably make it out. But it gives that sort of feeling of, it's super intensely smokey outside...

Jake: You're in the middle of his big swirling storm. But actually, it's just, you know, six feet of smoke spinning around the outside of the building.

Mark: Pretty much.

22. Marketing Moments vs Game Moments



Chris: Hey, Chris again.

Sean: And Sean.

Chris: Hey, if you saw the second trailer for Firewatch, there's a moment that takes place here where Delilah points out that there's someone in Henry's tower. Henry points out that he's not there. Camera swings back to the tower and it's a big dramatic ending. Of course, that moment happens in a completely different part of the map in the actual game and is totally unrelated to this moment that you're now experiencing,

Sean: And this was a trailer that we debuted with Sony at E3, so we knew we had a big audience, and a lot of people are going to see it. It's really, really challenging, you all know because everyone goes to movies. What it's like to watch a trailer for a movie that you're excited about and maybe have already decided to see and then be shown too much stuff and every once in a while a movie either has the ability to or the sort of the Chutzpah to just show you a scene that hit the cutting room floor or an alternate version of something that gets you feeling the way you should feel and excited for the movie as presented, but it doesn't spoil it for you, and I think that's... I'm really happy that we ended up doing that. I think it's good that you're not lying. It's not like we showed you a mechanic, but you can't do anything.

Chris: I think that we basically had to find a way to accurately convey that type of tension and mood of the game without spoiling it, and so we basically ended up just writing those trailers to fit. I think they worked.

Sean: Yeah. I'm happy with 'em.

23. The Disposable Camera



Ben: Hi, it's Ben.

Jake: Oh, it's Jake. Hey Ben. So, let's talk about Henry's camera or I guess more specifically the Goodwin family camera. We liked the idea of Brian and his dad bringing one of those little cardboard cameras out with them and we thought at various points in production, maybe we should cut taking photos because it's really complicated. Maybe we should just, just see the ones at the end and the credits and be and be shocked by the Goodwin family.

Ben: When I joined the project, I actually was super excited about this feature. I liked the idea of having the camera have a little bit of a real world like feel to it. people seem to like when you showed an animated gif of it on twitter, people went crazy remembering these things.

Jake: Especially once the idea was proposed that on PC you could print out your photos or you can upload them to the Internet and get them developed, which the thing that we do.

Ben: Yeah, the photos that we take are actually secretly five-megapixel, first generation digital camera quality photos, but just good enough that if you print them out, they look OK.

Jake: Once we went all in on that as a concept, but it seemed like having the camera in the game was like an essential no-brainer. And then we went all in on, making it work like a real camera. Like we really wanted... you'll have a fixed number of shots you can take, every time you take a picture of Henry has to wind the camera by hand.

Ben: And some players like ignore it and don't take pictures. They'll take like the two that Delilah tells you to. And then the end credits will play, and they'll see two pictures and maybe have a little feeling of loss that they didn't participate in that feature.

Jake: Or people who get super bummed because they get really into the mystery and take pictures of like strange machines and ripped up campsites and a dead Brian Goodwin and then get to the end credit sequence and go, oh, that was....

Ben: Yeah, they only see the sad things.

Jake: I liked that, depending on how much you use the camera and what you choose to take a picture of, you end up getting a different story at the end of the game. That's the thing that I think worked out the best with the camera and made me the happiest that we actually went all out on building the stupid thing.

Ben: Yeah, it's really nice.

24. Environmental Breadcrumbs



Chris: Hey Chris here.

Patrick: And Patrick.

Chris: Hey Patrick. So, at this point in the game, we're starting off on the search for the teens. One big challenge we frequently had on Firewatch was figuring out how to guide players when the person giving you your current objective doesn't actually know where to send you. Delilah knows you need to find the teens, but neither of you have any idea where to start.

Patrick: And in this case we'd used telephone poles to get you up to Bear Tooth Point, and we're now using some beer cans to sort of lead you in the general direction away from that. Of course, we rapidly, saw that these teens were drinking a truly ludicrous number of beers in one walk.

Chris: I think you and I both placed quite a few of these beer cans, probably you even more than I. It started to sort of strain credulity.

Patrick: Right? Which is why I think we had to add that case at the end just to make it plausible. That there are something like 30 cans out there.

Chris: Probably the best tool we ended up coming up with for this, which was the smoke plume, was because we were getting increasingly uncomfortable with stretching fiction so far to the point of adding this many like Hansel and Gretel beer cans.

Patrick: That's right. And but even then, the smoke plume was not enough. Many players didn't notice it or weren't looking up, which we know is a common game design problem. And that's when we started adding a dialogue where Henry could call in to Delilah and basically say, do you have any ideas? I'm lost. I still can't find them. Kind of mirroring what we saw in play testing where people did get lost and got frustrated. Ultimately when that fell down...

Chris: Eventually, if you have not noticed anything, you haven't asked Delilah about any of this stuff, she will just call you and say, hey, I see some smoke, maybe that's where you should go.

Patrick: And that pretty well sews it up.

Chris: The sort of full court press of all of those things. I think most players eventually find their way to the teens. I mean, we, we figured it was OK for players to get lost a little bit. I mean, that is the point of this. You are supposed to be on an aimless search, a little bit of our vision, but you know, I think with all of the different tools we added in, most players eventually feel like they're actually on some kind of trail.

Patrick: I mean, I suggested an omniscient satellite AI that could contact you and tell you exactly where to go. But that was shot down.

Chris: It was a late cut.

25. Climbing and Navigating Obstacles



Will: Hi, I'm Will and I was the game play and systems programmer on Firewatch.

James: And I'm James and I was the animator on Firewatch.

Will: And we're here to talk about climbing and mantling today.

James: We had a bunch of stuff that essentially was more um, point-to-point interactive stuff, where you sort of look to the rock you wanted to put your hand on it and click on it and you'd kind of do that. A lot of the platform-y type stuff just got paired down because as you make the game you realize what game you're making and it's not really about being an athletic climbing person. It just kind of like made the game slower when you were trying to get to the next conversation. Mostly what the climbing stuff ended up being useful for in game design terms was characterization. So, some of the mantels do a decent job of getting across that Henry is, kind of a lumbering, slightly heavier person as we sort of like force you to watch Henry kind of slug over an edge rather than being a nimble, Mirrors Edge-y person.

Will: We also use it a lot of times to break up sight lines so that you get a good vista as you come up over a mantle, like when you see the man with the flashlight for the first time or kind of see the burned forest

James: In the cave, sometimes we use the camera animation on mantles to hide a sort of teleport to a different part of the cave. And which was a pretty useful actually. So that was quite good.

Will: The reason that it all got paired down as we, you know, didn't want you to ever fall off the cliff, didn't want you to go back down them. I'm like, nobody ever wanted to climb back up those twice. So, we just made them simpler and simpler and simpler until eventually getting to you just hit the button and climb all the way up.

James: One of the earliest conversations I've had with Jake, he just sort of casually mentioned, oh, and you know, we're thinking that you can't die in this game. And which now seems like the most obvious design decision ever for Firewatch. But I'd only been making games before then where it's like, yeah, and then you have your, your character can die and you respawn, like traditional video game stuff. And the idea suddenly of like, oh, like how do you make content that still feels like I'm climbing over stuff that I'm doing things but with absolutely no risk? And I remember at the very beginning being like, oh god, is that going to be a huge problem? Of course, now if you ever saw Henry fell to his death in the game, it would be ludicrous and ruin the moment. Absolutely. But Firewatch 2 is going to have lots and lots of falling your death obviously.

26. The “Time of Day” System



Ben: This is Ben again, and I'm here with Paolo.

Paolo: Hello, I'm Paolo, I was the graphics programmer on Firewatch.

Ben: So, we're here to talk a little bit about the time-of-day system that the game uses, and the skybox stuff. You're in an area where there's a weird device you can use this step and mess around with those while we talk.

Paolo: As you can see right now, you can walk on the different parts there, and you'll see the weather changing. So immediately when we started working on Firewatch, there were a couple of important points. We had to have a dynamic time of day, so at any point people could trigger changing the sky, changing the fog, changing each individual component independently. At the same time, this has all sorts of technical implications, but the most important is OK, how do we represent all of this information? Games have, um, many, many ways of a baking data, which means that you sort of gather the lighting information in a scene and then you save it into memory, which is usually a texture or other data structures, to then use it in real time. Now, the problem with that was that we had a lot of different permutations and we wanted them to change in real time, and also, we didn't know ahead of time how many we were going to have. So, we tried to go with a fully dynamic solution. In this case, what dynamic means is just that as you walk around, you'll see the sun moving around, the sky color

changing, the fog color changing, and the shadows moving. So, all those components are always rendered every frame and there is no information that is stored anywhere.

Ben: So, what pieces make up the sky, again?

Paolo: The sky, we tried first and approach of representing sort-of a simplified version of the scattering equation and seeing what that would look like. And it was looking good in the game, but it was still very difficult to author. And since Olly as the art director is absolutely talented with colors, at some point we just sat down and we sort of worked together and said, OK, imagine that you could just paint the sky in Photoshop and think about how that would work in the game. It might just magically work. And by doing that we basically dissected his process of assembling, just a painted sky in Photoshop and we created a shader — which are basically programs that are run on the GPU to render things — that suited his exact style. So really the sky is just a series of gradients that blend into each other, with a couple of controls to change curves and attenuations between them. So, as you will walk around you be able to see how, both the sky changes, and then the fog adapts to the same color, and the sun moves in the right direction. And then there were just a couple of numbers to make sure that like the brightness around the sun would be higher so that it would still sort of represent and give the feeling of what the sky and how the sky behaves.

Ben: And this, this like gave Olly the ability to test some things very quickly.

Paolo: Exactly. Having immediate feedback for filling a world that was as big as Firewatch, especially for the sort of limited team size that we had, was absolutely important. We had to have a way so that artists would make something quickly, have an idea what it will look in the game and knowing that it was pretty close to what we were going to ship.

27. The Canyon Crossing: A Nearly-Deadly Addition



Jake: Hey Jane.

Jane: Hi Jake. Let's talk about how I almost killed you over this canyon crossing.

Jake: Why would anyone have any objection to something in a game as, as lovely as this area?

Jane: So originally when we first built this whole canyon, you can only walk through the bottom where the creek is.

Jake: It looks like it looks really lovely when you're walking on the bottom looking up.

Jane: And you cannot get close to anything up here.

Jake: And you can just imagine what the top of the canyon looks like and you don't ever have to see it or make it.

Jane: And basically, there was nothing up here.

Jake: But what if... think about this though... what if you could walk across the top of it and look down and then we built all of that too?

Jane: I just remember the day when you mocked this up on the paper map and just gingerly just showed it to me and then I looked at it and I was like....

Jake: "What's that line doing going over there..."

Jane: No way. No way Jake.

Jake: There was no way I was going to win that. I mean, I, I, I ended up just building a lot of it myself to try.

Jane: And you were like, OK, how about this other thing? I was like, OK, this is fine, but THIS is DEFINITELY not happening.

Jake: I just secretly built a million walls and trees and did every single thing that I possibly could to make it so you would look....

Jane: You did a good job though because the thing I was really worried about was when you're up there you end up seeing basically the whole length of the canyon and then also all the way to basically towards Delilah's tower, which means it's like....

Jake: Through like the Bear Tooth Point area.... Mule Point...

Jane: It'd be way too much game to try to draw. That was the original sort of, you know, fear.

Jake: It was a lot of very careful... like... and then you go around this turn and then you secretly dropped down three feet and a bunch of huge trees come up. I was very happy that we were able to get the canyon crossing again because it's one of the few places where I think you do a total figure eight over yourself.

Jane: It was nice that you managed to problem-solve all the sightline areas before I lose my mind.

Jake: Thanks for not killing me. I'm alive to be on this commentary track.

28. Duck Sounds!



Jane: Hello, this is Jane again.

Chris: And Chris.

Jane: And we are now by the lake and um, you might be noticing that there's some really sweet duck sounds by the lake.

Chris: Jane bugged me for duck sounds for... months. Actually, one of the oldest, you know, we track our tasks on the game with like a task tracker or a bug tracker, so you rank them all of a priority, and I think the like lowest or second lowest priority thing on my list for months was "duck sounds for Jane" and that just sat there until I think one day I just didn't have a lot to do and I was like, you know what, I'm doing it. I'm bumping the duck sounds up the chain. I think I just, I just looked on the Internet for public domain duck noises.

Jane: You were actually wondering what kind of ducks there would be too.

Chris: I looked it up, I researched it and I think I was like... mainly there... you know, like I think I fudged it a little bit because I didn't want it to just be like the same two. I wanted there to be a variety, so it didn't get annoying if you hung out there for a while.

Jane: Not just ducks, it's like waterfowl of all kinds.

Chris: So, I branched out a bit, but when we got them in! Thanks for bugging me about the duck sounds.

Jane: Yeah. Won't be a real lake without duck sounds.

29. The Story of Ropes, Climbing, Physics and Change



Will: Hi, this is Will.

James: And this is James again.

Will: We're talking about the rope right now. You should have, there should be one nearby.

James: Yeah. The rope was the very, very first thing I ever did in the entire game. It kind of seeped into being quite an important part of the world layout. We sort of have this whole Metroidvania items thing and the rope was very much our first, like, you know, that's the rockets that let you get through the door in Metroid. It was such an early flag we planted in the ground for ourselves. So yeah, there were lots of technical things...

Will: All the rope climbs are different. All the rope slides are different. Minorly different, but different enough. So, the rope had to be physically simulated. It couldn't be just a pre-canned animation. In order to get that to work, took a ton of time, lots of iterations. In the end I had to basically make Henry's hand a gravity well, whenever he is on the rope, and then grab the nearest parts of the rope, and re-skin them to bones that I was just making out of math around Henry's hand and belt. So, his like left-hand, right-hand and belt all takeover as fake bones and we re-skinned the rope every frame to get that to match up

perfectly. And if you look real close at the rope, you can see sort of a little bit in front of his hands, the texture on it, the tiling changes and kind of squishes and stretches and squishes and stretches as you go down. And that's because the rope position doesn't naturally always line up with even spacing when I swap in those fake bones.

James: Yeah, the rope is one of the best examples, if you were to like zoom the camera out and look at what's going on, where like I'm sort of animating by the seat of my pants, and just keeping his hands in the perfect position so that, that transition between the physics rope and the skinning version of the rope, it doesn't, blends to strangely, and is probably the, the set of animations in the game that has the most versions. There's probably like ten different versions of climbing down. There used to be things where your hands would swap in front of you, you know, picking the rope from one to the other and obviously that is unbelievably ridiculously complicated. Once we had the physical rope and...

Will: The thing is, you can get on it from anywhere, and at any time, and it all works. So it was, it was worth it in the end, but quite a bit... quite a bit of effort.

30. Atmospheric Effects: Light, Haze, and Color



Ben: Hi, this is Ben again and I'm here with Paolo.

Paolo: Hello!!

Ben: We're going to talk about stylistic fogging and some of the other effects in the game.

