

Out of Bounds

By Thermite/Nicole

Introduction

There's an odd feeling you get when you're out of bounds in a video game. It's a "liminal space", but different from a "traditional" liminal, like a hallway or a stairwell. It feels transitional because you're not supposed to be there, but it isn't an *intentional* transition. It's a space to transition back into an experience that never should've been interrupted to begin with – unlike a hallway or a stairwell, the Out of Bounds liminal space wasn't designed to take you back into a "normal" state.

I haven't found a name for the weird feeling when you're Out of Bounds – I might be the first to write about it? Part of the feeling is being "lost" while also seeing something that wasn't built for you or any person to see. However, what you're "seeing" needs to have enough perceived intention behind it that the Out of Bounds doesn't just feel like random noise.

There's a cosmic horror in the Out of Bounds – there's a god here. Someone who created everything in this world. And you're seeing something that they didn't intend for you to see or, even worse, that this "god" didn't even know about.

Since I don't have a name for this feeling, we'll call it "Boundless Loss" so I don't need to type "the feeling of being lost out of bounds" every damn time.

My Goal

Part of the Boundless Loss feeling is that the viewer feels “lost”. And this requires the viewer to have some input – a way to interact with the art and get lost in the first place. Otherwise, it’s just the artist taking the viewer “on rails” to vaguely eerie locations. The audience knows that the stuff they’re seeing was *meant* to be seen. It’s why Video Games are the only medium to give me the Boundless Loss feeling – a film like *The Backrooms* is well done, but *I* don’t feel lost. It’s a film. I know that this stuff was made for me to see.

Since input’s required for Boundless Loss, making static 2D art give off this feeling is basically impossible. You don’t have any interaction and the artist placed every single pixel there on purpose.

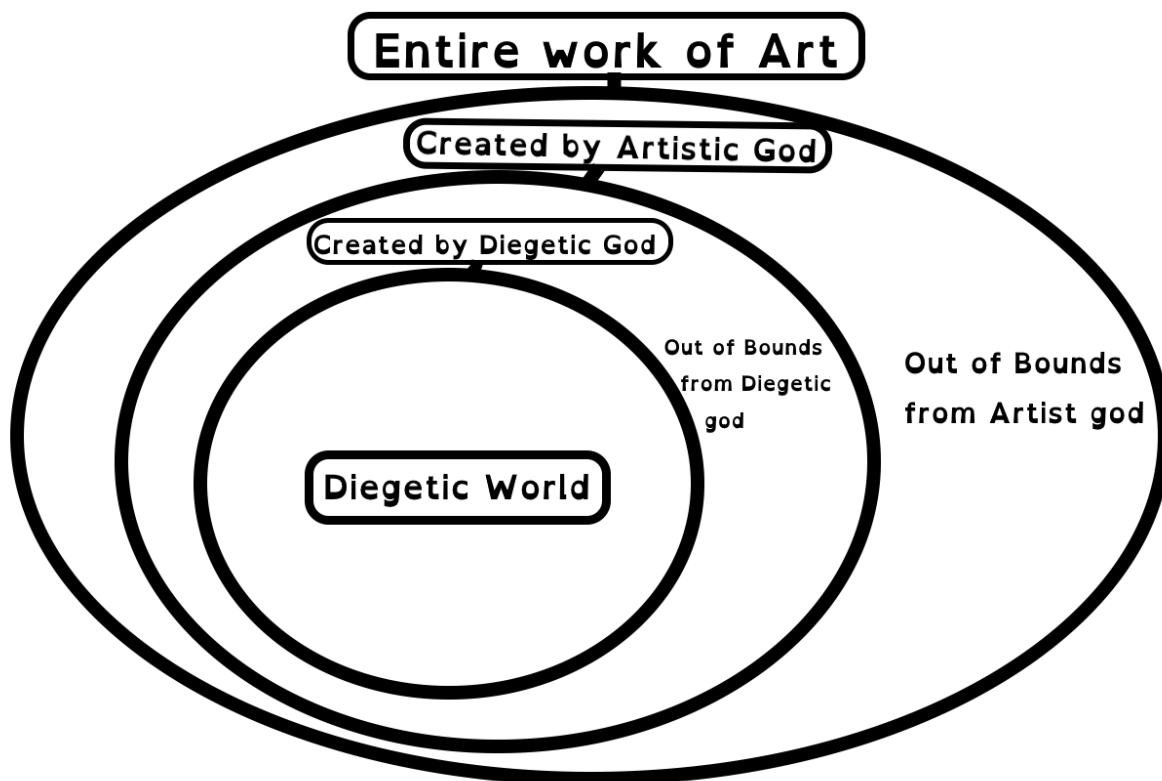
So that’s exactly what I’m gonna do. I’m gonna make some static 2D art that gives off this feeling.

