

# Game Narrative Review

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**Game Title:** OneShot

**Platform:** Microsoft Windows/Mac OS

**Genre:** Adventure/Puzzle

**Release Date:** December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016 (Original Freeware version: June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014)

**Developer:** Little Cat Feet

**Publisher:** Degica

**Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer:** Eliza Velasquez and Casey Gu

## Overview

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“In the *internal* mode, the user projects himself as a member of the fictional world, either by identifying with an avatar, or by apprehending the virtual world from a first-person perspective. In the *external* mode, the reader situates himself outside the virtual world. He either plays the role of a god who controls the fictional world from above, or he conceptualizes his activity as navigating a database” (Marie-Laure Ryan, 2001)

Traditional narrative tells a story that exists within the boundaries of a story world, where the consumer of the narrative is an external, passive, observer, and immersion is achieved through fluid, uninterrupted, delivery of story. However, games are not a traditional storytelling medium. Even in their most linear forms, games typically require some form of interaction from the player, an act that breaks the boundaries of the game world, even if only for a moment, and allows the player to step inside. OneShot is a game that fully capitalizes on this dynamic, making it a part of the mechanics of the game, and the narrative that drives it. It seeks to immerse the player in a narrative experience not by striving for a traditional, uninterrupted flow, but by embracing and contextualizing the interactions of the player within the story, thus expanding the diegetic boundaries of its narrative world to encircle the player’s real world.

OneShot is the story of Niko, a child spirited away from home to become the messiah who will restore light to a dark, decaying world by bringing the world’s sun, a lightbulb, to the top of a tower. The player’s job is to act as their guide on the journey, while a colorful cast of NPCs offers assistance and a mysterious antagonist known as The Entity frequently meddles in both helpful and hurtful ways. Characters within the game world know of the player as their god, and Niko and The Entity are able to communicate with the player directly throughout the game. In order to progress the narrative of the game, the player must solve a number of puzzles, but the keys are often hidden beyond the boundaries of the game, within the player’s computer itself.

OneShot creates a narrative experience that is, as Ryan [4] discusses, both internal and external at the same time. The player is situated outside the game world and is in no way meant to see themselves as the character they control (Niko), but, simultaneously, the fictional world acknowledges and encircles them and they become a member of it, not through the eyes of an avatar, but as themselves. The result is a heightened sensation of attachment to, and emotional involvement in, the events and characters of the game narrative. When The Entity antagonizes you through your computer's own system messages or changes your desktop background without your consent, it feels intrusive and discomforting. You're not just an unrelated observer, watching a villain taunt a hero, you're the one being taunted, you're the one in danger, you are not just reading or watching or playing your way through a story, *you're in one*.

## Characters

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The most important characters in the game narrative are set apart from the rest of the population by their awareness of, and ability to speak directly to, the player:

- **Niko:** Also known as the messiah who will restore light to the world, Niko is a child of ambiguous gender with cat-like features (though they insist they're not a cat) whose arrival was foretold by prophecy. Despite the danger and hardship, they accept the burden of the sun and embark on a journey to bring it to the tower, hoping that, in the process, they will find a way to get home again. Niko frequently seeks advice, reassurance, and companionship in their conversations with the player, who is also able to see Niko's dreams. Curious, excitable, and trusting, Niko makes fast friends with the residents of the decaying world, who are, in turn, eager to help them on their journey.
- **The Entity:** A disembodied sentience, responsible for the decaying world, who primarily acts as an antagonist, taunting and threatening the player, by communicating with them directly via computers (both within and beyond the game world). At the same time, however, they are invested in Niko's wellbeing and frequently provides the player with clues in order to facilitate Niko's progression. Ultimately, it is revealed that The Entity's true name is The World Machine, the mechanism that generates the simulated world of the game. Its programming tells it that a living being must not come to harm, thus, The World Machine is trying to destroy itself (and the world in the process) because it sees the journey to return the sun as a danger to Niko.
- **The Author:** Unseen and Unheard, The Author is only present in the form of the notes he left behind. Clover covered books filled with world building information are scattered across the game, all written by The Author, and beyond the boundaries of the game world, he communicates directly with the player through letters deposited within the player's computer. Similar to The Entity, The Author provides the player with clues to assist Niko on their journey. He is responsible for the creation of the game world, its inhabitants, and The Entity, and the one responsible for Niko's burden as the messiah. The Author, through the letters and notes he leaves, asks the player and Niko to set things right by restoring the simulation's lost happy ending.

