

Game Narrative Review

Your name (one name, please): Douglas Kuras

Your school: Rochester Institute of Technology

Your email: dkuras202@gmail.com

Month/Year you submitted this review: November 2023

Game Title: *OMORI*

Platform: PC

Genre: Adventure RPG

Release Date: December 25, 2020

Developer: OMOCAT, LLC

Publisher: OMOCAT, LLC

Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Andrew Batino/Tiffany “Omocat” Liao

Table of Contents

Overview	1
Characters	2
Breakdown	12
All Cards Are On the Table	12
Headspace: A Dreamy Nightmare	13
Real World: A Gentle Slap in the Face.....	17
The True Horror of <i>OMORI</i> , and the Importance of Payoff.....	20
Narrative Replayability and Volume	22
Strongest Element	25
Unsuccessful Element.....	26
Highlight	27
Critical Reception	29
Lessons.....	30
Summation	31
Works Cited	32

Overview

DADDY LONGLEGS

No bandage can stifle an eternal wound... and there will be a time when its influence will bleed through.

Forgetful the DREAMER may be of this peril, a peril never forgets to be.

“My mistake” is not an excuse. While people can always learn from their mistakes, few mistakes can actually be fixed. Even simple mistakes can wrack a person, especially a youth, with guilt and self-blame. Sometimes, however, the loss and the scars left by these mistakes cut deep and ruin lives. Hiding from that kind of guilt will only make it fester and whittle you away. Instead, the first step in absolving guilt is to admit it, accepting the consequences of your mistake and the backlash of your honesty.

The narrative of *OMORI* centers around two worlds: a bright and fantastical world made by protagonist Sunny’s dreams, dubbed “Headspace” by the game’s community; and Faraway Town, also known as the real world, where Sunny must live when his dreams end. Both worlds show him different horrors and force him in different ways to face reality, which holds a horrible truth that he had spent the last four years trying to hide from. The game’s horror elements are infamous and hard to ignore. Its monsters, though few in variety, are amorphous and untouchable by the player, and at their most frightening, they serve as direct parallels and reminders of traumatizing events. However, the game most commonly presents its players with

Narratively speaking, the significance of *OMORI* comes in the many approaches it takes to telling its story and instilling its own brand of fear. Indirect elements and indefinite implications serve to deliver a tragic storyline to you on a silver platter before you even know that the truth exists. Returning to the game only reveals hidden elements and leaves the player to speculate on hidden meanings in every line of dialogue. This creates an environment that the player can find something new and meaningful in every time they return to the game. Its ambiguous narrative is so full of content and in-plain-sight narrative devices that a single replay can change the way a player views every single story beat that comes their way.

Characters

OMORI is packed with dozens of radiant characters. Many of them have their own side quest lines in both worlds, giving the player more opportunities to explore both worlds and bring them closer to each one. That said, the main narrative focuses primarily on one group of friends.

- **The Friend Group – Sunny, Aubrey, Kel, Hero, Basil, and Mari.** All of *OMORI*'s major protagonists/deuteragonists were once part of a tightly-knit friend group. Every member of the friend group has a Headspace variant that reflects the way they were before Mari hung herself four years ago, or at least it's believed that's why she died. At that time, the group was wedged apart and split off to cope in their own ways, with some taking it better than others. In the game's main route, as you meet back up with each of your old friends, you find that all of them have, in some way, changed. Even Sunny, who remains as quiet and cliff-faced as usual, is implied to be much different from his former self.

AUBREY

In the few months after MARI died... everything changed so fast.

SUNNY and BASIL became more closed off... KEL made a bunch of friends playing sports... and HERO always seemed to be busy studying.

Headspace Characters

A lot of characters in headspace are defined and don't change much, if at all. Even when characters do change, especially side characters they tend to snap back to their old selves before long. Instead of being expanded upon here, the main characters of Headspace get their narrative depth from their real-world counterparts.

- **Omori** – The initial player character. Of the friend group, Omori is the only one who doesn't share a name with his real world counterpart, Sunny. He's been living in a monochrome void known as White Space for as long as he can remember. In the colorful outer environments of Headspace, he alone retains a purely monochrome color scheme reminiscent of a piano. Under the player's control, Omori is a silent protagonist who never says a word on his own. He seems to be driven purely by the zany adventures that Headspace has laid out for him, even if they distract the party from more important objectives or keep them away from the darker reaches of Headspace.

Omori is something of a shell to protect Sunny from the truth, and can thus walk through Headspace without fear of the truth. When the trauma gets too intense to bear, it's Omori that steps in and puts it back to bed. In the end, when Sunny tries to finally confront the truth, he must come to blows with Omori and try to tear down the walls that he himself set up to protect himself. However, Omori responds by battering and berating his creator with the intrusive thoughts that caused him to hide the truth away in the first place.

While Sunny was quiet both before and after Mari's death, Omori's unique ability to reach a third stage of Emotion in combat suggests a more sensitive and open nature for his old self. As far as abilities go, Omori deals lots of damage and opts to cut down and erase enemies instead of dealing with them, much like he does to the truth whenever it rises up. He can and will exploit his enemies' emotions just to keep them down, then stab them in the heart when the time is right.



Your friends will never forgive you.

They'll abandon you like you did them... and that's what you deserve.

- **Aubrey** – A peppy and cutesy girl, and one of the only two girls in her friend group. She wears her heart on her sleeve in Headspace, being the quickest to come to tears when sad, light up in sparkles of glee, and rush to Omori's side – though the latter may be due to her not-so-subtle crush on Omori. Nonetheless, she's also hotheaded and quick to anger, especially with Kel. The two never really got along, and while it's a somewhat playful rivalry that tends to die down as quick as it starts up, she's always the one who escalates simple pranks and teases into full-scale arguments.

Aubrey's abilities also show that she's rougher than she lets on. She can use a baseball bat to smash her way through any overworld obstacles, and her combat skills range from pep-talking and cheering on her allies to striking enemies with her hard head, beating them down, or going so all-out that she knocks herself out in the process. It seems like a simple personality trait at first, but this serves as a parallel to her drastically different real-world self, who triggers most of the real world's major events.



AUBREY

I'm really sorry for pushing you over BASIL.

Even though at least half of it was KEL's fault...

- **Kel** – Easily the most energetic of Sunny's friends, Kel's boundless positivity comes across as recklessness and teasing in Headspace. He is a refreshing dose of comic relief

even in his constant clashes with Aubrey, no matter who starts it (it's usually him). Jokes and references to his short height are strewn throughout Headspace.

Kel is a trickster in both personality and abilities. He can use his speed stat to attack, heal and juice up his friends, make enemies feel random emotions, and much, much more. He doesn't fit a singular archetype, instead allowing his abilities to speak for his spontaneity and race-to-the-finish attitude. For evidence, look to the skills that give him unique temporary buffs.



KEL

HEY, SWEETHEART!! REMEMBER US!?

We're the kids who almost ruined your wedding!

- **Hero** – Kel's brother, Mari's boyfriend, and one of the oldest of the friend group. Among his friends, he's often the most level head when things get rocky, at least until he comes face to face with his crippling arachnophobia. Until then, however, he's the most capable one of stopping the fights between Aubrey and Kel. When someone needs talking to, Hero can brandish his golden charisma to bring them to his side.

Hero is primarily a peacemaker, as reflected in his battle skills. Cook, a simple heal, is the only skill in the game that can be used out of combat. He has a whole series of skills dedicated to charming opponents, forcing them to aim their attacks at him and usually inflicting some kind of debuff on them or a buff on himself. By default, he learns no damaging skills, but certain optional events and items can provide him with some. Even so, both of his damaging skills have supportive functions.



