Nicole Maiorano
DigiPen Institute of Technology
n.maiorano@digipen.edu or nicolejmaiorano@gmail.com
Dec. 2013

Game Title: One and One Story
Platform: PC browser
Genre: puzzle platformer
Release Date: 2011
Developer: Mattia Traverso
Publisher: Mattia Traverso (distributed by Armor Games)
Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Mattia Traverso

Overview

One and One Story follows a young couple as they fall in love, out of love, and in love again. The player primarily takes on the role of the male character, but also takes on the role of the female character when the narrative dictates. The story begins with the characters not actually knowing each other, but the male thinks about the female. As the relationship grows, the two of them fall in love, though it is just beginning. They experience rough patches, as many couples do, with opposing views and disagreements. The female runs away, leaving the male, breaking his heart, and leaving him to feel awful without her. She returns, in the end, promising not to hurt the male anymore. Once again, they have fallen in love. *One and One Story* is an elegantly simple telling of this beautiful narrative.

Characters

- **Boy –** This is the main player character. A male silhouette outlined in blue, Boy is easy to identify. Throughout the game, the player experiences Boy's thoughts about Girl. Based on the textual, on-screen thoughts from Boy that the player is able to see, Boy is a very feeling-based thinker. His world almost seems to revolve around his emotions. The love that Boy feels drives him forward within the story of the game, always reaching out to Girl, the cause of the strong emotions Boy is experiencing. At this point in his life, Girl, and the love he feels for her, are the only things that matter to Boy—they are the sole focus of his attention.

- **Girl –** Girl plays several different roles within the game. She is one of the player characters, she is the goal, and she is the antagonist. Her biggest role, however, is as Boy's psychological Shadow. A female silhouette outlined in pink, she is just as easy to identify as Boy is. She is unsure of her emotions as she is the one to run away. Not only does she run away from the

emotions she is afraid and unsure of, but she also runs away from Boy, leaving him. Her decisions are based on gut reaction and instinct. In the end, she realizes how she really feels, having fallen in love with Boy, and she stops running away.

Breakdown

One and One Story's narrative is outstanding because of its elegance and simplicity. There are three pieces of the game in particular that really stand out as being perfect examples of the game's simple elegance. The first piece is the interstitial text between chapters, or sections, of gameplay. The second piece is the use of mechanics as metaphor that exists throughout the entire game. The third piece is the way the game was cut into chapters. Each of these pieces helps to create a whole that is narratively excellent and well-communicated to the player.

One of the best ways to communicate an idea in a game is through text. *One and One Story* uses the interstitial text between chapters to communicate the story of the game. The first text outside of gameplay is simple: "Once we were shadows." During this section, the player can control either Boy or Girl. Prior to this section, in the tutorial section, the player is told that he can switch to the other character, but it is in such a way that says that Boy is thinking about her, "I used Z or C to think of her." This simple sentence provides a fair amount of information to the player— that Boy and Girl are not yet necessarily together at this point in the story. This is again hinted at with the interstitial text through the use of the word "shadows." Girl, as Boy's psychological Shadow, represents something unknown within him. Girl's thoughts, her reasons for action, and her emotions are all unknown to Boy, and therefore the player. Shadows are intangible, and Boy, being a physical being, cannot simply reach out and touch the Shadow. He needs to become one with his Shadow in order to understand it and what really hides in its darkness. Neither Boy nor Girl is fully aware that they are in love with the other. As they are unaware of their true emotions, they are living in darkness of their True Selves. By using these simple and elegant words, the player is given both the conscious and unconscious stories of the two characters. The interstitial text moves the story forward in a way that makes it easy for the player to understand. Another example of the text that helps to explain the course of the story near the middle of the game, is, "And she was running away." This denotes a major change in the course of the story. At this point, Girl has possibly fallen out of love and is running away from Boy, hurting him in the process. Without the text, the story is not communicated quite as clearly as it needs to be as there is no audio outside sound effects and music. The game is simple, almost too simple for the story to be explained without the use of words.

The simplicity of the game, and the gameplay, comes from the use of mechanics as metaphor. With each new section, denoted and described by a piece of interstitial text, there is a slight change in the mechanics. At the beginning, the player can switch between Boy and Girl. When the player is not playing as one of them, the character's silhouette appears slightly transparent, as a shadow, just as the first interstitial text states. The first time the mechanics change, the interstitial text states, "When she saw me, she ran to me." Right off the bat, the player can imagine what this means for the mechanics. The mechanics are used in such a way that the player understands the part of the story through gameplay. While they can be told the story through text, by forcing them to be part of the story through gameplay, the player becomes more invested in the story. By getting immersed in the story, the player then feels the emotions the story is intended to evoke. The use of mechanics as metaphor within *One and One Story* is possibly the strongest element of the narrative the game has to offer. The narrative is enhanced through the use and authenticity of the mechanics, as well as the evoking of the appropriate emotions throughout. By having the mechanics change as the story changes, it feels more like the story is actually progressing rather than a story being told over an unchanging game.

