

# Game Narrative Review

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**Game Title:** Sally Face

**Platform:** PC

**Genre:** 2D Adventure, Psychological Horror and Mystery Fiction

**Release Date:** 2016 - 2019 (Serial Publication)

**Developer:** Portable Moose

**Publisher:** Portable Moose

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

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## Overview

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*“You know, the biggest worries normal teenagers have are about petty things like being popular and having nice hair. Not us, though, we just have to worry about saving the world, I guess.”*

The story of *Sally Face* plays with a well-trodden trope; a group of friends answering the call to adventure, with nothing less than the fate of the world at stake. Darkness permeates this familiar dynamic of found-family, and the themes of belonging and acceptance that are called upon within the narrative are starkly contrasted with graphic story beats. Replete with cliffhangers and plot twists, *Sally Face*’s narrative is designed to keep players baited and invested as the twisted truths and sickening secrets of Nockfell are uncovered one chapter at a time.

Told in episodic chunks of story and interspersed with flashbacks, dream sequences and puzzles that are oh-so-gratifying when you crack them, *Sally Face* introduces players to a distinctly zany cast of NPCs, pairing lighthearted character interactions with jarring moments of “Uh, what was *that*”. Repetitive exploration of environments—as well as returning to interact with previously introduced characters—is strongly rewarded within the game, and the twists and turns that come along with the story are chillingly macabre and delightfully horrific.

# Characters

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- **Sal “Sally Face” Fisher** - The blue pigtailed, mask wearing protagonist. Sal goes identifiably by “Sally Face”, (roll credits) a title he reclaimed from grade school bullies and a reference to the face prosthesis Sally sports that conceals scarring from a traumatic childhood incident. This same incident marks the loss of Sally Face’s mother, and leads to Sal and his father moving into the Addison Apartments in the town of Nockfell. Sally Face is vaguely androgynous; while the game never concretely labels him, Sally uses both male and female presenting pronouns, and doesn’t correct those that call him either “boy” or “girl”.\* As a protagonist, Sally Face is inquisitive and friendly, despite being met with shocked and sometimes rude reactions at his masked appearance. Note that over the course of the five chapters, we never see what Sally’s face looks like without his prosthesis.  
\*For the sake of this analysis, Sal will be referenced as ‘he’, as this is the pronoun majorly used in-game.
- **Larry Johnson** - Larry serves not only as our introduction to the lore of Addison Apartments, but also Sal’s first friend. He’s quick to befriend Sal and join him on his sleuthing, and the two form a brotherlike bond. Larry enjoys injecting overkill puns into every scenario, head banging to metal music, and hanging out in his basement apartment, a pastime that eventually rubs off on Sal. Larry believes he is cursed after he accidentally kills an Apartment Resident’s pet rabbit, and shortly after Larry’s father–Jim–goes missing.
- **Todd Morrison** - The “smartest kid that Larry knows”, Todd is the designated brain and gadget maker of the friend group. Todd is a textbook nerd that always seems to have a device ready for any supernatural need the group has. Frequently sitting at a computer or hunched over a microscope, Todd’s always ready to give Sal the next piece of information. Todd also lives in the Apartments.
- **Ashley “Ash” Campbell** - Initially peer tutored by Todd, Ash is shown to be artistic, empathetic, kind, and patient. Her and Sally Face have a close relationship, and when she is first introduced to Sally, dreamy music plays over her entrance. Despite this teased intimacy, it is never explored whether or not romantic feelings exist between her and Sally. Note that Ash does not live in the Addison Apartments.
- **Residents of Addison Apartments** - The unique and odd inhabitants of the Apartments, who become relevant to the game’s narrative with each

respective chapter.

- **The Devourers of God** - A cult that predates Sally, the Apartments, and much of Nockfell. The exact members of the cult are ambiguous, but it is important to cite that the cult has control of the local police, and many other influential members of Nockfell. The goal of the cult is to summon “The Endless One”, an eldritch-like entity who will bring about the end of the world. Preparing for this entails constructing a secret temple beneath the town of Nockfell and summoning demonic “shadows” that corrupt the human soul. An ancient prophecy cites that the “Child of the Abomination” will one day be the cult’s downfall.
- **Misc. Other Characters** - The characters outlined above are the main individuals and groups of *Sally Face*. Other characters will be mentioned in this review, but are minute in their respective importance to the plot.

## Breakdown

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The pacing and structure of *Sally Face* is controlled in the form of five chapter installments—*Strange Neighbors*, *The Wretched*, *The Bologna Incident*, *The Trial*, and *Memories and Dreams*, respectively—that feature in-game timeskips between episodes, often aging up characters and their interpersonal relationships to show that time has passed.

Each of the chapters follows a mini-arc highlighting notable events in Sal’s life, starting simplistically with his move to the small town of Nockfell, and ending with ghostly allies, demonic foes, transdimensional travel, and fighting for the fate of the world. Details previously teased in past chapters are often followed up on in the subsequent installment, following the narrative formula of raising a question, letting it sit with players, and answering it later on, producing a mix of anticipation and mystery. The bulk of the first four chapters are framed in the form of interactive flashback exposition, with players acting out the order of events. The fifth and final chapter is set completely in the present.