HERO

Hey there, KEL. There's no need to get angry.
It's just a game, after all.

- **Basil** – A shy, reclusive young photographer. His Headspace self is gentle and kind enough to tend to a full garden and a master of flower crowns. When misfortune comes his way, he brushes it off and reassures everyone that he’s just fine. This aspect of him sometimes causes him to “brush off” violent events and look down upon himself more often than not. Luckily, he has a good set of friends that will always be right by his side! Right?

In console versions of *OMORI*, there is an exclusive postgame boss rush, during which you can choose to enter with just Omori and a combat-ready version of Basil. Like Omori, he can reach a third stage of Emotion in combat despite being one of the more shy members of his friend group. His basic abilities provide healing and support, but picking up certain postgame items can give him unique abilities with effects that allude to each item. His most notable ability is “Flower Crown,” which has a special variant that calls back to Mari’s hanged body.



BASIL

There’s something special about everyone living their own lives. Those are the moments I want to capture!

- **Mari** – Omori’s beloved big sister. She’s sweet, kind, good with the kids, playful, charming – not much of a fighter, but everything else about her is perfect. She sits eternally on a picnic blanket that just so happens to be laid out wherever Omori and pals go, usually with no explanation as to how she got there. Notably, the picnic is always laid out in a place that enemies can’t get to.

Mari doesn’t participate in combat. Instead, she serves as a quest log, reminding the player of their main and side objectives every time they talk to her. Her picnic basket is an iconic save point, while the food she has laid out for the party is apparently so tasty and refreshing that it maxes out everyone’s HP and Juice in one fell swoop! To put icing on the cake, interacting with the cooler on Mari’s blanket provides you with a unique interaction in every area. Seems the friend group just can’t have a calm, complete hangout without Mari.



MARI

If you're having a hard time, I can lend you a hand.
Big sister is always here for you! Hehe...

- **Sweetheart** – Despite the very few appearances of her real-world counterpart, Miss Candice, Sweetheart is the most prominent antagonist present in Headspace. Her presence looms over much of Headspace's more childlike narrative, but more in the way a fly looms annoyingly over your food than in the way a bear stands threateningly on its hind legs. She is comically vain, driven by pure self-interest to a naive degree. As such, she rests at the core of the game's longest and most tedious segments.

Sweetheart is loud, boisterous, and too obnoxious for even the main cast to ignore, almost as if to deliberately distract the narrative from its dark undertones. She is constantly causing problems, being the catalyst for the Space Ex-Boyfriend quest line towards the beginning of the game and the very reason you enter the penultimate area of Headspace. Sweetheart's presence as an antagonist is not necessarily meant to oppose the player character, but to directly oppose the player's narrative progress with her big, loud, annoying laugh.

SWEETHEART

Yes! That must be it! My dazzling looks... My charming smile... My gregarious personality... It must be so difficult for you to even stand in my presence!

Real-World Characters

- **Sunny** – The player character in the real world. His name is chosen by the player, but Sunny is the default name. He is pale and always well-dressed, but not monochrome like Omori. He was always known to be a tad shy, if not anxious enough to be considered selectively mute. After the accident that resulted in the death of his sister, he has been completely holed up in his room, hiding from the shame of his own involvement in the accident. With 3 days left before the day he moves, however, he answers a knock on his front door and goes out one final time by Kel's side, silently hoping to relive the good old days.

Facing the world after so long is difficult for Sunny. He has no sister to back him up and no one to help him reconcile with the truth, especially thanks to the unsung, subconscious vendetta he holds against Basil for knowing (and, to an extent, causing) what happened that day. However, even after reconvening with Kel, whenever Sunny is left to his own devices, he ends up face-to-face with amorphous horrors that all closely resemble

SOMETHING. The power of friendship was never the solution, as Sunny's problem was always the blame he placed on himself and the belief that he could never be forgiven. The prospect of seeing his old friends again thus terrifies him profoundly, but as he watches Kel and Aubrey scuffle just as they used to, as he sees Hero jumping back into the fray to bring everyone back down to earth, he finds the strength to overcome his fear, face the truth, and finally push his life forward.

Sunny has the least dialogue in the game by far, speaking only one sentence during the main route's final cutscene.



7/20 - SUNNY'S
BIRTHDAY

Excerpt from Basil's photo
album

SUNNY won't leave the box, so KEL put a food bowl inside.

I guess this box will be SUNNY and MEWO's new home.

- **Aubrey** – When the friend group got together, Aubrey found love and companionship in her friend group that she couldn't find elsewhere, not even at home. When it split apart and everyone went to cope in their separate ways, Aubrey was left betrayed and, once again, all alone. That is, until she met up with Basil one final time and decided to hang out, only to find that everything in his photo album had been scribbled out with a black marker. She stormed out on Basil, and from that point on she began to push everyone else away just as she felt they'd done to her and her memories.

In a total face-heel turn, Aubrey is the closest thing to a main antagonist that the real world has.

When Sunny first meets Aubrey in the real world, she's bullying her former friend Basil, backed up by a gang of hooligans and the nailbat in her hand. The fights she gets into with you and Kel have gone from mere squabbles to full-on violent encounters. With her revealingly casual getup and vibrant pink hair, she is, on all fronts, the most drastically different from her Headspace self among all of her former friends. If she's capable of changing for the worse, however, she's also capable of changing for the better. She's still soft on the inside, she just blames and lashes out at the people around her to keep the heat off herself.



AUBREY

Where were you when MARI died?

WHERE WERE ANY OF YOU!?

- **Kel** – In the real world, Kel ended up taking his energy and directing it towards his basketball team. He's still all smiles and still a great source of comic relief, courtesy of being a bit of a dope, but he dials the teasing back significantly now that he's grown tall. He just looks on the bright side of life and gets as involved as possible when his friends need him (or when he decides he's going to help them). When Aubrey's hooligans show up, he gets fed up with their immaturity and tries to bring them back down to Earth, contrary to his teasing-prone younger self. The presence of Kel in the real world is almost like that of a big brother, like that of Hero in Headspace.

Ultimately, Kel was left alone when Hero eventually took off for college. His friends had all split apart, with two of them becoming reclusive, one becoming a borderline gangster, and the other... well, being Mari. The game never shows us many of his new friends, but dialogue with Aubrey and certain NPCs suggest that he was the best off after Mari's death, making new friends and taking his new situation in stride. For old time's sake, however, he still comes back to Sunny after hearing about the incoming move-out day. The old days are still fond memories to him, he's just had some time to grow up.



KEL

Hey, this is serious business, ANGEL! Serious adult business! You don't want me to get adults involved, do you?

- **Hero** – As it turns out, Hero's name is just a nickname that he got because he really, really liked the local pizza place's "hero sandwich," but the name still fits his personality. Hero's Headspace qualities shine through equally in the real world, as if he's been trying

to keep this same persona up since his youth. He can still keep a level head under any kind of pressure, and his charisma now shines through as a soft, almost motherly empathy. Based on this, it can be hard to believe that, after Mari's death, he succumbed to depression, fell out with his brother, and spent the next year focusing on his studies. He apparently got back on his feet in time to head off to college on good terms with Kel, but he continues to bottle up the emotions that Mari's death burdened him with.

When he returns to Faraway Town, Hero leans into his kind and empathetic side, doing everything he can to be there and provide support for his friends. The time he spent studying medicine and gaining experience in college has given him the skills and proactive attitude he needs for the job, even in life-threatening moments. He ultimately gets through to a saddened Aubrey and brings the four main characters – Sunny, Aubrey, Kel, and Hero – back together for one final hangout in Faraway Town.