And I’m gonna do it by cheating. On my website, I’ll host a gallery where you can click through a bunch of different drawings and such that “try” and give the viewer the Boundless Loss feeling. I’ll have 10-20 drawings, with the number of drawings I have marked on top. Each drawing will come with a description, trying to explain how I tried to capture the Boundless Loss feeling. The viewer can click “next” and “previous” arrows at the top to traverse the gallery. Once the viewer reaches the end of the gallery, the display on top will say 10/10 or however many drawings I’ve made, but the viewer can still hit next, ticking up the counter well past the “maximum”. Then it starts loading creepy, glitchy drawings. Sometimes pulling descriptions from the wrong places. This keeps going until you reach a place where the viewer can download this PDF, explaining what the Boundless Loss feeling is.

The Different Levels

SPOILERS BELOW: MAJOR SPOILERS FOR HOLLOW KNIGHT, OMORI, BUGSNAX, DELTARUNE, AND THE STANLEY PARABLE.

There's a few different levels to the Boundless Loss feeling. Out of Bounds from the Diegetic god, Out of Bounds from the Artistic god (Physical and algorithmic variations), and Out of Bounds from Real Life God.

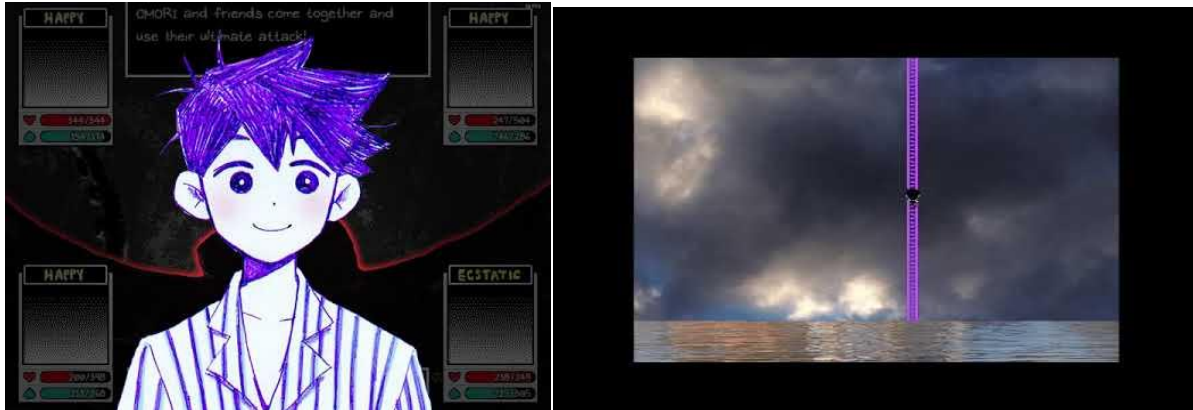


Out of Bounds from the Diegetic god

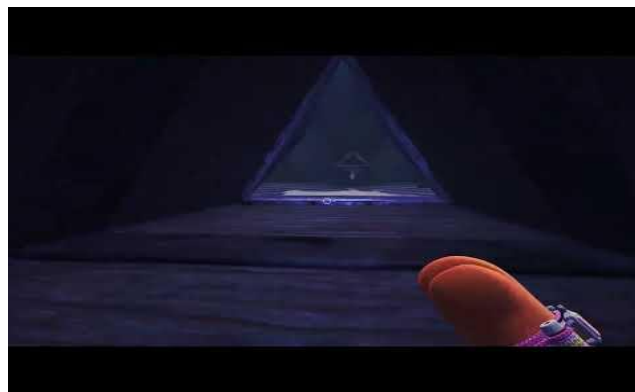
If there's a god or "creator" of the world (think of Sunny from Omori creating all of Headspace or all the gods in Hollow Knight), OOB from the Diegetic god is something that the Diegetic god doesn't know exists or something that the Diegetic god doesn't want you to know about.

Crucially, this stuff was intentionally placed here by the Artistic god – the creator of the entire artistic experience. The artist or the gamedev.

Think of Blacker Space or the Abyss from Omori – these were buried and hidden by the creator of Headspace (Sunny).



Or (on a less dark level), the Triplicate Space from Bugsnax. I think a lot of it is the way you access it – it very much feels like you're sneaking into an area climbing on Geometry that you're not supposed to climb onto to reach this area.



The Abyss from Hollow Knight (the edge of the world, buried by the Pale King) and the Snowgrave route from Deltarune are also strong examples of the OOB from the Diegetic god. They're both so hidden that you know that someone was hiding these areas and routes from you,

but they're intentional and fleshed out enough that you know that the game devs had to put them here on purpose.