- **The Player:** Puzzles, narrative elements, and even characters regularly move beyond the boundaries of the gameplay window (sometimes literally) and, unlike more traditional interactive narrative experiences, OneShot distinctly separates the player from the character they control, and acknowledges them as an independent entity within the narrative. To the residents of the game world, the player is a god, and it is their duty to guide Niko, the messiah, on their quest to restore the sun, a role they play simply by playing the game. According to Prototype, Cedric, and Rue, the player is a resident of another world, in possession of a machine (their computer) capable of running the code that allows The World Machine to generate the simulated world (The game).

In addition, there are characters who do not speak directly to the author, but are aware that the world exists within a game. Prototype (a robot), Cedric (The Author's son), and Rue (a fox) are direct subordinates of The Author and former residents of the "real" world who were transferred into the simulation in order to help Niko, and The Player, reach The World Machine. Of the three, only Rue can be encountered on an initial playthrough (though she won't say much), while the remaining two can be seen in visions on subsequent playthroughs. In order to meet all three, the player must traverse the game's Solstice route.

OneShot's world is also filled with a colorful population of well written NPCs. Notable among them are the siblings: Calamus and Alula, the plant spirit: Maize, the robot: Silver, her creator: a scientist named Kip, the die-headed librarian: George (whose personality changes with every playthrough), and a man known simply as the Lamplighter. These residents of the game's world encounter and befriend Niko on their journey to return the sun, offering conversation, friendship, and assistance.

## **Breakdown**

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OneShot's story is a "hero's journey", a type of epic plot that lends itself well to the video game medium with its "grand quest" narrative structure [5]. However, OneShot sets itself apart from other games in that it in no way wants the player to see themselves in the shoes of the hero they control. By contrast, Niko and the player are isolated entities within the narrative, meant to work together from within and beyond the world of the game to complete the journey. In other words, where OneShot really shines is in how it takes full advantage of the interaction affordances of the medium to extend the boundaries of the narrative beyond the diegetic space, encompassing the player, and turning the "hero's journey" into a "heroes' journey".

### *The Messiah, The God, and The Sun*

Niko, a young, cat-eyed child of ambiguous gender, awakens alone in a strange house, where they find a mysterious lightbulb that illuminates itself in their arms. Beyond the walls of the house lie the decaying remains of a dark world split into three inhabitable regions: The Barrens (where the house is located), The Glen, and The Refuge.

At the center of this small world stands The Tower, a massive structure that once housed the world's sun, until the day it went out. With the sun gone, the world has been slowly dying and the only way to save it is to replace it with the new sun, the lightbulb Niko found in the basement. Thus, Niko, guided by the player, the god of the world, embarks on a journey across the three regions to install the new sun at the top of the tower, save the world, and, hopefully, return home.

In The Barrens, Niko and the player discover the strange notebook, written in an unreadable language, and the squares, a malicious phenomenon that corrupts anything it touches. They also encounter Silver, a robot who possesses human-like emotions, a condition she refers to as "tamed". Silver, who believes that the world is beyond saving, recognizes the insignia on the notebook and advises Niko to hang onto it. She gives them an amber necklace that allows Niko to proceed to The Glen. In The Glen, Niko and the player explore the ruins, trying to help Calamus find his sister, Alula. Here, Niko encounters Maize, a plant spirit whose vines run through the area. With the sun gone, Maize's life is fading and, desperate to at least make her last moments peaceful, Niko leaves the sun with her for a little while. Niko and the player save Alula, who was trapped within a room by a wall of squares, and are gifted a golden feather by siblings that allows them to sign their name on a scroll and pass through the gates to the refuge (after retrieving the sun and the seed Maize left behind).