The story feels like it changes and actually progresses because the game does so. The game does this through chapters. By calling each section a chapter, it helps the player to get into the necessary mindset to experience a story. Chapters is a word typically associate with books, and therefore, stories, which is why it helps the player to understand that a story is being told. By cutting the game into chapters, the player experiences each section slightly differently. The game is split into eight chapters, each with a different mechanic that helps to tell the story of that section. Each section allows the game to be delivered in small chunks that make the story much more manageable to take in. The chapters help to make the game feel simple by forcing it to fit into these blocks that highly simplify the game in general. As each chapter progresses, the player can easily see the same progression within the game's story.

Through the use of interstitial text, mechanics as metaphor, and chapters, *One and One Story* presents a narrative that is both simple and elegant. Players can relate to the story and the characters that feel almost like empty shells that the player is meant to project himself into.

Strongest Element

The strongest element of the narrative was the changing mechanics throughout the game. Every time the story changed, so did the mechanics. By changing the mechanics, the player feels the story that much more strongly. The changing mechanics, like moving from a section where Girl moves with Boy to

a section where Girl is always moving to the right, assist the narrative by making it truly interactive. While some games present their narratives in ways that simply tell the player the story, *One and One Story* captures the player and allows him to become invested in the story. By playing through the story, the player experiences the story almost as if it were actually happening to him. The changing mechanics immerse the player in the story by supporting the idea that they are part of the story, not just watching it.

Unsuccessful Element

The least successful part of the game was the ending. This small section is the only part where the interstitial text that comes before it does not adequately describe the mechanics of the section. Because the text does not describe what it actually going on, it feels like a much weaker piece of the game. While the section is important in completing the metaphor of becoming one with the psychological Shadow, it lacks the presentation required to make it both strong and meaningful to the player. There is an element of trust in the section that certainly makes it stand out from other sections; however, it still does not quite meet the expectations set up by the rest of the game.

Highlight

While much of the game has great narrative moments, the highlight of *One and One Story* is the section in which Girl is running away. This entire section has the strongest use of mechanics as metaphor within the entire game. Girl is constantly running away, moving from her typical starting position on the left side of the screen to the right. There are moments where the player must move quickly to push a block to save Girl from walking into spikes or so she can still assist the player in successfully completing the level. However, the most important part of this section is the urgency that it evokes. When the player sees Girl moving constantly, running away, he feels like he needs to get through the level as quickly as possible so he can try to catch her. This moment particularly stands out because of how much emotion it actually evokes from the player as they play through this section.

Critical Reception

One and One Story was a finalist in the Student Competition of IGF (Independent Games Festival). However, even being a finalist, it has not been reviewed by many reputable sources to any great ends. However, there are a couple short reviews of the game which mention aspects of the game's narrative. On the website Indie Game Reviewer, there is a short review of the game. The writer states, "What is particularly impressive about The One and One Story is how well its creator has married

gameplay with narrative. Granted, the narrative maybe a minimalist love story but each beat in the plot is directly connected to the way in which the two characters interact in the game play. This is a rare achievement and it should be commended." Kit Goodliffe, the writer of the article, gave the game a score of four out of five stars. In another review, on a blog entitled *Sit Sam*, the author writes that, "The game's story is the second unique aspect that sets it apart...The romance of the boy and girl is told on the text between levels in such a way that the player connects with the breadth of the experience."

Lessons

- **Minimal text can create a compelling story** – *One and One Story* is possibly one of the greatest examples of this. This is one of the strongest lessons that can be learned from this game. The only text in the game is used to teach the player how to play the game while simultaneously putting the story into words for the player. The interstitial text throughout the game is a great example of this.

- **Simple mechanics can be used to create an emotional response in players** – While the lesson learned from this game's design is mainly about using minimal text, we can also learn that simple mechanics have their merits. While many people want to experience games with complex mechanics that make an engaging experience, simple mechanics can be used to deliver a specific emotional experience. For instance, when the game states that Girl is running away, the mechanics match the story. With Girl constantly moving, the player feels the urgency and fleeting hope that the game is meant to create.

Summation

One and One Story is a narratively beautiful game. The story, while it is a common one, is delivered in such a way that it almost feels new. The elegance of the game's simplicity alone makes it worth analyzing. There is so much narrative designers can learn from something so simple when so many games are moving towards making stories that are complicated and difficult to explain without an exceptional amount of text.