HERO

But I knew her as a person who would always want all of us to be happy, even if it was without her.

- **Basil** – Even in the real world, Basil will gladly make sacrifices to help his friends. Since he doesn't want anyone to get hurt, to the point where he obscures the true cause of Mari's death just to take the heat off of Sunny, he just sucks up all the sorrow in his heart and tells himself that "everything is going to be okay." If his photo album gets stolen by hooligans, that's okay. If his grandma is dying, you don't need to worry about it. Only when he hears that Sunny is moving out soon does he break, going back and essentially trying to drag Sunny back to his side every time they see each other.

At the beginning of the game, Basil asks Sunny to promise that they'll always be there for each other. Both of them are repressing the same truth, with the only difference being their perspective on the matter. While Sunny keeps silent in fear of what happens when the truth comes out, Basil believes that, by keeping silent, he is protecting Sunny from any potential repercussions of his actions. All they have to do is keep silent, make new memories, and stay by each others' sides no matter what. Ultimately, the toll of keeping the secret drove them apart just as Mari's death drove the entire friend group apart.

Real world Basil is the only character in the game whose dialogue portraits never show him with a genuine smile. Such portraits exist, but are only used in the main route's final dream sequence.



BASIL

I don't... want to be... alone... not again.
You... can't... leave me... again...

- **Mari** – Hero's girlfriend, a skilled pianist, a notorious perfectionist, a divine cookie-baker... what didn't Sunny know about his beloved big sister? She was the glue that kept the entire friend group together, so much that her relationship with Hero kicked the whole thing off. Unfortunately, since the story in the real world takes place four years after her apparent suicide, she appears there only in memories. When the others try to reconcile their old friendship, even when things go poorly, she is constantly portrayed as a kind angel of a person with imperfections that serve mostly as funny memories. The only time her flaws are painted as legitimate and serious character flaws is when the truth is revealed to the player.

The closest thing the game has to a portrait of real-world Mari is a portrait that appears when Sunny confronts what appears to be her ghost.



MARI

Know that I'll always be watching over you, okay?
As long as you remember me, I'll be here...

Monsters

The “monsters” are present throughout the game, haunting the player in both worlds. They are seen most often in Headspace, where they are apparently fragments of Sunny's trauma and guilt that slip through the whimsical world that he built over it to repress it.

- **SOMETHING** – The de facto main antagonist of the entire game. It had been hidden in the depths of Sunny's psyche for a long time, but the stress of moving away caused his trauma to resurface and spread throughout Headspace, bringing about SOMETHING's

return. It takes many forms, but its main form is that of a black, one-eyed specter that haunts Omori and Sunny as the most recurring horror element in the game. When you first encounter SOMETHING, its nature is completely unknown, apart from being a horror element. As the game goes on, SOMETHING is implied more and more to be a figment of Sunny's repressed trauma, slipping through the cracks no matter how bright and sunny Headspace gets. Towards the end of the game, it is revealed to be a personification of the traumatic experience itself. Its shape mirrors Mari's hair that drooped over her face when Sunny and Basil faked her suicide. Its eye mimics the eye that stared back at Sunny when he looked back at his sister's limp, hanging body.



SOMETHING sways in the wind.

- **Stranger** – Though its design is just Basil's silhouette, the Stranger speaks to Omori like a close friend, speaking often about a "truth" that must be confronted. It can be cryptic at times, but it mostly asks rhetorical questions and begs Sunny – rather than Omori – to return to it and find whatever truth he had locked away. During the game's alternate Omori Route, it emerges and lashes out against Sunny for being unable to face the truth. It is Omori, Sunny's avatar and protective shell, who steps in and defeats it.



STRANGER

So you've chosen to live that way. I wonder... Can you really call that living?

Breakdown

All Cards Are On the Table

Don't worry...

Everything is going to be okay...

No matter what happens...

Promise me that we'll always be there for each other...

Promise me...

Though the game doesn't say it directly, this text from the opening cutscene is Basil speaking to his good friend, the player character. As a brief spoiler, the character will break this promise, though it is not known if he agreed to it in the first place. The second line, however – “everything is going to be okay” – will go on to be one of the most unsettling things that *OMORI* can possibly show you.

Hitting the Ground Running

You take control of the aptly-named Omori, awakening in the room you have been living in for as long as you can remember. White Space is exactly what it sounds like, being a completely white space that only contains a few distinct items. To exit through the door, the player must take action and inspect the few things that surround them, otherwise their character will simply curl up on the ground in fetal position, resting eternally in the apparent safety of White Space. If you can't figure that out, just talk to Mewo the cat: it'll ask you if you're waiting for something to happen, as if to suggest that nothing will. This is the first part of *OMORI*'s three-part introductory sequence, and while you have no way of knowing it yet, it has just presented you with one of the central themes of the entire game.

You leave White Space through a white door, leading you to the oddly childlike “Neighbor's Room” that seems to be floating in the middle of space. One by one, the game introduces you to all of your friends, its combat system, and a taste of its horror element towards the end. This is the general rhythm of Headspace's playful adventures, though you don't yet know that this is a dream world. After the first Headspace segment, you are tossed into the real world, asked to name your character (though the default “Sunny” is already in the name entry box), and are ultimately ushered down a never-ending flight of stairs to get some food. A horrifying monster slowly surrounds you as you go down, and eventually attacks. Even when you calm down and overcome the monster, however, the food you end up making is not the same as the nourishing food of Headspace. That's not how reality works. This steak just makes you throw up.

By the time you go back to bed and enter Headspace for the second time, you've had a brutal taste of the realities you are set to face every time you wake up and the types of horrors that await you no matter what. Two cutscenes have let you know of your close connection with Basil, or at least what it used to be when the world still seemed all bright and colorful. You've taken your first steps into the neon-esque colors of Headspace, and your run-in with White Space has given you the importance of taking that first step towards what you want to do and of finding narrative pieces by exploring the world around you. Only when you know what's going on, usually after a playthrough or two, do you know that the game has told you exactly what you're in for from the start.

Hidden in Plain Sight

This is the beauty of *OMORI*: even before the secrets of its narrative are revealed, it hides bits and pieces of it in plain sight. It codes its themes all throughout the narrative in order to hit harder with all of its biggest, most memorable moments. Afterwards, it leaves players to ask questions about what exactly they'd been seeing all throughout their time in Headspace – why *was* there a random massive smiling whale stationed right at the end of the twisted Deeper Well, anyways? The game provides plenty of incentives to go back and explore its world or even play through it all over again, allowing players to digest the game's less obvious elements now that they know the truths of its narrative.

To more specifically detail how *OMORI* tells its story, this review will be split into a few main sections. The first will outline the power of *OMORI*'s wide range of storytelling methods as seen in Headspace and, briefly, the game's choice of art style. The second will outline the shocking reality that awaits in the real world and the parallels, both thematic and literal, that tie it back to Headspace. The final section will be about the game's closing acts, alternative routes, and postgame content that entice the player to go back and discover more about the narrative beyond the game's ending. Every time the game presents you with a big, memorable moment, there are plenty of smaller narrative elements that converge at that moment, elements that may not even be noticeable the first time around. The game's volume provides the player with ample room and incentive to go back and discover any narrative elements they may have missed, and perhaps to discover new elements that they never even considered.

Headspace: A Dreamy Nightmare

Much of *OMORI*'s playtime is set in Headspace. It's primarily bright and cartoonish, owing to its purplish color scheme and its cast of zany, otherworldly creatures. It also happens to be filled to the brim with narrative implications that carry all the way into the real world and plenty of scares that loom over the player without the need to focus on the horror. In fact, for the main world of a horror game, Headspace hardly threatens the player at all with its horror elements, yet it still manages to instill fear in you.

