

Game Narrative Review

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Month/Year you submitted this review: December 2023

Game Title: *OMORI*

Platform: macOS, Windows, Nintendo Switch, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Playstation 4

Genre: Role-playing game

Release Date: December 25, 2020 (initial worldwide release)

Developer: OMOCAT LLC

Publisher: OMOCAT LLC

Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Andrew Batino / Omocat

Overview

“Don’t worry... Everything is going to be okay.”

... is what Sunny tries to convince himself of after his older sister - Mari - died. For the past four years, he has shut himself into his room and escaped into his own imaginary world known as HEADSPACE. HEADSPACE has just about everything Sunny could ever want: Omori - a reliable and cool alter ego - his best friends and sister, and plenty of fun adventures awaiting their party every step of the way. It is a world where nothing bad can ever happen and his sister is alive and well... But SOMETHING haunts him. Whether it be the waking or dream world, he can never escape it. Worst of all, his best friend Basil is a constant reminder of what the two of them did to Mari. So long as Basil and SOMETHING are around, Sunny could never truly forget.

Thus, Omori takes matters into his own hands.

Seizing control of HEADSPACE, he forces Basil to disappear from Sunny’s imaginary world. Though the party ventures out in hopes of finding their missing friend, Omori does everything he can to make the party forget Basil even existed and, should worse comes to worst, reset

HEADSPACE back to square one. This is how Omori protects Sunny-- to stop him from feeling pain, Sunny must not remember.

But Omori has no control outside of HEADSPACE. With his moving date fast-approaching, Kel invites Sunny to hang out one last time. Should Sunny open the door and accept Kel's invite, he begins interacting with his estranged childhood friends once more-- Basil included. With more reminders of the past than ever, will Sunny reconcile with his old friends and finally confront the truth? Or will Omori find a new way to 'help' Sunny escape from the crushing weight of his own guilt, and in turn, abandon Basil once again?

"An unallowed burden has been placed upon you. You have the power to change the future. What will you do, DREAMER? What will you do?"

Characters

Every main character has at least two distinct versions: the imaginary HEADSPACE version based on Sunny's childhood memories and who they currently are in the present day REAL WORLD. To avoid confusion, the two versions will be analyzed under one section-- save for one exception. Any significant supporting characters will be mentioned elsewhere as needed.

OMORI

The game's titular character and main player character during HEADSPACE, Omori is Sunny's alter ego. Though he appears to be unfeeling and remains silent, he does his utmost in preventing Sunny from remembering the pains of his past by (violently) suppressing anything that may so much as hint to the truth. He is responsible for HEADSPACE Basil's disappearance and the cyclic nature of HEADSPACE's adventures. As a result, in the game's true route, Omori serves as the game's antagonist and final boss that Sunny must overcome in order to move forward.

Feigning Being Neutral Through Apathy: Because Sunny wanted to suppress his memories and fears, Omori became the ideal image of cool apathy. He almost always appears neutral, giving the impression that everything is alright. But because he was born from Sunny's repressed feelings and fear, he also inherits all of Sunny's bottled up emotions. Though it partially serves as a hint to Omori being the game's final boss, Omori's additional emotion tiers in gameplay serve as a representation to just how intense Sunny's feelings truly are. This is why, once Omori comes to represent the self-loathing and disgust Sunny feels towards himself, they are painfully overwhelming and impossible to fight against. Omori is someone who cannot be separated or beaten by Sunny because he *is* Sunny; all he wants is to end their pain should Sunny be unable to bear it all himself.

SUNNY

OMORI's protagonist and main playable character in the REAL WORLD. Much like Omori, Sunny is almost entirely silent. But compared to Omori's active nature in suppressing the truth and taking control of HEADSPACE, Sunny rarely ever makes decisions of his own. He is often swept up in the flow of what others tell him to do and fails to communicate any potential grievances or worries he may have. This lack of communication is what results in Mari's death: because he failed to tell her how stressed he was from her expectations and desire to have a perfect recital, he lashed out and shoved her down the stairs, breaking the violin his friends gifted him in the process. To this day, Sunny can only express stress and fear from SOMETHING that haunts him.

