

# Game Narrative Review

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**Game Title:** *Little Nightmares II*

**Platform:** Windows

**Genre:** Adventure, Puzzle

**Release Date:** 10 Feb. 2021

**Developer:** Tarsier Studios

**Publisher:** BANDAI NAMCO Entertainment

**Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer:** David Mervik (Game Writer)

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## Overview

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*Little Nightmare II* is an adventure puzzle game. Players mainly use props in the scene to cope with puzzles, thereby promoting the development of the plot. Most of them adopt the “reader – ; role –” (Bal & Boheemen, 2009) answering method (+ stands for known, – stands for unknown), which makes players more able to understand Mono (the protagonist). In the end, the answer method is converted to the “reader – ; role +” (Bal & Boheemen, 2009) which leads to an open ending and makes the story impressive.

Secondly, due to the richness of the conflict in the game, readers can interpret the text in a variety of ways which makes the text more universal. Third, I use Althusser's Interpellation Theory to explain the relationship between characters. Then, I analyze a large number of contrast methods in the story by analyzing narrative elements and narrative methods. These contrasting methods have enriched the villain, thus enriching the depth of the story. Finally, I conduct a narrative analysis of Act 1 and find that *Little Nightmare II* uses a lot of Kernel Scene to make the plot more compact, which can attract players to continuously go through the whole story.

## Characters

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- **MONO** – Mono is the protagonist of the story. According to the ending, he is also the final boss - THE THIN MAN. At the end of the story, his partner Six abandoned him in a signal tower, a place similar to a prison, therefore, his latent desire is to gain freedom. It is worth mentioning that when he was Mono, he did not know this desire until the end of the story. Throughout the game, he is a good partner of Six and escapes the corrupt world they were in together. Mono is outgoing. He took the initiative to invite Six to be his partner without any hesitation even he has not met Six before.
- **SIX** – Six is a companion who travels with Mono. He is also alienated after being captured by The Thin Man but is eventually rescued by Mono. He acts as an auxiliary to Mono in the game, controlled by AI, and uses Mono to escape the world because Six does not have the power that Mono possesses. Six has escaped from reality at first, such as he only hides in a small space and listens to the music box. After meeting Mono, he begins to yearn for freedom. This is a change in his inner desires. However, unlike Mono, Six is an introvert and not easy to believe, plus some self-interest. He declines Mono's invitation at first until he realizes that Mono is in his favor. Another example of egoism is that Six always runs faster than Mono in the game. Even though there are some game design guiding factors, but this situation allows Six to choose whether Mono survives or not each time.

## Breakdown

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### Overall

*Little Nightmares II* can be seen as the whole plan of The Thin Man by creating a natural and unnatural conflict (by corrupting the citizens), The Thin Man makes the Mono think that he is natural, on the good side, and thus needs to escape the corrupted world. However, this false, constructed relationship between the protagonist and the scene makes Mono and even the players think that they are doing the "right" thing.

### Character Relationship & How The Thin Man plays his trick?

In my opinion, *Little Nightmares II* is a partial interpretation of Althusser's Interpellation theory. For Interpellation theory, Althusser "brings an instance for interpellation in everyday life: a theoretical scene takes place on a street and a police hailing 'Hey, you there!' The hailed individual turns around to respond to this hailing being trapped as a subject recognizing himself to be addressed by that hail." (Sadjadi & Ahmadi, 2018) In *Little Nightmares II*, there are many similar interpellation scenarios. First, in the story, there is a very obvious opposition, namely, the opposition between the big and the small. Naturally, big people and small people are divided into two gangs.

In the small gang, Mono, the protagonist, interpellates his companions by uttering "hey" softly. This is the fourth step of Althusser's theory of inquiry that "the subjects' recognition of each other". (Sadjadi & Ahmadi, 2018) This kind of interpellation from actually Mono as a big person, namely, The Thin Man who is the person in the signal tower, which is authority, unconsciously interpellate Six. Unconsciously because Mono didn't know that he is The Thin Man in the beginning. Mono's purpose of interpellation, or The Thin Man's purpose, is to use Six to help Mono cope with problems and move forward, thereby freeing The Thin Man from the tower.

Finish talking about interpellations between the companions. Immediately afterwards, through Ideological State Apparatuses, other small people were alienated in school, turning them into crazy small people, through the teacher who is also the boss of an act. Mono's goal is trying his best to prevent alienation, but the interesting thing is that the identity of the protagonist is interpellated by the ideology (The Thin Man), because Mono is fulfilling The Thin Man's task who symbolizes the ideology which means Mono is reaching the request that the ideology constructed for him to reaches a specific town (timeline), thereby releasing the responsibility of The Thin Man. This demonstrates that although Mono is on a "good" side, but the "good" side is constructed by the bad side. Therefore, Mono is finishing The Thin Man's desire unconsciously.