Tonal Whiplash as a Narrative Element

BASIL

N-No... That can't be...

MARI... She's...

There is no dictionary definition for the term “tonal whiplash,” but as far as narratives go, it usually references the effect of a drastic change in tone in a very short amount of time. Tonal whiplash can make a narrative very hard to follow when used incorrectly, which *OMORI* is guilty of at times. More often than not, however, it uses tonal whiplash to its advantage, surprising or panicking the player not by startling them, but by placing sudden bursts of horror in the middle of lighthearted shenanigans between friends.

Headspace's tone isn't just bright and cheery; it's outright childish. Some of the first things you see in its world are a giant spherical rhino bully and a house that's shaped like a shoe, and even late-game encounters include a giant shark CEO who commands his employees with iron contracts. By the end of *OMORI*'s first hour, most players already have a feel for Headspace's outlandish nature. However, they also have experience with the darker side of the dream world, and not just because of the monster in the first real world segment.

Rather than constantly holding its horror over the player's head, Headspace tends to pepper its scares throughout its main quest lines. SOMETHING seems to be lurking around every corner, appearing at random regardless of whether or not you're looking for it. Just as quickly as it appears, it vanishes with the same hauntingly quiet echo. Yet, even when Omori catches a glimpse of it in a field of bramble, he does so from the grated door of Sweetheart's obnoxiously pink castle. Hangman, on the other hand, tasks you with picking up eerily realistic keyboard keys that are scattered across Headspace in order to spell out a phrase, placing the Keys in the same spots every time rather than relying on randomness. During the main quest line, you'll naturally find most of the correct Keys to the Hangman prompt, but they'll eventually start leaving holes that contain a foreboding and usually-unsettling scene when interacted with. Still, once the scene is done, you are booted right back to your regularly scheduled Headspace faster than a vanishing SOMETHING.

These are the two primary examples of tonal whiplash in *OMORI*. The game goes out of its way to let you know about them, between the sound and fluid animation of SOMETHING and the unfitting, hyper-realistic Keys. However, Keys are common enough that you can usually find more than one in each area, mostly incorrect Keys. Correct or not, the screen fades to black and a slow, deep sound cue interrupt your gameplay every time you pick one up – yet another time the game goes out of its way to celebrate your Key-collecting efforts. The Keys use this odd transition to serve as a constant reminder of the true nature of *OMORI*, each one bringing you closer and closer to a dark secret. Not knowing which Keys are correct only adds to the anticipation, as you no longer know what kind of hole (or lack thereof) awaits you once the screen fades back in.

Nonetheless, in every situation, the game always seems to return you to Headspace, right where you were and as you were. Whatever you just saw was essentially slid under the rug by some

unseen force. Scarily enough, this is not the only time that Headspace can be observed “acting on its own.”

Characterizing a World

Bluntly put, Headspace is a living thing. You will encounter various horror elements and monsters during your time there, but Headspace itself may just be the worst monster of them all. This can actually be owed to its non-threatening presentation. Its bright colors serve as a sufficient distraction, but they can’t keep the demons out forever. Instead, the world constantly warps and changes in a desperate effort to shove the truth into the abyss. This, too, is presented to the player at the start of the game; when Basil shows signs of knowing too much, Headspace quickly removes him from the equation and slowly shoves him out of every character’s memory.

Headspace’s biggest and most overt obstacle that it presents to the player comes in the form of an obnoxious pink girl named Sweetheart. It’s true that SOMETHING is, for all intents and purposes, the main antagonist, but Sweetheart is a problem that refuses to remain solved for long and won’t stop coming back. On top of this, her narrative-light castle is arguably the longest single segment of the entire game that meets the players with puzzling mazes, mandatory comic relief missions, and a password locked exit that can’t be brute-forced. As mentioned in the character overview, Sweetheart herself is loud, obnoxious, and present, albeit indirectly, from the very first quest you get after Basil’s disappearance, acting from the very beginning as an easily identifiable and hateable “big bad.”

It may be difficult to view Headspace as a SOMETHING-esque monster at first, even knowing of its potential ulterior motives. The important context that solidifies this is that Headspace is, at its core, a world created and contorted by Sunny’s mind. Whatever is shielding you from the truth is something internal created for Sunny to hide behind. Maybe the world is not overtly scary, but it is unknowingly malicious and keeps you far away from a demon that you need to face. You can empathize all you want, but eventually, you must defeat Headspace.

DADDY LONGLEGS

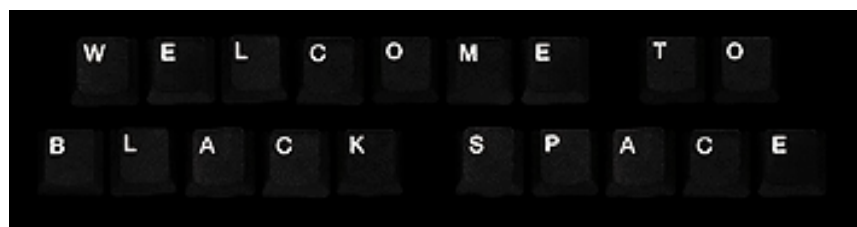
Yet, the end of this world may be an inevitability. The DREAMER is the only one with the ability that can truly set this world free.

The moment you realize the true nature of Headspace, however, the game has dealt you yet another narrative card that you don’t yet know about.

Literary Devices and the Payoff of Black Space

The final boss of *OMORI*’s main route is none other than Omori himself. It may come as a shock in the moment, as the dream sequence leading up to the fight is filled with admittedly solemn hopes and dreams. However, once you collect the solution to Hangman, you are treated to a

section implying that Omori isn't quite what he appears to be... and that, as the game has told you through hints, neither is Headspace.



Unsurprisingly, Black Space draws many direct parallels to White Space, especially given that you must explore it without guidance in order to progress. It contains many locked doors that lead to different abstract rooms, each containing a key that can open up another door, and so on. It is a direct allusion to another iconic RPG Maker game known as *Yume Nikki*, in which the entire game consists of walking aimlessly through doors and finding many different “effects” to progress. Other allusions include Omori’s use of a knife in combat and, perhaps most significantly, the primary location of both games being a dream world.

Typically, the purpose of allusion in text is to deepen a reader’s understanding of both pieces. The allusion to *Yume Nikki* works to *OMORI*’s favor because the former game uses its reality as more of a safe space and its dream world as a place where fear must be faced, an inverse of the latter game. Knowing about *Yume Nikki*’s dream world when dealing Black Space will thus immediately tell you that this place is filled with abstract, dangerous trauma.

Even without that context, however, the events that occur in Black Space are foreshadowed frugally throughout *OMORI*. Many of its areas imply heavily that Headspace’s bright colors are fabricated, calling back to its attempts to distract the player with areas like Sweetheart’s Castle. Many more show Basil dying in many different ways, usually just after he claims to want to tell you something. Coupled with the optional dialogue you get by speaking to Stranger, these scenes symbolize concepts that were foreshadowed earlier in the story, particularly those of Headspace hiding the truth and Basil knowing too much about it.

STRANGER

When you hid the truth, you sealed a part of me away with it.

He's been waiting for someone to save him all this time.

It should be noted that literary devices exist beyond references to Black Space as well, and are some of *OMORI*’s strongest assets. Many areas contain bridges or docks, structures that are meant to bridge gaps, but lead either to a dark area offscreen or to nowhere at all. The combat system is an easily-explained example: a simple, Pokemon-esque turn based system that revolves around manipulating your party’s and your enemy’s Emotions to gain different advantages in combat. Each character’s distinct Skills also allude to aspects of that character. That said, one

cannot understand many symbolic, allusory, and foreshadowing elements by looking at Headspace alone. More often than not, these literary devices refer directly to narrative beats that are introduced in the real world.