Paolo: For this stylistic fog we basically use the same approach that we use for the other rendering components and technologies in Firewatch. Which was how do we get something that allows Olly and Jane to really just be directive and paint colors and information like they want into a 3D world. So, the only challenge that was there really was how do we translate sort of a 3D scene that has, that depth into it into layers of colors. And immediately we came up with this technique of using a one-dimensional texture that is applied, you can imagine, imagine that the image, it's um, it's a sort of a rectangular image goes from left to right. Imagine that left is the color that is closer to the player, and right is the color that is in the distance. So, in that way you're basically able to paint color in the depth of the world. And that really gave Jean and Olly the control they needed to make the Fireworks colors as beautiful as they are,

Ben: Yeah, it really matches a lot of Olly's original poster and previz work for the game. And that technique is used a lot in like film. In film, they wouldn't even

just use one texture sometimes, they'll use like hundreds of these strips to, to layer out an entire scene, but can't do that in a video game because we got to render in a lot of frames per second on bad computers sometimes.

Paolo: For that, like for the color corrections specifically, we use the, the plugin that was actually available in the Unity asset store just worked right off the bat for us. It gave us sort of the real time tweaking that we needed. And thanks to that, we saved some development time, which was really precious.

Ben: Yeah, that was the "Amplify Color", if you're really wanting to make your own Firewatch. And in an area like this, Aspen Grove, you can see all those effects coming together. You see we have God Rays coming from the sun. We have depth of field. If you pick up an object to blur out the world, you can see all the different colors that Olly's manipulating beyond just like what the sky and light would provide.

31. Designing and Building Henry



Olly: Hi, this is Olly again.

Sindre: And this Sindre, I worked as a character artist.

Olly: One of the most important things about this game from our point of view was to try and get the player to kind of inhabit this character Henry. And a big part of that was his character design. Um, we wanted him to be a little different to the regular kind of character you might expect from this kind of game. He's a little older, a little more... portly and we wanted to make sure that when you look down you can see your body and you really feel as if you are playing this character. And to do that, I designed him from the point of view of, like, trying to make him feel like an old man in terms of the way he moves. And he looked. We used a lot of um, I guess reference for this...

Sindre: Yeah, I had a mood board that I made that's just essentially just like a collage of, like, Louie C.K., and there was also a fair bit of Wreck-It Ralph and the Heavy from Team Fortress, so I had these heavy, sort of slow-moving characters. Actually, when I was modeling, I would actually put a camera in Henry's head so I could look down at his body, which is like, I think I mostly designed characters for third-person games and mobile and stuff like that, I was not used to, you know, designing anything from that perspective. The initial model I sent you guys was pretty much just a bunch of primitives mashed

together, like really rough sort of like, you know, early, early Dreamcast 3D kind-of looking stuff just to get like a feel for the, you know, proportions, and to give James something to rig so he could just get something moving and kind of get a preview of the motions. Cause, you know, you don't need a fully formed highly detailed 3D model to just do animation. So actually, nailing that stuff on early on was really important, I think.

Olly: One of the biggest focuses was the hands because those are the things that the player sees most, and they're the most sort of expressive of Henry's, so we wanted to make sure that the shapes will really, um, simple and bold and evocative in order to allow James, our animator, to kind of give him the best material to work with and portray the character through those motions.

Sindre: Yeah, they're practically the main character.

32. Who Wrecked the Camp?



Sean: Hey, it's Sean.

Chris: And Chris, hey Sean.

Sean: So, we are at the teen's camp that has been destroyed, ransacked, rummaged, torn apart. I know you had some confusion over this, Chris.

Chris: I did. I didn't realize I had confusion. So, I was the person who did all the gameplay wiring logic hookup stuff for this scene, and the entire time I was doing it, I, for some reason, was under the mistaken impression that it was a bear that destroyed this. I, for some reason it convinced myself that oh, Goodwin was sort of involved in framing Henry for teen stuff, but also just separately and coincidentally, a bear just blasted through here and tore up the tent. And I think I didn't realize until the game was almost done that that was not the case.

Sean: And I think that's one of the challenges of making a game like this where telling a story that doesn't explicitly call out why everything is happening. I think me personally, I think you'd agree with me Chris, because we talk about movies and stories and a lot, is I really find it obnoxious when a story goes out of its way to explain everything and handhold you through the plot of the story. Ultimately you, the player may have thought... it doesn't really matter to you whether it

was a Goodwin or a bear because it's, it's doing all the things on an emotional level that it needs to do as a scene. Which is stress you out, realize there's danger, and create the fact that the teens feel like it was, you. Like you just know it's not you, so that's what works here.

Chris: Or, you may have correctly intuited what happened and that's also good.

Sean: Goodwin sets out to cause you to distress and frame you for acts of violence such as this....

Chris: By inflaming the already existing tension between you and these teens.

Sean: Exactly right. because he just wants you out of here. you entered that cave on your first day and he knows what's in the bottom of it. And doesn't want you to. Yeah, it trips a, a trigger for him, yeah.

33. Picking Up Objects



Will: Hey, this is Will.

James: And this is James.

Will: We actually spent a lot of time trying to get the physicality of Firewatch nailed down and one of the big parts of that was getting objects in your hand, like feeling like you could pick things up and touch them. Turned out to be quite a bit of work though, you know, nothing that was like reinventing the wheel. It was just a matter of getting, you know, very specific offsets and very specific grips for every single item in the game. Nearly.

James: We have tons of tons of concepts and we've looked at all sorts of games and like Far Cry 2 and things for like where's the best example of grabbing something in the world and it isn't just floating in front of you in this sort of Half-Life 2 style. We ended up just basically popping it into your hand over one frame but making sure that happens at the exact moment that your hand is swiping over it. And it's worked surprisingly well. There were sort of strange things as well, they're like these giant hands, and then like you put a beer can in his hand and suddenly be like, oh right, yeah, it looks like a little miniature minibar airplane kind-of can, and so there all kinds of strange little things that cropped up, but actually having the objects in your hands and you could turn them around from any angle, it ended up making it worth doing all these super

detailed props. Like Olly would make the fireworks and do just really funny, cool designs that you can only actually see if you turn them around and looked at them really closely and I think it paid off, basically.

Will: And those are just a couple of poses that we blend between. Those aren't even very complicated, the lookovers, right?

James: Yeah, not at all, really. There's basically one for books and there's one for everything else on. It's just pretty much two points like fully to the left and fully to the right with just like a sort of intelligent blend between those two things. So, um, there were so many items in the game we couldn't have authored individual examines for them all, but even that ended up being incredibly hard to tune and to get just right. Again, lots of iteration.

34. Delilah Drawing Henry



Olly: It's Olly again.

Jake: Ooh, it's Jake.

Olly: I realized a sort of halfway through development that the player has a kind of nebulous idea of what Henry looks like, and that would be a fun thing to play with by getting the player to describe themselves to Delilah, and then having those answers feed into a drawing that you then find in Delilah's tower at the end of the game.

Jake: I think actually even one step back behind that you had done a sketch really, really early on of the inside of Delilah's tower that just had a drawing of Henry's face and said "Henry" and pointed at his tower and that was... that was the inspiration maybe. Maybe Delilah... I thought that moment already was really cool. You get to Delilah's tower and see that she'd drawn what she thinks you look like, and an Arrow pointing and you're looking at tower, but in that sketch, it was Henry's face, and how would... I think you said that, oh, this doesn't make any sense because she would not draw an on-model perfect Henry. And then Sean took the Delilah Draws Henry idea and ran with it and made it the conversation for Day 3, because I think Day 3's initial design was, you nail up some boards! Nels and I had to actually build the end result from all the sketches you did have the different of the different faces, shirts, and mustaches.

Olly: Originally it was going to be, I was just going to draw individual drawings for each. Yeah...

Jake: It ended up being well over a thousand, maybe thousands and thousands of variants that would've had to be drawn! Yeah. We had to do something smarter, so we broke it all down into pieces. And that piece of paper that you find in Delilah's tower is actually, I think being like put together from pieces in real time for each player. Like there is, there's no texture that has any one of those things.

Olly: And it allowed us to do a somewhat sort of shonky Delilah drawing, which I think is quite funny and unexpected.

Jake: I love that Delilah is bad at drawing. It's a game full of everyone who can draw, because you drew all of it, so it's good that Delilah just draws... phbbbt.

Olly: Yeah, just draws a bad drawing.

35. The Outhouse and Generator



Jane: Hi, this is Jane again.

Chris: And Chris.

Jane: And we are right by the outhouse. And this is also where we decided to put the generator that Henry has to use for power.

Chris: To make it as annoying as possible for when he's using the facilities.

Jane: So normally I think the generator's not usually by the outhouse. Usually, it's actually under the tower where it would be more convenient, but we decided to put it there because it's usually more interesting for gameplay if you sort of cluster a few objects of interest together, so it's not just super spread out.

Chris: It ended up being a real challenge for audio because most of the time when you're in the tower you don't want to hear the generator because it would just get annoying and repetitive. But there were certain times, like when you first arrive at the tower and you flip the power switch on generator goes on, you want the player to hear the generator, so it needs to be much louder. But then you don't want them to like walk down the stairs and the generators is incredibly loud. So, I had to do all this weird cheating basically to cheat the level of the generator audio volume depending on what the game needs it to be. Also,

funny story about the generator. So, you found this like classic generator model...

Jane: I think it's called Genero... Generis... I think it's something like that. Basically, I based it off of this real generator, but you know to not infringe on anyone's brand name. I just changed a little bit and although funny I would just call it the Generic.

Chris: And then we actually heard from someone we know works for the real generator company. He was telling us that when he saw that in the game it cracked him up because at the that actual company when they're frustrated at their own product, if something is like not doing its job, they actually call it Generic Generator. We managed to nail it, completely nail the insider terminology for this classic generator.

36. Elks: A Lament



Ben: Hi, it's Ben.

James: And it's James again.

Ben: And this is Day 9, a story-only day. There's not a lot to do.

James: Yeah, primarily you eat a sandwich, but there was going to be elks, and in the sort of framing of the beautiful sunset across the canyon, there was going to be a very majestic heard of elks. And in fact, this is why we made the elk rig, as far as I recall, because now the only other place in the game where you see it are... there's a dead one which is optional, and apparently quite hard find...

Ben: Yeah, most people miss that one.

James: Yeah, there's one in the intro, but we made them so they could majestically stalk through the Canyon in a herd. And um, well actually I made an elk walk cycle, and nibbling on grass animations. But the problem was we did all this weird like, you know, sort of conjecture about like how we could implement this, and it's uneven ground and there's winding passengers through the canyon... well maybe we could do some kind of elk navigation, or we could have them walk along a spline... and then it very quickly was clear that that was very silly.

Ben: What's interesting though is this is still one of the most taken photographs in Firewatch as it is. Like people still think it's very pretty.

James: Yeah. It ended up being less is more. Everyone, you want to slap elks everywhere, but sometimes you've got to exercise restraint.

Ben: Well, game two, nothing but elks, probably.

James: I agree completely.

37. Julia



Sean: Hi Larissa, how are you?

Larissa: I'm very well, thank you. How are you?

Sean: I'm good. I think you probably know this, but in the original script, your character was not Australian. She was from Chicago. And then you were cast, and I changed the entire script.

Larissa: Hooray! For me. Yeah. I didn't actually know that she was from Chicago, but I did know that she was originally American, but then when we discussed it, you know, you had that thought of or why couldn't she be from anywhere as a, you know, the world becomes more multicultural. And therefore, since I am Australian natively any way to just, you know, capitalize on that.

Sean: It was like a beautiful discovery. It was so serendipitous because it would've been really easy, I feel like even though you and Cissy sound so different, you have different tones of voice, um, I think it would have been easy had you had an American accent for people to be a little bit confused. It's a really startling scene, the scene that we're in here, where the radio chirps and it's his wife and not his boss.

Larissa: I watched a bit of game play with people in that moment playing the game and their commentary on it and it's always really fun to have that... "what? Who is that is that is that..." you know, it's kind of like having that moment of going so unfamiliar to kind of jut in with this, with this different sound when everyone's expecting it to be Cissy.

Sean: I really don't believe we would've gotten that with such a potent pop had it not been the accent. And to the point where I think, had you had an American accent, I would've asked you to do one. I wouldn't have had the idea, had I not been presented with you as an actor. Yeah. I just, it never even occurred to me for that to be the case until it was like, well, she's the best woman for the job and oh, she also happens to be Australian. Oh wait, why isn't Julia Australian? Wait, that's so much better across the board. Why wasn't she Australian to begin with? I am bad at my job.

38. “The Delilah Brain”



Sean: On Day 2, you have a bunch of conversations with Delilah about Julia. Or not. You can choose to have those conversations in any which way you see fit, being really open about your life or lying or just sort of playing it soft and all of that stuff now comes to a head here on Day 33 and, all of the choices you make, there's something like 30 lines of inquiry, but you can experience four, I think there's like 33 maybe? You'll experience four. And whatever is true in Delilah's mind, based on that, ends up sort of triggering this conversation here where she wants to know either about Julia, a name she heard on Day 15, or wants to tell you about her life and her experiences with a guy named Javier. And a lot of players will play this game and never even know who Javier is. It might be you might not know that that character exists because of the way you talked to Delilah on Day 2.

Patrick: You learn more about Delilah if you tell her less about yourself, if I'm not mistaken.

Sean: It's actually the poles. So, if you tell her absolutely everything or you tell her absolutely nothing, yeah, you learn a lot about her. The way we've made these work on Day Two is kind of interesting. There's a lot of sort of state management going on. We're paying attention to a lot of stuff. One is just how long has it been since you've talked to Delilah, but then we also kind of need to know how long it has been since Delilah has talked to you about some heavy

life stuff. Because if she keeps calling you back and being like, so tell me about your life. So, wife, girlfriend? Blah Blah? It's just gonna feel at best, annoying. And at worst, completely unbelievable. So, we're also tracking that. And then we also don't want Delilah calling you like all the time, like we don't want her calling you when we know there's a good chance you're about to discover something big in the mystery. Like, you're about to climb to the top of the wire on Day Two. And we don't want her to be like, "so, girlfriend?" That would be bad. What we did is we actually paced the game out by putting these invisible sort of like cube triggers all over the world. I mean I've probably placed, I don't know, 30, 40 of them. And as you enter them the game just sort of asks itself, how long has it been since Delilah's called you? How long has it been since she talked about Delilah? And what is true, what does she know to be true about Julia? And it was a little harder to debug but we built a pretty clean looking, at least, I tried to build a really clean looking a state machine for it, but ultimately, I'm really happy with the way it played out in that it feels like you're wandering through the world and the conversation unfolds naturally. But furthermore, it was really fun to actually build, once I had it working. Because I could pace the game by physically moving triggers around the world, where it was like, oh that was too soon. Let's spread these apart, delete that one, but that one over here, put that one in this grove. And it was a really satisfying way to tell this part of the story.