The game follows a narrative structure complimentary to its story, with each chapter containing: past action -> present effect, followed by a forward hook into the next installment. For the purposes of this analysis, we shall follow the same structure, succeeded by the takeaways of each chapter.

**Content Warning:** *Sally Face* features depictions of graphic violence, death and suicide that may not be agreeable for some viewers. Proceed appropriately.

# Chapter 1 - Strange Neighbors (Released August 2016)

## Past Action:

*“This will be our new beginning. We can finally leave what happened in New Jersey behind us now...Why don’t you go explore the building while I finish unpacking?”*

Sal moves to the town of Nockfell and settles into Addison Apartments with his Father, the pair having left New Jersey after an accident, the details of which are kept intentionally vague. All that is known about the event—revealed via a dream sequence Sal experiences at the start of the chapter—is that as a result, Sal’s mother died and Sal’s face was irreparably damaged. Players later find out within Chapter 1 that the official record of the incident points to an aggressive dog attack, yet Sal insists that this story is inconsistent with what he remembers.

Shortly after beginning his initial exploration of the Apartments, Sal meets Larry, and the two become involved in solving the (very) recent murder of longtime resident Mrs. Sanderson. Sally can explore through the Apartments and find a myriad of strange things, including an unexplained shadowy figure with glowing red eyes lurking on the basement level, and the ghostly apparition of a seven year old girl in the abandoned floor five bathroom. This begins to hint at the supernatural thematic elements of the game. Together, Sal and Larry are able to gain evidence that reveals Apartment Resident Charley Mansfield as the Sanderson killer, which leads to his arrest.

## Present Effect & Forward Hook:

*“I don’t think you’re a murderer, Sal.”*

The first chapter wraps up with a nicely placed plot twist that serves as the lead-in to the next installment. Players learn that in the present setting of the game, set years after Sal’s initial move to Nockfell, Sal has been incarcerated for first degree mass murder, the means and motive of which are kept ambiguous. The gameplay players have been working through is in fact a narrative retelling of the events that led up to this, with Sal explaining it to his mandated therapist in the present.

## Chapter Takeaways:

- The establishing chapter focuses on setting the scene and introducing Sal to the environment of the Apartments, along with a handful of supporting characters. Each character that is available for Sal to interact with displays

their personality memorably and can easily be associated with key features, making it simple for players to recall them when referenced. The slew of NPCs introduced during *Strange Neighbors* is kept from being overwhelming through this careful attention to character development.

- Chapter 1 also gives players a taste of the narrative ominousness the game continues to substantially develop over the course of the overarching story, and teases some of the longer-running mysteries that the game has to offer, such as the accident that cost Sal his face and his mother.
- Focusing on the broader purpose of Chapter 1, the opening section institutes the use of flashbacks as a storytelling device, allowing players to get a sense of the narrative momentum of *Sally Face*; a linear story with gaps to fill in between the given present and past context. The foundation of the environmental puzzles that *Sally Face* loves to scatter about is likewise established, showing off a range of interactable objects and background elements.

## Chapter 2 - The Wretched (Released July 2017)

### Past Action:

Months have passed since Sal's first days in Nockfell, allowing a time skip between the first and second chapter. Sally begins to experience cryptic nightmares that add a layer of bizarre and ghastly visuals to gameplay. The nightmares often take the form of pseudo-memories that have a freakish edge—faces of characters garishly unzip to jumpscare the player and gruesomely dilapidated versions of things in Sal's waking life appear to haunt him. These nightmares usually have something to offer the player in terms of context or plot rehashing, but also serve as narrative flare.

Apart from that, Sal has settled well into his new life. He's grown familiar with many of the other Residents, and even managed to befriend some of the ghosts that inhabit the Apartments.

In a crucial-to-remember instance of character interaction, Larry and Sal share a vulnerable moment concerning the unexplained disappearance of Larry's father, Jim, and Larry's belief that this loss happened because he is cursed to attract tragedy into the lives of the people he loves. His reasoning for this; he gained the curse by accidentally killing a fellow resident's pet rabbit when he was younger, with his dad vanishing the next day. Larry also attributes the sightings of the red-eyed shadow (previously seen by Sal in Chapter 1) as a result of his curse.

*“I know how it sounds but I know it’s true. It’s all my fault. My dad. The rabbit. Mrs. Sanderson. Everything.”*

Most importantly, this chapter introduces players to the other half of the friend group; Todd Morrison and Ashley Campbell. Both are found when accessing Todd’s apartment after the treehouse scene, and while Ash leaves shortly after her introduction (to return with more purpose in Chapter 3), Todd sticks around to help Sally draw out some of Addison’s ghosts, one of which divulges key details about the workings of a local cult–The Devourers of God. Through teaming up with Larry and completing a few mini-objectives to gain a crowbar, Sal is able to access areas of the Apartments that were boarded over before; an endeavour that eventually puts him face-to-face with the red-eyed shadow. The shadow is subsequently revealed to be a product of a ritual enacted by the cult; using one of the ghosts in the Apartments as a vessel for demonic possession, warping them into a malevolent being. The red-eyed shadow attempts to kill Sally, but Larry shows up with one of Todd’s devices to save the day, dissipating the creature.

