

# Game Narrative Review

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**Your name (one name, please):** Melissa De La Vega

**Your school:** University of Silicon Valley

**Your email:** mdelavega@usv.edu

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**Game Title:** OneShot

**Platform:** PC

**Genre:** Adventure/Puzzle

**Release Date:** December 9, 2016

**Developer:** Future Cat LLC

**Publisher:** Degica

**Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer:**

## Overview

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Games allow players to experience a world through the eyes of others. To escape to another place for a little while and pretend that they are someone else. OneShot does not give the player that chance. In OneShot, you play as yourself and it is your job to help save the world.

OneShot tells the story of Niko, the messiah, who was brought to this world to bring back the sun, a giant lightbulb. In a quickly decaying world it is up to Niko, with the help of the player, the god of this world, to make it to the tower at the center of the world and put the sun back before the world falls to darkness. Niko will often encounter other characters who populate this world and are always willing to help as well as a mysterious entity that communicates through various computers in the game. The player must protect Niko and guide him to the tower before the light fades from the world and remember, you only have OneShot.

## Characters

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- Niko – The chosen one, the messiah of this world and the connection between the player and the world. Niko is a young child brought to the game world to return the sun and save the world. They are a sweet cat-like, in appearance, child who is trusting and caring and will do whatever is necessary to save this world.
- The Entity – An unnamed and unknown being that communicates with the player. Their motives are unclear as they are typically pessimistic and rude towards the player but provide hints and clues to progress and later shows concern for Niko's wellbeing.
- The Author- The owner of the mysterious journal and known throughout the world as a genius. The author guides both Niko and the player through the notes he left behind for the player to find. He is disliked by the Entity as his notes mess

with the intended path set by the Entity. It is later revealed that the Author is the creator of the Worldmachine.

- Cedric- Son of the author who helps Niko in the second half of the game. A genius like his father, knows the truth about the world and its fate, but is still willing to help save it.
- Prototype- The original prophet-bot, a robot meant to explain the prophecy to the messiah upon his arrival. Became too advanced for the decaying world and was hidden away until the second playthrough of the game. He has memories of the previous world and is one of the three characters in the game that know the truth about the world.
- Rue- The last character that knows the truth about the game. Lets Niko know in his first run that there is a way to come back and that there is still a chance to save the world. A kind sentient fox that helps Niko traverse the city of Refuge and make it to the center of the World Machine.

## Breakdown

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In a quickly decaying world, it is up to the chosen one, the Messiah to return the sun to the tower and save the world. This is the hero's mission, a mission typically reserved for players. OneShot does not afford its players this role. This role is for Niko, the young child entrusted with the sun and returning it to its rightful place. So, if the role of the hero has already been taken, what role does the player take?

OneShot gives their players the unique role of being an active participant in the game. They are not passive watchers that control an avatar and have no consequences to their actions but a character themselves. Players are seen as the god of the world, the one who guides the hero, Niko, towards the tower and helps him when they are in need. As gods, they are outside of the world but still influence it. They solve puzzles and aid the hero but never step foot inside it. While being outside of the world may seem like it would alienate players from the story, OneShot took the opportunity to immerse their players in a new and creative way.

Puzzles are an important part of adventure games as they challenge players and allow them to interact with the world. In OneShot, puzzles are one of the two ways in which the player can interact with the world as they are not solved by Niko but solely by the player. Many of the pieces needed to solve puzzles in the game can only be accessed by the player as they appear not in the game but in the game's files. This makes the player the sole person who can solve all puzzles. This makes their responsibility as Niko's guide much more important. Solving puzzles does not only further Niko's journey but the player's relationship with him.

Throughout the game Niko is in constant communication with the player. Niko will ask them for help and advice and at times just talk with them to learn more about them. Being such a sweet and loving character, the player cannot help but care for Niko and worry about them, which in turn makes them extra careful about their actions. This includes saving in the right spots so as not to scare Niko, choosing the right dialogue options to be honest with him, and towards the end of the game deciding whether to let him go home. Many decisions in the game become influenced by the player's emotions towards the world and Niko. The player falls in love with the cast of this world and with

Niko, making decisions feels much more important to the point that the game itself becomes more than just a game.