To Be Neutral to Loss Through Escapism and Conflict Avoidance: In his attempts to pretend everything is okay, Sunny resorts to escapism to cope with his grief, self-loathing, and pain. From the start, he has always been someone who tried to avoid conflict and avoided taking blame whenever possible. After breaking a vase, he hid behind Mari and she was the one who took responsibility for it. Even though he was the one who scribbled over Mari's face in Basil's photo album, he ran away so Basil took the blame. This then caused Aubrey to relentlessly bully Basil for the past 4 years. And now, he has avoided telling his friends that he was the one to kill Mari, instead pretending everything is okay in a fantasy make-believe world where nobody can ever argue or fight with him. He is neutral by trying to ignore the reality of the world, remaining like a passive outsider to his own experiences. It is only once Sunny resolves to overcome the pains of his past that this passiveness disappears, marking his first steps into growing and changing as a person.

BASIL

The final person to join their childhood friend group, Basil is a shy but avid photographer who cherishes his childhood memories. He is immensely kind to a fault and tries to minimize conflicts between his friends. In HEADSPACE, he considers everyone in the group his best friend. But his REAL WORLD counterpart has a strong preference for Sunny and has become extremely anxious after Sunny abandoned him. This strong attachment links to why Omori causes him to disappear and violently silences him in HEADSPACE: Basil is the only one who knows the truth. Add on how the shadowy figure of STRANGER heavily resembles him in HEADSPACE, and Basil takes on a focal role in the story and serves as a red herring for the story's overall mystery.

Always in Fear of SOMETHING: Basil is primarily motivated and driven by his constant fears, born from his parents abandoning him when he was young. Given that he is the newest person in the group, he's often afraid of being a burden or an outsider to the group, anxious over the possibility of being left alone. After witnessing Sunny kill Mari and being driven by his fear that Sunny would get hurt if the truth was found out, he comes up with the idea to frame Mari's death as a suicide... which only exacerbates his fears of being abandoned after their friend group

dissolves and his best friend shuts himself away for four years. He grows to be afraid of SOMETHING in his unwillingness to accept that Sunny killed Mari and completely breaks down when he learns that he may truly be alone as Sunny is moving away and his grandmother is on her deathbed. All of the guilt and fear eats up over the years, but the alternative is revealing what Sunny has done. Still, it becomes too much to bear. In all but the true route, Basil kills himself, dying for Sunny's "sin" in a manner similar to the Messiah. And with his death, he takes the truth and burden of Mari's passing with him.

AUBREY

One of Sunny's childhood friends. Once a cheerful and upbeat girl who had no fear like her HEADSPACE counterpart, Aubrey is now a very short-tempered and cold person, outcast and distant from everyone in town-- save for the Hooligans. With seemingly no love or care for her old friends, she claims she wants nothing to do with any of them anymore. Her hostility is especially evident towards Basil, who she actively bullies with the Hooligans. She gets into conflict with Kel and Sunny as a minor antagonist during REAL WORLD segments when the two try to protect Basil from her.

When Anger is All That Is Left to Anchor Someone In Grief: Aubrey's hostility towards her friends is not completely unfounded. Mari was her best friend, so she took Mari's death especially hard. Her father had abandoned her family in the past, her mother is extremely neglectful, and her friends had all drifted apart, leaving her without anyone to lean on. The only thing she had to remind her of happier times is her anger for what once was, made worse when she believes Basil is actively ruining their memories by scribbling over their photos. Her anger towards her friends may also stem from the neglect she experiences from her mother-- her mother is completely withdrawn from the world and leaves Aubrey to fend for herself, in a similar way to how Sunny, Basil, and Hero withdrew from everyone after Mari's death. Thus, Aubrey grows resentful of her friends, believing that they've all moved on too quickly in an attempt to erase Mari from their memories and leave Aubrey to grieve with her anger all alone.