Real World: A Gentle Slap in the Face

KEL

Sigh... AUBREY's really changed since you last saw her.
Her and her new friends have been nothing but trouble.

Upon exiting Sunny's dreams, you'll find that the real world is a blatant contradiction of what you're taught about the game in Headspace. Instead of peppered bits of horror that remind you what you're playing, you experience longer horror segments whenever you're left alone, unveiling the true nature of Sunny's shattered psyche. Snacks which heal you in Headspace do nothing in the real world, apart from giving you a comedic description of its flavor index. Most of all, you can encounter all of your old friends, but none of them are quite the same as the friends you've come to know. It has been four years since Sunny has spoken to his friends, and now that you can step outside with him, reality hits you over and over again like a ton of bricks.

The bluntness of reality means that secrets that Headspace might have been keeping from you can finally reach you.

AUBREY

Who cares what MARI thinks? MARI's dead.

A Game of Back and Forth

Both of the worlds in *OMORI* are intrinsically linked not in spite of their differences, but partly because of them. When the real world presents you with something different from what you're used to, it directly calls back to elements of Headspace by directly and noticeably contradicting them. Thanks to the way these differences are emphasized, Headspace tends to stay at least somewhat fresh in the player's mind. The first fight with real-world Aubrey contains such an instance if you choose to attack her with Sunny, resulting in him using the knife and giving her a tangible wound. Aubrey herself, however, is evidence of the other way that the real world draws from Headspace.



During the first Headspace segment of the game, Hero hands you a chart to help remind you of how the Emotion system works in combat. It may seem like a simple reference at first, but the character used to exemplify each Emotion is chosen deliberately, as their Emotion on the chart directly foreshadows how they initially coped with Mari's death. In particular, Aubrey represents the Angry Emotion to foreshadow her violent attitude in the real world. Her combat skills that deal recoil damage to her also call attention to her real world form, which ends up feeling a lot of the consequences of her actions as an antagonist.

Other elements of foreshadowing are less direct, like Basil's first quote about "everyone living their own lives" in reference to what happened after the friend group split. Looking back, the real world constantly ebbs and flows with Headspace, moving back to give payoff to narrative elements seen in the dream world only to go forth and completely contradict others. One particular contradiction it makes is the way it handles the main cast, or at least what remains of it.

Actual Character Arcs!

Headspace characters tend to stay the same throughout your adventures. None of them really fight each other, save for a console-exclusive extra boss. Aubrey keeps her heart on her sleeve, Kel never ceases to tease, and the one thing you will probably remember about Headspace Hero is his dazzling charm portrait.



The real world handles characters a little differently. While there are plenty of lighthearted and goofy moments to help you grow close to the main cast, the story here takes on a more somber and intensely personal tone. Aubrey is clearly locked in her own internal conflicts now that her old friends have come barging back into her life, yet Kel still ultimately loses patience and chooses not to associate with her. Meanwhile, you get to see a vulnerable side of the levelheaded Hero, who never quite managed to come to terms with Mari's death, all while Basil slowly falls apart as his greatest fear, being abandoned by Sunny, comes closer to being realized.

These real-world characters are real people, capable of growth, change, and regression. They are not the same fabricated memories that follow you through Headspace. They are your friends. At least, for what that's worth.

Major Symbols

A white egret orchid. In the language of flowers, it symbolizes the phrase, "my thoughts will follow you into your dreams."

Your last day in the real world starts with a request from a hooligan named Kim to go talk to her closest friend, Aubrey. Kel and Hero haven't ever been in her house before, but you find that it's messy and littered with empty bottles. Chances are, she does not have a good relationship with her family. You are not told when this might have started, but you might infer that this explains her decision to cast blame on all her former friends.

The major symbols of the real world are few, but impactful nonetheless. The image of Aubrey's house on its own tells a story, but the scene leads you to a much more common and recurring trope within the narrative.

HERO

AUBREY... Let's put MARI's photos back in the PHOTO ALBUM.
All these photos... They belong together in one place.

As a photographer, Basil commonly kept records of his memories with his friends in a photo album. This album appears many, many times across the narrative of *OMORI* – in Headspace, in the real world, and even when the truth is revealed. Actual flashbacks are few and far between until the game's ending, even though the friend group's history is central to the game's theme

progression. Instead, the photo album contains many detailed and captioned images, each acting as its own little slice of flashback.

This photo album is more than just another way to show-not-tell *OMORI*'s story. It is the friend group's greatest treasure, containing what little remains of a formerly unbreakable bond. When everyone comes back together, it forms a sudden link to the core of what makes the game so hauntingly memorable.

The True Horror of *OMORI*, and the Importance of Payoff

OMORI has already proven to be somewhat unorthodox for a horror game, but that's partly because it focuses on its story far more than its scares. Yet, it still manages to carve a niche as a horror game despite standing out. Why is this? Is *OMORI* even a horror game to begin with, even if it's so much psychological horror? A simple Google search defines "horror" as intense fear, shock, or disgust, and while intense fear is present, it isn't in a shocking or by-definition "horrific" manner. Looking for alternatives, however, may lead one to instead find the word "haunting." Though it lacks a verifiable source, one Google definition of the word is much more fitting for what *OMORI* instills in its players.

Be persistently and disturbingly present in (something).

An unverified definition of the word "haunting"

The Powerlessness of Friendship

BASIL

The path to your future will open soon, but only you can decide what to do in the end.

Every time the player is faced with one of *OMORI*'s haunts, their character is alone. There may be NPC conversations, but the character, be it Sunny or Omori, is all alone. In the overworld, your friends can stay by your side and help you through anything, but they cannot save you from yourself. If you hide the truth from yourself and from them any longer, you will have to carry it with you as you move away, and your friends won't be there with you anymore.

The presence of Sunny's moving day in the story is easy to gloss over in the presence of other, much bigger narrative factors. Nonetheless, it provides important context to the narrative – you are a traumatized boy, and you have just three days to repair a broken friend group, absolve yourself, and remove the massive weight from your chest before you're stuck with it for good. While the first few real life segments only help cement the idea that people like Aubrey wouldn't take kindly to the truth, the later segments see you returning to her and bringing the gang back

together. With a big group hug, Aubrey is forgiven for bullying, assaulting, and nearly killing Basil. Could they not do the same for Sunny?

Every part of Sunny's mind, at least from what has been shown, has thus far been dedicated to shoving the truth further and further away. Only when everyone comes together can Sunny actually rediscover the truth, but just like the game's other haunts, he can't rely on them, only try to believe that they would support him. He is empowered by friendship, yes, but the so-called "power of friendship" only goes so far. Just like in *White Space*, he must take that step towards the truth, and afterwards, the player must take that step to finally confront a suicidal Basil.

Bringing It All Together

The main route of *OMORI* has an utterly spectacular ending. Memories, symbolism, narrative implication, and character growth all come together in one final set of events that ultimately leads to you overcoming your fear and confronting your trauma once and for all. The truth is revealed to you through a different version of Basil's photo album, and knowing that Sunny's friends can believe in each other and forgive someone like Aubrey, you literally experience his thoughts as he comes to forgive himself, giving him the courage to admit his guilt and ask forgiveness from his friends.

To go over every narrative element that converges in the final sequence would constitute a whole essay of its own. So many scattered elements of narrative converge in the final scene in some way. However, this is no better exemplified than through the example of *OMORI*'s title screen music.

MARI

We never did get to play at that last recital.