The Thin Man not only alienated people through school, but also used the media which appears as a television in the game to control people. TV is one of the few, a symbol that exists in every Act. The Thin Man uses the media to control people of all ages in the city-minors are controlled through schools, adults are controlled through television in small towns, and elderly people are controlled like adults in hospitals. This environment ensures that Mono and the player believe they are on the good side.

Hailed Subject	Method	Goal
Mono & Six	- Create conflict between natural and unnatural - Using TV to teleport Mono & Six to particular timeline/place	Free The Thin Man
Normal People	Adolescent – School Adult – TV The old – TV	Create conflict between natural and unnatural which leads to free The Thin Man
Boss – Hunter, Teacher, Doctor etc.	Unknown	

Consequently, The relationship between characters and the plot in *Little Nightmares II* can be explained by Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses theory by

using different haled methods, the ultimate goal of liberating that The Thin Man is achieved.

### Narrative Elements

\*The time of the story is always night

Act	Character	Scene	Environment
1	Protagonist – <u>Mono &amp; Six</u> Boss – <u>Hunter</u>	EXT. – Forest	TV, Artificial traps, rope, mouse traps.
		INT. – Hunter's Living House	Rotten food, flies, dead family members with the uncanny valley effect, axe, broken mirror.
		EXT. – Outside Hunter's Workshop	Saws, corpses, shotguns, cages.
		EXT. – Behind the warehouse	Dirty pond, carrion.

#### Natural & Unnatural

From the above table of Act 1 scene elements, readers can find that *Little Nightmares II* uses a lot of corrupt elements in the scenes, thus creating a sense of a barren world. Other Acts are also expand these corrupt elements based on Act 1.

### Narrative Language

#### Little & Big

As the name of the game shows, the core contrast in this game is the contrast between the small and the big. The author chooses the small as the narrative point of view, thus, the author can use the big opponent to create a sense of oppression and the huge scene to create a shocking visual experience. The author not only uses the contrast between the small and the big in the narrative and the scene but also makes full use of the advantages of the small characters in the gameplay, such as only small characters are able to get into the position that the big opponent can't reach. Therefore, Mono can avoid the enemy by hiding in the narrow environment which enriches the understanding of the villain.

#### Light & Dark

The game also strictly controls the amount of light present, so that the atmosphere of the game is shrouded in a dark and cold tone, which enriches the mystery of the scene and makes players want to understand more about the story. Then, light is often used in gameplay to highlight the key items, which also makes the player have a "phototaxis" and a good impression of light, thus enriching the narrative of the game. It is worth mentioning that some stable and strong light sources are also used to show the scene, which will make players actively interact but get frustrating feedback. The game needs to control the light intensity more strictly to achieve a better guiding effect and gives players a more immersive narrative experience.



\*The hat in the former is a collection system in the game, and the HSL of its light has an L (Lightness) value of 39, while the latter is a meaningless interaction with an L value of 69. This is obviously not reasonable enough.

## Narrative Structures

\*Act 1 is chosen as the act of narrative analysis here. The reason is that this act is released as a demo version, so Act 1 (except for the tutorial part) should be the most attractive chapter of the whole story because the game needs this act to attract unfamiliar players to buy games. Secondly, this chapter also lays the basic loop of the game, and the other chapters are similar in structure. So, I use Act 1 as the representative of this game narrative for analysis.

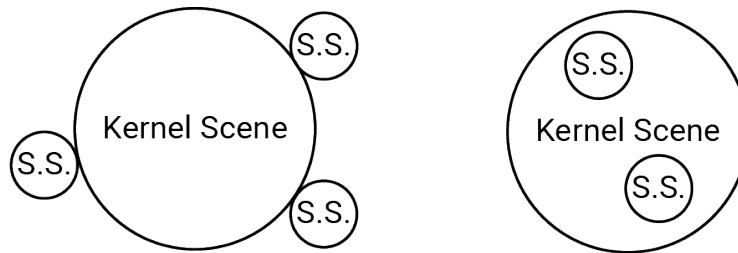
Act 1			
In Scene column: “S” stands for <u>Satellite Scene</u> , “K” stands for <u>Kernel Scene</u> . (Porter et al., 2002)			
Scene	Function(s)	Settings	Plot
1 – K	Disturbance	INT. – Narrow Space	The player sees a mysterious door and is about to enter this door.
2 – S	Exposition	EXT. – Forest	The player controls the protagonist to explore the world (tutorial).
<p><b>Main Conflict - Person vs. Environment.</b>  Mono came to this world with the unknown. He wants to understand the world, therefore, he keeps moving forward (the front in the sense of the story line), exploring the world by facing difficulties. However, he meets some difficulties that the environment sets.</p> <p><b>Theme - Exploration.</b> The protagonist gains knowledge about the world (rules of the game) by constantly exploring the scene and coping with problems (puzzles).</p>			
3 – K	Complication	INT. – Hunter’s Living House	Mono meets Six who is in the similar situation (small size) as Mono, and Mono tries to invite Six become a partner with him.
<p><b>Main Conflict - Person vs. Environment.</b>  Since Mono is very small, he will be blocked by many large environments. In terms of gameplay, the game introduces puzzles that must be solved by two people, which assists in narrating Mono's weakness and reflects the conflict between the individual and the environment.</p> <p><b>Theme - Friendship.</b> This scene is dominated by friendship. Its structure is "missing – finding – gaining". Mono's lack of friendship leads to start looking for partners, and Six is the object to be sought. Interestingly, the author describes Six as a character that</p>			

