

I Can't Stop Reading Fan Theories About 'Inside'

By Phil Hornshaw
July 7, 2016

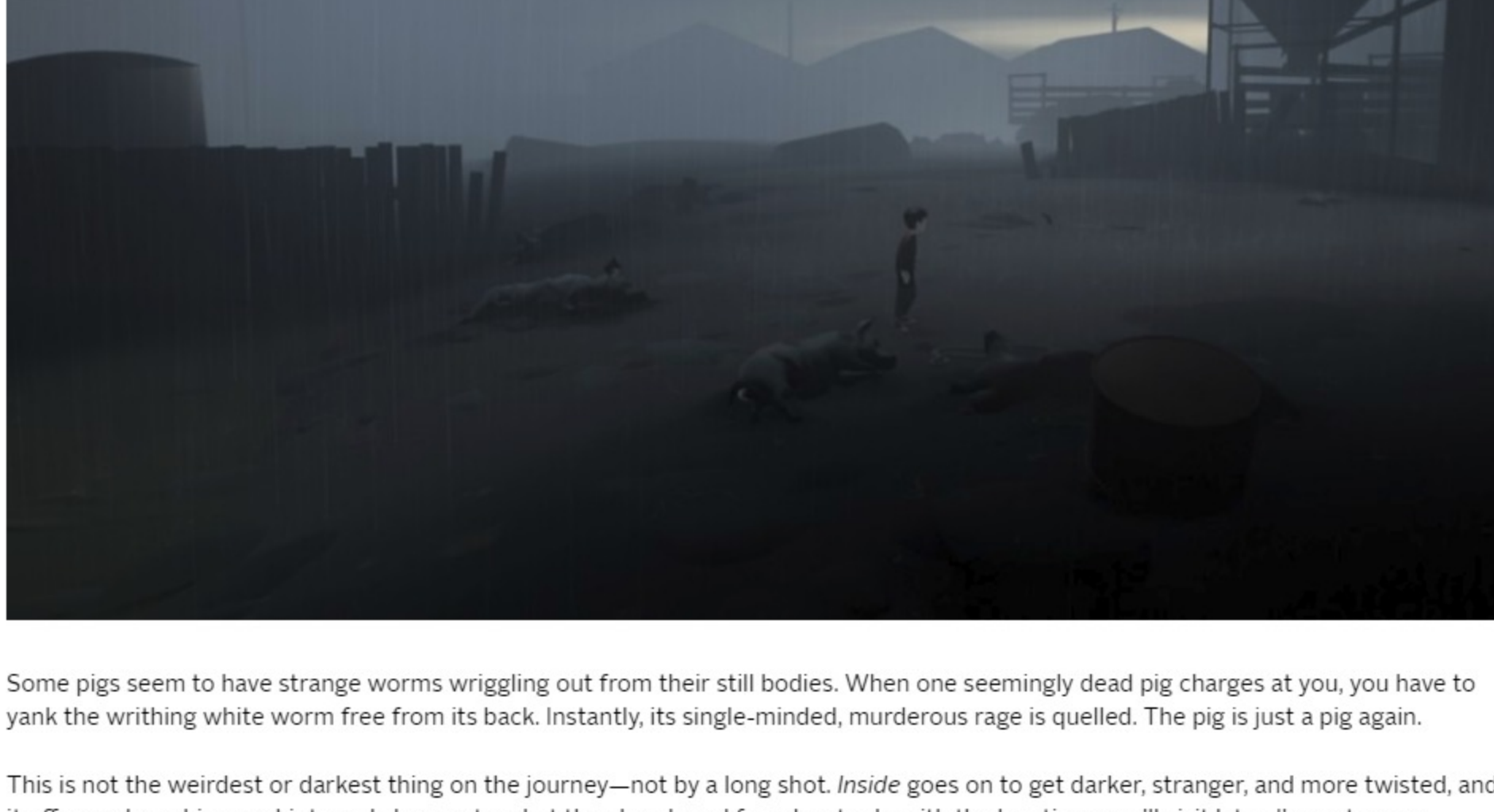


Spoilers for *Inside* below. Go play the game first. You have time! It's like three hours long!

I have no idea what happened in *Inside*.

Actually, that's not true. In fact, I have too many ideas about what happened in *Inside*. Developer Playdead's new game, like its previous game, *Limbo*, leaves a lot open to interpretation. And there's a ton of weird, scary, Cronenbergian shit to unpack in the short horror game. So I've been talking it through with everyone I can.

Here's an example of the strangeness at play in *Inside*: there's the weirdo pig farm from early in the game, which you enter while fleeing armed men in the woods who chase you with trucks and dogs, attempting to kill you. The abandoned farm is piled with the rotting corpses of dead pigs. Not slaughtered or butchered, or seemingly used for any purpose. Just dead. In heaps. Everywhere.