39. Julia, Cont'd



Larissa: From my point of view, it makes it so much more heartbreaking that he leaves her so far away, and I think because I married an American, I had like a long-distance relationship for maybe four months before I came over, and it's really stinking far away. To have that separation. If it's Chicago, you kind of go, we'll get on the plane for a couple of hours and then you can go and visit her, but a 14 hour journey and the emotional heart string pull, all of that... you can, you can understand why he's so torn about what to do and also for him to move to a completely different country and then have to deal with, you know, a, a sick wife and living in a space that he's unaware of, you know. Even though of course living in the forest is about as unfamiliar as you can get as well, but you know...

Sean: Yeah, it's like 14 hours for the trailhead from Australia, and then another 14 hours in the trailhead to lookout tower, so it's like more than a day's journey away from this person.

Larissa: That's right. That's right. And then the only contact you by phone, and you know, and I think we discussed this in recording where, when you have a phone conversation with someone, it's great now with, with Skype and FaceTime and everything because you can actually see the reaction, but there's so many little nuances to the conversation that you just have no idea. Is it because they're half

asleep? Is it because they don't give a shit? Is it because, oh I'm sorry, can I swear?

Sean: Oh, you can totally swear, there are so many fucks and shits in this game you can't stand it.

Larissa: Fuckin' shit. Or is it because he doesn't give a shit about her anymore and she doesn't know, and she's confused anyway? So that kind of complexity for me made that little sane so much more beautiful and tearing at the heartstrings kind of thing.

40. You Took the Food



Ben: Hi, this is Ben again.

Gabe: And I'm Gabe. I did production and office management on Firewatch. This is Day 34 and Ben, how long did it take you before you actually saw this day?

Ben: Well, since I'm a good person, I never actually made the choice to steal that food, and did not see it until after we shipped.

Gabe: So, I definitely did. I played through every day, hundreds of times.

Ben: You did a better job than me, Gabe. I really, I didn't see it until we were submitting the first patch for PS4 when you chose this path and I was like, what? There's content here that I've never seen?

Gabe: It's my job Ben. To show you content that you've never seen.

Ben: All right. Hopefully the next game I get to see the whole thing before it goes out.

Gabe: As long as there's no moral choices in it, you will.

Ben: Yeah, that's fair.

41. Henry & Delilah's Long-Distance Intimate Moment



Sean: In the scene, Henry and Delilah get sort of the closest they get in the game in terms of their intimacy. Cissy, I think you're drinking, you've been drinking and that's pretty obvious. Rich slash Henry, you, you're you, delightfully awkward in all of your painful ways. And something. I don't know if I told you guys this, but I had this notion that this was going to get really hot and heavy. Right now, the scene sorta ends very like in a suggestive manner and I was going to write it to be much more explicit and to go into a place of just like raw nakedness even though like it's audio, but just very private and sexual, but I didn't because I was afraid.

Cissy: I love that you didn't.

Rich: I'm glad of that too.

Cissy: Number one because awkward walkie talkie sex is just awkward. But number two, because if isn't playing it as a flirty relationship, then it doesn't have to go there. And then this way kind of leaves it up to people's imaginations, which I think is more poignant than spelling it out.

Sean: I think also we became so close as a trio over this that having to sit in on that after having to write it was going to be like a bridge too far for me. Yeah. I just

wanted to say you guys did such an amazing job with very limited stuff I put on the page in the scene. This is probably my favorite scene in the game.

Cissy: You like set the mood. You lit the candle, you know.

Sean: I'll just leave this here.

Rich: Put the needle on the record.

Sean: A little Moody Blues and walk out.

Cissy: No, it was, it was easy to feel all of that. Rich, I feel like I'm yapping the whole thing, yapping on about it. How did you feel about it?

Rich: Uh..... *so good*. [everybody laughs]

42. I'm Looking at You



Sean: When Delilah asks you, "Hey, are you looking at the fire?" Most players are just either looking at it or about to trigger, pull the trigger and say or hit shift and scroll to "Yeah, I'm looking at it." And she goes, great, and starts talking about the fire. But because we are game developers and we know what you're looking at, if you were just staring at Delilah's tower, when she says, "Hey, are you looking at the fire?" Henry, without your input, will go, "no, I'm looking at you." And Delilah's response to that, the way Cissy Jones played, it is so perfect. It's surprised and like, almost like, you can feel the one little butterfly on her belly, and I'm just so tickled with it as a moment in the game. I think Jane or someone came up with it and was like, yep, we're doing that. And it was in the game very, very shortly thereafter. So, the next time you play Day 64, or if you haven't gotten to that point right now, do that. And you will be hopefully as tickled as I was.

43. The Mid-Game “Montage” Structure



Sean: Hi guys, it's Sean.

Chris: And Chris. So here on Day 76 we're concluding a series of shorter days that internally we referred to as the montage.

Sean: The goal was to figure out a way to let you play through the passage of time.

Chris: The inspiration came from a few different places and Sean, you can sort of correct or add as necessary. Um, one was just obviously the cinematic concept of a montage. We thought that's just a cool way to, you know, convey long passage of time without spending a huge amount of the player's time relative to that.

Sean: You referencing movies made me think of every sports montage ever. Every training montage. And then remembering that for like three weeks I was obsessed with this idea because we're, we're trying to figure out ways to come up with new gating mechanics. And I was like, oh, there should just be like ledges and stuff that Henry isn't strong enough to pull himself up. And then inside of this montage there should be like a part where Henry goes, like underneath his tower and there's this like a support pole that goes across. And you could just do pull ups two or three times during the montage and then by the time we get to Day 76 Henry has the strength, the upper body strength to

pull himself higher, which would explain the new gating mechanic. So, it was like sports montage to the max. We would have had to get like another 80's song in there....

Chris: Like a jock jam.

Sean: I would've killed for a jock jam in this game. I would have given up Etta James for a jock jam. Absolutely not. No.

Chris: Sports montages, as well as film montage is important influence here. Also, the game 30 Flights of Loving I think. Yeah, that, is a very short, like 10-minute experience. If you look it up, 30 Flights of Loving by a guy named Brandon Chung who's just a brilliant independent game developer. Um, I did the music for that game coincidentally. And um, that game is pretty much entirely told through a series of hard cuts out of sort of out of chronological order. And when we sort of combined what we liked about that and thought would work in our game with the existing day structure that we talked about earlier, it just made sense as this sort of second act of the game. So that I think is surprisingly rare in games. You don't see a lot of montage video games.

Sean: No. And I kind of know why it's technically actually really hard.

Chris: It is really hard. And we actually strayed from our original concept, which was much more of a montage with very quick, you know, quick shots. I mean it's, it's a stretch, maybe actually to call it a montage because you play several minutes of game at a time. You know.

Sean: There is a moment in here where you can, if you, if you take all the food, if you do that, you'll, you'll get a very small day. And I'm sure there's a tape on that. That is montage-y in length, but it's a technical hurdle to make a montage. It's hard.

Chris: You have to load the entire world in and out.

Sean: It made like being able to cut on a beat like a montage would sort of impossible because we're loading scenes and moving you all over the map and redressing the scene every time and it's, you have to actually build quite a technological underpinning to do one. And I think that's maybe at the core something that we discovered at least.

44. Creating the Knock-Out Moment



Chris: Hey, it's Chris again.

James: Hi it's James again.

Chris: This moment by the lake where you get punched out by the person who turns out to be Ned Goodwin is one of the few times in the game where we have a complete takeover cutscene like this sort of fully animated.

James: It shows the burden for the whole second half of the game of the player feeling scared. When they get to the research site, a lot of people have talked to me about, um, they will always worried that they were going to get punched again, because it happens from behind. So, they can't see someone like spinning the camera around. Um, yeah, on a, it's along with the rope breaking on Day One. It's probably like one of the biggest punchy action set pieces I got to animate. And it's also interesting that like most of the action happens off camera. So, I'm sort of implying a bunch of stuff and then sort of handing it over to audio and being like, OK, you need to basically make most of this actually work.

Chris: Yeah, scoring this was almost like scoring a tiny little radio drama because they're the sort of creeping footsteps behind you and they're panning slightly from right to left as they approach. And then there's the big, like Indiana Jones style fist punch sound, which was really fun to do. That's definitely the most

outrageous sound I got to put in this game. Um, and then the ringing. Yeah, it was, it was really fun. This moment changed a fair amount. Because it was so incredibly difficult to communicate to the player, oh, there's this exact little thing on the ground that you have to notice and pick up and you have to do that for the game to progress. There was actually a version of this where you didn't technically need to pick up the radio and it just led to way too much design uncertainty and confusion.

James: Yeah. This was definitely one of those points where we, we have to be realistic about is the game actually getting better for giving you the option to completely ignore every single part of the through line of the game. And in this case, we said, no, it's not actually.

Chris: Yeah, a lot of this game ended up being about finding a compromise between player expressivity and actually making sure some kind of coherent story got told. So, this was quite a significant example of that in development. Took a long time to nail down, but I'm pretty happy with where it ended up.

45. Turt!



Sean: Hi Jane.

Jane: Hi Sean. There's a turtle here!

Sean: There's a turtle here! I think is probably your doing, even though in classic Campo Santo form, playing autopsy detective on how the Turtle got into the game is not yielding any definite definitive results.

Jane: I think I remember wanting something, like I said, I just want a place that's very pleasant in the game and I also want something very cute in the game. I think that was kind of on my wishlist.

Sean: And we killed two turts with one stone here.

Jane: Someone maybe said something about turtles and then...

Sean: A turtle fit into the scope of what creature we could let you find and manipulate and animate and we weren't afraid of it then. We had the idea really early and we were afraid of animals.

Jane: Yeah, because you're like, what if someone wants to like throw a thing, you throw a cute animal, usually that will hurt the animal. And then maybe someone said, "it will be fine if it's a turtle".

Sean: You can definitely launch this turtle right into the lake and hopefully Henry will say something about it if you do. Which is one of my favorite moments in the game. And then I think Turt Reynolds, the name you can choose for him was a bad joke made by a guy who shares an office with us. Zach Johnson of Kingdom of Loathing, he came out and said, what about Turt Reynolds? And we all groaned and then I wrote it down.

Jane: And then we're like, well, now we have to have a turtle in the game.

Sean: And then Turt made his debut at E3 2015 in the Firewatch E3 trailer and people lost their silly minds.

Jane: If we put Turt in this trailer, then we have to make it work in the finished game.

Sean: Yeah, he has to be a cornerstone. And then you can feed him when you put them in your, you're can give him a granola bar when you put him in the box back in the tower, I think that's still in the game. You got all your wishes.

46. The Surprising Complexity of Interaction



Nels: So here we are at the gate of what Henry only knows is Wapiti Meadow....

Sean: Soon to be known as Wapiti Station.

Nels: Dun dun dun. So, we can even talk about how you actually technically don't have to come here on this day at all, but presuming you haven't done anything strange, you now have to attempt to break into this weird fence, just seemingly out-of-nowhere in the middle of the woods.

Sean: Um, and realizing that the story needed that, we then were in a pickle where we went, well, "we've never made you do anything like that before". Like go and do an adventure-game-thing, like use an object with an object. And so, we've kind of put ourselves in a position via the story and I think this is what I would classify as like not great game design, folks.

Nels: Correct.

Sean: Where, I, for lack of, I'll take full credit, I guess had pushed us into a place with the story where you needed to try to get into this place to justify going somewhere else less important to find a way to get in later. Because when you're telling a story like, and then you have to kind of create a diversion, you don't want to be like the most important thing you want is behind this gate, but

you need to go elsewhere to get behind it. It's like the biggest bugaboo of adventure game design, but we had written ourselves right into it and the story was now, like, the game design was now subservient to the story. Which is a really bad if you're a game designer or an aspiring designer.

Nels: Not the best place to be.

Sean: Not great. So Nels and Will and James set about piecing together the concept of being able to pick up things and then contextually change the action you could do with those things. And in terms of look and feel, I think you guys did a great job of being able to pick up the rocks that are to the left of the gate. There is, you probably don't know this Player because it's very difficult to see, but there is a stick to the right of the gate....

Nels: And there's another one off to the left. Once you try to get in in some fashion, the game doesn't really, the game is agnostic about which, then you can say like, "Hey Delilah, I don't think I can get in here" and of course in like, you know, classic Firewatch fashion, there's a bunch of, a bunch of very subtle like micro-branches where if you actually tried to break in with all three of the things, Henry's like, "I tried to smash it and break it. I can't do it." So, there's like a little bit of reactivity there. That's cool. But also me and James and Will basically had to go through like a Bataan Death March to get this to work just because nothing else in the game at all works this way, with like object, because the objects they're in your hand... but then as he used them on the gate then they were destroyed, but they have to go somewhere, and it has to sync up with the special... it's just any, any one element that is complicated to do it in a game to make look nice and it has like all 10 of those.

Sean: And it's not built on any sort of like reusable system because we didn't imagine we were making a game where you would use thing on a thing, like you do in like Monkey Island or whatever. But we walked ourselves right to that unfortunately. But I think you guys did a valiant job, and I really love the way it actually feels to do it. I'm just glad I wasn't the gameplay programmer on it.

Nels: Lucky you.

47. Creating an Ambient Soundscape



Jared: This is Jared Emerson-Johnson. I work for a company called Bay Area Sound. We did a lot of the sound editing and sound recording for the game, did a lot of the ambience and a lot of the effects.

Chris: And I'm Chris Remo, and you've heard me on commentary before, but on this one, I'm speaking in my capacity as I guess the audio director on this game, a role that I really did not deserve to have. Um, and basically had to figure out as I was going along, we ended up developing a pretty close working relationship where we sort of split the sound design duties. It ended up being fairly half-and-half, probably slanted towards Jared in terms of total work volume.

Jared: Although you did almost the entirety of all the implementation, so you are sort of the mastermind of what we needed and how it should go in the game. And I just kind of took whatever you needed from me in and made it. So I was, I was sort of the content horse and you're the overseer and overlord, the overlord of sound, which was great. I mean, it's funny you mentioned that you, you know, your inexperience, but it was a smoother than some projects go. It was a lot of fun for me.

Chris: Yeah. And you, at one point, went and did some field recordings,

Jared: You know, the sound in the game kind of breaks down pretty evenly between sound effects, which are the footsteps and the interactive parts of sound where you know, you're the players interacting with objects and things in the game. And then there's the ambiance part. And especially in this game, in any game, the ambiance is important, but in this game that was sort of really where we started and finished in terms of what the sound needed to be in creating this space. And so, I actually had several recordings I've been making over the past 10 years or so, you know, various other big outdoor national park location stuff from Yosemite and stuff from... I've actually been hiking on the Pacific crest trail over the past 10 years, which is a trail that goes all the way from Mexico up to Canada. So, it was great. So, I mean really, all of the ambient sound you're hearing is, is really coming from real wild wild spaces up in the mountains.

Chris: Yeah. And the ambiance, man, it took, I think it took us so long to dial in the approach we wanted to take both in terms of the source material itself and also the way that it was designed and implemented. I feel like we were revising that basically until like the last third of game development. I mean not even just revising, but I would say like fundamentally changing how it worked and eventually what's in the game now is sort of three layers of ambience that are mixed according to, you know, where you are and the needs of the space and so on. Plus, additional what we call sweeteners of environmental noise like sort of wildlife and wind rustles and things like that, to give it some character.