KEL

Kel is one of Sunny's childhood friends, with a goofy, energetic, and somewhat impulsive personality befitting of a sidekick. Though he often gets into small squabbles with his friends - and most particularly, with Aubrey - he deeply cares for them and is the first to reach out to Sunny after so many years. His invitation is what kickstarts Sunny's road to confronting the truth, and the events of the past have changed him into someone who often tries to help the people around him as a 'hero.' Compared to his childhood friends and brother, he appears to be unaffected by Mari's passing and maintains a positive outlook on life.

How Too Much Happiness and Positivity Can Hurt Those Left Behind: It is precisely because Kel has always been such a cheerful person that he distances himself from his former

friends. This is because, after Mari's alleged suicide, Kel tried to be positive and cheer Hero up from his depressive state. However, his positivity was extremely insensitive to his brother's feelings, causing Hero to hurtfully lash out at him. Because Kel struggles to read the room, he inadvertently hurts his loved ones. It is only once Hero yelled at him that he realized that constant positivity could be a detriment, causing him to avoid his friends over the years so that he doesn't accidentally hurt them as well. And so, this realization manifests in the present REAL WORLD Kel: though still a bundle of positivity, he has grown to be more thoughtful and sensitive to others' feelings; he does what he can to support them and reach out to them in their time of need.

HERO

The oldest of Sunny's former friend group. Compared to his younger brother, Hero is favored by his parents as someone 'perfect': he draws people towards him with his charisma and seems capable of doing just about anything he tries. Much like Sunny and Aubrey, Hero is deeply affected by Mari's passing, causing him to withdraw from his former friends and brother. His REAL WORLD counterpart is more prone to intense emotions and is meeker when compared to his HEADSPACE version. But there is still a part of him that hasn't grown up and continues to cling onto his childhood memories, causing him to comment on Kel and Aubrey's confrontations in surprisingly childish ways.

Grief and the Sadness That Shows Love Is Still Here: Much like the others in his friend group, Hero takes Mari's passing poorly and is unable to cope with the overwhelming anguish and despair. As someone implied to have romantic interest in Mari, Hero believes that he has failed her because he never noticed how much she was suffering; he blames himself for not being there for her when she needed him most. In retrospect, how could he have missed something so obvious? Why didn't he know? Hero's grief over Mari manifests as sadness and guilt, leading him to wallow in despair as a shut-in for at least a year. He cannot do much more than eat or tend to himself at the barest minimum level and has never once visited Mari's grave. To prevent himself from breaking down further, Hero avoids his old friends by hyperfocusing on college and being away from them for many years. But what Hero fails to realize is that, just how torn he is over Mari's passing is proof enough that he truly cared about her and loved her. It is only once he realizes this and accepts her passing that he begins to move forward, carrying memories of her with him in a manner not unlike that of Sunny's development.

MARI

Sunny's older sister. As "the glue that [held] everyone together," her apparent suicide is what causes their childhood friend group to completely fall apart. Many recall her warm and kindhearted nature, which is still reflected in Sunny's image of her in HEADSPACE. She remains confined to the picnic basket in HEADSPACE, never joining in with the group's adventures so that she may never be hurt again.

What drove the two to argue over the recital in the first place was Mari's fatal flaw: her constant need for everything to be perfect or just right. The others in the group occasionally found her perfectionism to come off as somewhat uptight, but it especially caused issues when she unintentionally pressured Sunny into being perfect during their recital practice together. No longer able to bear with it, he accidentally shoved her down the stairs during their argument, resulting in her death. This argument and the framing of her death as a suicide would then haunt Sunny and Basil for the next four years under the form of SOMETHING-- with SOMETHING being a ghostly silhouette of her corpse, its right eye wide open.