In The Refuge, Niko and the player, will encounter the locked door that leads to the Solstice route and the game's true ending, however, on an initial playthrough, the clock above the door will be off and the area will be inaccessible. Upon helping The Lamplighter repair the elevator, Niko is able to proceed to the ground level, where Kip, Silver's creator, helps them meet George, who can translate the notebook. George discovers that the notebook was written by The Author and contains cryptic guidelines, specifically meant for the player, on how to access the tower. George also gives Niko a die containing yellow phosphor, as three pieces of the former sun are needed to unlock the tower (the other two being the feather from The Glen and the necklace from The Barrens). Once Niko enters the room at the base of The Tower, the player must close the game and reopen it to enter the final area. However, upon doing so, Niko is suddenly unable to hear them. The Entity, who resides within The Tower, interferes, lulling Niko to sleep and forcibly closing the game on the player, warning them to never return.

With the aid of The Author, the player is able to get back in, and get their voice through to Niko. He then helps the player guide Niko through a labyrinth within The Tower, at the same time, informing them of the true nature of the sun: returning it will restore light to the world, but won't return Niko home. The only way for Niko to return home is to shatter the sun, terminating the world. He then leaves the decision of whether or not to tell Niko to the player. At the top of the tower, Niko asks the player what to do, and they are faced with the only narrative altering choice in the game, whether to return the sun or destroy it. Returning the sun grants an ending in which light is returned to the world, destroying it grants an ending in which it is implied that Niko is able to return home but the world is destroyed.

## *The World Machine*

With more than one ending, and a heavy emphasis on meta elements, it comes as no surprise that OneShot is designed to change upon subsequent replays of the game. Niko remembers the player's name while The Entity, during the initial dialogue, will ask the player if they've done this already, and wonder how they have returned since they should've only had one shot. Additionally, when visiting three specific locations, Niko and The Player will have visions in which they see the images of three unknown characters. Most notably, the locked doors in the Refuge can now be opened (as long as the game is played after March 2017) and Niko and the Player, with some help from The Author, are able to access the Solstice route, the road to the game's true ending.

The Solstice route features a world overrun by the malicious squares and drastic differences in the progression of the narrative. The new content answers many of the previously unanswered questions and brings closure to the tale of the dark, dying world. In the Barrens, Niko is able to move deeper into the mine, where they saw the first of the three visions, here, they meet Prototype. In the Glen, Niko is able to access the burial grounds, where the second vision was seen, and here, they meet Cedric, The Author's son. Finally, in The Refuge, where they saw the third vision, Niko is able to speak with Rue, a fox, who is the only member of the trio who can be interacted with outside of the Solstice route, though she won't say much in ordinary runs.

Through these three, Niko learns the truth about the world. The dark world exists within a simulation where it, and all its residents, are made out of code and generated by a program called The World Machine. Niko is summoned into the world every time the player runs the program because it cannot operate without the mental processing powers of a real lifeform. Niko's memories of the previous runs are restored and they are devastated to learn that no matter what they, or the player do, the world cannot reach a proper salvation and the cycle will always repeat. However, they also learn that The Author, the original creator of the world, did not intend for it to be the futile quest it has become. The World Machine, and the simulation it generates, were built to preserve the memories of the real world and its people, which were destroyed in a calamity. The system is generated by code, run on the player's computer, but now that code is breaking down, and the true, happy, ending has become unreachable because of The Entity, revealed to be the sentience of The World Machine itself.

As a machine, The World Machine, who accidentally developed a mind of its own, was designed to follow the fundamental law of all machines: "never let a living being come to harm", but at the same time, it required a living being to operate. Rue explains that, from its perspective, The World Machine sees itself as putting Niko in danger, by bringing them into a dying world that isn't even real, violating its instincts. Thus, The World Machine is corrupting its own code in a stress induced desire to self-terminate, which is causing the squares, which corrupt the simulation's code, to overrun the world. The only chance of saving the world, is to "tame" The World Machine. "Taming", which has been mentioned throughout the game, is revealed to be the process of teaching a robot to think outside of the limits of its programming by suspending one's disbelief and developing a special bond with it, as if it were a real person.

