

OVERVIEW

Firewatch follows Henry, the protagonist, in the summer of 1989 as he works as a fire lookout alongside his boss, Delilah, in the Shoshone National Forest of Wyoming. The duo tackles a bizarre mystery with hints of a grand conspiracy deep in the forest, while they each grapple with their own past failures and trauma.

Henry and Delilah eventually solve the anticlimactic mystery, revealed to be an attempt by the hermit Ned Goodwin to escape his own responsibilities. When they are forced to evacuate by an out-of-control wildfire, they must then return to their "real lives", and face the responsibilities that had originally compelled them to escape to the forest.

STRONGEST ELEMENT

Firewatch's strength lies in its characters. Henry is a realistic, relatable character, with whom many players can at least partially identify. The first act induces strong sadness, and hits hard for those who've experienced similar loss, and it's easy to empathize with Henry when he tries to escape from reality. Delilah is also a charming, relatable character. Her witty jokes and playful sarcasm feel real, and are endearing to the player. She is another complicated person, and when she divulges details of her personal life, it feels like someone is confiding in you, and their friendship feels real. Because much of the narrative of Firewatch is told through Henry's dialogue with Delilah, their characters and relationship are of the utmost importance.

FIREWATCH

Patrick Butler
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
patrick.wv.butler@gmail.com

LESSONS

Firewatch demonstrates that a video game story may be about things that do not even take place in the game at all. Firewatch uses the summer of 1989 to tell a much larger story, of Henry and his life, and Ned, Delilah, and Julia, and their lives. That summer is simply a tool, with a beautiful background, that allows Campo Santo to tell a story deeper and more meaningful than a standard mystery. The events that occur in-game ultimately amount to nothing, and the main characters are left in the same situation they began in, and faced with the choice to face their responsibilities, or fall deeper into escapism.

CHARACTERS

Henry

Henry is a middle-aged fire lookout in the forests of Wyoming. Originally from Colorado, Henry took the job after his wife developed early-onset dementia, and left to be with family across the world. While his dialogue and personality is often decided by the player's choices, he is generally sarcastic, mildly grumpy, but mostly good natured. Henry carries deep emotional baggage related to his marriage, and it is implied he has had troubles with alcoholism, including a DUI related to coping with his wife's illness.

Delilah

Delilah is the veteran head fire lookout, and Henry's boss for the summer. She is peppy, funny, sarcastic, and roughly the same age as Henry. She struggles her own personal demons, and is also heavily implied to have issues with alcohol, and guilt related to failures in past relationships. While Delilah is possibly the second most important character, she is only ever spoken to through the walkie-talkie, and never seen or interacted with physically.

Ned Goodwin

Ned is a former fire lookout who had been stationed with his young son, Brian, in Henry's lookout a few summers previously. Ned is a Vietnam war veteran, and implied to be suffering from PTSD. While little is ever revealed of Ned's personality, it's shown he is something of a reclusive outdoorsman, often climbing, hiking, and camping, bringing his reluctant son along with him. After his son's death in a climbing accident, Ned abandoned his post, and has since lived a secluded life in the forest.