Still, even in death, she continues to advise and encourage Sunny. Whether it is Mari's spirit actually supporting him and forgiving him or Sunny's consciousness allowing him to forgive himself through Mari's image is hard to say. But it is an absolute certainty that Mari (in the form of SOMETHING and as herself) is one of the catalysts that supports Sunny in confronting the truth, accepting it, and choosing to move forward.

Breakdown

An Unconventional Story Structure: *Kishotenketsu*

For most, storytelling has a primary golden standard for structure: the three-act structure that is essentially a beginning, middle, and end. Based on the general definitions of the three-act structure segments, *OMORI* is technically no different. Its first act begins in HEADSPACE as set-up for what Sunny and Omori have been doing for the past four years. It also cements important information going forward, such as how Sunny is set to move away from FARAWAY TOWN in three days, giving the player a good picture of the story's overall scope.

From there, two potential inciting incidents can be debated upon. The initial belief would be that Basil's abrupt disappearance by SOMETHING in HEADSPACE is the inciting incident. However, as the player further advances through Omori's story, they quickly realize that the journey in HEADSPACE is deliberately disconnected from the overarching plot and does not actually kickstart anything that moves the plot forward. On the other hand, Kel knocking on Sunny's door and convincing Sunny to hang out with him again checks off every box for what an inciting incident should be. Without taking this first step to move out of his comfort zone, Sunny is instead placed on the HIKIKOMORI ROUTE where he allows Omori to take full control away from him. Nothing changes. Nobody moves forward. There is no plot. Thus, it is Kel's decision that breaks Sunny's four year long status quo and gives Sunny the opportunity to begin interacting with his old friends. It is through these interactions that Sunny potentially reconciles with everyone because his suppressed memories begin resurfacing, making it the perfect inciting incident for the TRUE ROUTE's main story.

Still, it is only a ‘potential.’ For most of the story, Sunny remains a passive character. The places that he and Kel go to hang out are all places that Kel says they should visit for old time’s sake. Confronting Aubrey because she is bullying Basil is something Kel urges him to do. Even in HEADSPACE, it is Aubrey who urges Omori to lead the party to save Basil and tells the party where to go or what they should do. Everything Sunny does, it is always at someone else’s behest. He is, after all, someone who runs away from responsibility or decision-making to avoid conflict. In all but the TRUE ENDING, Sunny ultimately avoids making the decision to change and succumbs to his guilt, either ending his life or suppressing himself even further.

As a result, the first plot point only occurs when Sunny chooses to confront the truth for himself, showcased through the moment he breaks the black light bulb in WHITE SPACE-- the black light bulb that represents “a suppression of an idea.” By breaking the light bulb suppressing his memories, Sunny forces Omori to turn HEADSPACE into BLACK SPACE and unleash the SOMETHINGS to stop Sunny in his path.

Thus begins Act 2, where Sunny faces each of his fears head-on and recovers his memories from memory lane. Even with Omori’s attempt to deter him or Omori trying to silence Basil from telling the truth; even with the fear that he will lose all of the friendships he had just made and regained in the past few days, Sunny gathers up his courage to confront the truth. Believing in the support his friends have given him, Sunny repairs his broken violin and confronts Omori with it for the second plot point.

Last but not least is the third act: Sunny ‘defeats’ his alter ego. This isn’t accomplished through the usual beatdown found in combat. Sunny quickly realizes that he can’t win against Omori. Instead, Sunny triumphs by giving himself the closure that he has never gotten. He plays his first and final duet with Mari, convincing Omori that Sunny is able to accept the truth and accept Omori as a part of himself. With his internal conflicts resolved, Sunny is able to reach out to Basil and save him before finally telling his friends the truth of Mari’s passing.