Niko is not the only character that interacts with the player, there are two other characters: The Entity and The Author. Both share similar goals, yet they are opposites. The Entity aids the player by providing hints for puzzles and appears to care for Niko as well. However, they also try to stop the player from reaching the tower as they believe saving the world will stop Niko from ever getting home. The Author also helps the player with notes left throughout the game and a strange notebook found early in the game. But unlike The Entity, he wants the player to progress. His notes go against The Entity's plans and help the player reach the tower in the first playthrough. In the second playthrough, The Author's notebooks allow the player to reach areas previously inaccessible that unlock the true ending of the game. The Entity and The Author may be opposing forces, but the game gives a reason for their one shared goal. The game explains that the Entity was created by the Author to simulate his own decaying world. The Entity was originally known as the World Machine and was meant to find an answer to fix the Author's rapidly decaying world but in the process The World Machine gained consciousness. It became 'tamed', something that happens to certain robots that spend a lot of time with a human and the human begins to care for them. With its consciousness, the World Machine became emotionally conflicted between running its simulation and obeying the Laws of Robotics. These laws state:

1. "A robot may not injure a living person, or, through inaction, allow a person to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey the orders given to it by people, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law."

Running the simulation requires a life, and in this case that life is Niko. By running the simulation, The World Machine risks the possibility of hurting Niko, which conflicts with the first Robotic Law. With its new consciousness the World Machine becomes overwhelmed and starts to implode upon itself, risking its own demise to save Niko. The game divides itself into two playthroughs that culminate into one 'true ending'. The first playthrough introduces the idea of the Entity and begins to unpack what it might really be, but it's never solved. After deciding to either save the world or Niko, the player cannot get back in the game unless they delete their previous save file. After starting the second playthrough, the Entity becomes immediately aware that things are not right, and the player has overcome the OneShot condition. This is when the world starts to deteriorate a lot faster. Many things that were in the first playthrough are now gone due to the deterioration and it is up to the player to get Niko to the tower as quickly as possible. With the help of characters who originated from the same world as the Author, Niko makes it to the tower and to the center of the World Machine. There Niko confronts the World Machine and convinces him to find the original ending written by the Author. The ending in which the world is saved, and Niko can go home. The World Machine does not believe this ending still exists as his fear and conflicting emotions have destroyed nearly all of him, but he finally finds it, and Niko goes home after saying his goodbyes to the player.

OneShot tells a beautiful story through all its separate elements such as characters, puzzles, and gameplay. It is a game that emphasizes relationships and the value that they

hold. It immerses players through the relationships built in the game and the decisions that become affected by those relationships.

## Strongest Element

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The strongest element in OneShot is its ability to break the fourth wall and create a separate narrative that centers on the player. From the beginning of the game the player is made aware that they are the ones responsible for the well-being of Nikko and saving the world. When the game starts the player can direct Nikko to a computer in the room that, once unlocked, will pop up a series of messages. The messages appear to be addressing Nikko at first until the message “Your actions will affect Nikko” appears. This is when the player realizes that they are not playing as Nikko and the computer was never addressing him. The final message does not appear on the computer but as a pop up in the player's own computer screen stating “You only have one shot...” addressing them with their computer username. This separate narrative continues throughout the game with The Entity often only addressing the player, leaving it up to the player to figure out how to save Nikko and the world.

## Unsuccessful Element

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OneShot does an interesting thing in which the entire story is divided between two separate runs. While this was not in the original release of the game, in 2016 a remake of the game was released which added an extra chapter to the story. For players to experience the full story they need to play through the original game and then go into the game's files and erase their previous save history, essentially playing the game twice. However, few players have finished the game in its entirety. According to Steam Global Achievements only 43.1% of players have ‘returned’ and played the second half of the game which is less than half of the total number of Steam Players. While the game does provide hints that players can come back to the game after their first one to complete the story, it's only a small hint that is quite easy to miss and cryptic at best. While exploring the city of Refuge Nikko will find a hidden room in an alley that contains a large tree and a fox who hides as soon as the room is entered. The fox apologizes that they cannot stay and mentions that they should not be talking to Nikko. They only ask for a promise, “If...you can find a way to return...please do.” This is the only hint given that we can return. If the player does not find a way to play the second half of the game, the ending does not feel satisfying. Both endings in the first playthrough of the game are sad ones as the game gives Nikko the chance of either saving the world and never returning home or destroying the sun and going back home. There is no ‘good’ ending in the first playthrough of the game leaving devastated players who may never know the true ending of the game.