#### Present Effect & Forward Hook:

Similar to the present structure of *Strange Neighbors*, players find Sal recounting the events of *The Wretched* to Dr. Enon–Sal’s therapist–during his session; it should be noted that this is their last session before Sal’s trial. It’s a tall tale to believe; talk of ghosts, cults and conspiracies with no concrete evidence other than Sally’s word.

A final plea from Sal implores Enon to go to Addison Apartments, insisting that all the proof he needs is there. Indulging curiosity, or maybe a bit of faith, Enon ventures to Addison–now rundown, windows boarded over and crumbling at the seams. His initial search brings him nothing, but searching the old treehouse behind Addison yields the appearance of Larry. Actually, it’s the *ghost* of Larry that spawns before Enon, attempting to relay an important message.

*“Don’t freak out, man. We need your help. You have to get Sal out of jail! This shit is much deeper than we thought. Please. You have to get Sal here...this is important. If Sal doesn’t get here soon, then–shit.”*

Unfortunately, Enon, shocked, frightened, and apparently made clumsy at Larry’s ghostly entrance, accidentally stumbles back over the open treehouse trap door and falls, landing in a very broken and very dead heap on the ground.

With Enon gone, the method of storytelling in the present is switched to Sal being interviewed by the local news before the impending trial. A particular question sets up the arc for Chapter 3; Sally has a distinct aversion to bologna, to the point where he’s received special meal adjustments to compensate.

## Chapter Takeaways:

- Chapter 2 is the heaviest instalment in terms of exposition, world building and character development. It does mass amounts of narrative legwork in order to expand character relationships introduced within the first chapter; fleshing out Sal and Larry's friendship and laying groundwork for characters to come into more prevalent narrative play (such as Larry's father).
- *The Wretched* emphasizes the value of re-exploring previously introduced environments, as well as revisiting character interactions between Sal and NPCs. Players can choose to re-explore the area at their own pace, or go straight to the next story objective. The former choice will still loop the player to the objective once all other options are exhausted, but in the meantime, Sal is able to talk to residents that didn't open their doors in Chapter 1.
- This chapter highlights one of the many times *Sally Face's* narrative develops a strong theme of empathy and kindness that juxtaposes the dark nature of the game—the interaction between Sal and Larry in the treehouse being a focal example of this. Sal consoles Larry, telling him he can't take credit for every bad thing that happens in his life.
- *The Wretched* also adds the narrative mechanic of minigames, used to tactically flesh out narrative details, utilizing simplistic 8-bit pixelated graphics to convey plot points not elaborated on in the main story. In game, this translates to Sally's handheld gaming device—the Gearboy—mysteriously updating itself with playable content focusing on members of the apartment community, and their connections to the Devourers of God. The 8 Gearboy minigames can be played at any time once unlocked, in any order—or not at all, if the player wishes. Sal's Gearboy, once suped-up by Todd Morrison, can also be used to detect ghosts in the area when prompted by the player. Sweeping the Apartments and randomly triggering this feature of the Gearboy will reveal a slew of concealed content that can be used to unlock hidden lore and easter eggs.
- Our antagonists are properly introduced within this Chapter, as the ghost that Sal and Todd summon alludes to The Devourers of God operating in Nockfell. The Gearboy mini-games elaborate on this.
- While certainly dense at points, Chapter 2's material is rewarding with the mystery it breadcrumbs, still staying strong with its elements of intrigue. A

huge takeaway from the chapter—discovered in the treehouse scene with Enon—is the learned fact that in the future Larry is dead, due to reasons unknown by the player.

## Chapter 3 - The Bologna Incident (Released February 2018)

### Past Action:

By now, players are familiar with the structure of gameplay; environmental puzzles that require the scouring of locations in order to find a solution, as well as talking to NPCs to shed light on how to achieve goals. As always, meticulous combing and revisiting of the environment is rewarded. This is all transferable to Chapter 3's change of scenery, with gameplay unfolding in Nockfell's local High School. What seems like a simple mystery of discovering the source of the school's unappetizing and suspicious looking bologna meat leads down an intense and shocking rabbit hole. With this being the focus of the chapter, players explore through the school, offered the choice to proceed straightforwardly with the story objective, or hunt around for lore tidbits. The latter yields being able to access Sal's, Larry's, Ash's and Todd's lockers, each of which feature interactable items that elaborate on the character's personalities and how their relationships have evolved since Chapter 2.

Players with a thorough search ethic can find Travis—a character previously introduced at the beginning of *The Bologna Incident* as Sal's bully—crying in a bathroom stall, and likewise can find a crumpled up note at the foot of a trashcan nearby, detailing Travis's struggle with his sexuality and parental abuse. Sally is given the option to console Travis, offering him a shoulder to cry on whenever he needs.

