

Overview

*The White Door* is the latest installment in the esoteric, *Twin Peaks*-inspired Rusty Lake universe. Focusing on the struggles of Robert Hill, the narrative weaves between themes of surrealism, horror, and mental health. This narrative sets itself apart as exemplary among the Rusty Lake franchise by providing unique experiences to new and old fans, seamlessly matching and subverting the established canon of previous games by use of an unreliable narrator.

Highlight

The narrative highlight of *The White Door* occurs near the end of the story. After enduring terrible experimentation, a string of pseudo-real nightmares, and fully corrupting his soul, one morning Robert wakes to find slivers of color re-entering his life. This serves as a magical moment for the player, as up until now the waking world was fully monochromatic. By following the routine of the mental health facility one more time, Robert is able to fully return color to his experience sliver by sliver, and is ultimately able to reconcile willingly with his own estranged soul.

Rely on player lore base to connect linked stories

- Trust returning players to intelligently connect and draw meaning from repeated imagery. They will feel knowledgeable and accomplished for noticing "Easter eggs" of connectivity themselves.

Subtle franchise links allow for wider audience

- By containing only vague references to prior games and carefully controlling contact with recurring characters who know more about the universe than a new player, *The White Door* made itself the most accessible Rusty Lake game to onboarding players.

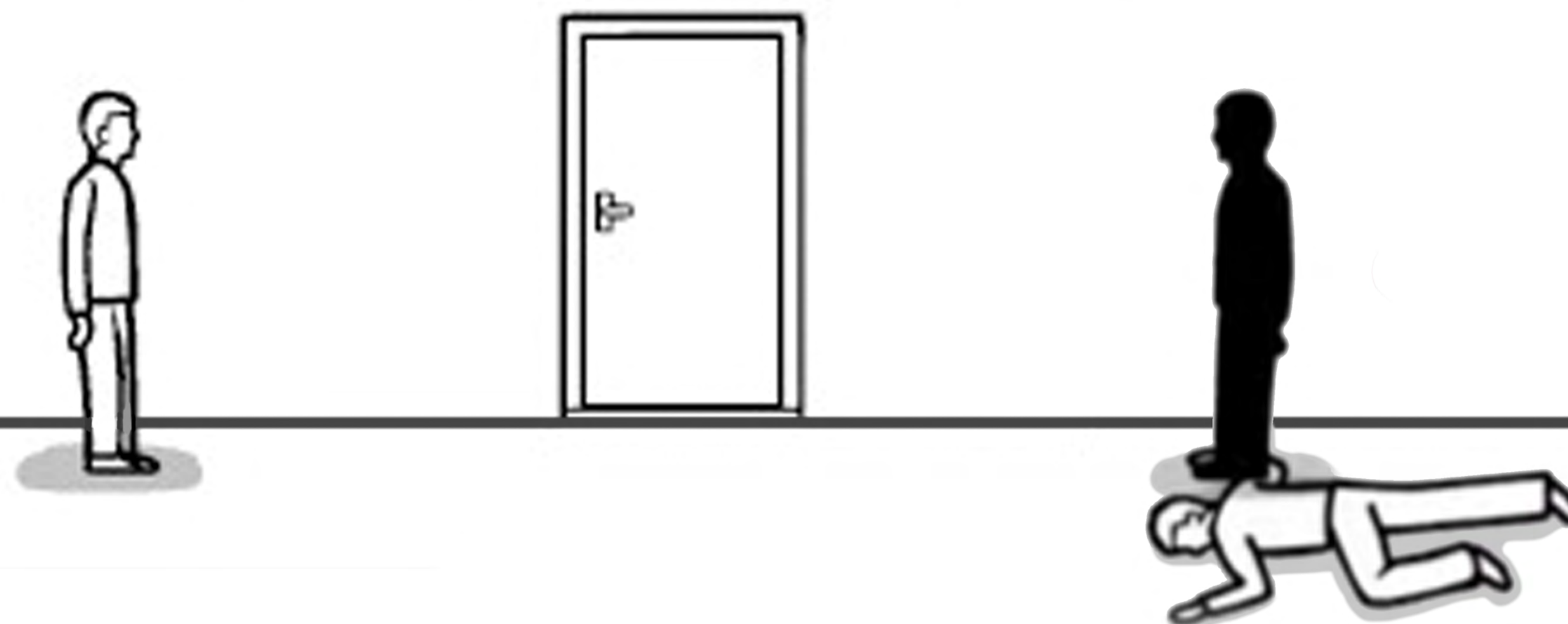
A series can create its own set of rules/affordances

- After a full franchise of games, returning series players are led to immediately make assumptions about *The White Door* mental health facility due to the antagonistic nature of Rusty Lake Mental Health & Fishing before gameplay even begins.

Breaking those rules can make for unique narrative beats

- After seeing Robert become corrupted, the player loses all hope of his recovery. Him managing to return to himself via *The White Door* facility's methods was a well-executed twist that makes players sharply aware of the assumptions the series has taught them to make.

# THE WHITE DOOR



Strongest Element

The strongest element of *The White Door*'s narrative is its ability to reference preexisting canon while telling a fully independent story that doesn't alienate onboarding players. It achieves this through its repetition of the series' iconic imagery, characters, and actions, but recontextualizing them in a fresh perspective. This culminates in a narrative that simultaneously gives these things new meaning without contradicting preestablished events and characters. It accomplishes this by leaning into the series' surrealism, the use of dreams for narrative sequences, and the inherent unreliability they establish for their protagonist Robert Hill. This skewed perspective gives the game a unique narrative flavor and excuses itself from any narrative contradiction with the series - any conflicting events could be pure delusion of the character. This strategy makes it stand out to players both new and familiar, as every event in the game gains new significance based on the player's knowledge of the overarching narrative and themes - a new player, a somewhat experienced player, and a fully-versed player will all have unique impressions of the meaning and reality of various scenes.

Weakest Element

The weakest element of *The White Door*'s narrative is actually the perfect consequence of its strongest element - by keeping itself viable for onboarding players, the game actually fails to make any narrative impact in the overarching plot of the series. Although *The Woman* appears, we're no closer to solving her mystery. Although a sequence from *Cube Escape Theatre* is present, it doesn't provide meaningful insight into the remaining questions the overarching series left us with in its previous installment - *Cube Escape Paradox*. It leaves the game intriguing on its own, but makes it less impactful overall by reducing the game's significance in relation to larger series conflicts and narrative beats.

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