Out of bounds from the Artistic god

There's two variations to the OOB from Artistic god – the algorithmic variation and the physical variation.

The algorithmic variation has the game glitch out or an algorithm mess up in a way that makes something look like it was created intentionally, when in reality it was just a bug.

Think of the Minus worlds from the original Mario Bros or the farlands from Minecraft. Neither of these were intentional, but they look like they're created with purpose.



The physical variation is a little less creepy – it's just a part of the game world or geometry that the artist never intended for you to find. Think of clipping outside the arena during the Mecha Wiggler boss fight in Super Mario Odyssey to explore the rest of Metro Kingdom



Debug Rooms (similar to the ones from Minecraft or Super Mario RPG) sort of count? But they're way less creepy and give less of the Boundless Loss feeling. I think it's because the Debug Rooms built for testing mechanics and dialogue imply that someone was meant to see them – that they're meant to be used, just not by you. They imply the existence of another developer, which somewhat diminishes the Boundless Loss feeling.



In the original release of the Stanley Parable, there was a secret “ending” you could get. The way you get there is kinda weird/janky. You start to go through some doors and as soon as they start closing, you back up. The narrator disappears as if you just trapped him in that room, and doors open all the way back to the beginning. When you follow them, you find a secret door that puts you in another liminal space (a stairwell), leading you to an escape pod (also a liminal state). As you approach it, the game resets. Some statements from the devs and other mods imply that this ending wasn’t completed – Diegetic god never intended for you to see it, but you can still access it and it’s creepy as hell.



Out of Bounds from Real Life God

Admittedly, this is even less defined than any of the previous categories. But understanding the Boundless Loss feeling you get from OOB from Real Life God seems important to understanding Boundless Loss as a whole and maybe replicating the feeling in mediums besides Video Games.

The only place I get this feeling is with the deep ocean – the twilight zone. It feels like no human was ever meant to see the stuff

down here. The stuff down here isn't even touched by the light of the sun.



Source:

https://www.reddit.com/r/thalassophobia/comments/88t3z0/underwater_waterfall/

Undertale and Deltarune

To anyone who knows me, this report seems unusual – I haven't brought up Undertale and Deltarune fifty times yet. And I would've liked to use more UT/DR examples above, but I ran into a few issues trying to analyze it. One major issue is that I don't know who the hell the Diegetic God is and who the hell the Artistic God is.

First, you have the dark worlds. The OOB from Diegetic God areas are, in my opinion, the secret boss areas. Jevil's prison and the basement you fight Spamton in. They're sectioned off from the rest of the game and you access them using secret keys with surprisingly obscure puzzles. [HalfBreadChaos](#) also points out that these "basement" areas might be the undersides of the cabinets in each Dark World's final area – literally "out of bounds" from the cabinets that these Dark Worlds are made of.

But this begs the question – who is the Diegetic God of the Dark Worlds? The obvious answer is "The Knight" – the guy going around creating these things. The Knight is also a distinct entity from Gaster, which makes sense.

Then who is Gaster?

He's also a Diegetic God because, y'know, he isn't real, but the way he's written makes him seem more like an Artistic God. The intro sequence, the valentine later, and the release of Deltarune Chapter I as a Survey Program imply that he's the one that's created "Deltarune", making him sorta like a stand-in for Toby Fox.

But that doesn't work either! Because Gaster *lives* in the OOB from the Artistic God. Entry Number Seventeen (which is referenced

subtly several times in Deltarune) is something you can only find through datamining and hacking, which is the definitive OOB from the Artistic God location. If the Artistic God wanted you to find it, they'd probably just put it in the game, while *this* Artistic God lives in the place where the Artistic God cannot see.

The Goner Code is in a weird position – like Entry Seventeen, you can only get it by datamining, but it's not clear if Gaster wants you to find it – but Chapter 2 dialogue from Spamton references it, which makes it seem like it's OOB from Gaster? Making it OOB from the Artistic God, but the Chapter 2 reference makes it seem like Toby wanted you to find it?

There's also the room in between –you got there by flipping between two rooms quickly until you “glitched” into a secret hidden room. It had the same vibes as the Escape Pod ending from the Stanley Parable, where your other party members just disappear and everything's vaguely eerie. This makes it feel more like Artistic God OOB, but then there's a sign hinting at it in Chapter 2, pushing it more in the direction of the Diegetic God OOB.

There's also the thing with Onionsan – the song coming from the sea. There's just... a song that isn't “new” playing deep under the ocean? What?? This leads me to believe that Toby Fox is doing all this on purpose – the deep ocean is the *ultimate* real life OOB, and he's manipulating the Boundless Loss feeling so effortlessly.