*“We don't have to be enemies, you know that right? I think under all of that anger, there's a good dude who's afraid to be himself. If you ever need someone to talk to or if you need to get away from your dad for a while, you can hang out with me.”*

Initially, none of the school staff or lunch ladies will tell you any information about where the school gets the bologna. It is only after some snooping (and after completing a few puzzles, of course) the group learns that the school buys it's bologna off Addison Apartments Resident Mrs. Packerton. The group determines that the next step is breaking and entering into Packerton's room back at Addison.

After returning to Addison from the Highschool portion of gameplay, Sal and company begin to make headway on the mystery of the bologna, discovering in a disgustingly morbid reveal that the source of the meat is human flesh being farmed by the Devourers of God, which Packerton is a member of.



The friend group has a mistrust of the local authorities due to past events within the narrative, and agree that if they want this handled, they have to do it themselves.

Additionally discovered is the existence of a new level environment underneath the Apartments; a sub-basement stone temple with ancient architecture and a disturbing amount of bones.

### Present Effect & Forward Hook:

The bizarre nature of Sal's retelling is scrutinized by the interviewers; no proof of cannibalism or flesh farming was ever found within the Apartments, and while Sal attributes this to yet another Nockfell coverup, it's charted as another fantastical lie.

In the remainder of the interview, players learn that Ashley has been called by the prosecution to testify in Sal's trial, and Todd is revealed as having been held against his will in a psychiatric ward for the past few years.

### Chapter Takeaways

- The theme of kindness and empathy resurfaces with strong visibility in this chapter—appearances in *Sally Face* aren't always what they seem, and those who initially look frightening, disturbing or abrasive aren't necessarily malevolent in their nature. The most prominent example is Sal, with his unmoving prosthesis face, or any of the ghosts that appear throughout the game that often have blood, guts and gore incorporated in their design. Both are friendly, but initially unsettling to lay eyes on. Within the reach of this chapter, players witness Sal being kind to Kim the lunch lady, who's unappealing appearance yields to a sweet personality, and Travis Phelps, who's stereotypical bully treatment of Sal doesn't deter the latter from offering support.
- *The Bologna Incident* flaunts the game's puzzle complexity, with portions of Chapter 3's puzzle system proving especially difficult. Packerton's room boasts puzzles on almost every door, fridge and cabinet, with solutions being integrated within environmental cues and player problem-solving. It is the most puzzle-heavy section of the game, made tense by the feeling that players could get caught any moment by Packerton returning home. On top of the Packerton puzzles being intricate, this also means players solving them are working under pressure.

- By now, the game's established that in the present setting, Sal has been incarcerated for murder, Larry is dead, and Ash (as we discover here) is alive and returning to testify in Sal's trial. *The Bologna Incident* follows the pattern of previous chapters, teasing the whereabouts of one of the core four characters in the present, with Sal's imprisonment being the forward hook of Chapter 1, and Larry's ghostly status being the same for Chapter 2.
- The Devourers of God cult has a temple beneath the Apartments, and seems to have a range of local connections in Nockfell, including the police. The flesh farming that the friend group uncovers is a disguised source of income for them, indicating an interwoven presence within the town.

## Chapter 4 - The Trial (Released November 2018)

### Past Action:

A considerable amount of time has passed since we last saw Sal and the crew; the group is college aged now, Sal and Todd living in a house down the street from Addison, with Larry's move-in imminent. They've kept up the practice of ghost hunting, still intent on tracking the movements of the cult—movements that recently have been quiet. Ashley comes to visit from out of town, sharing a heart-to-heart with Sal as they reminisce on all they've been through together. Even though Sal doesn't live in the Apartments anymore, the familiar aspect of re-exploring them is still possible by joining Larry in an attempt to reconnect with some of the friendly Addison ghosts that have been strangely absent as of late. Despite the efforts of the still modded Gearboy, none of the ghosts are present, leaving the bulk of exploration to consist of NPC interaction to color in the time that's passed between chapters.

A key (and heart wrenching) plot point that occurs in this section of *The Trial* is the death of Larry. Sal receives what seems like a goodbye text from Larry after they finish their day at Addison, and although he rushes back to try and find Larry, things don't end well. An additional handwritten note Sal finds points to suicide, and Larry's body is never found.

We're not without Larry for long, however. Though he vanishes from the corporeal world, his ghost is quick to appear as it becomes apparent that The Devourers of God are done laying low, and intend to put their demonic plan in action that night. While Larry apologizes to Sal for leaving him behind, the matter is overruled by the pressing stakes of the situation as a runed-pillar is summoned from the sky, piercing down through the Addison Apartments like a toothpick. Sal and Larry advance, jointly controlled by the player as they clear their way through the building. They encounter each of the Apartment Residents that we have come

to know, but are confused at their suddenly vacant, strange behavior, as if they are mere shells of people. During Larry's segment of gameplay, one can see that all Residents have been overgrown in black webs.