is not easy to believe, thus enriching the turning points. In gameplay, friendship is expressed as Mono and Six work together to decrypt and find an exit.			
Beat#	Plot		Turning Point and its function
1 – S Dramatic Question	Mono finds a house in no one's world		This is a <u>turning point</u> in the story. Before finding the house, the world is “silent” that nobody in the world. However, after the presence of the house makes the world alive and the protagonist maybe can find people to discuss what happened. Therefore, this turning point makes readers <u>increase curiosity</u> .
2 – S Introduction Of New Character	Mono finds Six and invites Six as a friend but Six rejects.		Another <u>turning point</u> ! Mono does find a friend, but the friend rejects him. This action makes players wonder why Six rejects his invitation to <u>increases curiosity</u> .
3 – S Relationship Affirmation	Six is trapped by difficulties and wants to cooperate with Mono.		The <u>Climax</u> of the scene. Solving the problem that Mono is too little to continue his adventure. The theme of this scene which is friend are pointed out.
4 – S Relief	Mono and Six escape from the house.		Intentionally blank
4 – K	Obstacle	EXT. – Outside Hunter’s Workshop	Mono and Six alarm The Hunter and begin to escape from The Hunter.
<p><b>Conflict – Person vs. Person</b></p> <p>On the surface, this conflict is between people, but it is a conflict between the mainstream order and the sub-order. The mainstream order is the grown-up Mono, and the sub-order is the current Mono. This is also the core conflict of this game. The conflicting core should be Person vs. himself.</p> <p>Theme – <b>Alive</b>. The theme of this scene is expressed through the chasing battle with The Hunter. The low fault tolerance rate makes it more difficult for Mono to survive, thus shaping a world that is difficult to survive.</p>			
Beat#	Plot		Turning Point and its function
1 – S Introduction Of New Character	Mono and Six alarm The Hunter		A <u>turning point</u> which gives the player a new direction by introducing an opposition and it also increases curiosity by confusing players with “why The Hunter wants to catch Mono and Six”.
2 – S Plan Revealed	The Hunter hunt Mono and Six		Intentionally blank

5 – S	Relief	EXT. – Forest	Mono and Six temporarily escape from the Hunter and continue their travelling.
Beat#	Plot		Turning Point and its function
1 – S Relief	Mono and Six solve puzzles together to strength their relationship		Intentionally blank
6 – K	Confrontation	From EXT. – Forest to INT. – Depot	Mono and Six meet The Hunter again and try to escape.
Beat#	Plot		Turning Point and its function
1 – S Conflict Continues	The Hunter find Mono and Six again		<u>Turning point</u> by <u>surprise</u> the player. In the previous chase, the author does not give much information about The Hunter and the player thinks that The Hunter has already left. However, the return of The Hunter gives players a surprise and also provides them with an opportunity to explore the secrets of The Hunter.
7 - K	Crisis	INT. - Attached depot	Mono and Six trap in an attached depot, but they also find a gun at the same time.
<u>Climax</u> of the scene and act. Mono and Six completed a rejection of the distorted world's interpellation by killing The Hunter, thus temporarily solving the problem of keeping themselves from being corrupted.			
8 - K	Resolution	INT. - Attached depot	Mono and Six kill The Hunter and travel to next town.
Beat#	Plot		Turning Point and its function
1 – S Conflict Continues	Mono and Six are going to a new town.		<u>Turning point</u> <u>which increasing curiously</u> of the story. The player completed the initial story but did not have a deep understanding of the whole story, but only vaguely understood the opposition. By introducing a new scene, the player can understand the narrative world from a new perspective.