But wait! When putting this into perspective, it appears that a large chunk of *OMORI*’s story cannot be included in the three-act structure by definition of its elements. Because the story has very little change or story-relevant events taking place from Sunny’s unwillingness to take action, it pushes the first plot point to the very last two to three hours of the game. This then begs the question: if so much of *OMORI*’s middle is ‘filler’ that can be omitted in the three-act structure, does this mean that *OMORI* could have been executed better and is a poorly written story?

Not necessarily. *OMORI* does have its issues when it comes to filler and story-writing, but the story structure is not the cause of those problems. Rather than viewing *OMORI* through the three-act structure, it is best to take into account that *OMORI* was conceptualized and created by

a Japanese-American artist. This likely influenced the storytelling structure of choice as *OMORI* is actually a *kishoutenketsu* story, which is a four-act storytelling structure commonly used in Japanese media.

Compared to the beginning, middle, and end found in three-act structures, *kishoutenketsu* is made up of an introduction, development, twist, and conclusion. For *OMORI*, the beginning or first act of the three-act structure and the introduction of *kishoutenketsu* are quite similar: both first acts are used to establish and introduce key elements of the story and/or setting that the audience needs to know going forward.

It is from there that the two diverge. The purpose of *kishoutenketsu*'s second act is to develop and flesh out the elements introduced in the first act; almost everything imaginable is expanded upon to make the world feel more lived in and alive. While minor conflicts may occur during this act, they don't fundamentally shake up the story's plotline and instead supplement the development it is currently going through in the second act. This is exactly the case with *OMORI* where Sunny and Omori's respective times in the REAL WORLD and HEADSPACE are spent 'meandering' in these settings, allowing Sunny to familiarize himself with his old friends and the people of FARAWAY TOWN again while Omori is desperately trying to dissuade Sunny from remembering the truth by finding HEADSPACE Basil. They both have confrontations and encounters - with Sunny and Kel fighting Aubrey in the REAL WORLD and the various boss fights in HEADSPACE - but they only hint towards the overarching story to come and don't actually push the story forward.

Nothing major really happens until the sudden twist where, upon finding HEADSPACE Basil, Omori treats him callously. The person he and his friends have been looking for and the person who is supposed to be his best friend? Omori ignores his pleas for help and outright stabs him to death, silencing him so that he can ascend to the throne in RED SPACE and take full control of HEADSPACE. It is at this moment that the player realizes that, not only were Sunny and Basil actively involved in Mari's passing, but they were playing as the game's main antagonist for a majority of the game. It is Omori who has been keeping HEADSPACE Basil away from everyone. Omori is the one who has been responsible for perpetuating the constant cycle in HEADSPACE and actively trying to keep Sunny away from the truth.

With the twist driving the story onward and unveiling what the story is really, it begins to approach its conclusion. *Kishoutenketsu*'s final act resembles the final part of the three-act structure in this regard. For *OMORI*, this is everything leading up to his final confrontation with Omori and his decision to reach out and save Basil from SOMETHING. These culminate into the final conclusion where, after forgiving himself and stopping Basil from succumbing to his fears, he tells his friends the truth.

The writers deliberately chose *kishoutenketsu* because of how well it complemented *OMORI* in a way that the three-act structure cannot. After all, the concepts and ideas *OMORI* tries to explore actively clash with the three-act structure or monomyth, which necessitates an ‘active’ protagonist who is constantly trying to engage with conflict... something Sunny simply is not.

OMORI's Intentional Use of Ludonarrative Dissonance

This idea that the three-act structure or monomyth would actively clash with *OMORI* is best exemplified in *OMORI*'s use of ludonarrative dissonance. As previously stated, Sunny is a very passive character who simply goes along with the flow of what other characters are doing; he rarely, if ever, makes his own decisions. The most active thing Sunny does - prior to the story's twist - is creating HEADSPACE so that he can escape from the truth; the other is choosing to answer the door when Kel knocks.