With the action also ramping up, players encounter their first boss battle. Sal discovers that Terrence Addison, the Landlord of Addison Apartments, seems to have been possessed by a grotesque monster inhabiting his body, green flesh spilling out of his mouth and wrapping around him in a horrid cocoon. Sal wields his electric guitar (previously modded by Todd to be able to fight supernatural foes) to fight off the giant, tendril laden, teeth covered eldritch beast.

Defeating this boss frees Terrence's soul, who gives Sal a horrible but definite truth; all people residing in the Apartments have been infected by darkness. Sal is left with no choice but to vanquish all vessels of the infection before it spreads and consumes more of Nockfell, and the world.

*"I'm afraid there is one more task remaining, and it is a hideous one... You must kill all those who have been tainted by the Dark."*

In an uncomfortably grim sequence of gameplay, the player and Sal are forced to kill every single Resident of Addison Apartments, including Sal's father and friends, not to mention the majority of the cast of characters players have been spending so much time getting to know.

Todd, having been kidnapped off-screen by the cult members, can be found collapsed by the front door of the Apartments once Sal accomplishes this gruesome task. Some kind of ritualistic possession has been enacted on Todd, his body covered in scratches and his eyes a bloodshot red, but before Sal can react, the police show up and find our protagonist, bloody and irrefutably guilty of mass murder.

#### Present Effect & Forward Hook:

*The Trial* holds one of the biggest and shocking twists within the narrative of *Sally Face*. The verdict of Sal's trial is a negative one, Ashley's testimony met with the falsified diagnosis of an imposter Dr. Enon (Sal's therapist from the first chapter), sent by the cult to ensure Sal's demise. This Enon bears a passing resemblance to the real one, with his physical features being a caricature of the original. Players can piece together that this Enon is a plant from the cult, whose purpose is to solidify Sal's guilty verdict. Sal's been the linchpin of thwarting the cult's plans thus far; by vanquishing the red-eyed shadow, uncovering the bologna scheme, and destroying the vessels of darkness within the Apartments, he's thrown a wrench into their wicked plans. All of this connects into one of the cult's oldest prophecies, which has been sporadically mentioned throughout the game: *The*

*Child of the Abomination.* The subject of such prophecy is foretold to be instrumental in the cult's downfall, a role Sal seems to be acting out quite well.

The result of Sally's trial is unfavorable for our prosthesis wearing friend; Sal is found guilty of mass murder, and sentenced to capital punishment, much to Ashley's distress. All evidence Sal cites of the cult being the true culprit is dismissed. The story jumps forward three years later to the day of Sal's execution, and Ashley, having never stopped trying to prove his innocence, rushes to the jail to stop the proceedings.

She is too late, reaching the window just in time to see Sal's death by electric chair. The scene is rife with shock as players watch our protagonist—and the character they've been playing as this entire time—die.

*"Time of Death is 6:33 PM."*

With one chapter left to conclude the story and the stark absence of Sally hanging over the heads of the players, the plot is at a low point of hopelessness and heavy emotion.

### Chapter Takeaways

- Chapter 4 provides the most answers to the previously established mysteries in *Sally Face*. As the penultimate chapter, it follows through on teased character storylines, such as the crime Sally committed that landed him in jail, how Larry ended up as a ghost, and what happened with Todd. It also follows through on subplot elements, like the reveal of Terrence Addison's true form. In previous chapters, Terrence only ever interacts with you by peeking through his mail slot, with only his eyes visible. This is chalked up to him being recluse, and the morbid unveiling of the *real* reason Terrence's full sprite is never shown certainly comes as a surprise.
- New mechanics emerge, such as the time-based pattern replication of Sal's electric guitar, and the simultaneous control of both Sal *and* Larry, dually playing through a chapter segment.
- *The Trial* features a game-changing cliff hanger in the penultimate chapter—the death of Sally Face, our protagonist. While coming back as a ghost within the in-game world isn't completely out of bounds, seeing the character we've been playing as for four chapters flatline before us is certainly a grim, unexpected turn of events.

## Chapter 5 - Memories and Dreams (Released December 2019)

### Past Action:

Our final chapter of *Sally Face* comes five months after Sal's execution. The only friend of the original group left, players control Ashley, who's hellbent on destroying the cult. Ash devises a plan to destroy the hidden temple (discovered in Chapter 3) beneath Nockfell through explosive means. She's pre-laid C-4, but she hasn't followed through in hopes that Todd (who was kidnapped from the psych hospital during the five month gap in the storyline) is still alive. Larry's ghost has also been absent since the fall of Addison, leaving Ash largely on her own.