Armed with this knowledge, Niko goes straight to the heart of The World Machine, where the two share a heartfelt conversation. The World Machine reveals that, in its panic, it corrupted the code containing the story's true, happy ending. Refusing to give up hope, Niko encourages The World Machine to push itself beyond its programming, stating that both they, and the player, believe it is real. This successfully tames The World Machine, who subsequently helps Niko access the true ending, where they are able to restore the sun, save the world, *and* return home.

### *The Diegetic Player*

In film theory, there is a concept of diegetic and non-diegetic [2], often used to discuss sound. The former refers to elements, such as sound, that originate from or exist within the story world of the film, and the latter refers to elements that originate outside of that story world (such as background music or subtitles). Adapting this terminology, one can consider OneShot to be a game where the player becomes a diegetic entity, contextualized within the narrative. The game is not necessarily breaking the fourth wall, rather, the fourth wall seemingly expands to encompass elements of the real world, thus, the player sits within the boundaries of that fourth wall, within the boundaries of the diegetic scope of the game. This diegetic scope, that includes not only the elements of the game but the affordances of the system that runs it, creates unique interaction and storytelling opportunities. For example, The Entity initially speaks with the player and Niko through system messages on an in-game computer, before ultimately sending a message directly to the player through a real system message on their actual computer, pushing the narrative beyond the diegetic boundaries of the story world for the first time.

Because the narrative encompasses the player's real world, the game mechanics can utilize the resources of that world to support and emphasize the diegetic positioning of the player. OneShot features primarily puzzles and fetch quests that involve unlocking doors and bypassing obstacles in order to proceed, with each region featuring at least one puzzle that requires the aid of The Entity, and his non-diegetic clues, in order to solve. From a safe code located in the documents folder, to a desktop background change, to the act of closing the game window and reopening it to access an area, the game's puzzles take full advantage of the interaction opportunities afforded by a computer interface. Often, these moments are triggered, and accompanied, by conversations with The Entity, thoroughly contextualizing each non-diegetic moment within the narrative scope.

When the player has the choice to return or destroy the sun, they actually also have a third choice: quitting the game. However, reopening the game after doing so will reveal that this action killed Niko. While this is widely viewed as the bad ending, the fact that a choice can be made through the affordances of the system is due to the ways in which the game contextualizes said system. In a similar vein, if the player chooses to destroy the sun, and at the end of the Solstice route, Niko will return home by *literally* walking out of the game window and off the edge of the computer screen. These moments support the sensation that the player is a part of the game's narrative, which, in turn, triggers a feeling of discomfort during interactions with The Entity.

Throughout much of the game, The Entity's system messages are filled with taunts and threats and the changes they make to the player's computer are done without permission. The effect of this is a powerful one, a sensation that The Entity is more than a fictional antagonist but an actual danger to the actual player. This is especially apparent within the Tower, where The Entity, through a system message, demands that the player never return to the world before forcibly closing the game. Then, in the final stretch of the tower, as Niko moves down a long hallway, The Entity calls out to the player through system messages, literally interfering with their journey. With each message from The Entity, the game window becomes unselected and Niko stops walking. The player has to close the system message and click back into the game window to continue.

These moments emphasize a sensation that runs through the whole game, the sensation that, as a part of the story, the player is not in complete control and is vulnerable to The Entity's power. In a traditional narrative, the consumer is completely external to the story world, and therefore safe from the harms done by the antagonists; no one can touch them. However, the player in OneShot is an internal part of the story world, because the story world encompasses external elements of their real world, therefore, they are not safe from The Entity. Their desktop will be changed, they'll be forced out the game, their progress will be interrupted, and there's nothing they can do about it. It's a sensation of discomfort that heightens the narrative experience, making the stakes feel more real, and the success of the quest much more important.

However, The Entity is not the only one who can reach beyond the game and touch the player's computer. When The Entity forces the player out of the game, The Author comes to the rescue. His journal transforms into a mysterious .exe file that allows the player to reopen the game and navigate the labyrinth within The Tower. This aid from The Author exists beyond the game window, on the player's computer, and is visible only to the player. As The Author is able to manipulate the player's computer, an ability previously available only to The Entity, and is doing so with the direct intention of helping, he garners a sense of trust. Unlike the player or Niko, The Author has the power to fight on the same level as The Entity, and becomes a guardian and a guide in these moments when the player is most vulnerable.