Jared: This project was really kind of unique in that way and in its relationship with the ambiance because it was such a key part of creating the atmosphere of that we spent a whole lot of time figuring out how we wanted to sort-of differentiate each of the individual sections of the park. And also, at what point you're in the story, and how the ambiance should subtly change. It was probably the most detailed ambiance work I've done on I think any project I've ever worked on doing this, just because it had to be so specific and subtle, but also evoke really clear tonal feeling across the game.

48. Backtracking, Shifting Tone, and Holding Interest



Jake: Hi, it's Jake.

Jane: And it's Jane.

Jake: We are at the medicine wheel, which was a thing that I put into the game when I was first gray boxing it and learning how to make anything in a game like this.

Jane: That was in really early. I think basically we put in the tower and then very soon afterwards that was the medicine wheel.

Jake: I think it was the thing Sean and I thought it would be cool to have in the game. I did not know how to make a medicine wheel so, or I didn't know how to make a video game, I guess? So, I made it the way a real medicine wheel is made, which was out of a ton of tiny, tiny rocks, which meant that whenever anyone in the office turned their camera towards where the medicine wheel was from the tower, the frame rate died. And you went in and fixed it, which is great, by replacing it with like a real game thing.

Jane: And also, it actually streams that really fast.

Jake: It's like the most efficient medicine wheel ever put into game.

Jane: And that's a fantastic landmark actually, because you, you know, this is like nothing else like it in the game. I was like, oh, the medicine wheel that you instantly know where you are.

Jake: When doing work as on Firewatch's environment art and skies and all these other things, what do you keep in mind when you think about like a player has walk through here before, how do I keep it fresh when they come back through?

Jane: So, we want to make sure that it looks different from different directions and also the lighting and to feel the whole area it's got to be different, so it seems like a totally new area.

Jake: Yeah, it was surprising to me how much... even if you're walking like just north to South through an area, if you go through it once and then if you go through it the next day or a later part in the game and you and Olly have just swung the sun 180 degrees, so all the shadows are going the other way? It can feel completely fresh. Or the, I mean the obvious trick, is make them go through it the opposite direction.

Jane: But both things together really make a whole space, feel like a totally new space.

Jake: Yeah. That was the thing that I think you and Olly and I collectively tried really hard to do is keep the player walking in as many different directions, as many different times of day as we could because we knew that the world was fixed.

Jane: We want to reuse areas, but also, we don't want to feel like we're making people backtrack.

49. Controlled Burns



Jane: Hi! It's Jane again. So Nels, what is a controlled burn?

Nels: A controlled burn is actually a technique that real wildland firefighters use. They actually have these amazing things called drip cans, which are basically like tin-man oil can, except they're just full of like extremely flammable fluid and they're always on fire. So yeah, it's awesome. So basically, firefighters will dig a bunch of firebreaks and then use these drip cans to light a bunch of small, controlled fires to burn out all the flammable materials in an area that a big like proper uncontrolled wildfire is approaching. So that when the fire, due to the wind or whatever, gets to that area, that area is already burned, so the fire can't keep spreading kind of past where that burn was. So, in the case on the game right here, the idea is that this, the firefighter crew burned out all the fuel right next to the river so that the fire couldn't jump — be blown basically across the river. That hope is between the controlled burn and the river itself; the fire wouldn't actually spread all the way up to Two Forks and beyond. As you will discover later in the game, they did not succeed at that. As is often the case in the real world. Fires are nothing if not unpredictable.

Jane: In terms of technically how we achieve this, basically we have a pre-burn sector that is all lush and beautiful and full of trees that you cannot, um, push through. So, it works great as a gate. Um, and after the controlled burn in the, in the story we swap the whole area, this whole piece, including the ground and all the

trees in it with a new piece of artwork basically, to the post-burn sector which lets the player walk right through.

Nels: It's interesting that like there's kind of this baseline of the world, and there are these almost just two chunks just sitting right on top of it.

Jane: The world is made of tiles in a way. So, we have the option to swap different tiles in and out and this is a great place to use that technology.

Nels: Yeah, it's pretty great.

50. Maintaining Scale in Level Design



Jane: Hi Jake.

Jake: Hey Jane. In this garden surrounded by scary mannequins. Seems like a great place to talk about how you figure out perspective and scale when making a level.

Jane: So, um, when you start making a game one of the first things you need to do is to have scale reference. So, what we did was just to download a bunch of free scale models.

Jake: Yep, just some some royalty free t-posed nude men and women.

Jane: I think the man is just a default ZBrush man.

Jake: Before you put in the trees and before you put it in the grass and before you put in the rocks, when all you have is terrain, it can look like it's like a six-foot-wide hallway or it's like a quarter mile wide. You can't even tell in first person. But then once, boop!, there's just a little nude man out there — you really, you really know.

Jane: How tall is this tree? Oh my gosh, this actually... oh, that's a really tall tree. Yeah, it looks tiny before you get the scale man in.

Jake: So, there's also, you'll notice there's a collection of different scale men out here. When I first dropped our scale people in, um, they came in with some default material that was like, this is like a glistening onyx stone?

Jane: I think the default unity material back then was just some very glossy black.

Jake: Yeah. So, we had these like, just rippling, glistening stone statues including parts... full anatomy. There were some parts that were very good at catching the light and I think when Nels was gray boxing... Nels was like, I, I got to get in real close on some parts of this level and I just don't know about this. So, then the next day when we got latest...

Jane: It's very distracting when that glossy material is...

Jake: It's debatable though, if that's more or less distracting than the jean shorts that were slapped on. Um, it feels to me Jane, like in early dev as you got bored, you just kept like festooning the scale man with more stuff.

Jane: That was one of those times when I was like, is it worth spending 15 minutes to make myself happy? Yes.

Jake: Maybe some more time to add some love handles and then some heart-shaped chest hair, who's to say?

Jane: 15 minutes turned into 30 minutes of fun and now you know...

Jake: Oh man, by the end of the production gray boxing was really fun. Like, you'd know that there was someone was in there working because you would just see all these like love-handled jorts Henry chest-hair dudes flooding all over the place.

Jane: I think my favorite part is also when you've done level designing in a space, sometimes you've lifted the terrain without lifting the scale men. Sometimes once in a while I'm like, why is this area kind of not performing great? And I look under the earth and there's like four buried, floating scale men underneath. Thanks Jake. Delete. Those are my favorite little Jake surprises.

Jake: It's good. Or like I'll see what off in the sky like in this case there's a, there's a couple of deliberately way out in the distance because I wanted people to look at how forced perspective works also. Also. So, you know, zoom in on some jorts guys, be happy.

Jane: Oh, another note about the scale lady here. She's actually the same model that we use for the teens in the lake. We just added a ponytail really.

Jake: And sparklers.

51. “Pork Pond”, The Fruits of Iterative Design



- Sean:** The thing that is great about Pork Pond, other than it is called Pork Pond, which is a wonderful thing to say — do you want to say it?
- Jane:** Pork Pond...
- Sean:** Pork Pond, Pork Pond.
- Jane:** It's not even really a pond.
- Sean:** It's barely a pond.
- Jane:** It's like a Pork Puddle, really.
- Sean:** It's Pork Puddle, that may have been a pond at one point. Later, dear player, you've probably, you, hopefully you notice that there is a Pork Pond sign in Delilah's lookout tower after Delilah has told you, if you talk about Pork Pond, that people just keep stealing the sign.
- Jane:** It looks great in a den or a cabin, really.
- Sean:** Yeah. And that's one of those things that was really fun about making this game was such a small team, is that I named Pork Pond "Pork Pond" after, my

girlfriend's dog, Pork Belly, who I like very much. He is a Japanese Chin. And he is very weird. And then I wrote the goof about the sign not being there because there wasn't a sign. And then the next thing I knew someone said, oh, it should be in Delilah's lookout. I don't know if that was you, Jane. But that's the sort of thing you would do. You'd be like, I was playing the game, and I felt like that Pork Pond sign should be in Delilah's tower....

Jane: If I were Delilah, I would have totally stolen it.

Sean: Exactly right. So, then we just say yes and we keep putting goofs into the game. So that is the ballad of Pork Pond.

Jane: Pork Puddle Pond.

Sean: Pork Puddle Pond. I like how this is our only tape together and it was just us saying Pork Pond about 15 or 20 times.

Jane: Pork Pond...

52. Animating a First Person Character



Will: Hi, this is Will.

James: And this is James again.

Will: And if you look around you should see a TV in front of you with a pretty weird looking image on it. That is actually what Henry looks like from third person. So, you're looking at Henry as we saw him in Unity editor.

James: Yeah. Henry is very much sort of an ultimate Cronenberg nightmare. He's got sort of like... we called them the spider bones where you can stretch his shoulders really far away from his torso. early on I remember looking at a .gif with the team of like how Crysis was doing the first-person stuff and if you look to that, you can sort of see his spine and neck becoming this mad giraffe creature. and we, we took that concept and run with it. So, we ended up sort of like, almost any animation in the game, if you look at it from outside of the exact angle we want you to, it would completely destroy immersion and you'd be horrified and possibly sick.

53. The Eavesdrop Moment



Sean: Coming up here on the end, Jacob...

Jake: Yes, Sean...

Sean: Henry and Delilah are talking, and then there's a clatter, and you realize there's just been an open third line on their conversation. And I remember coming up with this, or something like this, in my living room before we had an office in the summer and fall of 2013.

Jake: The idea that you'd hear someone cough over the radio seems like that sort of thing that got us really excited when we were in like day zero of talking about making Firewatch.

Sean: We had another idea back in the lake side of this day, the beginning of this day, where you would hear your conversation coming out of a radio nearby, but just the way our audio system worked, in the particular like the peculiarities of trying to get that to work just never really read to the player when we people would play it. But we had all these moments... this sort of like the way we think about the design of a story like this in general. For better for worse, at least with this game. Where we would sit down and just pitch each other all these moments that were really disconnected, once we had a conceit, like there's somebody

listening to you on the radio, like: oh, a guy punches you out. Like, oh, you hear your voice coming from a bush, which we didn't end up using.

Jake: Oh, you rip your bed apart and find a bug under the mattress which means someone was listening in your tower and we're going to bug the tower. I think we actually had a bulletin board up in the office full of tiny Post-It® notes that were just cool ideas, cool story things. If we could find a place for them, we pulled them off that and put them on the linear list of, of that crit-path events.

Sean: Yeah. There are things that we could just sort of like put as little, um, like mile markers in the story and not knowing how you would get to them because you'd play your own way. But if we had enough of those in the story that were surprising then maybe you, the player, would like it.

54. Keeping Players and Henry on the Same Page



Jake: Hello Chris.

Chris: Hey Jake.

Jake: Good to see you on the commentary. So earlier, a long time through Firewatch development, the way that Day 76 used to end was with Delilah just basically freaking out. She and Henry got that call from Goodwin and just basically said, “oh shit.” And it ended on an ambiguous panic. It turned out that that actually put people in this situation you are in now at the start of Day 77, not knowing what to do. Like we cut in with Henry at his desk sitting there and everyone who played the game sort of thought... why is Henry just sitting at his desk when the lesson that happened was a huge freak out? And we rewrote it to be what you’re seeing here where Delilah actually says at the end of the day, sit where you are, don’t do anything. Wait for me to call. And then when it cuts in Henry sitting in his chair, it makes sense. And I know that sounds completely obvious and maybe even dumb that we did not initially have Delilah tell you to do what we then depict you doing.

Chris: I think one of the reasons is because so much... this speaks to one of the biggest challenges, honestly, in designing the narrative for this game, which is a first-person game that also skips time. In a movie, when a movie’s skips time, you can have the characters have done all sorts of things and that the viewer can

catch up on that later and there's tension and not knowing what happened in the missing time. You can't really have that stuff get filled in for the Player character because you are that character.

Jake: Even if they're cinematic cut time, your motivation as a player is a continuous line across the game and obviously it doesn't have a time skip and lets you the player save, walk away and come back. Realizing that we had to write Delilah to bridge that moment was a really good concrete example that stuck out to me of how those... how the story and your expectation as a player and your sort of motivation to keep going have to line up as well as they do.

Chris: This seems another big challenge because the entire... that whole chain of her getting you to Cottonwood Creek by way of this sort of ruse that she sets up. Um, there were a lot of players we found who figured out what she was getting at before you actually went through all the little steps. And immediately said, "Oh! Cottonwood Creek!", and they left.

Jake: I then Delilah was like, tell me when you see the thing on the poster! I, ohhhh...

Chris: Yet another big challenge of how to sync up player intention and awareness with character intention and awareness. Really a big challenge in this game overall.

Jake: Anyway, look at that poster.

55. Who Are Panic, Inc.?



Cabel: Hello, my name is Cabel Sasser, I am the co-founder of a company called Panic here in sunny Portland, Oregon. With me is...

Steven: Steven Frank, I'm the other co-founder of Panic. And what are we doing here by the snowmobile?

Cabel: Why are we by a snowmobile? Steve? You see, ah, the Snowbro logo on the snowmobile is our one content contribution to the game of Firewatch. Jake asked me to design that logo and I did, and I think we can safely say this game would not have shipped if it weren't for that logo. That's not true at all. I'm very sorry. Steve, what is Panic?

Steven: Well, Panic is a company that makes Mac software that we started back in 1997 or so and of course recently we've done iPad and iPhone software as well and we were approached by a Campo Santo to see if we wanted to fund a video game. So how exactly did we get involved in that?

Cabel: Good question. We made one of the first MP3 player apps for the Mac called Audion. And as was the style at the time being the late 90's, you could make your own skins or interfaces for it. One guy made some really cool skins and his name was Jake Rodkin and Jake Rodkin, of course, went on to Telltale Games. we kept in touch with him, him and Sean Vanaman left to try and make their

own game. They came to us, we said, hmm, I think we have a little bit of money in the bank. We can maybe help you out with this. And it worked! We're here and we made this game that you're in right now. Our contribution was primarily financial, but we also put on a really cool event for GDC, which was this super themed, we got to pretend that we're Imagineers kind-of thing. We did some Q&A, we sort of were sounding board on ideas, and we also did Fotodome. It was an incredible experience for us to get a taste of what it was like to make a game, um, through these guys. And we've always been curious about that world, and it turns out the gaming market is kind of awesome and a lot of people play video games — probably way more than buy professional Mac utility software — and games affect people in ways that our current software doesn't affect people. You know, you get fan art, you get these incredibly emotional fan letters about how this game touched people. It has been incredibly rewarding for us to work on this thing. So that leads to my next question, Steve: would you do this again?

Steven: Oh, absolutely. I want to see what the sequel to Firewatch is! It's going to be a snowmobile racer probably...

Cabel: Yeah, yeah, I think you do trick jumps...

Steven: Henry versus Delilah...

Cabel: And Sonic. Could we throw Sonic in there too?

Steven: Gotta have Sonic!

Cabel: ...and Cream The Rabbit?

Steven: Eh....

Cabel: I'll cut that part. Thank you for playing Firewatch. We are happy to have been a part of this game. We hope that you enjoyed it as much as we enjoyed being a part of making it. Thank you. Good night.