I have my rough notes down there – idk it just felt appropriate keeping all of this stuff way below the actual content of this PDF since this is all about the Out of Bounds

Part of the feeling is being “lost” and also seeing something that wasn’t built for you or any person to see, while also having enough “intention” behind it that it doesn’t just feel like random noise

- Perceived artistic intention vs. Real artistic intention
- Being “lost” requires the viewer to have some input – a way to interact with the art and get lost in the first place. Otherwise, it’s just the artist taking the viewer “on rails” to vaguely eerie locations. The audience knows that this stuff’s meant to be seen.
- Which is why making static 2D art that gives off this effect very hard – you don’t get any interaction, and there isn’t really any part of 2D art that the artist didn’t put there on purpose
- Like a liminal space but not really
 - It feels transitional because you’re not really supposed to be there – but it’s not an intentional transition. It’s very much an unintentional transition because ideally the normal gameplay doesn’t get interrupted by this
 - Unlike a hallway or childhood, this liminal space wasn’t designed to take you back to a “normal” state, which is what I think is part of the feeling
- A sort of “cosmic horror” in finding something that the god of this world didn’t intend for you to see or something that the “god” didn’t even know about
 - Not exactly the same feeling as being lost in a Forest in real life?
 - Closer to the feeling of being in the deep dark ocean or the Kola Borehole thing

- A few different levels:
 - Out of bounds from what the Diegetic God created
 - If there's a god or some "creator" in the mythos of the world (think of Sunny from Omori or the gods that shaped the world in Hollow Knight), it's something that they *don't* want you to see or buried so far deep that you feel like you're stepping away from the overworld or smthn
 - Crucially, the stuff was intentionally placed by the Artistic God – the creator of the game
 - Think of Blacker Space or the Abyss from Omori or the Abyss from Hollow Knight
 - Or the secret conspiracy rooms in Bugsnax where you get to them in a weird way
 - The Snowgrave route or Soundtest room from Deltarune
 - Out of bounds from what the Artistic God created
 - Algorithmic Variation
 - The game glitching out or an algorithm messing up to make something that looks like it was intentionally created, but was made by a bug.
 - Think of World -1 from the original Mario or the Garbage Data levels when you're breaking the game in SMB3
 - Most infamous example might be the Farlands from original Minecraft
 - Physical Variation

- A part of the physical geometry/terrain of the game that the Artist never intended for you to find
 - Sorta like Debug stages with all the mechanics, enemies, and effects that you're gonna wanna test, but it doesn't evoke the same feeling
 - I think it's because Debug stages imply that this area was intended for *somebody*'s eyes – other developers
 - Think of the usual “clipping” out of bounds – like when you're exploring SMO's Metro Kingdom during the festival or at night or when you're playing SMG and go to an area that isn't supposed to be loaded for this specific Star but there's still stuff there anyway
 - Stanley Parable escape pod ending in the original release might also count
- Out of bounds from what Real Life God created
 - The Kola Borehole thing or flying out into deep space might count – the recent Voyager thing has those same vibes. Or exploring the deep ocean and seeing creatures that you feel like were never meant to be seen
- Whatever Toby Fox is doing with Deltarune
 - Unused Text

- There's hidden text in the code of the game specifically labeled as Unused Text
- It's dialogue – someone trapped somewhere Dark
- Updated when Chapter 2 released
- Spamton glitches out and seems to “hear” this person once, but that's it
- Clearly, Toby Fox put it there because who on earth just labels dialogue as unused dialogue and keeps updated the unused dialogue
 - So it *should* count as OOB Diegetic God, but it's kept so secret and barely acknowledged by most characters in the game that it has the same vibes as OOB Artistic God. I think it's because you really do just gotta look through the game's code to find it?
- Error Handlers
 - No way for you to see them
 - Similar to Goner Code – no way for you to read them in game, but it feels like Toby Fox wanted you to see these anyway, so they have properties of both OOB Diegetic God and OOB Artistic God
- The Room In Between
 - The way you get into this room is by going between two arbitrary rooms rapidly for a bit until you're suddenly placed into the room in between
 - There, a weird song plays and a man gives you an Egg that isn't too important but isn't too unimportant either

- In Chapter 1, it felt closer to OOB Artistic God stuff 'cause this stuff wasn't ever explained. You just had to do something that felt like clipping into the walls by rapidly going in between two rooms
- In Chapter 2, there's a hint at the Room In Between, albeit a subtle one, making it feel much closer to OOB Diegetic God – a couple characters even acknowledge the egg