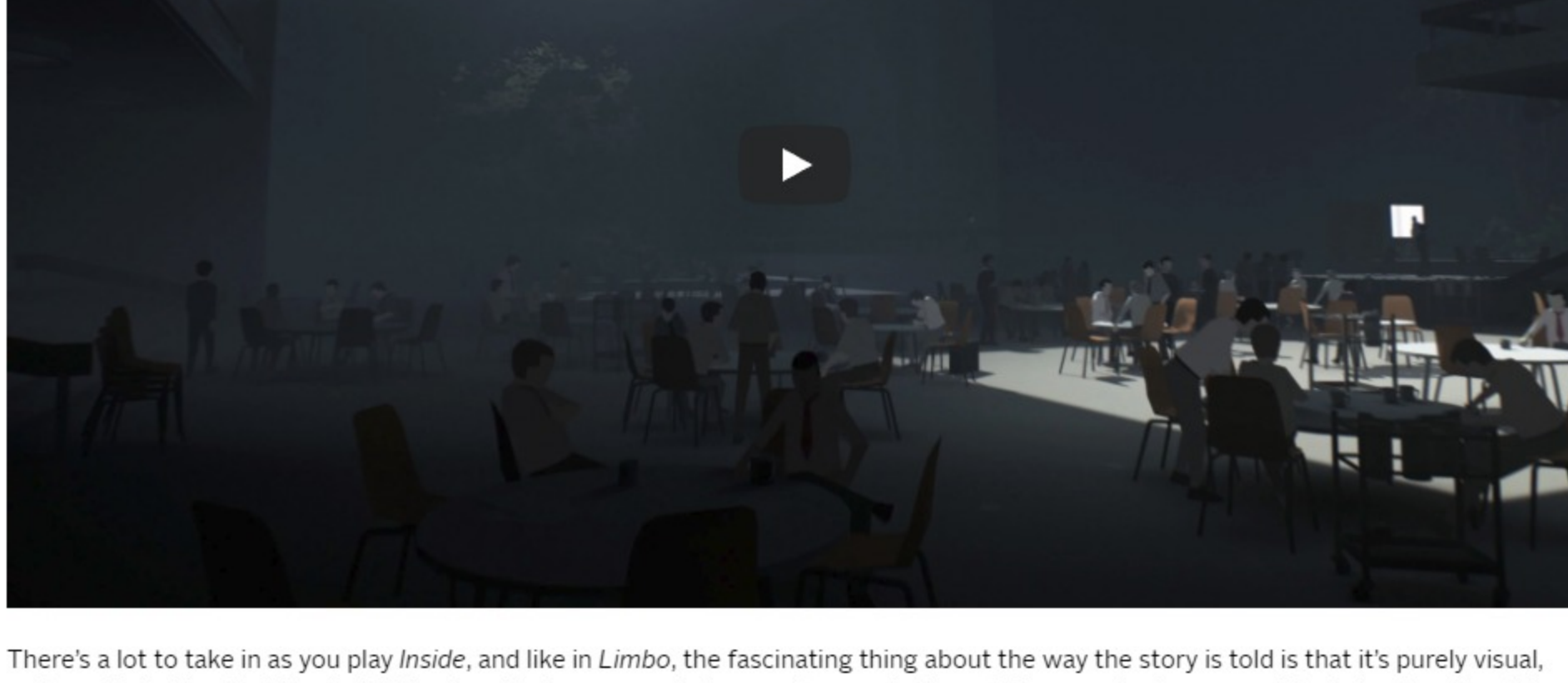


Some pigs seem to have strange worms wriggling out from their still bodies. When one seemingly dead pig charges at you, you have to yank the writhing white worm free from its back. Instantly, its single-minded, murderous rage is quelled. The pig is just a pig again.

This is not the weirdest or darkest thing on the journey—not by a long shot. *Inside* goes on to get darker, stranger, and more twisted, and it offers only ambiguous hints and clues as to what the abandoned farm has to do with the locations you'll visit later. I've got some theories.

And definitely, the best part of the game is trying to make sense of it all.