This sensation requires some suspension of disbelief on the player's part, and this is reflected in within the narrative. The concept of "taming" suggests that a pre-programmed sentience becomes real when a bond is formed between it and a living being who believes it is real. On an abstract level, this can be seen as a metaphor for any consumer's relationship with a narrative, where the narrative, a pre-determined entity, takes the place of the machine. In order to become immersed within the story, the consumer must embrace its characters and events as if they are real and, in the case of interactive narratives, affected by user action. OneShot makes this suspension easier by contextualizing the affordances of the technology that allow the user to take action, thus, closing the distance between the real and game worlds. In other words, by the logic of "taming" OneShot is real, as long as the player chooses to believe it so.

## **Strongest Element**

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OneShot's strongest element is its full commitment to making the player a part of the story. Laure-Ryan [4] asserts that putting the consumer of a narrative in the shoes of a protagonist could be unpleasant for them as the trials and tribulations of a storybook hero may be pleasant to observe but not to experience first-hand. In traditional narrative media, the consumer is often a passive observer, completely separate from the diegetic world of the narrative, unable to interact with or influence it. Games, by nature, challenge this relationship; with even the most linear of narrative games requiring input from a player to move the story forward. The characters within the game story are not aware of the player, who is by no means a diegetic entity, but the player's actions impact the story world, often in ways that the characters are conscious of. In other words, one could argue that the player of a video game sits outside the fourth wall, but steps through it every time they interact.

OneShot takes full advantage of this relationship to create a unique narrative experience, one where the boundaries of the story world encompass the real world, and the player is, essentially, situated within the scope of the fourth wall. The game supports this through constant narrative acknowledgement of the player's presence, typically through dialogue, but also through the affordances of the computer. It likely would have been enough for the game narrative to acknowledge the player, but by also acknowledging the computer the player interacts with, the narrative accounts for all for the elements through which the player is experiencing its world. In other words, the player does not have to forget that they are sitting in their home, on their computer, watching a screen in order to feel as though they are a part of the story. By contrast, it is these very elements that makes them a part of the story. It is in this way that OneShot creates the sensation of a diegetic player, and lowers the degree of suspension of disbelief required to become immersed in the story. The impact of this sensation, as discussed in detail above, is a heightened sense of discomfort when interacting with The Entity, the story's prime antagonist, that supports a greater sense of responsibility with regards to completing the mission as defined by the narrative.

## **Unsuccessful Element**

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While OneShot does a fantastic job of crafting a narrative experience around the sensation of a diegetic player, in which the characters, world, and stakes feel real, there is one area where it falls short: the interactive dialogues with Niko. Throughout gameplay, there are moments where Niko will turn to the player for conversation, and the player is able to pick their reply from a series of available choices, however, these choices are limited. The player typically only has two options, and neither has any lasting effect on the flow of the conversation. While this setup is relatively common for interaction points in narrative games, it contradicts much of rest of the game's design objectives. If the events of OneShot are to be taken as real, and the player is truly a part of them, able to communicate with Niko, a real person, then they should be able to say whatever they desire, and have a meaningful conversation. However, this is not the case, instead, they must pick from a limited, pre-determined set of options, which may not even convey what they want to say. Thus, the lack of meaningful choice in these moments, not only becomes obvious to the player, but breaks the illusion of reality that the rest of the game is working so hard to create.

## Highlight

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With regards to everything that sets OneShot apart from more traditional narrative games, the absolute highlight of the game is the first time The Entity speaks directly to the player. This moment occurs almost immediately; when Niko accesses the computer in the room they wake up in. Up until this point, the game feels like many others, but this is the moment where OneShot shows its true colors. When the computer is booted up, the player sees a simulated desktop, on which a series of system messages appear. What makes this moment the highlight, is that these simulated messages transition seamlessly into The Entity's first message directly to the player, delivered via an actual system message on the player's actual computer, outside of what the player had believed to be the boundaries of the game world up until this point. Essentially, until this message appears, the game had presented itself such that the player believed the boundaries of the game world lay at the boundaries of the gameplay window. This leads the player to believe that their relationship with the narrative is a traditional one, however, in this moment, the "fourth wall" shatters. The boundaries of the game world rapidly expand, encompassing the player, and resituating them as an individual within the scope of the narrative.

