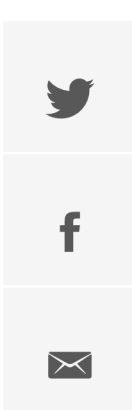




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# Why We Love Gone Home (and Why You Will Too)

by Joe Rybicki, Contributing Editor • Jan 13, 2016 @ 10:00am



When *Gone Home* debuted on Windows PC in 2013, it turned heads and raised eyebrows with its tightly focused, minimalist storytelling and unconventional gameplay. And now, it has arrived on Xbox One. Here's why this is one gaming experience you definitely don't want to miss out on.

## The Storytelling

You're back at home, in your rambling Portland house. Your parents and little sister are nowhere to be found. Go.

That's pretty much the setup for *Gone Home*. Any story elements beyond that, you need to pick up as you go. You'll have some ideas, of course; the house is big, spooky, and very empty, which leads to a palpable feeling of menace. You'll come across information about the house's previous owners, which will give you clues. And you'll find pieces of your sister's diary, which can be considered the main storyline. But the brilliant thing is that *Gone Home* never shows all of its cards; when you begin, you're not even certain exactly what kind of game you'll be playing. Is it a horror game? A puzzlegame? An adventure game? It's not immediately clear... and we're not about to spoil it by telling you. But we will say this: Even with its dramatically minimalist storytelling style, *Gone Home* is virtually guaranteed to surprise you.

## The Subtlety

A key element of the novel approach to storytelling is that *Gone Home* very rarely hits you over the head with...well, anything. Much of the context of the story is gathered simply by exploring, poking your nose into every corner, and putting together the pieces yourself. You'll be reading your sister's journal, yes, but much more of the story can be fleshed out and/or sketched in by searching everything else in the house. You won't necessarily need to in order to understand what's going on, though – and the game doesn't lead you by the hand and point you to this supplemental material. This is a dramatic departure from most story-focused games, but it works wonderfully here, especially when combined with...

## The Setting

The entire game takes place in a house. A single house. It's a *big* house, to be sure, but still – the environment is much smaller than what you'd find in pretty much any other game. But it's a brilliant move here, because it allows the designers to pack an incredible amount of detail into that one house. It feels like a real house, one that's been lived in by real people. This realism makes the story that much more effective.

## The Soundtrack

You can't discuss *Gone Home* without mentioning the role that music plays in giving the game a sense of time and place: specifically, the Pacific Northwest in the mid-'90s. Scattered around the house are cassette tapes (yes!) that, when placed in a handy boombox, blast out perfect representations of the '90s Riot Grrl music scene. Artists like Bratmobile and Heavens to Betsy spit out lo-fi masterpieces that will be instantly familiar to players of a certain age, at least in spirit.

## The Legacy

Given that the game is so very memorable in so many ways, it's perhaps not surprising that this two-year-old game has already influenced other developers. Probably the most obvious is *Life Is Strange*, with its teenage protagonist, Pacific Northwest setting, and wealth of notes and such found through exploration. But developers of games as diverse as *Alien: Isolation* and *SOMA* have cited *Gone Home* as an influence. That's pretty good company.

And this year, a new game from Fullbright joins that company: an eerie sci-fi adventure called *Tacoma* that looks to maintain the spirit of *Gone Home*, if not the setting. Until then, enjoy exploring this creepy old house. *Gone Home* is now available on Xbox One!

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