Did you want to play it with me now?

You won't familiarize yourself with this theme too much if you rush through the main menu every time, but the song accounts for this by starting with just two lone piano tones that you'll recognize instantly when you hear them. The piano has a distinct sound that manages to remain distinct from the rest of the game's instrumentals. As it plays more and more in the game itself, players come to realize that this is a tune that Mari practiced a lot during her life. Not only that, but Sunny was familiar enough with it to wake up in the middle of the night, recognizing the familiar tune playing from downstairs. The more you hear it, the more you wonder if that's all it is – just a memory of a bygone era.

Sure enough, at the end of the main route, it's revealed that Sunny and Mari planned to play this song on stage as a violin-piano duet. When you realize that Sunny's frustration with the song is what ultimately led to Mari's death, the memorial song suddenly becomes traumatic and solemn without changing anything about itself. Then, when Sunny finally tries to overcome his trauma, a

different version of the song plays in the final moments: “Duet.” Over the course of *OMORI*’s narrative, its title theme changes drastically. It starts as a simple quiet tune, turns into a loving memory, twists into a painful reminder of lost family, and wraps up as the very symbol of Sunny’s relationship with his sister. The good ending ushers you out with just the first few notes of this theme, now in a higher, more lighthearted octave, and the credits roll.

Once you’ve finished the main route, however, *OMORI*’s narrative continues.

Narrative Replayability and Volume

The game’s main story, communally known as the “Sunny Route,” leaves some of its questions unanswered. The Keeper of the Castle is a particularly big hint. The Keeper is an optional monster found in a secret passage of Sweetheart’s Castle who offers to give you reign over the castle when it deems that Sweetheart will never return to it, but it never opens up the offer during the Sunny Route. To solve mysteries like these, you have to go back and play the game a little more, exploring different possibilities. It all starts at the final fight against Omori. Now that you know that your final defeat in that fight is scripted, it’s only natural to wonder what happens when you choose not to continue. Worst-case scenario, you waste 10 or so minutes and go back to the title screen, so what’s the harm in trying?

Yet, The Game Continues

The most infamous soundtrack associated with *OMORI* is not a track made for the game, but a track by artist *bo en* [sic] called “My Time” that plays in many of the game’s trailers. The song itself talks about a desire to escape reality, and a subsequent struggle to fall asleep and leave the waking world behind. Gunshot sounds toward the end of the song suggest that the singer’s problem is solved by suicide. However, for how well-known the song is and how often it is associated with *OMORI*, it plays exactly one time in the entire game, and if you only ever reach the good ending, you will never hear it.

*Oyasumi,
Oyasumi!
Close your eyes, and you’ll leave this dream...
Oyasumi,
O-ya-su-mi!
I know that it’s hard to do.*

The chorus of “My Time” by *bo en*

So, where in the game did Omocat hide “My Time?” As it turns out, you don’t have to continue after dying in the Omori fight. Refusing to do so causes Sunny to give into the pressure, returning you to White Space as Omori. In Neighbor’s Room, your Headspace friends seem excited to see you, but there is no dialogue. There is only a slow, pitched-down version of the usual music, giving the aura of a solemn farewell, just before you regain control of the broken Sunny only to jump off a balcony to your death. Only during the credits of this ending, which follows Sunny on his long fall to the pavement, do you hear *bo en*’s infamous song. Considering

any unused key items you might have or side quests you never finished, this alternate ending may entice a player to go hunting or web-surfing to figure out what they missed. What they will find is a spiraling rabbit hole of additional content.

OMORI hides a lot from its players. Just in the real world, you can complete a ton of side quests to unlock a slew of new interactions, unveil entirely new points of character development by returning to the Church area and accessing Mari's grave through its back doors, and even play an entire Headspace dungeon with the real world crew. When you wake up in Basil's house, instead of saving him, you can go right back to sleep; what then awaits you is a grisly image of Basil and two new, unnerving endings. Headspace has Orange Oasis, an entirely new area with a haunting train sequence, a level-grinding pyramid, and a completely unique boss fight, but it's only accessible by backtracking to Pinwheel Forest after defeating Space Ex-Boyfriend. As if that wasn't enough, you cannot find every Hangman Key by playing the Sunny Route, even if you can find all of the correct keys. Instead, some of the keys reside exclusively in the so-called "Hikikomori Route," or the Omori Route for short.

There is little that is special about the Hikikomori Route itself. If you inspect Kel's incessant door-knocking, but choose to go back to bed instead of opening up, then you spend all of your time in the real world doing monotonous chores in your house until the end. Each day's repetitive events still end with the same mental monsters that you meet in the Sunny Route, but the pattern of monsters appearing when you're alone is gone, as you have now dedicated your time in the real world to being alone. The general story of Headspace remains generally the same up until the end sequence, where Omori ultimately saves Basil and allows Sunny to hide once more from the truth.

In terms of adding to the narrative's volume, this route presents an antithesis to the theme introduced in White Space – that is, the importance of taking that first step towards progress – by giving the player an unmoving, incomplete version of the narrative should they choose not to step outside with Kel. This, however, is generally where the importance of the main Hikikomori Route ends. It adds some characterization to Omori, but there are other ways to discover the same characterization. The most significant part occurs only after you finish the route.

The Rabbit Hole

After you defeat the Hikikomori Route's bosses and finish your final real world chores, you return to bed and return to White Space, almost as if nothing ever happened. You go through a sequence reminiscent of your first ever encounter with Mari and Basil, who has returned to Headspace for good, but now sits with Mari on her eternal picnic blanket. Now that you've finished the main Hikikomori Route, Headspace is completely open to exploration. Luckily, there is a whole slew of postgame content prepared to enable you to do just that.

You can return to previous areas to gain access to new, exclusive areas, bosses, items, and skills. If you collect every incorrect Hangman key, you can form a stick-figure drawing of Mari's hanged body and gain access to a new area called the Abyss. If you go back to the penultimate area of Headspace, Deeper Well, you can collect note sheets and engage in real boss fights against the monsters that attacked you in the real world. If you look at some of the game's coded

variables and damage numbers, you may notice a patternlike appearance of the number “143,” a flashing sequence used by Minot’s Ledge Lighthouse every Valentine’s day to say “I Love You.” Eventually, you are allowed to return to your laptop in White Space and enter Black Space 2, an expanded version of Black Space with the same abstract elements and even more. Unlike Black Space, there is no end goal in Black Space 2. It’s just an endless, *Yume Nikki*-esque wander through the very bowels of Sunny’s psyche.

In a sense, Black Space 2 is *OMORI*’s true final destination. It is an endlessly explorable area that never gives you any guidance or explanation. Pretty much everything in Black Space 2 is open-ended and left entirely to the player’s interpretation. However, this review did not even scratch the surface of all the extras that can be found in the nooks and crannies of *OMORI*. The main game is very short for an RPG, but the experience and impact of the narrative lasts far, far longer and cuts deeper than a single playthrough could ever imply. Only by looking into or playing the game and falling down its deep rabbit hole can the game’s pure volume be quantified.

Strongest Element

OMORI's narrative works incredibly well on a surface level. The main questline alone is packed with a full palette of wildly different emotions, with dozens upon dozens of ways to dig deeper into the narrative. What makes the game so enticing to explore, however, is its open-ended element. While a good amount of information is dumped onto the player, usually through dialogue, its core, most memorable events are the ones that don't tell the player exactly what happens. It makes implications, but when these events are presented, the implications range from indefinite to dubious.

It would be an impossible feat to write this review without following these implications. To do so would be to craft a spider's web of theories to discern every possible meaning behind each implication. There is, however, one major implication within the game that has raised questions in prior discussions of the game and its narrative.