And because Sunny is doing everything in his power to avoid the truth, his desires and wants completely clash with that of the player. The story spends a majority of its time in HEADSPACE, which is the perfect place for Sunny to avoid being confronted by his past. Whenever he is in HEADSPACE, he can stay within his own bubble and is never challenged to leave his comfort zone. He is always “waiting for something to happen” rather than taking the initiative to make something happen himself.

As for the player, a number of players go into *OMORI* knowing that it is a horror mystery game. That makes them curious about what could be so horrific about a nostalgic and cutesy game centered around an innocent childhood group of friends. Even if they are not aware of the game's genre, the game immediately dangles the mystery in front of the player by beginning with an out-of-context scene of a younger Basil asking a younger Sunny to promise that they will always be together. It then thrusts them into WHITE SPACE without any goal in mind. The player is then forced to explore and look around the limited space to figure out what they should be doing. It is through these beginning scenes that a precedent is set for the player: they are supposed to be interested in the overall mystery and the game continually makes them curious so they want to unravel the truth behind all of these out-of-context scenes and hints they're being fed. In complete opposition to Sunny, the player wants to know the truth.

The result is a jarring amount of ludonarrative dissonance. Because Sunny wants to spend most of his time in HEADSPACE while the player wants to explore the REAL WORLD and learn more about how Sunny's real friends are doing, the game then tries to force the player to align with Sunny's interests. *Omori* and Sunny continue spending more time in HEADSPACE in an attempt to keep Sunny safe from the truth. They throw the player on all sorts of whimsical adventures, complete with quirky characters and a colorful cast, in hopes that it is enough to dissuade both the player and Sunny from exploring the REAL WORLD further.

Yet, the player still wants to learn what Sunny and Basil did. They want to know the truth behind Mari's death, and in turn, they are the ones that make Sunny answer the door and begin making those first steps to confronting it all. Even when HEADSPACE tries to lure the player in one last time with lengthy fantastical castles or an extravagant casino to fuel an addiction to fantasies - one amusingly named the LAST RESORT - it doesn't dissuade the player. But for all of these efforts being thrown at them, it may do two of the following: it either makes the player wonder why Sunny wants to avoid the truth so badly and try to empathize with him in spite of everything *or* they become frustrated with Sunny and his unwillingness to make a decision, finding his fantasies ridiculous and wanting nothing to do with them.

Both are the point. These are the feelings that *OMORI* wants the player to feel, but it is not something the player can experience without the ludonarrative dissonance and *kishoutenketsu* structure to supplement it. *OMORI* challenges the player to recognize how Sunny is feeling and make them experience the same feelings that Sunny is feeling. Because, deep down, Sunny knows how the player is feeling. Deep down, he is afraid that people will not accept or forgive him for what he has done and he is frustrated with himself for being the way he is.

Narrative Parallels and the Purpose They Serve

HEADSPACE is a reflection of Sunny's subconscious, after all. Though it is not meant to add much to the overarching story, it still provides significant insight on how Sunny feels through narrative parallels.

The first of these narrative parallels can be found in the form of Captain Spaceboy and Sweetheart, who both play major roles throughout HEADSPACE's 'story.' Captain Spaceboy, also known as Space Boyfriend, is a green-haired hero who is hopelessly in love with and adores Sweetheart. Despite the fact that she has abandoned him multiple times and has mistreated him, he continues to crave her affection and respect, idolizing her to an unhealthy, almost dependent degree. As angry as he is at her for constantly leaving him and breaking their promise to be together, he still finds it "almost impossible [...] to imagine life apart from her " and continues to ask her for another chance. In spite of everything, he hopes that she won't abandon him and break his heart again.

But she does, driving him to seclude himself on a desolate mountain with nothing but the desire to die (particularly in the HIKIKOMORI ROUTE). Amidst all of his suffering, the only thing he has "left are [his memories]" of him and Sweetheart, signaling a wish to return to what once was of their past.