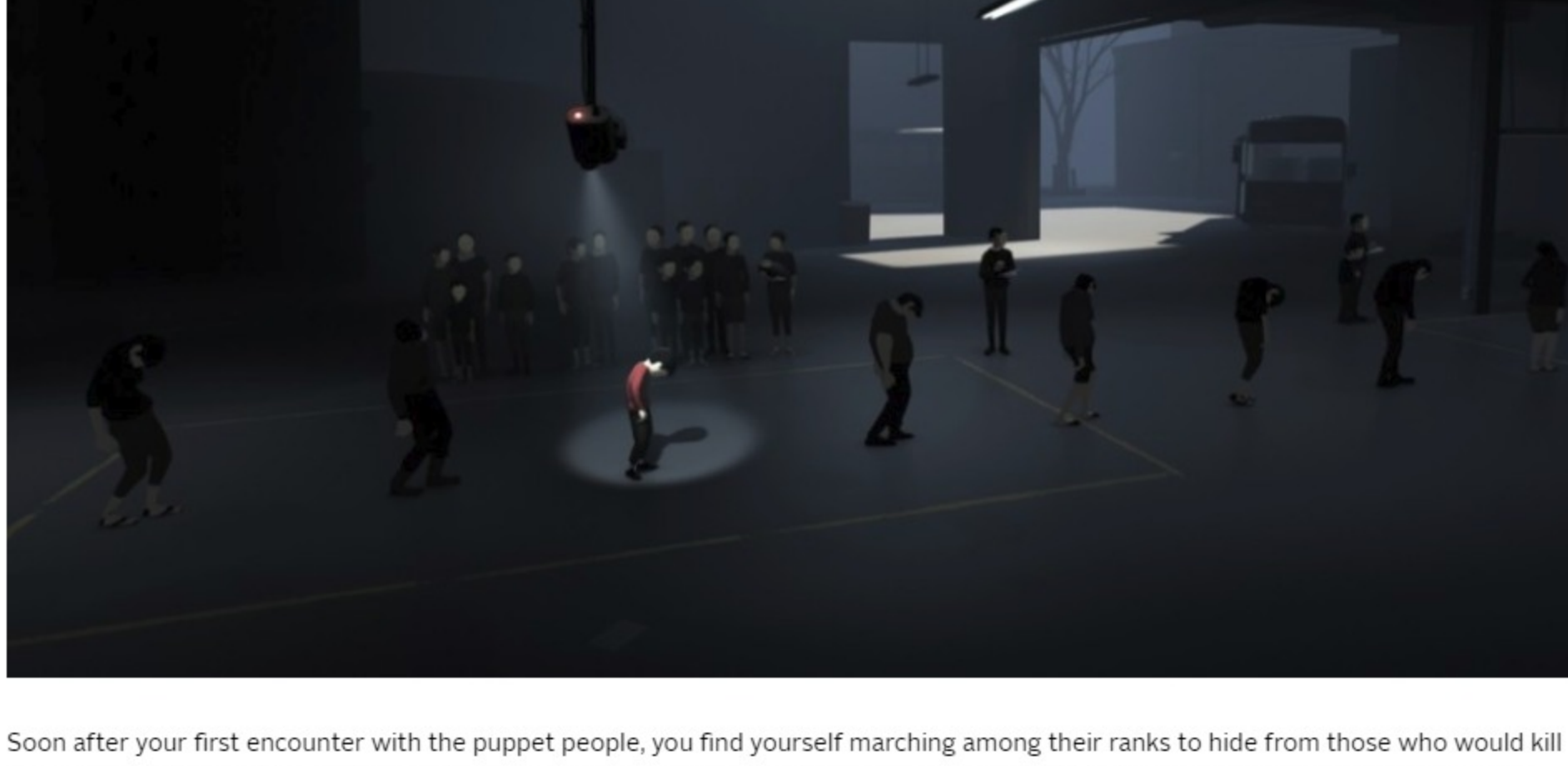
MASKED MEN, MIND CONTROL, AND A WRITHING MASS OF FLESH



There's a lot to take in as you play *Inside*, and like in *Limbo*, the fascinating thing about the way the story is told is that it's purely visual, and mostly just implied. You're left to draw their own conclusions as they work through the game's strange world, piecing together things spotted in the background and trying to understand what's happening in the puzzles as you solve them.

What's fascinating is how all these seemingly disparate things bleed together into a seamless experience, begging for players to think through how they relate to each other. Right after the encounter with the pig whose mind is seemingly influenced by that wriggling white worm, *Inside* takes you through rusting factories, ruined warehouses and crumbling offices. It introduces you to mindless husks of human beings that are, it appears, manufactured for manual labor or sold as products. At one point, you put on a helmet that lets you control these creatures for your own ends. Take the helmet off, and they go limp and silent, like puppets with their strings cut.

OK, mind control. Sure. Got it. But who's doing the controlling? And why?