56. Where's Cottonwood Creek?



Sean: Sean here. Hey Jake.

Jake: Hey Sean. The hike to Cottonwood Creek, the one you are ostensibly on right now, is a thing that changed a couple of times in the game and it was actually one of the bigger spatial changes that we've made over the course of Firewatch. The place called Cottonwood Creek on the map is now in due south of the middle of the map, but it actually used to be north of the lake. If you are, um, if you ever head over there, you'll notice there's a lot of cottonwood trees there. There are cottonwood trees in both places.

Sean: It was originally where we ended up with it though. It started where we are now.

Jake: And then we, we, we had a crisis of conscience somewhere in the middle of the game, and went, is actually walking around and Firewatch fun? Should we condense everything....

Sean: Is the core mechanic of the game of the game fun? Oh no, hedge!

Jake: You hit a point in development sometimes where you question these things and we said, is this going to be too big of a deal? Do we want to put Cottonwood Creek right next to the research site? And we did it and it was, it was still pretty good, but I think as all the pieces laid, laid out into the game, once the music

started coming in, once a lot of the sort-of incidental ancillary conversation started coming in, we were able to sort of breathe a big sigh of relief and go, oh, it is all the stuff, all of these parts seem to be working. And then we went, gasp, all those parts are working, and we made Cottonwood Creek like three inches away from the research site gate, put it back, put it back! And it, um, it was, it was a pretty quick change to put it back.

Sean: But it was very quick to put back. But I had a panic attack because I realized that having everything so condensed when it was, when Cottonwood Creek was over by the lake, just totally hamstrung my ability to get in some of the dialogue that happens here. And I think this stuff is actually really important to the story and the character development of these two people. And I think with like 10 weeks left in development, maybe even less. It was a very short runway. I went to Jane and Jake and I said, I think we have to move Cottonwood Creek back, and then beads of sweat appeared, and then they thought about it for a second and went, yeah, OK. I think, I think it's not gonna be that big of a deal. Because I had already been like, it's not going to be that big of a deal. We can just... And it was fine.

Jake: It turns out that what it took was me literally picking up the cache box by the lake and the cache box by Cottonwood Creek and doing like the little magician, like shell games swap. And then I changed the labels on the map, and it worked.

57. The New Radio: You Don't Have to Pick It Up



Sean: Hey, it's Sean.

Chris: Hey, it's Chris. Here in this cottonwood creek area where you have to get the new walkie-talkie that Delilah has planted for you, or had planted for you, it is possible to just never pick it up in the first place. Go straight over to the research site. And that's in part because it's in a game like this where we aren't constraining your movement, there isn't really anything we can do to force the player to walk to a certain place and do a certain thing before going to a different place. We would have to put up some kind of infinite wall or something between you and the research site to stop you just going straight there. Um, and we didn't really want to do that. We thought about it and we really could not think of a good reason to do so.

Sean: Which then meant, which then meant that the entire research site scene had to be written, had to be bifurcated. And then written to support having the new radio versus not having the new radio. and that was really hard. And then had to be like logically programmed to support both those things. And the way a lot of the branching sort-of dialog stuff works in a game like this, it's not like a choose your own adventure, where you go to a different chapter. It's really... the game is looking line-by-line through the hundreds of lines that it takes to for the play

the characters to communicate their stuff while in the research site. It's going line-by-line and playing the truest one. So, a lot of the lines are shared across, "has new radio" versus "doesn't have new radio" state. it's jumping in between ideas that both a hit upon and changing Delilah's response most of the time. And playing through that and finding those spots and writing with that level of detail and branching is really hard. And we would probably find a new way to do it in the future.

Chris: It's hard to say. We tried hard to think of a way around it and we really couldn't. And it affected everything. It affected writing, it affected, here's a weird one, it affected music because if you go all the way to the research site without getting the new radio, um, you know, typically when you have the radio and you go into the research site, there's this music that kicks in. What if you go to the research site without getting the new radio, not because you were intending to skip that part of the game, but because you just want it to go check it out to doing the video game exhaustive thing of like, I'm going to check every place before I do the thing, but I'm going to go back and get the radio and then do it. Um, how do we read your intent? How do we, as the designers know, I'm intending to skip that part of the game. I'm not intending to. Do I start the music cue? Do I not? There were a lot of different areas where we had to just take our best guess basically about, well if this and this and this, but not... we think this is what the player means to do and we're going to support that. And that was just something that we constantly had to live with throughout development.

58. Our Baffling Process



Jake: Hey, it's Jake again.

Chris: And Chris.

Sean: And Sean.

Jake: Hey everyone.

Sean: We had to design for this tape, but I don't remember what it was.

Chris: So, then you're completely in the spirit of our stupid, stupid design process.

Sean: Ah yes, that's what this tape is about. The design process for Firewatch.

Chris: It's really bad to admit this on a recording....

Sean: But you purchased this game, so you're inside.

Chris: And if you played this, you already completed it, so you know that we nonetheless finished a game. One of the big things that we constantly run into on the design side, on this game was: OK, how do we reconcile this linear story that needs to be told with something that allows some degree of player

exploration and choice and a big world that we tried hard to not just hard gate absolutely everywhere... and what that meant we had to come up with a lot of weird creative solutions to why you had to go to a certain place or why you couldn't go to this place and frequently we would forget what those were.

Jake: We'd forget why it happened. For instance, the commentary Firewatch Audio Tour document says that this node should lie on Day 15 and I'm sure that we had a really hilarious and apropos reason for why this, this remark should happen on Day 15.

Sean: Oh, we had a very, very great, very strong design idea for Day 15 that tied a bunch of stuff together but didn't get written down coming out of a meeting and was lost to the recesses of my mind....

Jake: We all laughed about it when we sat down to record this commentary node, and that's it's perfect, but this is on Day 15. So, I'm sure you as a player, this is the most perfectly timed conversation or moment in the, in the commentary to hear about this, but we don't know why that is.

Sean: But because it's content games like Firewatch are so are designed around ideas and sort of loose concepts oftentimes as opposed to systems with hard rules. It's easy to forget the decisions you made and then when you do, you agonize over the perfect solution you kind of remember having for days until you finally just let it go and move on and come up with something else.

Jake: You have to trust that if you blow it up and come up with something else, it will probably be functionally about as good as the one that's the reason that you forgot.

Chris: I think there are probably parts in this game that we redesigned three times and I think what ended up happening was we sort of internalized all of the requirements of each of those particular things so often that it gave us a better understanding of the whole game, which is maybe just a horrible justification for it.

Sean: We got very good at anatomy by reopening up our patient over and over and over again. And looking at his insides.

Chris: So, enjoy. Enjoy the results of our, our stupid, stupid labor.

Jake: Man, I bet people won't even be on Day 15 when they hear this in the final commentary...

59. Crime by the Numbers



Jake: Hi Jake here.

Olly: It's Olly.

Jake: So, I guess we're going to talk about crime by the numbers. A crime series.

Olly: Yeah. I think this came from the desire to make a very video game, sort of collectible series. Something that you could collect across the course of the game. And also, my desire to just design book covers because I wanted to.

Jake: Yeah, I think that you did that first. You did a first batch of book covers and it was Steven's Room and the, the J. Allard self-help book, Birds of Wyoming. And it had Deaths Strikes at Two. And we all decided as a group in a stupid loud meeting that took up the whole office that it would be hilarious if this was in fact one of like the Sue Grafton Alphabet Murders....

Olly: Or that little Dick Francis horse racing series....

Jake: Every single one is about a jockey who was killed...

Olly: We thought that our idea for series was somewhat ridiculous, but then realized that Dick Francis had written over 40 crime stories about horse racing.

Jake: Yeah, and it seems like just between an office conversations and long walks home from the office, we've came up with all 10 of these and then you drew them.

Olly: That's exactly how it happened.

Jake: But people seem to like them. We've seen people collecting, trying to collect all of them across the course of the game.

Olly: You get no achievement for collecting all of them, sadly. Jerks.

60. Sound Design in Firewatch



Jared: This is Jared Emerson Johnson from Bay Area Sound and I did a lot of the sound design for the game under Chris's supervision.

Chris: And it's Chris again.

Jared: So, we just want to talk a little bit about the foley and the interactive elements of the sound design for the game. For the most part, I would say like 95 percent of the time we're recording all that originally for the game rather than relying on library sounds and stuff, which often is the case.

Chris: Yeah. And we actually started off using a lot more library sounds and we ended up redoing almost all of those, of that implementation because Jared, I'm curious to know how you felt about this, but I just felt that that stuff was too big and punchy for this game. You know, we were telling a game that was so much about this human scale drama and in some cases ambiguity. And then also just very naturalistic and how the wilderness was presented, that it seemed almost like putting too fine a point on it to have sort-of traditionally big and punchy foley and sound effects behind it.

Jared: Right? Yeah, that we'd call "gamey" sound design, which is usually a little bit larger than life and big and, and you know, sometimes that's important because the player needs the feedback of what they're doing...

Chris: Yeah, well when you get punched out by Goodwin and there was a couple of moments of like that big outrageous sound design when it's really called for.

Jared: Yeah. We weren't really subtle and a lot of it. You still get the feedback, you still get that feeling like you're actually in this space and interacting with it, but it's a little more subtle, a little more tailored and honestly, like when you have an opportunity to record live foley, it always ends up being better than a library sound, you know, even in the big gaming games. And so yeah, for all that we just went out and, you know, either went out to a fence and recorded a fence or um, you know, I got out my, my backpacking backpack and just spent several hours just getting all, every kind of little rustle and clank.

Chris: I think there have been hundreds of different sounds for this.

Jared: Of course, you're not gonna use all of them, but you know, you need to be able to find exactly the right...

Chris: Oh yeah, I sifted through every single one and found the ones that match to the animation like as closely as I possibly could.

Jared: What would really matter to me as I was playing the game and we were talking back and forth was really making it, you know, when you are interacting with something in the game — when you're moving a fence or opening a door, entering a new space — that it really feels like you're there. Because so much of the game is, is just walking around and talking. So, when you actually get a chance to pick something up or interact with it, I wanted it to feel kind of special.

Chris: As development of the game went on and it became clear that sound effects and ambiance were going to have to do so much of the heavy lifting, it was incredibly intimidating for me as a first-time audio director, but I'm ultimately actually really grateful for that because it was just so intrinsic to the game and we had such a big impact on the overall experience.

Jared: Yeah, and honestly with every new game there's a certain amount of kind of reinventing that needs to happen because you have to, you know, you just have to keep playing the game, playing the game, put the sounds in, OK, these ones work, these ones don't work, play the game again, and we'd just probably did that, I don't know, 20, 30 times over the course of the production. OK, this is working. Oh no, this has changed, so now we need a new thing and that's how you make a thing that feels good in the end.

61. The Research Site Break-In



Chris: Hey Jake.

Jake: Hey Chris.

Chris: So, over the course of Firewatch's development, we swung back and forth pretty, pretty wildly, um, in terms of how much we wanted to play up the conspiracy part of the story and how explicit we wanted to make a Goodwin's involvement, and how much we wanted the player to buy into it versus how much we wanted to player to think this was sort of all in Henry's head or, or played up between Henry and Delilah. And the research site was really the moment in the game where....

Jake: There's definitive proof something is happening. Whatever it is.

Chris: We obviously knew as the developers of the game, that the reality of the situation was a little bit sadder and more mundane. I think we kind of wanted there to be this big moment that suggests... maybe this is something really huge. I think we got carried away a little bit.

Jake: Um, we, we, we arguably slash probably did. And thinking back to it now, the reason that the type reports came into the story at all, as you said about the pendulum swinging back and forth, I think we didn't like the story being 100

percent ambiguous. We didn't want... we didn't also, I don't know if we knew that we could support a world where Henry and the Player and Delilah, a hundred percent construct a reality that doesn't have a single shred of proof. And we're like, OK, well we got excited about maybe it's the seventies conspiracy moments of like, you know, you're in a room full of whirring machines.

Chris: I think we on the team kind of kind of hyped ourselves up in the same way Henry and Delilah do. I mean I remember when I first came, how did the first draft of the music that you're hearing right now? I showed it to you only I think because I felt too stupid to show it to anyone else because I'm like, this is so ridiculous. We can't put this on our game. And you were like, oh, maybe we should put it in.

Jake: I don't know. Henry has gone nuts. Everyone's going nuts.

Chris: It's true, we're all going nuts.

Jake: Maybe it could have been pulled back a little bit on all fronts from what you're observing right now, but maybe it's the best. Maybe it's for the best.

Chris: Could be. Could be.

62. Building Props and Set Dressing



Jane: Hi, this is Jane, I'm back again and now I'm here with...

Will: Will Nunes, I was a prop artist.

Jane: And this is one of the few areas in Firewatch where is not just about trees and rocks. So, we wanted to make sure that this area feels very man-made and that it's spooky and is ambiguous. The goal here is that you are going to get here and you're not quite sure if this is like a surveillance operation or if it's scientific. Um, and that's kind of what I told Will when we were trying to make a lot of props and Will was really great about it. Just like, "Hey, Will, can you please just make a bunch of boring scientific equipment?"

Will: Yeah, I mean we were actually just looking at a lot of stuff like, you know, stuff that monitored, you know, thermal energy and stuff like that, like very, very standard kind of a scientific equipment, but arranged in a kind of sense that made it look kind of a little more eerie and a little more cluttered and haphazard and not really definable from someone that didn't really understand what this equipment was.

Jane: Yeah. I think if you actually look up each prop that they actually are real like equipment, right?

Will: Yes. I used reference from the late 80's with all of his equipment. They're all real equipment that people use to monitor the wind or environment, stuff like that.

Jane: Is there like a favorite piece of property in this tent, Will?

Will: Um, I would say the equipment, just, it's really simple, but I had a lot of fun making it and seeing the layout and kind of trying to convey this kind of eerie looking equipment and you're doing something you're not quite sure what it's about, ambiguously technical, and seeing where I could take it and see kind of, you know, the colors and the mood and how that would all fit together and how to set that scene right.

63. The “Conspiracy Board”



Nels: And here we are, I’m Nels once again, and we’re talking to Jake about Henry’s crazy conspiracy board.

Jake: Yes, it’s conspiracy board time.

Nels: This first appears after you go to the research site and discover a bunch of crazy stuff, right? What did you actually want to the player to like be thinking about when this thing just kind of shows up.

Jake: We wanted the idea that Henry had stayed up all night just... when you get to the research site and you start feeling like maybe this conspiracy exists, but when you think maybe there is a conspiracy, we wanted to take all of the pickups that you’d sort of been idly grabbing throughout the game. All those sorts of documents and notes and then putting them up on the board as if Henry stayed up all night trying to find connections between things. There are very few, but we wanted to sort of re-present to the player all the stuff that you have been doing and now that you know that there is in fact someone out there listening to you and watching you. Do you want to reassess all the things you’ve been picking up in a new light? Also, it just gives a nice aesthetic change to the tower. Right? It just fills the room up with a bunch of garbage and makes Henry looks like maybe he’s going a little nuts.