Sweetheart still wants nothing to do with him. From the start, she was always someone selfish who constantly wanted more and could not stand being challenged or rejected. Anyone who refused to feed into her fantasies would be sent to the dungeons, as she is "the one who makes

the rules around here.” These horrible dungeons are the place where Sweetheart silences those who refuse to go her way, sometimes to the point of partaking in sadistic torture. It is here that the HEADSPACE party may find previous versions of themselves, tortured and executed. Time and time again, she has been a primary obstacle in stopping the party from finding HEADSPACE Basil and constantly distracting them from their goals. Still, it is not just that.

Should she be rejected multiple times over by HEADSPACE Hero, she begins to delude herself into finding justification for his rejections and ultimately comes off as someone who is so self-absorbed in herself, she cannot face the truth that she is an utterly detestable person. Even when given the utmost love and devotion by someone who truly cares for her, she gets rid of Captain Spaceboy the moment he is no longer of use to her and cares for no one but herself. And when all is said and done, she is left a crawling, crying, and broken mess who is dragged away by a shadowy, demonic monster in the basement or dungeon that was meant to be her fantasy kingdom where she was supposed to get everything she ever wanted.

When laid out like this, it becomes evident that Sunny has projected his relationship with Basil onto Captain Spaceboy and Sweetheart. Much like Captain Spaceboy, Basil hopelessly idolizes Sunny as his best and only friend who he is willing to do just about anything for. But though the two promise to always be with one another, Sunny completely abandons Basil, leaving Basil to suffer in a broken state all on his own for the past four years. Yet Basil continues to cling onto the hope that Sunny will come back to him, as exemplified by the STRANGERS who tell Omori that “[t]here are some who still believe in you” and that Basil has “been waiting for someone to save him all this time.” Basil is the one who wonders if, one day, things can go back to the way they were before and desperately hopes that his “words reach [Sunny] one more time.” But in almost every ending, Sunny never does. Even though Basil is the one he confided in most and Basil had done so much to help him and keep him safe, Sunny abandons him the same way Sweetheart abandoned Captain Spaceboy. It is as if Sunny got rid of Basil the moment he no longer needed him, leading Basil to die in every ending except the true ending.

To further the parallels to Sweetheart, Sunny has constantly tried to live in his own fantasy where everything is right according to what he wants. He is the one ‘making’ the rules in HEADSPACE via Omori, refusing to hear or even consider the actual opinions or thoughts of his friends in the REAL WORLD. And through Omori, Sunny is distracting himself from the truth - that he has been a horribly selfish person who abandoned all of his friends (and especially Basil) when they needed him most - and torturing and killing the imagined versions of his friends. Much like Basil, and much like Sweetheart, he succumbs to his guilt and fears of SOMETHING in all but one ending. In escaping to HEADSPACE, the place where he got everything he thought he wanted, he is consumed by his own thoughts and feelings; he ultimately dies to them.

Captain Spaceboy, though hopeless and clearly desperate, is always painted in a sympathetic light. He is someone who is trying his best and puts his heart into what he does for the one he loves, even if it is never reciprocated. This is not unlike Basil, who Sunny feels immense remorse over abandoning and leaving to suffer under Aubrey's relentless bullying for the past four years.

And that only makes him feel even more guilty. He, as Omori - his alter ego - puts it, is someone who has "caused so much suffering," is "selfish" and "less than useless." He is someone who has "never done anything for anyone else." Sunny, just like Sweetheart, is a ridiculous, unsympathetic villain who "[doesn't] deserve to live."