As can be seen from the above table, the scene arrangement of *Little Nightmares II* is different from the dichotomy of Kernel Scene and Satellite Scene in traditional narrative. Kernel Scene is mainly used as the scene in *Little Nightmares II*, while Satellite Scene is more like the beat of the scene. The Satellite Scene in the traditional sense should be used as an enhancement of the Kernel Scene. Its relationship is as shown in the figure below, so it can generally be deleted. However, *Little Nightmares II* includes most

of the Satellite Scene in the Kernel Scene, which makes the Satellite Scene more meaningful. The advantage of this method is that it allows players to get a fast-paced narrative to keep players continuously curious about the story.



Traditional Narrative Context

Game Narrative Context

This narrative method is also well integrated into gameplay. For example, the secondary functions in the game loop, such as the collection system, are represented in Satellite Scene, while the Kernel Scene is used in the main game loop, such as decryption and chase. This structure ensures that the rhythm of the narrative is interesting, and it also ensures that the gameplay has a reasonable rhythm.

## Strongest Element

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The conflict shaping In *Little Nightmares II* is the strongest element. First, the most superficial conflict is Person vs. Environment, which is how Mono survives in the strong (big) world as a weak (small) without being alienated. This conflict is generally represented by Person vs. Person, which is the conflict between Mono and monsters. In fact, the core of these conflicts comes from Person vs. Fate, because the master behind the alienation of this world is the grown-up Mono who is The Thin Man. The Thin Man wants to use Mono to release him, but if Mono completes his mission, the ending will be the same as the performance, eventually becoming The Thin Man. The Thin Man is like Oedipus, under the arrangement of fate, it is impossible to escape this cycle and finish his fate unconsciously. This is what I think is the strongest element of this game.

## Unsuccessful Element

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This is not actually fault about the narrative itself, but it's a good example about how the game mechanic affects the narrative. First, because the game is a horizontal 3D perspective, it is difficult for the player to accurately reach the place they want which leads to character's death. It's like watching online videos suddenly get stuck. Players have to temporarily suppress their curiosity about the plot, to repeatedly play the scene that should have passed. This is harmful to the continuity of the narrative. Secondly, there are still many bugs in the game and the unobvious guide of the puzzles in the game makes the game more difficult, which makes the player have to play the game from the checkpoint again, which is fatal to the player's enthusiasm and the continuity of the narrative. It's like watching an online video suddenly come ads. These two points are in urgent need of improvement in the game.



## Highlight

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What impress me is definitely the end of the story, Six chooses to let Mono go on the edge of the cliff. As a player, I definitely look at this issue from Mono's perspective. Throughout the game, there are multiple experiences that Six are caught and Mono tries his best to rescue Six, and each time Six is undoubtedly giving his hands. Therefore, Six's action is unacceptable for players. However, if you look at the problem from Six's point of view, Six may not think that Mono does all these things, because we don't know the time when Six is absent and what he experiences. It is also possible that Six just thinks that Mono is by his side whenever Six wakes up. There is also a detail that when The Thin Man is about to take Six away, Mono just hides under the bed and holds his head in fear. After seeing this scene, Six gives up resistance. In general, Six's action is very impressive. Even if I watch a gameplay about *Little Nightmares II* on an online video website, most of the comments are discussing why Six let go at the end.

## Critical Reception

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### iMore – 90/100

Overall, *Little Nightmares II* is a cute horror game but “it will grab you, suck you in, and terrify you.” (Review, 2021) Reviewer believes that it has reached the level of a sequel rather than just a remake of the previous one. Especially, *Little Nightmares II* has good sound effect design that “the sound really draws you in” (Review, 2021), and it also “guide it [the player experience]” (Review, 2021) which effectively keep the continuous of the narrative.

### GameSpace – 90/100

*Little Nightmares II* has good lighting design, “the atmospheric lighting in the levels is perfectly pitched to create a perfect blend of horror with a dash of intensity.” (*Little Nightmares II Switch Review – GameSpace.Com*, n.d.) The exquisite art has some uncanny valley effect which is “exceptionally creepy” (*Little Nightmares II Switch Review – GameSpace.Com*, n.d.).

## Lessons

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- The author can set up a surface conflict and sets up a core conflict to hide under the surface conflict. This can make the conflict interesting and make the meaning of the work more profound.
- Authors can use Kernel Scene more to make the plot structure compact, which can continue to attract players to play the game for better narrative.
- The author can use more contrast to enrich the opposites, complicate the story, and increase the depth.

## Summation

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*Little Nightmares II* is worth being analyzed because it has a deep conflict, which creates a deep theme. This makes the interpretation of the story more diverse and more universal. Secondly, its narrative structure is compact, which can attract players to play

continuously. Finally, it uses a lot of contrast techniques to enrich the opposite of the protagonist, thereby enriching the narrative and making the story more in-depth.

## Citation

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