Nels: Early in the game, we kind of had this — way when we were like barely past prototyping — we kind of had this notion that you find stuff out in the world and you can basically pick up and keep like almost anything. And then all this stuff you found would have this like home in your tower and we kind of like for a variety of reasons, kind of carved back on that idea a little bit, but it ended up instead kind of becoming this, right?

Jake: Yeah. Cause the only thing that you can really reliably keep in Firewatch and the shipping version and that has a UI associated with it is notes and documentation like those go into the notes screen. You can read them there and then it seemed like having all of that stuff sort of barf back out of the inventory into the world all at once when your perspective on the story changes was a cool way to handle that. Um, it was also a way to remind people of all the things that were out in the world that they had found, like to remind them of missing people, flyers, to remind them that they'd found a little bit of stuff from the Goodwin's, to remind them about Ron and Dave and about the research site. You could always at the start of days, at the end of the game, go and refer to all of the written sort of evidence that the story had left behind so far.

Nels: Yeah. Not only does a whole bunch of stuff that you optionally pickup show up here, but even after the board shows up the first time, still things that you find on the night of Day 77 and 78 also get added in here. So even continues to get bigger as the days move on even after our first shows up. Right?

Jake: Yep. And then he goes home and is sad.

64. Why Delilah Drank Tonight



Chris: Hey Sean.

Sean: Hey Chris.

Chris: So, I love this little bit of writing and acting here where Delilah is drunk.

Sean: I too love it... now. Yeah. Um, there was a big rewrite at one point there. This scene was originally, Delilah was just sort of in hunker down mode. Don't go outside, we're going to let this, let this blow over and that's exactly what we don't want you to do, and you have a good relationship with her... at least they have some warmth to her perhaps. And it just didn't really work as written and as recorded. So just sort of had the idea, got to the point where it's like, well, I want to change that, and the first idea was... and she's drunk. And I'd always thought that Delilah probably overindulged, I don't think she's an alcoholic or anything, but neither is Henry, but they both drink, and have, you know, probably had drunken nights that they really, really regret, being able to bring that into the game was... just felt completely correct. But then recording it was soooooo tough. Um, Cissy Jones landed in just a perfect place, but when you write "your character is drunk", you get a lot of, like, you get a lot of like hiccupy like... hobo. And I, we did sort of, you know, you sit down, and you just take five and you talk about it and you just kind of get her loaded and go on! No, we spent probably a good half an hour, maybe an hour just coming at the

drunk lines from different angles. And then yeah, it, it snaps in your headphones in real time in a way that then produces the feeling that you're talking about, Chris, which was like, oh, I love this. It's cute, and correct, and right, and it feels real and does, does all the things that needs to do. But it makes me laugh, but Cissy nailed it.

Chris: And as a note, this was one of, I think only two remaining parts in the game on the design side that are the survivors of a previous design where Delilah would reach certain thresholds where she would just cut you out of radio contact. And we kept two of them for sort of narrative reasons.

65. The Wave Receiver



Jake: Hi there, it's Jake, I'm talking with Nels and we are going to get into the wave receiver. I believe it is the Anderson Receiver, in fact.

Nels: Oh, absolutely. Anderson Brand!

Jake: Do you remember even where the wave received came from in Firewatch? I'm going to back up because I know where the wave receiver actually came from, which is a Fry Cry 2 you can hunt for diamonds using a little beepy, beepy handheld device that works basically like the receiver.

Nels: Correct.

Jake: But I wonder. I can't remember what made us think that it was right for this game.

Nels: So, it was primarily a functional thing where we realized that a lot of the kind of A to B to C structure of the game was basically Delilah saying, "Hey Henry, you should go here. Oh, you're there now. You should go here." And we wanted to have some other object element thing.

Jake: Yep. A thing that could lead you somewhere, but neither Henry or Delilah would know where you're going.

Nels: Yeah. And then it was like, oh, well what about that diamond thing from Far Cry 2.

Jake: We already have the map from Fry Cry 2. We should obviously also have the diamond hunting mechanic.

Nels: Obviously, and then it was just kind of as soon as the first prototype was in there, I was like, oh yeah, that will work and totally be good so we can just make that increasingly real until we had an actual artifact in the world that you could like wiggle around in your hand.

Jake: Oh, I miss. I miss the prototype version of the wave receiver in the gym because that was our like YouTube-streamer-friendly horror game version where once you sort of got closer and closer to the object that was revealed to be a Forrest Byrnes standee that had come to life and was charging at you at high speed. Like the.

Nels: Yeah. That was also my favorite.

Jake: That was. That was good. I feel like the real in-game wave receiver could never deliver on the full potential of the maniacal self-propelling Forrest Byrnes screaming at you like a Serious Sam enemy or something. At least that was my imagined canonical Forrest Byrnes wave receiver sound was that.

Nels: That is actually exactly what it was. I took that sound off of Serious Sam and put it in. Oh yeah. Well, yeah, so that's how we got a wave receiver!

66. What's a Bugout Bag?



Sean: Nels, it's the spooky night-time scene.

Nels: So spooky. Impossibly spooky.

Sean: Coming up with the scene was funny because the bag that is in the little grove here is known, I think, definitely internally — I don't know if this is in the game — but as the “bugout bag.”

Nels: It's definitely the bugout bag. This is what actual hardcore survivalists call their “Oh Man. If the nukes hit New York City, I can grab my two bugout bags. They're in m'closet, throw them in the back of my pickup and drive immediately within 12 minutes of the air raid siren or whatever.”

Sean: Yeah, and it's funny because we wanted to tell a really sort of a nuanced story that didn't hit you over the head with exposition and I think the bugout bag is probably a little confusing.

Nels: It might have been a bit.

Sean: It's definitely confusing upon first discovery. This is Ned Goodwin's bugout bag, which is, the heat's getting too close. I've gone too deep. This Henry and Delilah charade and I'm going to have to leave really soon, so if Henry gets too

close, I'm just repelling down, scurrying over to get this bag and I'm out and I might as well wire it to a battery for the effort. So, if it gets discovered, I know that it's gone. I don't get led into a trap.

Nels: And this is things that like actual weirdo hermit people that live in the woods... like this is actually a thing that they'll have. They'll have like their main campsite, but then if their main campsite is discovered they have like another second supply cash where they can just grab their stuff and disappear, and it just happened to be that Goodwin for sentimental or other reasons was keeping the key to the cave on this backpack. He didn't. He didn't like in any way leave it for Henry intentionally. Just happened to be that the weird electronics on it also got picked up by the wave receiver and then what was meant to be like Goodwin's safety net backup thing is actually what is his ultimate undoing.

Sean: There's an article in a GQ magazine that I think you'll probably be talking about later, Nels, written by a reporter named Michael Finkel about this hermit who lives in Maine....

Nels: Christopher Thomas Knight.

Sean: It's a wonderful, wonderful long read. Um, it's, you can find it online, again, it's GQ magazine and we, I like plumbed this thing for inspiration for Goodwin and how he would set up his camp, what he would do if he thought he was going to get caught. And it was, is an idea that I know went into my notebook upon reading this article. It's really great and it's really wonderful reporting from Michael Finkel.

67. On Simplification



Jake: Hi there, Jake here again.

James: And it's James again.

Jake: Let's talk about the beginning of Day 78 because what we shipped was fairly straight forward, Henry listening to the tape recorder of the previous night's conversation, but in earlier versions of Firewatch, this was a lot more complicated. This was actually the day or this morning was when Henry would discover a bunch of Brian Goodwin stuff. His like Pee-Chee folder full of full of scribbles and homework and stuff was actually wedged into a drawer under Henry's desk and he'd hit his head and it would fall out, um, at the start of Day 78 or earlier actually, we really liked the idea that players and Henry could find it at any time in the game up until this point. But it ended up creating this complete nest of madness which you had to animate.

James: Yeah. Because of these permutations of, have you found the folder or not, and then needing a fail-safe at certain points along that with lots of different versions of getting the folder. It was very complicated as well because we were tying into things like getting the cave key at the same time as getting the folder and the animation itself ended up being like pouring through tons of documents because it was like a postcard and his homework and like physically opening this thing, um, which ended up being a little bit silly because he

realized we've already built systems whereby you can pick objects up and inspect them. So why are we forcing like four of those in a row in a cut scene? So, I must've done probably, you know, five or six pretty distinct versions of this and then we cut it completely.

Jake: The folder falls out, the folder falls out, but then you pick it up and then you read it, but then you found the keys. But what if you drop to the keys and then find the folder? Oh Man. Yeah, yeah. It was, it was one of the biggest reliefs for me when we cut this and just put all the folder stuff where it belongs in the world and the keys over on the backpack permanently. I was very worried that you would, you would be sad that it was cut because it was so much animation work, but I feel like you were also relieved that it was finally just dead and buried in a superior version shipped.

James: Yes. Um, the only thing was I haven't thought about was we had a nice little interaction where you would grab keys, and for the first time in the game a pick-up would like fail and you sort of fumbled the keys. Right? And they go under the desk. Um, which I always liked that animation, but what I will say this, I have been making a Firewatch reel and all this kind of stuff that cut I'm including in the reel now.

Jake: Rude.

68. Being Alone in the Cave



Sean: Something I like that came on a little later in development that you did Nels here, is... we are without the radio and I; I like how that feels across like the broad swath of the game. I think it's really cool to then just be alone, um, but there are these sort of a reflexive Henry comments to himself based on things you're looking at and the way those are tuned throughout here are really nice. Um, Player, I don't know if you've seen this, but when you're walking sort of an upper level of the cave, you can look down to the right and you can see Brian Goodwin's shoe and when you sort of like zoom in on that, Henry will just call out to someone, is someone down there, someone in the cave, and Nels sort of like concocted that and put them all in the game. And we wrote some lines that worked for it and they're not all over the place, but I really liked the way it made the cave feel.

Nels: Yeah. I, it's actually kind of one of my favorite moments in the game in terms of Henry's monologue too, because we conceivably, even though Delilah can't hear you, we could have looked up the same normal radio interactions or be like you can make these dialog choices in Henry either monologues to himself or talks to the radio even though he knows Delilah can't hear him, but I don't remember. I might, I might have just tried it on a whim. Maybe someone suggested it. I don't exactly remember, but just having those play automatically when you've been looking at a specific object or area of, of the cave, or like

anywhere between like half a second to two seconds, and then those kinds of monologue moments show up. Or when you perform a specific action like zooming it ends up... it feels very natural in a way that like little kind of auto-monologue lines in games often don't. And there's like a couple in the upper level of the game and then a couple more down near the bottom when you actually find Brian's body. It was kind of a bummer that they came online so late and there aren't any other spots in the game where Henry doesn't have access to the radio because I actually would have loved to have a few more of these in the game somewhere as well.

Sean: You're always thinking about what design tools do I have to change the pace or make you feel something different? Um, and I don't think we realized they were a club we had in our bag until we had sort of like laid the whole game before us. We were like, we really liked these and, and Rich did such a good job performing them. It was just, yeah, they really worked for me in the game.

Nels: Yeah, they're good. They're quite good.

69. Building the Cave Interior



Jane: Hi, it's Jane again here with...

Jake: Me, Jake, hi.

Jane: So, the way we work usually is that Jake will do a lot of the level design with gray boxing and the cave is no different.

Jake: That's true. The cave is no different in that regard, but it is different in that it's ridiculous. Firewatch usually when you're building it you only have to worry about the floor whereas the cave is a completely contained area. Like it's, you know, it's a cave and I really wanted to take advantage of that perhaps to an excessive degree. Like I really wanted the cave to feel like this snaking labyrinth that wove in and out of itself and that you could see areas you were going to get to later from places you weren't at yet and stuff. But I had no idea if it would actually be allowed to exist inside of the rules of Firewatch until, I guess until I handed it to you!

Jane: Well, the interesting thing is that like, you know, for example, this hole where shoe is, you can actually see all the way down to where the body is.

Jake: You can't quite see the body, because you can't lean far enough in.

Jane: But yeah, but the space is all actually connected in a way that makes sense.

Jake: The is also actually exceptional in that I think it's the only place in Firewatch where we cheat space. There are a couple places in the cave where you drop off a ledge and in the middle of Henry's drop animation we just cut the camera and like blink you to another area that's like a few hundred meters farther away because the cave ended up being so weirdly nested on itself, like this compact ball of yarn to the point that it didn't actually get you all the way to Brian's hideout.

Jane: And so, to make this space make sense while not spending too much time making it, we just decided hey, I guess by cheating it a little it's OK. And I don't think people actually noticed.

Jake: It also cuts your travel time down. Like people were spending a long time walking through it in the early version of the gray box.

Jane: Figuring out how to light the cave. Because you know like video game lighting, yes. But you still have to make sure there are spots opening up to the sky so that you know... because we need to make sure that Henry can go through this without a flashlight.

Jake: Right. But it's also nice and dramatic to have those little cracks of sunlight coming through and it looks nice. But like thinking about those torches, that's true. Spike walls.

Jane: Or an underground lake, how about that.

Jake: Almost almost, almost almost made it. Don't tell people about the lake.

70. The Evolution of Brian Goodwin



Chris: Hey, it's Chris again.

Sean: Hey, it's Sean.

Chris: The entire Brian Goodwin saga changed absolutely, massively multiple times really, over the course of the, of the design and writing process. There was actually a previous design revision in which you as the player through just various means could like trigger the discovery of the existence of Brian Goodwin much earlier in the game and we had to allow for like all these different possible branches of when you could find that out and when Delilah would tell you more information and so on and so on. And it was, it became like a nightmarish possibility space that we really had to rein in.

Sean: It became just a very unwieldy story. Inside of that story was the idea that Delilah didn't know who Brian Goodwin was. She knew Ned Goodwin. He was a lookout who was out here but did not know that he was here with a son because it was against the rules and that he had broken the rules by bringing his son out here. and from a design side that was, not to mention the unwieldy nature of the being able to find out who he is until the very end or figuring out that there was a kid in your tower on day one, that was unwieldy. And then furthermore, we were running out of tools to communicate the story of Brian

Goodwin because they were, the only thing we had was the discovery of objects, which felt very one-note.

Chris: And very, it felt very like bread-crumby. Oh, there's all this little information you have to know in this order. So, you're going to find these things in that order. And we, there were too many of them and it felt completely contrived.

Sean: And this is just a design philosophy. I think this is a good, good story design philosophy, good mechanics design philosophy when something isn't working is... just ask yourself what happens if the opposite is true. I'll just say, OK, so what are the things that are true? Delilah didn't know there's a kid in the tower. I was like, well, what if she did? And not only she did, but she liked him. Oh my gosh, well that makes the emotional payload of finding Brian Goodwin like much more intense. And then once we had that we had another design tool to communicate about who Brian Goodwin was to you.

Chris: And that tool was the one tool we had for communicating information....

Sean: Other than finding something and Henry going "oh". yeah, we doubled the amount of information we can get to you and it just made the game much easier. It just, it opened up the game from the story side and it made us not have to constrain ourselves with that branching craziness of not knowing who he was and breadcrumb you around the world.