However, Ash has been receiving information about the *Child of the Abomination* prophecy from an anonymous contact within the cult. This information leads her to believe that the subject of such prophecy is Sal, making him the key to the Devourers of God's downfall. The contact has also been sending Ash information on how to summon Sal, a feat she plans to accomplish later that night. In one last effort, Ashley sneaks into the temple that's crawling with occultists, providing a rare stealth segment, to try and find Todd. While she doesn't succeed in finding her friend, she does find her anonymous contact in the form of an adult Travis Phelps, Sal's highschool bully. Travis has been helping Ash to bring down the cult after he was indoctrinated, his switch in allegiance in part due to Sal's kindness toward him in *The Bologna Incident*. Travis confirms that Todd is alive, but insists that Ash's best chance at winning is by blowing up the temple, regardless of his or Todd's survival.

### Present Action:

Ashley tells all this to Sal's headstone in the local Nockfell Graveyard. She laments about how lost she feels, powerless to act against the Devourers of God. She's still hesitant to blow up the temple, instead hoping to resurrect Sally and gain back an ally. With the faith that Sally is still somewhere out there and able to be summoned, Ash begins the ritual.

Switching to Sal's perspective, players see that Sal is trapped in the limbo-like realm of the "Beyond". He receives the help from the Vestige of Jim Johnson (Larry's father), whose earlier disappearance from Larry's life was a result of Jim's attempt to bring down the cult. Jim instructs Sal on how to aid Ashley in her ritual by completing a series of puzzles placed as precautions to ensure that no one else could venture back from the Beyond except for Sal, who Jim's been waiting for, knowing that Sally was the key to the cult's prophecy.

*“You can still stop them, if you wish too. In fact, you are the key to their destruction. If that means anything to you now.”*

To locate these puzzles, Sal must travel between dimensions, which introduces a vivid switch in the standard art and music style for the game. The first dimension is a brightly colored, cartoonish version of Sal’s college house, with all of the art assets taking on wonky, non-uniform proportions. The next is a 3D rendered, geographic forest location, where the player can suddenly move in more directions than just the horizontal plane, and the third dimension comes in the form of a Tim Burton derived artstyle, with characters having spindly long limbs and large faces. The final dimension comes in a delightful claymation rendition of Sally’s sprite and environment. Through completing each dimension’s puzzle, Sal is able to be consciously (but not physically) resurrected in the form of sharing Ash’s body, transforming her left arm into a glowing, pulsing beacon of light—a weapon to be used against the cult. Ready and finally reunited (albeit in a strange way, but what else can be expected from the world of *Sally Face*) the two set off toward the temple.

The story of *Sally Face* comes to a peak in a final face off against the Devourers of God. Once the temple is reached, players simultaneously control Ash and Sal in their own respective planes of reality, the former fending off occultists and the latter having to defeat a humongous version of the beast previously encountered in *The Trial*. They’re joined by the sudden entrance of Larry’s ghost, significantly aged, as he appears from the Beyond to help make the final push. Players gain control of Larry, in addition to Sal and Ash. The battle is waged with all three of them epically combining forces and wreaking havoc on the cult, beast, and temple. Todd is found and saved, and the final scene illustrates the four friends sharing one moment of reminiscent friendship and relief before Larry vanishes (for good this time) and Sal returns to the Beyond.

*“I just want you all to know how much you mean to me. I love you guys so much. I was lucky to know you. I’m glad I got to see you all again.”*

The ending is bittersweet, but an ending nonetheless. We fade to black.

### Chapter Takeaways

- This installment pulls out all the stops in terms of a climatic final act, filling the progression of gameplay with a stealth section, continuous puzzles, alternate art styles, and a bombardment of battle-heavy sequences. Building off of the dual-playing style from *The Trial*, players are given the opportunity now to jointly control Ashley and a resurrected Sal and Larry

during the story climax, with all three having different battle styles that are switched between rapidly in a tactic meant to challenge the player.

- *Memories and Dreams* has a plethora of discoverable lore that gives clarity to some of the more long awaited plot questions. For example, if the player has been thorough in their exploration of previous chapters and found all of the relevant scattered collectibles, the DOG achievement can be unlocked here, delving into Sally's childhood accident via cutscene. It was not a dog that attacked Sally and his mother, but a man in a dog mask; a member of the Devourers of God seeking to cull the foretold *Child of The Abomination*, who they correctly identify to be Sal. In trying to protect Sal with her body, Sal's mother is shot through the stomach, the same bullet destroying Sal's face.
- Apart from being the culminating story segment, it should be noted that Chapter 5 is also the only installment primarily set in the present. The exception is a few flashback references made by Ash concerning the day prior to her visiting Sal's grave, listed as the past action above.

## Epilogue

Despite *Sally Face*'s protagonists winning the final battle, the game doesn't end on a high note, and things don't wrap up with a perfect bow on top. The group's efforts against the Devourers of God may have smited the cult itself, but it is revealed that 33% of the world was infected with darkness due to the workings of the cult. Additionally, the price of the victory is high; alongside players having to cut the losses of all the Addison Apartment Residents, the deaths of Larry, Sal, and everyone else that was killed in the chaos that ensued still weigh heavy. For a game that balances the dark moments with lighthearted ones, this final sendoff is firm and dire in the consequences it leaves players with.

A 100% completion of all five chapter installments gives you a brief epilogue cutscene that leaves room for future expansion. With a sequel announced in 2019, it's a safe bet to assume we haven't seen the last of what the world of *Sally Face* has to offer.