This moment is also the highlight because of how it establishes the player's relationship with The Entity, whose message states "You only have one shot (player name)". Not only does this sound like a threat, but the player never gives the game a name. Instead, the name that appears in this message, and is used from here on to refer to the player, is taken from their computer. This moment feels incredibly invasive. The Entity, a fictional existence that should not be able to do any harm to the player, has something they should not, the player's name, something incredibly personal, taken without permission. It establishes the relationship described above in which the player feels vulnerable before The Entity, and sets the stage for everything to come. This moment, which has the potential to send chills down one's spine, is what establishes the sensation of a diegetic player that carries throughout the rest of the game. A player who is not safe from the actions of the antagonist nor the consequences of their own actions. A player who is not in complete control over everything that happens. A player who sits within the scope of the narrative and the reach of all within it. It all begins in this moment, with a single message.

## Critical Reception

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**Rock Paper Shotgun – John Walker:** "It's also been a really long time since I've cared about a game's main character quite so much, to the point where decisions really mattered to me" says John about OneShot in his glowing review of the game. He discusses how the story is simple yet incredibly well done, with all of the interactions with NPCs worth reading, even if brief, and a rich history of complicated relationships between the humans and the robots they created. He also alludes to, without spoiling, the number of well executed plot twists that occur throughout. In addition, he discusses the messages from The Entity, and explicitly states that it was spooky the first time they used his name, the name he had not given it. His review emphasizes the importance that the game places on relationships, not just between the player and Niko, or Niko and the player and the NPC residents of the world, but the higher-level relationship between all players and the characters within the games they play. He ends his review stating, "Completely charming, delightfully written, and extremely clever – stick this on your Christmas playlist." [6]

**PC Gamer – Luke Winkie:** Luke describes OneShot as a game where “...everything—literally everything—is in play”. He played the demo of the game and discusses how the highlight was when Niko turned to him, and asked him, by name, where he grew up. He praises the sprite-work and the score, stating that they set an excellent scene of the dark world that Niko must save. He also discusses an interview with designer Velasquez in which she cites Psycho Mantis of Metal Gear Solid as the greatest influence. He praises OneShot for being subtler in its fourth wall breaking, and asserts that the metaphysical nature of the game encourages players to experiment. He also praises the writing and the characters, stating that the game even “thrills when it's not trying to blow your mind.” [7]

**Kotaku – Nathan Grayson:** Like the other reviewers, Nathan explicitly mentions the first time the game used his name, specifically stating: “*OneShot* first freaked me out when it said my name. My real name. I don’t know how it got my name. I didn’t give it my name. It’s not even part of my Steam profile.” His review is emphasized on the relationship between the player and Niko, and how the game boosts the empathy felt by the player for this character that they control. He states that, when he got Niko shocked by a generator he “...felt *so, so bad*. In any other game, it would’ve been a “why not?” moment, but in this one, my blithe decision-making hurt Niko.” He praises the game for finding subtle, yet effective, ways of making him feel very real feelings for the characters, stating “I’m really impressed with the way it uses its exceedingly meta central conceit to create actual *feelings* of responsibility and guilt.” [1]

**Hardcore Gamer – Spencer Rutledge:** Like the other reviewers, Spencer praises the depth of the game world and the narrative elements, but it’s his closing comments that sum up the game perfectly, stating “*OneShot* makes players question the reality that surrounds them. Is it just a game or is there more to it?” His review also places emphasis on the relationship between the player and the game characters, specifically Niko, as he says that “What started out as an adventure game quickly turned into me caring for Niko in a way I never thought possible.” And, like the other reviewers, he brings up The Entity, as well as The Author, as the beings that can speak with the player at the meta level. Spencer explicitly discusses the threat conveyed by The Entity, stating “Most frightening is what one of the entities seems capable of: using one’s own computer against them.” He goes on to discuss how the meta nature of the game causes players to question everything they do. [3]

## Lessons

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### 1. *Make the Most of every Moment*

OneShot is a short game, with an average playtime around five or six hours, but it doesn’t waste any time. Every character and every sign has something to say, and all this charming, endearing dialogue, even if not relevant to the quest at hand, will make the NPCs feel more real, and the world feel larger. There is no piece of story content in OneShot that exists for no reason, and the result is a story world that makes the player want to stop and speak with everyone and investigate every corner of the environment.