Chris: And in doing so it sort of simplified that total arc and allowed us to pack a lot more information into each of those deliveries. So, when you find Brian's backpack, when you find his hideaway, each of those is like very information dense because we just consolidated it all to those zones....

Sean: And can reference the stuff you've learned along the way. So, when you do find him, you actually feel like he's a human being who had a history and a life and personality and stuff. And I'm really glad we got there. We got there late, and you just don't know if that's going to happen. You just don't know. Um, we got there August, September, September-ish of 2015. That game came out in February 2016, so very, very, very late. Yep.

71. The True Tale of Gladius Sylva



Patrick: Hey, it's Patrick and Nels here.

Nels: Hello.

Patrick: You may have just found some role-playing game artifacts owned by Brian Goodwin and I thought we could talk about the ways that this character evolved and actually ended up incorporating a lot of elements of our own super nerdy childhoods. Like Gladius Silva here was....

Nels: Good old Gladius Silva was actually the, the very first D&D character I ever made in probably grade eight, maybe grade nine. Um, my very first D&D campaign, some other friends of mine on the speech team, the speech and debate team asked me to join their game and I was, I was very enamored that they invited me. So, I've had to make a cool character. So, I made a half-elf ranger because I was a giant dorko and taking a Latin class at the time I named him Gladius Silva, which, which of course means sword of the forest. And I remember when we were initially talking about, you know, like giving Brian kind of this, this, this geeky kid personality to contrast with the fact that he's like out in the middle of the wilderness. And I recounted this anecdote about Gladius Silva, and everybody in the office thought it was quite hilarious and because I had for my own edification a while back, rescued that character sheet from like

my parents' garage and then scanned it, I was able just to send over a .pdf of that scanned character sheet and a more or less showed up exactly in the game.

Patrick: Yeah. These are, these are probably your original die rolls from that fated first campaign.

Nels: It was, it was modified just the tiniest bit to like avoid Wizards of the Coast, Dungeons and Dragons copyright. Otherwise, that is literally just my dude. My favorite thing about Brian's proclivity for tabletop RPG is in a Henry's tower and two forks you can actually find a map that Brian made. It's basically like a D&D-ification of the whole area that you're normally in.

Patrick: Yeah. I ended up drawing that completely based on my own style of drawing when I was Brian's age. And Nels' age when he was Gladius Silva. I was a city kid who moved to a more suburban, like woodsy area at that age in my life. And I was so shocked to have all this like actual like woodsy terrain around me that I started mapping it with pencil and paper and drawing little legends, just like Brian did, kinda turning the area into more of a mythical landscape. So as soon as this character had jelled, I knew that he would see Two Forks this way and that cache boxes would be treasure chests. And the Boy Scout camp would be a halfling village. And so, it kind of just wrote itself.

Nels: Yeah, totally. That is our tiny tidbit of geek history in Firewatch by way of Brian Goodwin's Gladius Silva.

72. Ol' Shoshone



Chris: Hey, it's Chris again.

Sean: Hey, it's Sean. And you are in a clearing just beyond the body of a dead elk and nearby there's a cassette tape from Dave to Ron. I get them confused, the way I get, lots of pairs of characters confused... and things that I didn't write. It's a recording of the song "Old Shoshone" as performed and composed by Chris who's sitting here, but as written by one of the, as performed in the fiction of the game by, Ron or Dave... based on the lyrics that are discoverable in the, the Hawk's Rest that were written by Raccoon Carter. I wrote the song as lyrics. And then the whole Ron/Dave saga I left for myself to write later....

Chris: You wrote those lyrics before we actually had the idea of making it a real song in the game. That whole arc collided with a totally separate design idea, which was to have to have a, um, like a non-diegetic piece of music that was playing on top of the game at a particular moment. We really liked the idea of that generally have an actual song with singing and, and lyrics in it punctuate a particular moment, but we never, we just never really landed on a song that we thought worked or a particular way to integrate it into the narrative that wasn't going to stomp on the open nature of the game and it just kind of, we just sort of languished for a while until, I guess it was your idea. I can't even remember too....

Sean: I remember it being my idea only because I remember being really bashful about it because it was like, I'd never written a song before and I really, really, really wanted you to compose music and record it. But like, I was worried that it was bad. And also, making your friend and do this thing that you... you wouldn't tell me it was a bad idea. I was worried you wouldn't tell me it was a bad idea.

Chris: It's so funny because I read that as like, you just didn't really like, "oh you can do this if you want, but..."

Sean: I just didn't want to, it felt like, "so I've written a song and you're going to perform it!" it just did not feel like I was like, ugh, so I was really like feeling that like... then when you delivered it, I like... start crying. I was alone and like got welled up and I was like, "Oh man, that feels good."

Chris: It was so fun. I was really happy to do that. It was really fun. That was great.

Sean: And it's available on the soundtrack, which you can buy at the store.camposanto.com or from our Steam page!

73. Discovering Brian's Body



Jake: Hey it's Jake again.

Chris: And Chris.

Jake: Hey Chris.

Chris: Hey Jake. This area is one of the only areas in the game where we really let ourselves play up, um, sort of dressing a set in a really overtly theatrical and dramatic way, you know, this is... the reveal of Brian's body was such a big moment that we kind of figured we should just go for it entirely.

Jake: Also, it was possible to do because I think this is one of the only places in Firewatch where the direction from which the player approaches, and the time of day, are 100 percent in our control. Like you're only ever going to see this scenario under this circumstance. You're going to walk in, and sort of the scene will reveal itself from this angle and we have, there's no chance that the sun is going to be setting in the middle of it or whatever else. Um, so we leaned into it.

Chris: I kind of ran with that with the music as well. I, as you know, if you've listened to the music in this game, I don't, I really didn't lean on big string swells or anything like that. It's very kind of small-scale recordings, you know, guitar and

electric piano and Bass and things like that. I decided to just push this as far as possible. I did one odd thing with the music, which was instead of what you'd expect, which was making the music really minor, dark key, it's actually all in major, which is typically what people associate with happier, more upbeat music, but I pushed the strings far enough that I was hoping it would sort of come around the other side and make something that's a kind of a poignant....

Jake: It's cool. I like it. A fun fact about this area, if you bring a notable Brian Goodwin possession down into the space, you can set it down next to him using the game's put-back system.

Chris: One Russian streamer found that live, on like the day the game came out.

Jake: By accident! And it was amazing. That guy's stream blew up.

Chris: Yep.

74. Delilah



Sean: I came up with this character, Delilah, and then just thrust her upon you and said you are going to be Delilah in this video game. I liked working with you on the Walking Dead. You were amazing as Katjaa. How did that character come to life for you?

Cissy: Well, actually I think her name was Alice at first, if you recall...

Sean: Oh no, it was Alice. Oh no. What a hilarious thing to have to remember...

Cissy: I remember getting that email from you about a, "Hey, I'm writing a game, female protagonist, are you in?" And I didn't even have to think twice about it. I knew whatever you're working on, whenever, throughout history and time I will want to be a part of. But then you sent me the sides for Alice, and I got to read about this beautifully flawed but fun and self-engaged woman. And um, that's one of the things I love about the characters that you write is that they're actual people. They're not tropes they're not, um, stereotypes of anything. They're full-bodied people. And so, I got to dig a little bit into my past and what's made me tick. And, and what would make me take a job in the middle of nowhere and shamelessly flirt with somebody over a walkie-talkie and build her from there. The wonderful thing about Delilah is that there's actually a lot of me in her, meaning, like I grew up in Idaho. There are a lot of mountains and wildfires and

solitude and stuff like that. I left and I moved to Los Angeles and now I'm surrounded by concrete, but I kind of started out in the same, the same place

Sean: I was integrating so much of the way you speak and the way you tell a joke or laugh just back into the character. Do you feel like you had to create that stuff to be Delilah or were you making a concerted effort to sort of like become her?

Cissy: I think it's a little bit of both. Um, I am a bit of a smart ass. And so, a lot of the stuff that you wrote really lent itself to that. Um, but you know, as we started getting into the puns, you know, "wouldn't you lichen to know" and stuff like that. I was able. I was able to kind of sit back into this, this woman who just doesn't give a shit. You know, she's out there in the middle of nowhere and having fun because this is her life, and so having that freedom to just be an idiot, it was really freeing. It was a lot of fun.

75. Dawn of the Final Day



Chris: Hey, it's Chris again.

Olly: Hey this is Olly again.

Chris: Hey Olly.

Olly: Hey Chris.

Chris: Where you are right now in the game represents by far the biggest change to sort of environmental ambiance that we did in the whole game in terms of visuals and audio and everything else. It was just a totally different outdoor kind of vibe.

Olly: Yeah, it was really important that the end of the game felt a very sort of climactic and exciting. And for the style of this, we actually looked at first-person views of like real forest fighting that'd be recorded in Australia and it was so intense and the thought of like trying to hit that, like the benchmark has been set, right? So, we had to try and get something that captured that feeling. I think we were all surprised by how close it got in the end.

Chris: Yeah, for sure. It was, it was, I was really impressed.

Olly: It was amazing how close we got to the original vision without special casing any tools, like the tools that we had enabled us to get this effect like very quickly. And it was something I'd been putting off for a long time because I was really scared of being able to deliver something that felt exciting. And, and then I remember bringing everyone to the room and going "guys, I think. I think we got it!"

Chris: On the audio system I did have to special case of a bunch of stuff. What ended up happening was because of the needs of this day, I ended up redoing the way audio ambiance worked for the whole game to be able to support dropping elements in and out, which ended up being really useful retroactively for the earlier days when I went back and changed those.

76. Ned Goodwin Speaks



Sean: We're coming up on the end here, Jake.

Jake: It's true. We are.

Sean: You are about to hear or have currently heard the voice of Ned Goodwin, which we didn't know we were going to put into the game for a long, long time until we played it, because originally it was like a note he left you...

Jake: We went back and forth early on too. There was a moment I think where we said maybe one of the last conversations you'll have is with Ned Goodwin himself who's off in the woods. Maybe you'll pick up the radio in his tower. Talked ourselves off of that pretty quick and then yeah, maybe he leaves you, maybe he leaves you a note. Sort of a confessional note.

Sean: We also sort of bounced off the note because you would find it and it just didn't have the oomph and it didn't have the sort of cinematic nature of a conversation. And then we went, OK, well is the response to that to like put Ned Goodwin in the scene? You're going to meet the guy? Like thought about that for a minute and then we said, well you're going to talk to them and like, what are you going to say to him? And then we actually found the middle ground, which was a recorded note, which is like really, really great. It was like the thing that it never occurred to us because we had written notes and

conversations. The idea of just essentially having an audio log, did not like jump out at us for a few weeks. And then it was like, oh wait, you have a tape player.

Jake: He's left you recordings of yourself before...

Sean: It all connected and I'm really happy with where we landed with it. And also, Mac Brandt is the voice of Ned Goodwin. We had so many auditions and this happens all the time. You get a lot of very similar auditions. People trying to play someone a certain way and then Mac put a little bit of a, like kind of an East Coast accent on it and just...

Jake: I remember not being sure about it at first, but you and Chris pushed for Mac and I'm really glad that you did.

Sean: Yeah, he was just a titan.

Jake: This is such a weird goofy detail, just the sorts of things that you imagine in your head, but Goodwin leaving you this tape has meant that for me, my mental image of Ned Goodwin is that he has no one to talk to, but like when he left the Shoshone, it was like with a backpack full of tapes that he's recorded to himself, which obviously doesn't exist in the game. Doesn't say that. But now like the existence of that tape just painted that strange character detail into my brain. Now that it's on this commentary it's definitely purely canon.

77. The Design of Goodwin's Bunker



Nels: It is Nels, once again.

Jane: And Jane is back!

Nels: And we are here outside of Goodwin's... Goodwin's bunker, is what we ended up calling it. This is kind of the weird hideout hideaway that Goodwin has been living in for the past four years. Which may, some people may initially think, how could someone do that, that's unrealistic! But actually, we mentioned this briefly earlier in the commentary as well, but there was this man named Christopher Thomas Knight, who is also known as the Maine Hermit or the Last True Hermit, and he was this dude who lived in the woods in central Maine for like over 30 years. Thirty years. Not four. Thirty. To the point where he became like a folktale that kids in the region were like, "you know, my mom said we have to behave, or the hermit will come take us away in the night!" And everyone like, you know, stuff would go disappearing for people's houses or whatever. But almost everybody just thought it was, you know, local naughty teens or whatever, leaning into the legend. But there was actually this dude out in the middle of nowhere, um, and he had this insanely robustly stocked bunker. There's this great GQ piece all about it that had like diagrams of how he set up his bunker and whereas different supplies were, and that was like a major inspiration for this area.

- Jane:** Part of why he could survive for so long was that he would keep raiding nearby homes and campsites, you know, to get his supplies. And then he would hide all his trash basically in these trash-holes, I guess. So, when we were designing this space I was told, you know, look at this article and diagram for some inspiration and just make sure to have piles of trash around. But the funny thing is actually it was kind of hard as an environment artist to just make a pile of trash! OK, if I have to make a pile of trash, I now have to do the mental homework of thinking, well, what exactly could have, could he have taken from where. Because like, even though it's a pile of trash, what is actually in the trash? And what I'm going to model kind of does need to make sense, and need to tell a story of like, you know... you can't just have random TV sets for example.
- Nels:** Or like a big old car tire or something like that.
- Jane:** He wouldn't have stolen something like that.
- Nels:** And then the actual shape of the bunker itself that was more based on these old Native American structures that are actually in Point Reyes, California. Jake, I think, had seen them or maybe been up there or something, but there was this tribe of Miwok Native Americans who built these underground bunker smokehouse type things... the winters in Maine may be a bit cold, but obviously they don't compare in the least to the high-altitude Wyoming national forests. So, in all honestly, Goodwin probably should have frozen to death like, winter 1. He ended up way more like Christopher McCandless than the Maine Hermit. But... poetic license.
- Jane:** And the cool thing about this space too is if you go all the way to the end where there is a big window, you know, if you look out there, you can see Henry's tower, and also Delilah's tower. That's actually where both of those towers are. We didn't cheat at all. So, Jake did a really good job picking that spot for, um, this bunker.
- Nels:** It's one of my favorite moments where you get out to that opening and you realize that like not only has he been listening in, but he's literally been able to kind of watch you two the whole time. You can kind of imagine in your head like as, as Goodwin was listening to this conversation, he was like looking back and forth between the two towers as Henry and Delilah were talking. It's a very wonderful voyeuristic moment.
- Jane:** What a creepy dude.

78. Finding Goodwin's Notes



Sean: Hi Chris.

Chris: Hey Sean.

Sean: So, we are here in Ned Goodwin's survival bunker. Something you'll notice, dear player, is all of his like journalistic writings and logs are all over the walls and you may or may not have read them and you may or may not have read them because Firewatch isn't really a game that makes you passively digest written materials like a game like *Gone Home* or a game that tells all of its story through logs and journals you find around the world. And that was kind of a design challenge as a lot of this game was, because when you pick up an important note in Firewatch, Henry will sort of react. And then when you tell Delilah about it, he'll condense it down to a sentence or two about what the point of it is. And then they'll have a conversation about it. But that's not really the, that's not really on the table here because the helicopter's coming and Henry and Delilah or sort of, a little bit further apart. We kind of walked ourselves into a challenge of being able to check all the boxes about who exactly was Ned and what exactly did he have his hand in, presenting you a scene that is completely passive to digest. Which was difficult, I think.