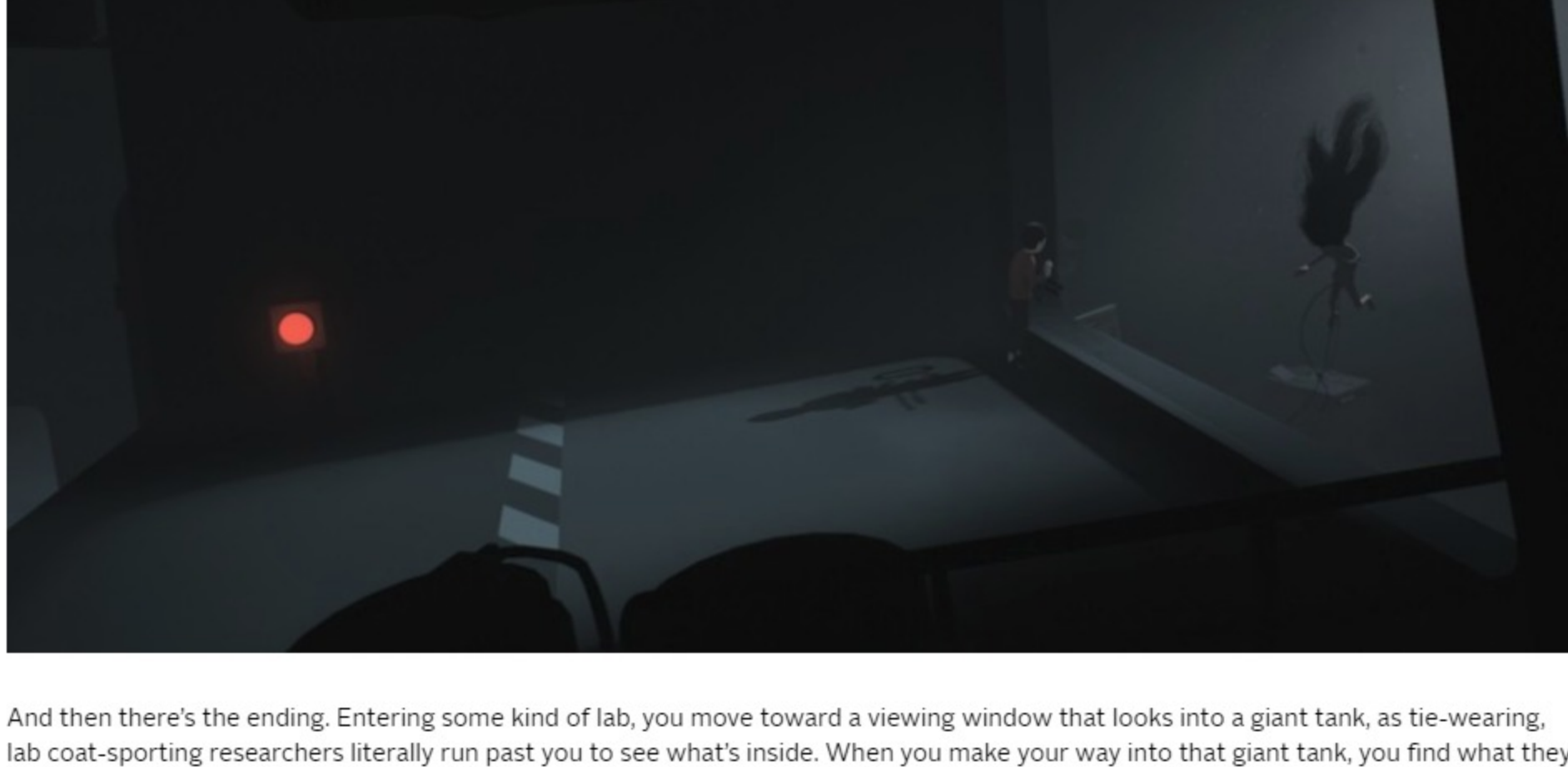


Soon after your first encounter with the puppet people, you find yourself marching among their ranks to hide from those who would kill you, pretending to be one of the mindless drones. As you follow the single-file line, you're marched right past a small crowd of people, including whole families with children. Every single member of the crowd is wearing a blank white mask—which is specifically slightly different from the blank-faced art style used for the boy protagonist and other humans. And later, as you slip away, climbing to the rooftops of the mostly abandoned, partially decrepit city, you see trains with open freight cars, loaded with thousands of these empty people.

The hell is going on here?

And then it gets weirder. A little further, you find yourself working through a flooded, destroyed research facility. Maybe the place where the puppet people are created? But what ruined it? As you're piloting a submarine through the sunken buildings, you come across pale children with long hair floating through the depths. Not bodies, though; they're alive, conscious, and human-looking—like mermaids. And they're following you. The creepy children fear lights but will rush you, drag you into the depths, and drown you.

Okay wait, how do evil mer-people relate to mind-control people?