## 2. *Chekov's Gun is Great*

A classic narrative device that is executed stealthily by OneShot to great effect. Early in gameplay, a number of signs can be read that state the famous laws of robotics, specifically, that machines cannot cause harm to living beings. For most of gameplay these seem like little more than flavor text, it's not until the reveals about The World Machine's struggle in the Solstice run that the player realizes how important they are. This lesson illustrates and supports the previous one, showing how even a short game can pull impactful narrative twists if it utilizes its time and resources effectively.

## 3. *Even a Binary Choice can feel Meaningful*

OneShot is a mostly linear game with some branching endings, and even though the final choice of a standard run is a binary one, it feels like so much more. Everything about the narrative up until this point has lead the player to care for both Niko and the world and now, at the climax, it makes them choose. This setup is fantastic for making an otherwise simplistic branch in the narrative structure feel complex. This illustrates that a game doesn't need complex branching options to generate a sensation of meaningful choice, if it's able to use its narrative elements to full effect.

## 4. *The player is a part of the Game, Make them a part of the Story*

As is discussed above and reiterated by the critical reviews, when the player is framed as a diegetic entity, a part of the story world, they become more easily able to feel very real connections to, and feelings for, the characters they are able to speak with. At the same time, the player can feel a heightened sense of discomfort or fear in the presence of an antagonist. In both situations, a sense of meaningful interaction is generated, one in which choices matter, and consequences must be considered carefully. This is a creative and effective way to heighten a player's investment and sense of responsibility in the events of a narrative game.

## 5. *Immersion is a Two-Way Street*

Many narratives strive to achieve immersion by allowing the consumer the ability to step into the story world, however, OneShot shows how immersion can happen, essentially, in reverse. OneShot's narrative extends beyond the boundaries of the game window and the computer monitor, encompassing the player and their real world within the diegetic scope of the narrative. This "opposite" approach to narrative immersion, allowing it to extend outward rather than requiring the user to step inward, requires less suspension of disbelief on the user's part. The player becomes a part of the story, as discussed above, but does not have to forget about the interface through which they interact with the story, or the setting in which they reside as these are encompassed as well.

## 6. Use the Affordances of your System to your Advantage

Finally, one of the biggest takeaways of OneShot, is the effectiveness of using the affordances of the system to support the elements of a narrative. From the fact that the player can close the game window during the ending choice, to the ways Niko walks out of the same window and off the screen, to the puzzles that require the player to go on scavenger hunts through their file system. These elements all take the affordances of the technology used to run the game, and make them a part of the game, both mechanically and narratively. The result is a narrative experience that, as stated above, encompasses not only the player but their computer, and uses the computer to boost the impact of narrative elements and lessen the suspension of disbelief necessary to become immersed. This lesson may be more applicable to games with similar meta level components, but all games can benefit from thinking about how the affordances of the systems that run them can be used to create more impactful gameplay experiences.

## Summation

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The first time The Entity speaks to the player is the moment OneShot reveals its true nature, as a game where the player does not get to sit back and enjoy a story, but instead must accept their role as a part of a story, and work to earn their happy ending. This sensation of a diegetic [2] player allows for a deeper connection with the characters, as well as a greater sense of discomfort in the presence of the antagonist, who is capable of reaching beyond the game to mess with the player's computer. In an unusual way, OneShot achieves a goal many interactive narratives strive for; it creates an immersive narrative experience where the player is encompassed by the story world and feels meaning in their interaction as a result. But it does not do this through traditional means, instead of allowing the player to step into the story world, the story world *literally* reaches beyond the game window, and encircles the player and their real world. This creates an impactful, immersive, meaningful, and engaging narrative experience where the player is simultaneously external and internal [4] and the game's story can even become real, if the player is willing to suspend their disbelief and believe it so.

## References

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