Chris: Yeah, and part of the reason we have to do that is because in games that really lean on you reading a bunch of text throughout the world, generally speaking,

those protagonists are either silent, or they have prescribed responses to things. Our game is... the dialog really is contingent on your choices. And so, we can't assume you actually read all the words on the page. We basically had to make a call for each note whether, OK, we're just going to let this player read it or not, or we're making the call that Henry explicitly read it in the fiction, and he will state its contents or make explicit acknowledgement of the useful information inside of it. And it just didn't, as you say, in Goodwin's bunker, it didn't seem to make sense to require all of that. And so, we basically said, OK, regardless of what Henry does, we have to allow for the player to absorb all this stuff. And we will put all the information in the story there, like, it's all there, if you want to read it. You don't technically have to.

79. Skipping Ned Goodwin



Chris: Hey. Chris here.

Nels: And Nels. Hello.

Chris: Hey Nels.

Nels: Hey Buddy.

Chris: So, you probably just went to Goodwin's bunker and got the message from him and learned about what happened and, and uncovered a huge part of the story, but as it turns out, you actually don't have to go there at all.

Nels: Not in the least. The only thing you actually have to do to kind of keep the game going is listen to that cassette he leaves you. After you snack is that there's kind of that dangling rope, but you can just n'er climb up that rope. You can just kinda be like, I'm good to be evacuated now. Goodbye.

Chris: The only reason that's the case is because we literally could not think of any good, reasonable, convincing excuse to force you to go up there. One of the big challenges in this game from a design standpoint was that it's one big, connected world and there are a lot of times where we just can't really force you to go somewhere and do a thing.

Nels: Or, if we did, it would just be absolutely terrible. Like we could technically allow you to walk all the way over to Delilah's evacuation tram, you get there and she says, oh, we're not ready to go yet, and then you would have to like walk all the way back to where you were. Then climb around Goodwin's bunker, and then magically she says, oh, it is actually time to go now, and that would be awful.

Chris: And so, because we eventually determined, all right, we have to allow for the player not going through there. That meant Nels and I had to then tackle the other hilarious and difficult problem of making sure that the game and the story didn't break for those players who do never find Goodwin's bunker. Yeah. That was a very complicated and a frustrating task I would say.

Nels: Well technically you can grab the cassette, listen to it, and then not even tell Delilah about it!

Chris: Yeah. There are a lot of different states. You can be... conversation states you can be in between getting that tape and getting to Delilah's tower. There's anywhere from only getting the bare minimum conversations, because you already exhausted most of it at Goodwin's bunker, all the way up to needing all of that stuff to be recapped on the way because you didn't actually go to the place. And we had to make sure that all of those possible player actions and combinations of actions all worked, and all made for a logical game where the story actually concluded, and information didn't just magically appear out of nowhere.

Nels: Yeah. There were so many different permutations of it. It's like, OK, we'd finally, you know like, hog tie one of them, and then one of us will be playing the game and be like, but wait, what if you don't do this? Then we have to be like, ughhh, OK, so what do we do if you do this, this, but not that, but this, OK are we have that one covered?

Chris: And then you go this direction rather than that direction.

Nels: Cause that's the other thing is like walking into Delilah's, there are so many different paths you could technically take. We had to like slap down just 15 different triggers probably to just catch all the different, like, went this way, but then looped over that way... it was a horrible mess.

Chris: Good times.

Nels: Firewatch.

80. Henry



- Sean:** So, Rich, as you know, we struggled so hard to find you. To find the voice of Henry.
- Rich:** And I was here all along!
- Sean:** You were just right there, in the valley, waiting for us! And you were discovered, basically — not discovered, but contacted via Twitter...
- Rich:** [Laughs] Those two things are synonymous.
- Sean:** Yeah. It's interesting to me because I don't think I knew who Henry was until you read for the character and then I went like, "oh, of course". Did you feel like you had to bring something out of the ordinary to him or something created, or was it more of an amalgam of the words on the page and who you are as a person?
- Rich:** I think the latter more than the former. I mean, I think that, um, I think that Henry and I differ chiefly in that I would probably classify him as an introvert, and I would classify myself as an extrovert. And so, I think pretty much flipping merely that switch did that for me. And that coupled with the words that, that made pretty clear what this guy was going through. And I think too, it probably did not hurt that I was recording this thing, you know, in a tiny little upright

coffin, basically. Where every wall is bumping my body in some way. So, there was a feeling of, even though there's this game takes place out in the woods, there was certainly a feeling of isolation that probably didn't hurt as we were recording. I'm going to bounce that back to you and say that I think that the writing was pretty clear on who Henry was and I just tried to sound like that guy. I guess.

Sean: This was your first voice acting gig really, right?

Rich: Yeah. My first video game for sure. This came right at a time when I was trying to get into voice-over work.

Sean: Does the type of work that is so different than being on stage or on camera, does it fulfill you in the same way? Do you find it... does it tickle sort of a different pleasure-sensor in your brain or...?

Rich: I wouldn't say it's exactly the same, but it's certainly a different part of my brain, but I would say it's at least as fulfilling as anything I've ever done on camera because there's sort of a freedom in the booth that isn't there if you're on camera. There's a lot of sort of, you can't move too far that way and you can't block your other actors light and you know, there's a lot of technical stuff you have to keep in your brain that has no bearing on what you're doing here. I mean, the, the most technical thing I have to worry about is that I don't get so loud that it clips the sound otherwise that's kind of it. So, I have free, full acting available range and that's a, an exciting thing. And, in a lot of ways, more exciting to me than on-camera work.

81. Asking Delilah to Stay



Sean: Hey Chris

Chris: Hey Sean.

Sean: I don't know about you, but I get a lot of email and tweets about people really, really wanting Delilah to be in the tower at the end of game.

Chris: I hear about that a fair amount myself.

Sean: And I am really, really happy with the performances of Henry — Rich and Cissy — here in the canyon, when she says there's a helicopter here, and it's ready for me to get on it. And if you're wondering why we ended up making the creative decision we made, there's sort of two things that I know Chris and I spoke a lot about. One is, Delilah is simply not the type of person to wait for anyone. Chris did a really good job with me just sort of painting a portrait of her emotional state and what it would feel like to be waiting for this guy to show up after a really, really tragic thing has happened and then just sit in this tower and wait for a helicopter... thinking about this dead kid and how messed up their entire summer had been. And the dread...

Chris: And you wrote that almost directly.

Sean: Yeah. And that's what I did. You basically painted that portrait for me, and I went, oh, well, she's just going to say that. I don't want to like sit here in the shadow of a dead boy. And I went like, "Yep. All right". Thank you for giving me that. And then alternatively, Henry's wanted nothing more than to be made to feel better over the past five, 10 years of his life. Definitely the past five. Definitely the past one. And that feeling of disappointment that you feel when you open the door and she's not there even though you ask her to stay and you can hear how badly Henry wants her to stay in Rich's performance in, in his voice. I wanted that feeling to go into the player, that level of disappointment, and then for some players to think, man, but how disappointed would I really be if this... if I was him. Obviously, we can't make you think that stuff, but if we do then I feel like the story has been successful in communicating this sort of emotional payload that it set out to provide. So, there you go.

82. Designing and Set Dressing Delilah's Tower



Olly: Hi, it's Olly again.

Jane: And it's Jane again!

Olly: So, this is Delilah's tower. Funny fact. This is one of the first things we concept of them built in the game. We always knew that the game would end with Delilah's tower and I always, I think we all liked the idea of the title screen being Delilah's tower. So that was one of the first things we did as a sort of test, but it wasn't until closer to the end of the game that we really thought about what Delilah's tower would be like on the inside.

Jane: And by that point we were very well acquainted with all sorts of towers, so I don't think we had a big concept about it. We just kind of went in and went through all our references and we just decided, um, we should have this kind of ceiling and...

Olly: It should feel familiar but different enough that it feels like Delilah's place. And we thought about all the things that the player learns about Delilah across the game and tried to like, communicate that through things, but also maybe some things that you don't know about Delilah that are interesting to find out.

Jane: I remember when I was just making props for her space and I would ask Sean, hey, like if she were just eating at snack, what would it be? And Sean would just say "peanut butter and apples!" And I would just ask Sean "what kind of slippers would she have?" And you know, we'll just have to think about, you know, through the props tell a little bit of, you know, the character of who Delilah is, like what kind of shoes she wears would be the fun kind of things to think about.

Olly: Um, interesting fact. Also, behind the mask of the firefighter who collects Henry at the end, is actually Henry's own face, because it's the only face that we had modeled in the game. I really like the idea that potentially someone would have noticed and thought it was this insane twist third ending ending, Henry sees himself and realizes it was all a dream. Henry died in the cave on the way into the park.

Jane: He rescues himself.

Olly: Oh... it's so good.

83. Writing and Designing the Last Scene



Sean: Hey Chris.

Chris: Hey Sean.

Sean: It's the last scene of the game.

Chris: Yeah. This, this was this took some, getting some, getting this was very difficult.

Sean: Yeah, something you would say in story meetings all the time, which was I was really afraid of writing the scene and I was really afraid of the end of the game, which I had never experienced in my career.

Chris: We went up to the wire.

Sean: You would say to me, "Oh, you're going to feel it out when you write it" and you would say that is sort of like. "And you'll figure that out on the page when you're working", when we were trying to really talk about the beats with this last scene. And I would go like... OK... and some direction that you gave me that was really valuable was just the muted nature of this scene because everything that has been said has already been said and there's sort of nothing left to do. And you get to a point in your life where that is true often. But movies and games never really explore what that space feels like because it's really hard to

choose to do that, to write the like not exciting thing, which I think is why the helicopter shows up to be perfectly honest. We needed something to counterbalance this feeling of like, well the story is just over. They're not going to get to see each other because that's just the way it goes. So how do we make this feel big and final? We better pay for a big helicopter and a guy's hand you grab and everything. And then to tie it all together, we decided very, very down to the wire that you were going to write music over the top of the whole thing. And I think it totally works. Yeah. What was that experience like for you?

Chris: It was very stressful because writing that music was literally literally in the last couple of days before content lock. But I think much like the writing of the scene, um, I think I had just sort of absorbed so much of everything that had led up to that point that it actually ended up being an easier process than I thought it was going to be. As for the ending as a whole, I mean we talked through how this game was gonna end so many times and on a literal plot level it actually changed a fair amount in terms of how the mystery gets resolved. All the sort of background information that's feeding into Henry and Delilah's last conversation. And I remember something that was really important to me was like, as much as possible, I would like the ambiguity and the sort-of meaning of the ending and all the events that have transpired to be not in the literal what happened, but in the, why did any of it happen, just in the sense of why does anything happen? I remember that was something that I thought was really potentially powerful about the way this game concluded. I think you, you got, I don't know if that means anything to anyone else, but I think that you got that in the writing and it was very, I was very happy with how it ended.

Sean: Thanks so much for like, you throughout the entire process, two-year process of trying to write this game, were just like a constant like checkpoint for me, because when you're writing, it's a very lonely process. It's very, very lonely and to drift off of the tone of the thing you're working on with the other people. It was very seductive. Hey guys, we're doing this totally new different thing. It's a totally different way now because I had a brilliant idea last night.

Chris: Yeah, that happened a bunch of times.

Sean: That is a very easy thing to do, but I always felt like you were able to ground me back to where we were headed in a way that I found to be very comforting and I thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Chris: Glad to help. I'm really happy with what we did with the ending. For something that so many people have very mixed feelings about, I'm almost even more pleased with we did it the way we did it.

Sean: Same. Exact same.

84. The Fat Prince



Jake: Hi, it's Jake again.

Paolo: And hi, this is Paolo.

Jake: There is a character who never appears in Firewatch but who sort of circles around its existence and I think has never been documented. And I wanted to know if we could talk about a Fat French Prince who lives behind a diamond wall.

Paolo: OK. So, um..... this is sort of a story about programming really, it's a story about life. Um, I don't know, Jake, I don't know if I can summarize it, but I'll try. I'll try. I'm a, I'm a very animated person and sometimes programming takes, takes the best out of me. I just happened to one-time stumble across a very, very hard to find bug, which is crazy because now I don't even remember what the bug was, but yeah, I was just like, um, I couldn't find a solution. And then after like hours and hours and hours of finding people sort of saw that I was struggling with it and trying to confirm what, what was going on and I just came up with, I think, what was one of the best metaphors that a human had ever created. So. Yup. That is, that is, that is how video games are made.

Jake: You're not even going to tell me what it is. That's fine, Paolo.

Paolo: Oh, it's fine, it's just like, I was banging my head against a problem.... and so, I compared myself banging my head against a diamond wall, and having a fat prince behind that diamond wall, making fun of me. And that was sort of like a metaphor of the computer who's always right, really, making fun of me as a programmer.

Jake: Ok, ok, I see.

Paolo: Clearly a clear metaphor that everyone can empathize with, and that everyone can see.

Jake: I'm glad that's on tape. Whether it goes in the game or not. I think that's it.

85. Goodbye



James: Hi, it's James again, so now we're going to talk about the secret alternate ending to Firewatch, which if anyone isn't aware of this, if you dilly-dally after the final conversation with Delilah, then the helicopter will just leave without you! And that is fully supported with its own animation content and so on and so forth. I, if I remember correctly, it was essentially a request from you to me, Jake, is that how you remember it?

Jake: I think that Sean and Chris and I all wanted it to happen once we realized the helicopter pilot was there, um, given that all of Firewatch and sort of, or not all of it, but quite a lot of Firewatch is predicated on the idea that if you don't do anything that inaction is action. Like if you let a conversation time out, it just times out. It seems ridiculous that a helicopter pilot would wait for a crazy person for this long. So, it seemed like a fun and accurate easter egg to let him just totally abandon you. I like, I don't know, my favorite ending of Firewatch is the one where the helicopter pilot flies away and the player raises their camera at the last second and snaps a picture of the helicopter leaving them behind, because the story, in that credit sequence is just totally weird, the Henry that gets left behind... is he burned alive? Does he go off and run into the woods and become a Ned Goodwin of his own? I don't know.

James: Tons of weird stuff goes into the very end when you understand the systems because like building that attempts of the scripting logic pretty complicated.

Um, but it's like I was at my most competent at scripting events. So, it just slipped in and like half a day near the very, very, very young.

Jake: Also, a game development trick that everyone should learn is that if it's the very last thing that happens in the game, it can be as crazy as you want because that game is unloading itself the moment it's done, who cares what mess that thing leaves behind your game is erased immediately afterwards. So just go nuts.

James: I'm very pleased. I'm very pleased we did that.

Jake: Yeah, same. That's the end of the Firewatch audio tour! Thank you very much for playing along and listening to all this stuff.

Chris: Yeah, but... what is Firewatch?

Ben: That was it. We did it. That was... the whole thing just now.

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