BASIL

AUBREY, KEL, and HERO are good friends.
You have to trust that they'll forgive us.

When Basil says this line in the Sunny Route's final dream sequence, it appears to imply that, when the truth comes out, Sunny's friends will forgive him. However, Basil does not guarantee forgiveness, only that Sunny "has to trust" that his friends will understand, even if they won't. With this in mind, the entire final dream sequence can then be seen as Sunny trying to prepare himself to tell the truth, not as anyone or anything else trying to help him with it. Alternatively, it could really be alluding to his friends showing the same forgiveness to him that they showed to Aubrey. Either way, this implication remains open-ended in the Sunny Route's ending, as players are not told whether or not Sunny's friends forgive him when he admits his guilt.

OMORI's open-ended narrative elements are most concentrated towards its end, no matter what route you take. There are entire unique rooms that usher in or cap off the end of both the Sunny and Hikikomori routes, but anything the game tells you in these rooms is usually something you already know. Sometimes, the game outright gives you symbols and their meanings, only to omit a different nugget of information when those symbols come into play. When you discover the foreboding "truth" that claws at the back of Sunny's mind, it's explained to you in the form of a photo album, but it lacks the same captions that add context to the photos in Basil's album. You can discern roughly what you're seeing, but you aren't ever told aspects such as what actions were taken intentionally or who, if anyone, should be at fault.

Most of *OMORI*'s narrative is either hidden in plain sight or dictated by heavy implications, and the game doesn't hide much from its players. In order to make sense of some parts of the story, the player must make inferences based on what they are given, but they are given all the tools they need. Because of this, each player has at least a somewhat different experience which is completed by their own interpretations.

Unsuccessful Element

Nearly every element of *OMORI*'s narrative is fully intentional, but at times, these elements have a bad habit of overstaying their welcome and making the game a tedious drag. Many players cite Sweetheart's Castle as the main offender, but Humphrey and the Underwater Highway also comprise a sizable part of the game's 20-hour runtime. These areas contribute little to *OMORI*'s overarching main narrative, instead focusing on building the silliness, life, and whimsy of Headspace as a world. While this can help make some players closer and more attached to Headspace, these segments often occur directly after serious parts of the game or real-world segments, posing narrative questions that hang in the air for hours upon hours of narrative-light dungeons.

At times, these parts of the game also drag on by adding horror and/or narrative dumps in the middle of some areas that are hidden enough to be missed. It is possible for these dumps to be effective, as found at the end of each Headspace segment where the game presents you with a foreboding or horrifying environment. The difference is that the Headspace end sequences usher the player into the real world by frightening them. Meanwhile, the "problem areas" tend to throw these long dumps in the middle of whimsical segments, only to cut right back afterwards as if nothing happened. The journey to meet Daddy Longlegs in particular is long on its own, but its horror elements are symbolic at best.

Highlight

Some of the game's most infamous moments are the narratives interlaced within every inch of its battle sequences. While the real-world fights with Aubrey are unbearably brutal and the battles with SOMETHING are all hopeless in their own way, the final battle of *OMORI*'s main route – the battle between Sunny and Omori – is the potent culmination of the strongest points of the game's mid-combat narratives.

The “dark player character” is a trope that RPG fans may be all too familiar with, and Omori follows this trend, to an extent. Rather than just being an evil clone or inner self, he is a manifestation of Sunny's desire to bury his transgressions and hide away from them. To allow Sunny to stay far away from the truth, Omori acts as a vessel that can traverse Headspace in Sunny's stead and cut down anything that dares to let the truth come out. By this point, it is known that Omori is also a brand name on Mari's piano, while the character Omori's color scheme matches that of a piano and sports a pair of vertically striped shorts. An odd choice, but they do look almost like the white keys of a piano.

Sunny loved his dear sister, Mari. Omori, whose name and visual motif calls back to Mari's piano, may also be someone that Sunny holds dear, though in a different way. When he fights Omori at the end of the game, he's putting down the avatar that protected him from the painful truth for so long. All throughout that fight, he's being reminded of exactly why he needed Omori to protect him.

The fight begins, and a symphony of violins begins to play with a gradual crescendo. Echoes of the very instrument that started all the pain symbolize the heartbreak of having to strike down the character they've controlled for most of the game. Trying to keep the truth locked away, Omori deprecates and blames Sunny not just for Mari's death, but for the pain that her faked suicide brought upon everyone. The only thing keeping him in the fight is the memory of his friends and his newfound belief that maybe, just maybe, they'll forgive him.

You remember KEL's words.

KEL: Friends... Friends are supposed to be there for each other.

No matter how much hope Sunny can muster, even if he tries to believe that he can be forgiven, he just can't forgive himself. The sorrowful violin symphony is invaded by distorted, audio-peaking overtones and noises, eventually ceasing to sound like violins at all. The environment gets redder and busier to usher in the game's final, harrowing twist.

You cannot defeat Omori. He is a deep-rooted part of Sunny, and even if you do deplete his health, the game reminds you again and again:

OMORI will not succumb.

In Headspace battles, whenever Omori would be defeated for the first time in any fight, he instead survives on just 1 HP. When this happens, you get a similar message that reads “OMORI did not succumb.” What was once a last-second hope of winning each battle, a foreboding yet isolated game mechanic, now drains your hope by reminding you that you can’t win this battle.

As Sunny is brought to his knees, the player is presented with a replica of the game over screen, followed by a faint image of Sunny in his hospital bed and a tried and true question:



If you choose to continue, you get a cutscene of Sunny, reduced to the same black-and-white colors as his knife-toting avatar, regaining his color as he stands up and plays the duet that he and Mari never got to share. This is the song known simply as “Duet,” and its piano-violin melody plays over a final montage of beautiful, bittersweet memories. You can also give up, leaving Sunny to succumb to the pressure and let the doubt within Omori take control of him. Invariably, this option leads him to take his own life. No matter what you do, the game presents you with your respective ending and eventually fades back to the title screen, which completely changes depending on the single choice you made on the continue prompt.

Critical Reception

Metacritic reviews of *OMORI* are generally high, with the lowest critic score sitting comfortably at 80. This review, given by PC Gamer, follows the general trend of praising the game for the way it balances horrific images, a brutal story of trauma, and many quirky, lighthearted moments. “When these horror elements reveal their distorted heads it’s pretty scary stuff,” notes reviewer Rachel Watts, “but the majority of the time, you’re exploring the dreamy fantastical world full of jokes and puns. It’s very much like Undertale in this respect, and much of the comedy comes from the kooky characters.” Watts also details a particular quirk of the game’s art style, particularly how it shifts between a pixelated overworld and fully-detailed battle sprites. While the overworld sprites didn’t scare her too much during horror segments, she notes that it “feels too close for comfort” when she comes face-to-face with a monster’s battle sprite.

Every critic, however, seems to have a different flaw that they notice with the game. The review on PC Gamer appears to see problems with some of the narrative’s dealings with mental health and notes that some things were easy to miss because “the RPGMaker visuals made them hard to spot” (Watts). Destructoid’s reviewer, Patrick Hancock, comments that the game “isn’t for everyone,” particularly not for those who value gameplay over storytelling. For context, Hancock seemed to abhor the game’s battle system and found little in the way of gameplay beyond “some puzzles, but they’re so simple that I refuse to even mention them.”

Like Watts, however, Hancock praises *OMORI* not just for its emotional impact, but for the zany, lighthearted adventures that create most of the game. While the battle system was not his cup of tea – a difference from Watts’ review, which praises its unique emotion mechanic and the way characters work together during team-up attacks – he still gave the game a 9/10, stating at the beginning of his review that “all of the criticisms I am about to share about this game are almost entirely wiped away by virtue of the perfect finale.” He does not elaborate, presumably to avoid spoilers.