And then there's the ending. Entering some kind of lab, you move toward a viewing window that looks into a giant tank, as tie-wearing, lab coat-sporting researchers literally run past you to see what's inside. When you make your way into that giant tank, you find what they have held there: a massive, pulsating blob of human flesh with limbs jutting out in every direction. So you start ripping out the cables they've connected to it, which look like more of those mind-control helmets. And as you do, the mass's arms snag the boy and drag you, scrambling to escape, inside of it. And then you and the fleshy thing are one and the same as, freed, it crashes its way out of the facility.

As the fleshy blob monster went cartwheeling down a mountainside to land in a motorless heap at the shoreline below, I grabbed my phone and started texting all my friends. Because what the fuck.

I'M NOT SAYING IT WAS ALIENS...



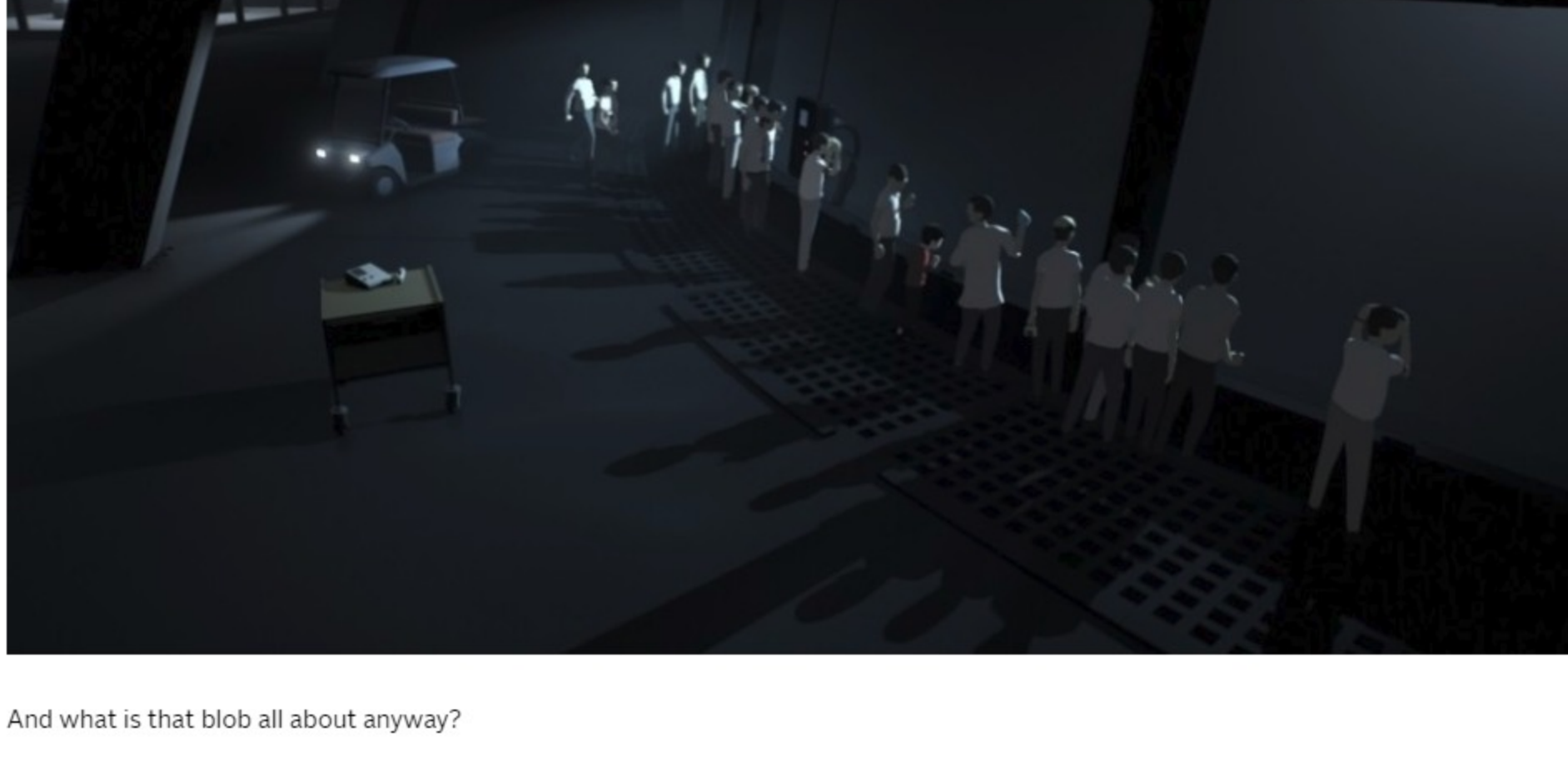
I spent the better portion of the long Fourth of July weekend reading theories about what's actually happening in *Inside*. No one agrees. Everyone has evidence. It's glorious.

