

There Is No Third Impact: Episode Three

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This year at Entropy we'll be rewatching the legendary *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Join us on this tremendous journey through one of the best television series ever made.

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We'll be watching the subtitled versions and discussing them here every week without spoilers.

Episode takes a step back to examine the world that Shinji and the others live in. We get some hints at backstory and what people not associated with the military or government think about what's happening in their city and the world.

We begin with Shinji getting some much needed training in the EVA. So far he's been thrown into battle without any desire or skill for it. He's the most reluctant weapon I can imagine: a depressed teenage boy who doesn't want to fight and doesn't even understand what he's fighting or what he's using to fight.

While he grows accustomed to the EVA's controls in the simulation, we come to learn more about the EVA. It's powered by a cable but also has a battery, which can keep it going for five minutes. Misato and Ritsuko discuss who Shinji is. Ritsuko believes Shinji's current coping mechanism is simple obedience. He doesn't know why he's there, what he's fighting, and he doesn't understand his own trauma, but he listens to the NERV team because he doesn't seem to know what to do or how to deal. He's a boy abandoned, made into a weapon—and he's not even a good weapon! We see what Ritsuko's getting at, too. We see Shinji almost remove himself, or rather, submerge his own identity in the act of obeying. He mutters the instruction over and over again to himself while doing exactly what they want him to do.

It seems clear that he's not really equipped to be an EVA pilot. But, here he is, piloting the EVA.

Misato talks about his isolation, his loneliness. Three weeks have gone by since his first battle with the Angel and he's made no friends. He receives no calls on the phone Misato gave him. He has no one. He just goes to school, trains in the EVA, and does chores at Misato's apartment.

Ritsuko describes him as a hedgehog.

Even if they want to warm each other, the closer they get, the more they hurt each other. Humans are the same. Shinji-kun must be afraid of getting hurt, so he acts timid.

We've watched Shinji interact with people for two episodes now and we see him in this one. He's extremely withdrawn and silent. It's not an unexpected assumption for Ritsuko to make.

At school, we meet Aida Kensuke and Toji Suzuhara. Horaki Hikari is the class representative, though she's not yet given a name. She refers to Toji by his given name, which is of interest, since everyone else refers to him by his family name. Aida is a curious bespectacled boy who doesn't believe the media reports of the recent battle. He and Toji discuss how the school is gradually becoming emptier as families evacuate the city. Toji's missed the last couple weeks of classes because he's been looking after his little sister who was injured in the recent battle. Further, Aida finds Shinji's appearance coincidental to the point of being suspicious, since he arrived at the school immediately after the battle.

While the teacher is lecturing the class, no one really pays attention. They're busy trying to figure out if this coincidence means something.

Shinji confirms their suspicions and class is effectively over as everyone crowds round his desk to throw questions his way.

But what they ignore is really interesting, and it's a peculiar way Anno goes about doing worldbuilding. He gives us essential information, but buries it beneath the more obviously interesting material.

From the teacher, we learn that a meteor struck Antarctica fifteen years ago, which caused much of it to melt, leading to rising sea levels. This led to war and all kinds of societal chaos. He marvels at humanity's ability to bounce back in just fifteen years.

He calls this the Second Impact. Which leads to the question, What was the first impact?

In addition, if we remember all the way back to episode one, we've had hints of this in the previous two episodes. Fuyutsuki mentions that it's been fifteen years since the last Angel was seen, for example. Is this a coincidence as well? Is the teacher purposefully occluding what really

happened? Or is this simply what happened?

Anycase, it's an interesting way of dropping breadcrumbs throughout the series. It's why watching this carefully or rewatching it is valuable.



Now that Toji knows who the EVA pilot is, he believes he knows who's to blame for his sister's injuries. He takes this out on Shinji, knocking him to the ground. When Shinji says he has no choice in the matter, Toji's anger rises. He doesn't strike Shinji again, possibly frustrated at Shinji's pathetic exterior. Toji lifts him up as if to fight, but Shinji just looks away, avoiding Toji's eyes. So Toji throws him to the ground and walks away.

Aida bothers to explain, but doesn't bother to help Shinji or offer him a hand or even a comforting word.

Rei's only response is that there's an emergency.

Shinji remains on the ground, bleeding, alone, threatened. No one seems to care for him.

As Tokyo-3 retracts below the surface, the military prepares to fight the Angel.

Commander Ikari is gone so Fuyutsuki takes command with Misato managing Shinji.

They're just wasting taxes.

Fuyutsuki almost laughs the words as the bullets fly towards the Angel. Misato scoffs at the permission they're given to use the EVA.

It's sort of a jostling for power between military and governmental agencies.

The only effective weapon observed is the EVA and the council gives them permission to use it. NERV was never not going to use it, however. And you can hear the resentment when Misato responds to the permission.