## Strongest Element

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*Sally Face*'s strongest element is its clever intertwinement of narrative needs and game design. Using the tactic of literal closed doors to lay intrigue, the game is able to use the same environment repetitively while still giving players the feeling of unlocking something new. Some doors within the apartments even tease their

contents coyly until later chapters allow them to become accessible—a story mechanic that lends itself to the atmosphere of curiosity *Sally Face* cultivates.

Likewise, the smart design of the Apartments allows for the reveal of hidden content simply concealed behind doors, and also integrates narrative reasoning sensibly. It controls plot pacing through which rooms become accessible at certain points in each chapter; a choice easily explained by certain residents being at work or unenthused by your presence at the time. This reasoning lends itself to the believability of the world *Sally Face* creates, despite the bizarre elements of such that surface throughout the story.

The formulaic layout of the building and its rooms allow for the reuse of art assets—another apt narrative design choice, given the common architecture of apartment rooms being copy-and-paste in most circumstances. In a game that leans heavy on storytelling through character interactions, the setting of the Apartments keeps NPCs together at a close range, cutting travel time for the player. The setting is easily traversible and allows for the worldbuilding of *Sally Face* to develop itself in a contained space that still manages to emphasize vast exploration of its environment.

## Unsuccessful Element

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In the midst of *Sally Face*'s multifaceted story of secret cults and malevolent darkness is a plot line that is out of sync. While the narrative prides itself on pulling wild cards out of its sleeve, all the pieces of plot fall into place with the patience of a keen player. Save for the storyline concerning Larry's father; Jim Johnson.

Larry's dad vanishing is integral to Larry's character, and Jim's mysterious whereabouts also serve as crucial to Sal's journey. Players encounter Jim—or what remains of him—as he aids Sal through the dream-like fugue of the Beyond in Chapter 4, and the explanation received is both isolating and a notable hiccup in plot flow.

It's revealed that Jim is actually an alien. He fled from his planet in the wake of darkness consuming it whole—the same darkness infecting Addison at the hands of the Nockfell cult. In a story that leans heavily on a supernatural-esq genre (with some mysticism thrown in), this shot of sci-fi like character exposition feels decidedly out of place, and widens the small-town contained story events to something out of scale. Jim's origins can be discovered through a series of journal pages easter-egged in Chapter 3, and is easily missable. When fully collected, the pages are hefty text blocks of exposition at best, and are completely disconnected with the established feel of the narrative. Even if players *don't* obtain the pages, Sally will still have the option to tell Larry that his father was an alien in Chapter 4; dialogue that, without finding the journal entries, seems sudden, unfounded, and



leaves an awkward gap in the plot. It also raises a slew of unanswered questions—is Larry half alien? Is the darkness the cult is so intent on bringing about also alien in its origin? The complexity of the created character point is left to be pondered but not elaborated upon adequately.

## Highlight

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The highlight of gameplay is found within the epic final sequence that preludes the end of Chapter 5, *Memories and Dreams*. Showcasing an impressive range of artstyle and soundtrack changes, as well as providing the players with control of three characters working in tandem, this series of quick-paced, turnabout scenes demands a fast reaction time from the player, and the ability to switch between battle mechanics in order to beat this challenging finale.

The final sequence also provides a narrative feel-good moment as players watch Sally, Larry and Ashley fight side by side to save Todd, despite the unconventional circumstances of such. In the face of challenges such as separate planes of reality, evil occultists and eldritch beasts, they persevere in these final paramount moments of gameplay.

This friend group has been through hell and back, and seeing them work together in wake of all the pain they've endured gives a strong narrative resonance of the game's themes friendship, teamwork and determination, as well as giving players a final monumental moment to root for.

## Critical Reception

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- *AdventureGamers*, 3.5/5, *Will Aickman* - "The script similarly acknowledges what it feels like to be a young person looking for their place in a scary, hostile world, and how wonderfully transformative it can be for a lonely kid to finally find people who understand them. Despite its macabre trappings, the prevailing attitude throughout the game is one of compassion, even for some of its ostensible villains."
- *indiegamereviewer*, 4/5, *Matthew J.* - "More than the puzzles and secrets, more than the murder mystery and ghost story plots, though, it's the characters that got me hooked on Sally Face. Gabry's deliberately primitive, cartoonish art – which makes just about every character look sort of weird and creepy – emphasizes that all of the game's characters are deeply flawed, but there's a hopefulness here that's too often overshadowed in games with similar themes."

# Lessons

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**The Value of the Uncommon Protagonist** - Sally is a decidedly uncommon protagonist in the landscape of modern video game characters. He's androgynous without it consuming his whole character, allowed to have a personality that doesn't revolve around his gender identification. He's not a middle aged, emotionally closed off white-man with trauma, he's a 14 year old kid with blue pigtails. He possesses trauma but is still kind and empathetic. We're able to connect with him, feel for him, and root for him, all without seeing his face. Physically, Sal's unemotive due to his prosthesis, but his voice is developed to be humanizing and identifiable, making him a noteworthy character in a sea of stereotypical protagonists.