Find all the secrets in *Inside* and you might discover a room in which you can yank a plug from the wall, suddenly rendering the boy you're controlling into an inert human husk like all the others he encounters in the game. Was he being controlled all along? Are you the thing mind-controlling him? Or is it the blob influencing him from afar to free itself from its prison?

And what was the deal with that facility, anyway, and who were those folks and what were they studying and why were they doing all that?

Also why does the water sometimes float on the ceiling rather than falling to the floor, ignoring the physical laws of the universe?

Inside is full of weirdnesses like that. Fan theories abound all over the internet, like the many cropping up on [the lengthy Inside Spoilers News & Thread](#) and on [Reddit](#). A common one is that the blob is controlling the boy to free itself, but then, does it actually manage to get free at the end of the game? At one point, the blob drops through a floor to the level below, falling into a glassed-in diorama. The scene, depicted in miniature, is a forested mountainside with the shore below it. And to get out of the facility, the blob crashes through a plywood wall, thinner than anything yet encountered—like a movie set. Like a diorama.



And what is that blob all about anyway?

My friends have floated the idea that the facility the boy is heading toward (and they think, returning to) is some sort of industrial manufacturing plant for drone people, grown in upside-down pools floating in the air. So maybe it's about corporations and control, especially since Playdead seems to have made sure that its mindless people are mostly dressed for construction, all capable of nothing but manual labor. Another theory: the boy is a test subject, perhaps the blob is too, and the entire game is a run to see how the new prototypes fare, with unexpected results, and it's all about science run amok.

Then again, so much of the landscape the boy runs through is destroyed or crumbling; maybe this place has been taken over by some invading army and its denizens turned into zombie-slaves. But then, one such zombie-slave literally emerges from a cardboard box when activated by that mind-control helmet, suggesting the "products" theory again.

For my part, I get a pretty intense *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* vibe off *Inside*. The masked people, the crumbling city, the puppet slaves, the mind-control parasites, the strange metal pods scattered throughout the forest locations—they all give off an alien invasion feeling, like something out of HG Wells' *The War of the Worlds*.