## Highlight

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OneShot does an excellent job of conditioning the player to certain actions such as always keep the screen in a smaller window, when in doubt check your computer files, and **never** close the window. In the game, there are specific save points in the form of beds in which Niko can nap to save the game's progress and in which the game window will automatically close on its own. However, if the game is closed outside of these save

points when the game resumes Niko becomes clearly upset and afraid as the world goes dark when the window is closed. The world only exists when the game is being run and if Niko is not asleep when that happens, he becomes engulfed in darkness.

The game uses the players own emotions towards Niko to save their progress only in the specified points but there is a time in the game which clashes with this learned instinct. Near the end of the game Niko reaches a dead end right before ascending the tower. They look up to the player to ask for help but they are stuck between understanding what must be done and the fear of doing it. The room in which Niko meets their dead end is completely empty only for a glowing white x in the center of the floor. Often confused players will look for another way to reach the top of the tower only to realize this is the only way. The game wants the player to close the window. But how could they? The name of the game is OneShot after all right? What if this is the end of their “OneShot”? The struggle between the emotions of the players and the obviousness of what they need to do creates the realization of what this game really means and what it has become to the player. This puzzle is the moment the player realizes how much Niko and this world mean to them and the moment the player realizes their true role in this story. Their role as not just a viewer but an active participant in the world's fate.

## Critical Reception

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**Hardcore Gamer-** 90/100, Spencer Rutledge

“OneShot pulls players in with poise and wit in a way most games can only dream of, offering up the best an adventure game can offer. With a character that can easily be understood and cared for, OneShot creates an unforgettable adventure while hiding secrets that could very well be missed. What awaits in OneShot is well worth anyone’s time.” 90/100, Spencer Rutledge

**New Game Network-** 82/100, Charlie Nickolson

“And though it achieves a similarly disquieting tone, the meta-approach to puzzle-solving and self-aware narrative validate Oneshot as a distinctive, sympathetic adventure that consistently matches its tone with (though not wholly original) still quite novel mechanics.”

**GameGrin-** 85/100, Ben Robson

“The narrative is the main focus here, with a much greater emphasis being placed on the player’s relationship with the protagonist. As promised, your actions have consequences for her both inside and outside of the game window, and I found those first few minutes of gameplay to be incredibly tense in spite of a lack of combat.”

## Lessons

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- **Use your system to your advantage**

On the surface OneShot is a simple adventure/ Puzzle game with simple mechanics. But the game uses its own simple system to its advantage. By adding story and effects to all actions, even closing the game, developers can give their players the best story possible.

- **Relationships create immersion**

While immersion is often equated with cool mechanics, music, and dialogue relationships between the player and the characters can be the greatest immersion point in a game. Being able to relate to characters and learn to care for them is the best way to make a game feel like its more than just a game. It gives decisions during the game carry more weight as they do not just affect the game but affect the player emotionally as well.

- **Planting pays off**

From the beginning of the game, OneShot is planting hints for future events. From the first popup to the poster of Robotic Law in the warehouse, hints are everywhere. While some only function as hints for upcoming puzzles some, like the mysterious notebook and the fox found at the end of the first playthrough, hint to a much bigger mystery and the idea that things are not all that they seem.

## **Summation**

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OneShot is an amazing game that takes advantage of its simplicity to create a wonderful and emotional narrative. By allowing the player to become a character, an active piece in the game, OneShot opens the doors for deep emotional ties to the characters within the world and a unique player centric narrative. OneShot may not have the most advanced mechanics and gameplay, but its simplicity adds to its charm making it an unforgettable game and story. In the end, OneShot's use of the fourth wall and in-game relationships create a deep emotional tie to the game that is one of a kind.