**The Devil in the Details** - *Sally Face's* full narrative design is catered for the keen eye of the thorough player. While it *can* be enjoyed without finding every hidden detail nestled within its construct, parts of the full experience is lost on those who aren't constantly spamming x at every given moment to discover the unprompted interactables and story segments. It can be gratifying to discover all the secrets a chapter has to offer, earning the 100% icon right next to the respective chapter name in the menu. But for those less inclined to reexamine every inch of the environment and follow through on every dialogue option, sticking solely to the main path that the narrative crafts, these missed details occasionally open up plot holes that can be confusing and hard to ignore. *Sally Face* is not a branching narrative; it doesn't give you a distinguishable variety of endings tailored around what you decide to pursue and subsequently discover. A simple epilogue cutscene plays when you 100% the entire game, but it's not the ending that is bemusing, but rather, the easily missed plot points—such as discovering the truth about Larry's father—that make for some quizzical story gaps that the player must face. Similarly is Travis Phelps's change of allegiance in Chapter 5; the groundwork for this switch is only elaborated on through events pursued by the player in Chapter 3, and if those events are glossed over (which they can be, easily), Travis's appearance as your savior doesn't *really* make any sense. For the devoted secret-seeker, this type of gameplay is gratifying and gives a sense of accomplishment, but for those interested in a more low-effort playthrough, or perhaps those unaccustomed to just how much certain video games can make you work for the full picture, it can be tedious to finish the story with a feeling of unfulfillment, and no idea where to find the missing pieces.

**Crafty Design Compliments Narrative** - In video games, the more narrative and design go hand-in-hand, the more your world is believable. *Sally Face* nails this with inexplicable thoughtfulness; from the setting of Addison Apartments that

reasonably supports character introductions and environment exploration to the dual wielding of both the past and the present in order to hook players in with tactfully placed cliffhanger endings and pre-teased plots. The episodic design of the *Sally Face* works to keep players engaged in the mystery-shrouded narrative and engrossed in the bloody details of the story, forming familiar gameplay loops of lore discovery, puzzle solving, environment exploration, and revisiting characters. In a game where caring about the characters is key, this is a brilliantly integrated design choice.

**The Power of Friendship is Worth Rooting For** - Sappy, but when done well, never gets old. *Sally Face* makes this work through giving players meaningfully fleshed out characters that propel the story forward. The personal dynamics feel familiar yet refreshing, with each character having their own notable quirks and distinct relationships. Brought together over a shared goal with high stakes and staying together through camaraderie and choice, the core four characters of *Sally Face* endear players to them through inside jokes, vulnerable moments and the heroic determination of taking up a task much bigger than themselves.

**A Brilliant Plot Tool: Cliffhangers** - In video games that rely heavily on story as their main form of content to offer, it's crucial to keep both attention and investment. Many games that feature this—such as RPGS or visual novel type games—have developed tactics to ensure that the player remains hooked even if they're primarily reading dialogue interactions or skimming through lore blocks. A particularly strong tactic (and one that *Sally Face* shows off to a T) is the employment of cliffhangers. The cliffhangers of *Sally Face* keep players coming back time and time again in hopes of finding out what happens to the characters they've been playing as, with a cliffhanger cleverly placed within each episodic chapter. With the initial release of *Sally Faces's* chapters being serial publications, the effect of these cliffhangers are intensified, as those who played through *Sally Face* as it was releasing had to wait months (and often years) between installments.

**Too Much Shock Factor Can Be Overkill** - There are a few times the plot errs on the side of trying to shock and surprise its players a bit *too* much. Often, it comes in the form of flashing an unsettling visual or turning to darker and darker themes, which begins to feel overly repetitive and purely for shock value. The balance between intrigue and overkill is a fine line to walk, and *Sally Face* tips over it a few times in its attempt to keep players on their toes. In particular, graphic depictions of suicide are shown multiple times throughout the story, in some cases feeling narratively unnecessary. Ashley's jump to self-harm in Chapter 5 when trying to resurrect Sal specifically seems rushed and shoddy, and although it pays off in the way she needed, it feels a bit too jarring in the context of her character, seemingly placed for purely another jolt of high-emotion within the scene.

## Summations

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*Sally Face* doesn't shy away from being intensely dark, giving players an adventure unlike any other found in the video game content field today. It handles mature themes and topics, all the while touching on values of kindness and compassion threaded within a larger plot of dismal tragedy and loss.

The mystery it weaves through its linear (but not always chronological) advancement of story structure allows for the sustained player intrigue, investing audiences in character action and consequence—an investment that pays off through rewarding narrative beats and reveals.

Despite its low moments, *Sally Face* still manages to hold a lighthearted sense of exploration and discovery, welcoming players into the wonderfully designed, weird and warped world of Nockfell; a town inhabited by the strangest of people with the biggest of hearts, ready to fight the forces of evil at whatever cost.