Inside the EVA, Shinji wonders why he's piloting if his father's not there, showing a clear line of causation between what he hopes to gain from piloting the EVA. He wants to be useful, even if only as a weapon. He wants his father

to be proud of him, even if it's only measured by his ability to destroy Angels.

We also come to learn that this is the Fourth Angel. That makes the previous Angel the Third, and then two unidentified Angels who came previously. We also learn that the previous angel came fifteen years after its predecessor. This is right around the same time that the Second Impact flooded and heated up the planet.

Meanwhile, Aida and Toji are in the evacuation center but Aida wants to see the battle, so they sneak out and observe Shinji's EVA fighting the Angel.

Aim at the center of the target, switch.

Shinji repeats the orders from his training over and over, and he seems prepared at first. He comes out shooting, lighting up the Angel, but immediately loses it when the Angel goes on the offensive, slicing his gun up and disconnecting him from his power cable. Shinji panics and flees, chased by the Angel.

Aida needles at Toji, hinting that his attack on Shinji may be inhibiting his ability to fight properly.

And then the EVA is thrown through the air, landing nearly on top of them.



This opens something up in Shinji. Seeing his classmates cowering on the mountain. Nearly smashed by the EVA, in clear and present danger from the Angel.

It breaks Shinji out of his panic, out of the fear paralysing him.

He fights back, immobilising the Angel and creating enough time for Aida and Toji to climb into the cockpit with him. This, of course, throws off the delicate neural link between Shinji and the Eva. Misato then wants him to disengage from the Angel and escape back to NERV so they can come up with a new battle plan.

Time is literally of the essence, as there are only a few minutes until the EVA's battery runs out.

But Shinji surprises everyone, possibly even himself. There's something subtle going on here. Maybe the guilt of realising that his previous failure led directly to the pain of someone else. Maybe realising that he's fighting the Angels for more than just his father's love and attention. Whatever the case may be, Shinji chooses to act. He stops obeying, which means he stops coping in this manner. He takes hold of the controls [literally] and brings the fight to the Angel.

Don't run away.

He snaps. Muttering those words to himself repeatedly.

Going berserk, screaming, he launches himself into the Angel, stabbing his knife right into its power source, ignoring how the Angel's limbs of light are piercing the EVA.

He screams through the pain, through the rage, through the fear, through the shame, and keeps stabbing into the Angel as the battery runs down.

He disobeyed and nearly got himself and his classmates killed, but he pulls off the win, killing the Angel.

Then collapsing into tears.

We see the pain so clearly in him. All these emotions, both complex and simple, writhing inside and tearing him apart. Shinji is just a child who wants to do a good job. He wants someone to care for him. To like him. To be proud of him.

But all he has is absence.

Toji and Aida discuss Shinji's absence a few days later. It's clear that Toji regrets what he did to Shinji. How could he not, after watching Shinji go berserk and weep?

Aida gives him Shinji's phone number and Toji goes to call him, to apologise.

But instead he hangs up again. Walks away.

It's significant that the episode doesn't return to Shinji. We don't see how he's coping with the fallout of the last battle. We don't see if he's congratulated by Misato and Ritsuko, by the rest of NERV. We're left with Toji, aborting his attempt to reach out, to even speak to Shinji.

We see this through a window, through the rain. We're left with the absence as we stare at the abandoned phone.

Neon Genesis Evangelion is a very subtle show, despite being one about teenagers piloting giant robots that fight giant monsters. It's worth noticing the framing of shots, the way sound and visuals are used. All the things not being said.

This episode contains the second fight between Shinji and an Angel, but that's clearly not the focus.

We spent the first two episodes working up to that fight, but the fight is only a few minutes long. The real focus there is Shinji.

The same is true here.

In a more conventional mecha show, the fighting would be front and center. But here they're almost a backdrop to the emotional state of the characters. I mean, obviously the fights are important. But the real focus of the show is how to deal with a world invaded by Angels where humans must pilot giant biomechanical things to fight them.

We also learnt a lot this episode. We're coming to understand how the EVA functions as a piece of hardware, though we also got a good look at its unarmored hands, which appear almost human. We've also seen what happens when an EVA takes over and acts of its own accord. While nothing concrete has been said about what the EVAs are, we're able to start putting pieces together. They're clearly not just robots but they're also clearly not purely organic creatures.

We're also getting more information about the Angels. We certainly don't know much, but we know this is the fourth one. There seems to be some timeline being kept and we know that the third Angel came fifteen years after the second. We also know that the Second Impact was fifteen years ago.

We're also seeing that life goes on. People still go to work, to school. People need to live and so they do. Many evacuate, but many stay, whether by choice or not.

Neon Genesis Evangelion is getting incrementally more complex and is also paying out information to us in an incremental way. We know much more than we did after episode one, but there are still a lot of mysteries. But character is always front and center.

And that character is Shinji, the Second Child, the boy abandoned by his father who now needs him as a weapon.