The most common complaint, held by reviewers such as those of Noisy Pixel and TheSixthAxis, is that the game can slow to a crawl at times, even in the case of some completely optional elements. “I was able to complete the game in 20 hours,” writes Azario Lopez of Noisy Pixel, “but that’s after getting stuck on a few puzzles. Further, there are just some slow moments, such as lengthy unskippable events and super long conversations with random NPCs.” TheSixthAxis’ reviewer, Nic Reuben, does not go into detail on the game’s pacing apart from noting that it’s “a little slow” in the pros and cons at the end of his review. Reuben claims to be biased towards the game as well, as he apparently felt a personal connection between his own experiences and the images and themes explored by *OMORI*. Lopez, on the other hand, goes further into detail towards the end of his review, calling the story’s first act “really messy” and stating how “things just won’t make sense until a few hours in, but sticking with it will prove worth it, trust me.”

Most sources gave *OMORI* a very positive review, extending even to its Overwhelmingly Positive review scores on Steam. “One moment you’ll find yourself with a glowing grin and watery eyes,” says Steam user “Larsson,” who reviewed the game after playing for nearly 100 hours, “then moments later you’ll be feeling the painful chills down on you as you slowly explore the horrible truth. You CARE about what is happening, without the game making you do so.” A

lot of positive reviews are short and hard to pull from, but those that are more meaningful praise the game for its narrative composition.

Lessons

- **Volume is a blessing and a curse.** The volume of a narrative can contribute greatly to its lasting impact, enticing the player to continually return to or think about the game. This is most easily achieved through optional missions, though *OMORI* makes potent use of foreshadowing in its dialogue and symbolism that becomes more obvious in hindsight. On the other hand, important or incredibly impactful narrative hints like Hero's depression shouldn't be locked behind these optional events and easy-to-miss hints. Additionally, getting carried away with a narrative's volume can drastically slow its pace and make the game's content feel like empty padding.
- **A game isn't always defined by its genre.** *OMORI* on Steam is tagged as a game of psychological horror. While horror is important to the game and its themes, the tone is often lighthearted and horror is often presented in short bursts or dedicated segments. Games should not, therefore, be dedicated to their genre or to plastering genre elements all over their surface, lest they risk restricting their possible narrative routes. Thinking outside the box in this regard can create some of the most moving and unique experiences that the video game medium has to offer.
 - **"Psychological" horror?** The term "psychological horror" usually refers to the use of unstable mental states to frighten the player, but *OMORI*'s shifting tones take it a step further. The lighthearted tones literally psych players out, and when returning to them, especially keeping in mind that everything in Headspace is created by Sunny's mind, they scare players into questioning everything they see.
- **Games contain many methods of storytelling by default.** Narrative elements can be expanded with indirect or background elements, even when it comes to common tropes and literary devices. This extends to deeply-explored topics like cutscene composition and character design, but also to less common elements such as art styles, background music, and unique animations.
 - **Plot holes aren't necessarily a bad thing.** Not every part of a narrative plotline needs to be handed to the player. In fact, *OMORI*'s best ending shows that an intentional lack of information can create an even richer narrative, if not just one that engages the player by asking them to interpret it.
- **Ludonarrative comes in many forms.** What makes game narratives unique is the way they tie gameplay and story together, otherwise known as a "ludonarrative." *OMORI* often keeps its ludonarrative simple, never really changing the main gameplay loop so much as it changes the way a player might view a familiar situation. Aesthetic changes to mechanics that functionally remain the same (as in the real-world fight with Basil) count just as strongly as mechanics whose functions allude to a part of the story (as in *Yume Nikki*'s knife), or story elements that can fundamentally change how a game is played (as in *Undertale*'s Pacifist and Genocide routes).

Summation

To be honest, though I commonly study game narrative design, my main interest is in the mostly narrative-light fighting game genre. Going back to the training room and finding or practicing combos and techniques is fulfilling in a way I could never describe. *OMORI*, however, helps me describe this fascination perfectly. The depth of possibility and the many ways you can play a fighting game encapsulate me just like *OMORI*'s narrative does with its layers and layers of elements and a narrative that can be interpreted differentially by each person. That is the breaking point for me. At that point, I no longer feel like I'm just playing the game, but using it as a vessel for the experience that I can create *alongside* it.

This is what makes *OMORI* such a worthwhile game to analyze. It combines narrative depth with sheer volume to create a masterclass on how to tell a story without giving it out for free. No matter where in the game you look, it manages to combine lighthearted whimsy with brutal horror in a way that makes the former feel fulfilling and the latter feel rich and meaningful. *OMORI* is, at the end of the day, a horror RPG, but it is not an RPG about horror. It's a game about companionship, trauma, and the importance of taking that first step to achieve closure. It is a shining beacon that symbolizes how horror games need not focus entirely on their horror elements to create a satisfying experience.

Works Cited

Liao, T. *OMORI*. Version 1.08 for Windows PC/Mac, OMOCAT, LLC, 2020.

The main release of *OMORI*. It has not had any major updates, but certain elements have been patched out of the game.

Liao, T. *OMORI*. Version 1.0 for Nintendo Switch, OMOCAT, LLC, 2022.

The console re-release of *OMORI*. I own the Nintendo Switch version, but all three console versions contain the same exclusive content. To my knowledge, this release of the game has not had any version updates.

Kikiyama. *Yume Nikki*. For Windows PC/Mac, Playism, 2004.

The main release of *Yume Nikki*, one of *OMORI*'s primary inspirations and the subject of many of its allusions.

Bowen, Calum Thomas. "My Time." *Pale Machine*. bo en, 2013.

bo en's original composition. A faster, pitched-up version is used in *OMORI*'s trailers and suicide ending.

Hancock, Patrick. "Review: Omori." Destructoid, 14 Mar. 2021,

www.destructoid.com/reviews/review-omori/. Accessed 25 Nov. 2023.

Destructoid's *OMORI* review. Their final score for the game was an 8.5/10.

Watts, Rachel. "Omori review." *PC Gamer*, 13 Jan. 2021, www.pcgamer.com/omori-review/.

Accessed 25 Nov. 2023.

PC Gamer's *OMORI* review. Their final score for the game was an 80/100.

Reuben, Nic. "Omori Review." *TheSixthAxis*, 25 Jan. 2021,

www.thesixthaxis.com/2021/01/25/omori-review/. Accessed 25 Nov. 2023.

TheSixthAxis' *OMORI* review. Their final score for the game was a 9/10.

Lopez, Azario. “Omori Review – Painfull and Beautiful.” *Noisy Pixel*, 2020,
noisypixel.net/omori-review-pc/. Accessed 25 Nov. 2023.

Noisy Pixel’s *OMORI* review. Their final score for the game was a 9/10.

“Omori.” *Metacritic*, www.metacritic.com/game/omori/. Accessed 25 Nov. 2023.

Metacritic’s compilation of *OMORI* reviews, and the source of the reviews I gathered.

Anderson, Kraig. “Minot’s Ledge Lighthouse.” *LighthouseFriends*,
www.lighthousefriends.com/light.asp?ID=474. Accessed 1 Dec. 2023.

A website that details the “1-4-3” lighting sequence of Minot’s Edge Lighthouse.

“OMORI on Steam.” *OMORI on Steam*, Valve Corporation,
store.steampowered.com/app/1150690/OMORI/. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

OMORI’s page on the Steam Store. It contains the recent and all-time reviews that users have left for the game.