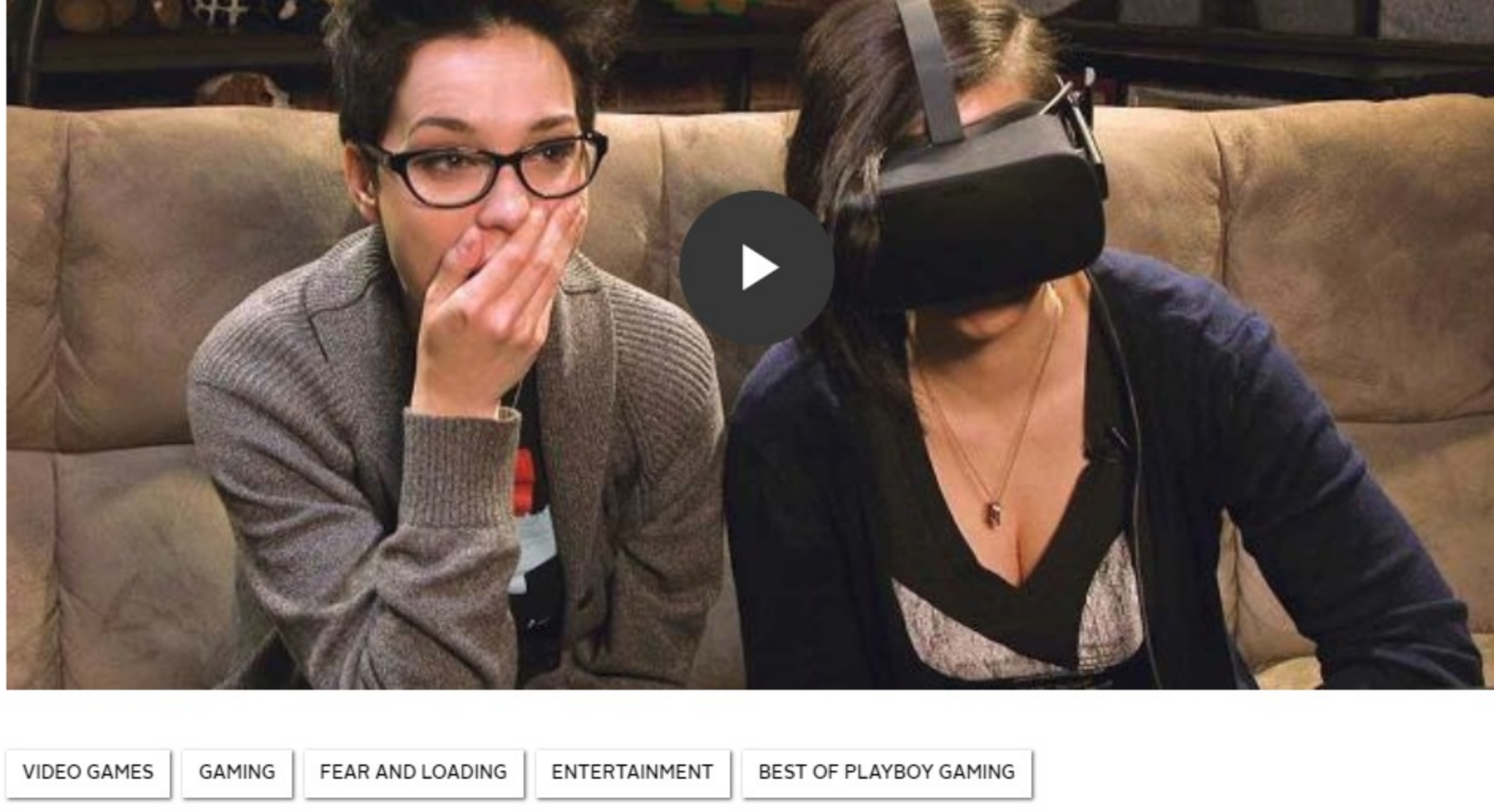


Or maybe not! What's so fascinating about *Inside* is that it's so ambiguous, yet that everything included in the game feels deliberate. It's fashioned in such a way that each of its elements adds to its oppressive atmosphere and its twisted body horror tone and feels important in its own right. How they all fit together isn't clear, but it does feel like they do. Nothing about *Inside* comes off as haphazard.

I don't know exactly what went on during *Inside*, and given Playdead's track record with ambiguity, I'll probably never know for sure what the developers intended. That's okay, though. I don't need to. Right now, I'm more interested in what everyone else thinks happened.

Phil Hornshaw is a freelance writer and the co-author of So You Created a Wormhole: The Time Traveler's Guide to Time Travel and The Space Hero's Guide to Glory. He was hoping the latter would help him get Han Solo hair, but so far he's been unsuccessful. He lives with his wife and annoying cats in Los Angeles.

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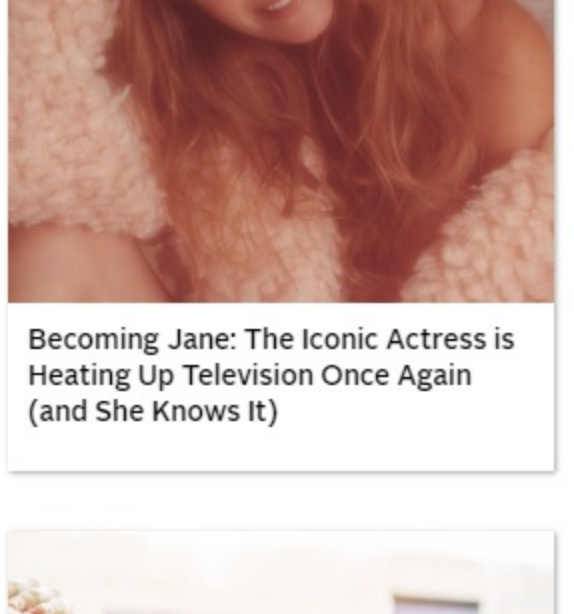
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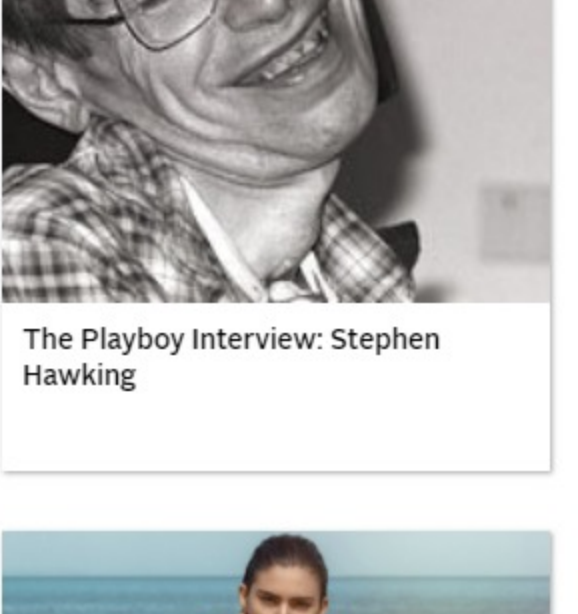
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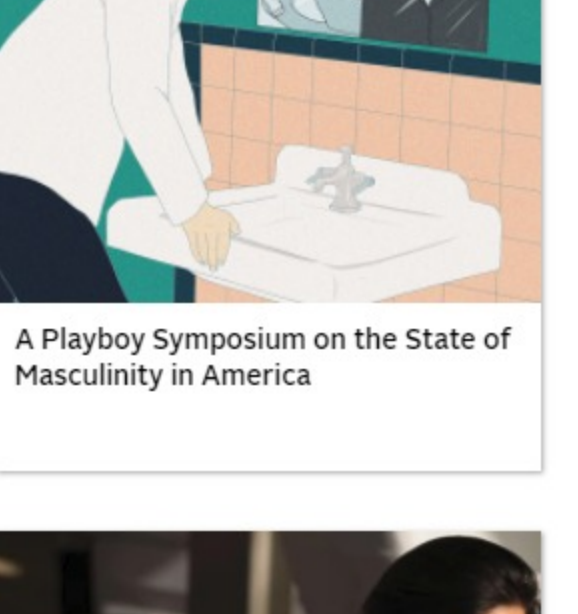
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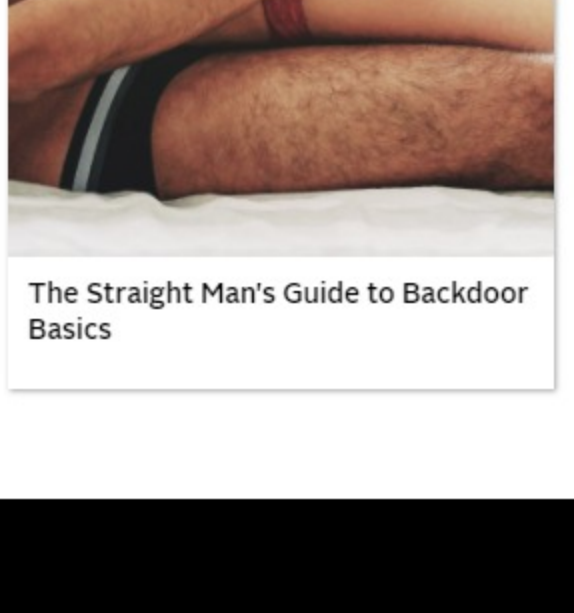
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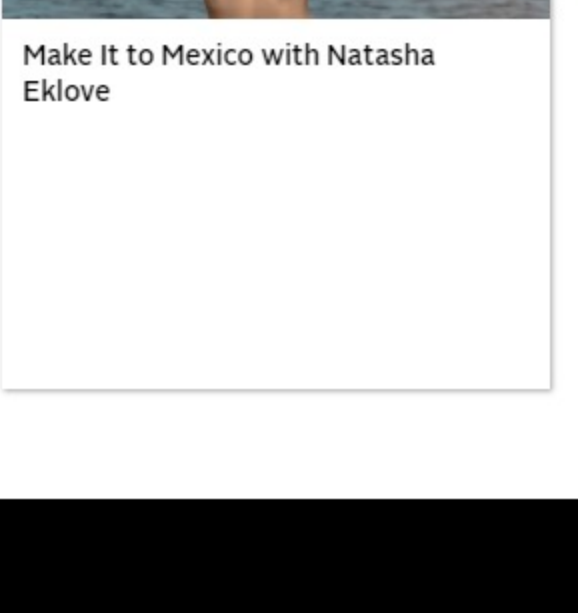
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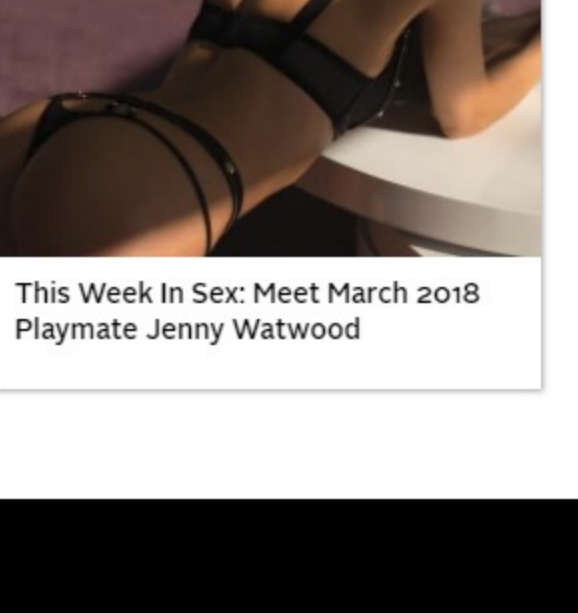
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