Should there be any doubt that Sunny finds himself a frustrating, ridiculous, and unsympathetic mess, then it is made even more apparent in HEADSPACE's technical final barrier between HEADSPACE and BLACK SPACE: Humphrey. In spite of his grand role, Humphrey is a friendly-seeming giant whale who lives in an isolated cavern all on his lonesome. With no contact to anyone or anything else, his insides serve as his primary source of amusement or entertainment. Each of them are assigned a different role, personality, and task to play, leading Humphrey to talk to himself in increasingly bizarre fantasies. Still, though Humphrey appears as polite and friendly as can be, he is still a complete and utter monster who doesn't hesitate to try and eat the HEADSPACE party-- something that he has done several times. He is always swallowing up undesirable things, even if they hurt him. Because rather than dealing with painful matters, he tries to bury them all in hopes that they disappear instead.

It is within Humphrey that Omori makes one final attempt to force the party to forget about HEADSPACE Basil and the truth. In a true last ditch effort, the ludonarrative dissonance actively tries to punish the player for even thinking about Basil or remembering him. And for many, this is the point where they grow completely and utterly exasperated with the HEADSPACE segments. How is it that a seemingly harmless-looking whale who roleplays in his own fantasies to ignore the fact that he's a complete monster who can't help but eat everything up the final obstacle to learning the truth?

... But who else is a seemingly harmless person who comes up with fantasies and imaginary versions of people to talk to in his head, using them as entertainment to ignore and cope with the fact that he is a sick monster who has done so many horrible things? Who else is trying to bury the truth and everything pertaining to it in his head?

In a terribly mocking manner, Humphrey serves as a representation of Sunny himself. He is his own final obstacle to the truth, and he cannot help but notice just how ridiculous and outright pathetic it all is. When looking at himself like this, does he really think he can change? Does he

really think he has the ability to confront the truth when he can barely do something about how he is now, even when it is shoved right in his face?

“No matter what you do, it will be hopeless.”
“They’ll hate you as much as you hate yourself.”

... Right?

The last and final narrative parallel begs the player to reconsider this notion. Fittingly, it is the only narrative parallel mentioned here that isn't a figment of Sunny's imagination. Rather, this parallel is found in the REAL WORLD through Aubrey.

In the current day and age, Aubrey is wrought with pent-up anger towards her old friends. Because nobody has tried to communicate with each other, she is under the belief that she is the only one still seemingly upset about Mari's passing while everyone has moved on too quickly. This anger is made worse towards Basil, who she mistakenly believes is sabotaging and tarnishing the memories they all had with each other. Her anger mirrors the anger and frustration Sunny felt amidst his duet practices with Mari. Even though her uptight perfectionism seemed to be driving him up the wall, he never told her how he felt and let it fester within. It appears Mari never noticed how Sunny was feeling either as she continued to move forward with practice like nothing happened.

But because Sunny actively pushed his feelings and the others away, he couldn't take it anymore. He explodes in an argument with Mari the night before the recital, and, as she tries to calm him down, he pushes her right down the stairs, killing her immediately. Similarly, Aubrey has been pushing away all of her old friends and dissuading them from interacting with her as she simmered in her own anger. The root cause of it is the lack of communication to clear up misunderstandings and reconcile, but she gives them no chance to talk about it.

Her anger rises until, in a fit of anger as she asks where all of her friends were when she needed them most, she accidentally shoves Basil into the lake. Were it not for Sunny being urged to dive in and save Basil and Hero showing up right in the nick of time to pull them both out of the lake, Basil and Sunny could've both potentially drowned. Aubrey could have killed Basil.

And if she did? Would her friends - both new and old - grow to hate her and never trust her again? Would they find her a completely unforgivable monster? What would she think of herself if she actually killed one of her former friends, someone she truthfully knew was too kindhearted to do such horrible things? Would she be completely deserving of the suffering she's feeling because she was irrationally angry at Basil in the first place?

Fortunately, Basil does not die from this incident. But if Basil had died, perhaps Aubrey also would've become so overwhelmed with guilt and suffering that she couldn't stand it. Accident it may be, she could come to believe she is a complete monster who had relentlessly bullied someone who didn't deserve it-- all because she had been so caught up in her own feelings and didn't reciprocate his attempts to reach out; she never tried to talk things out with him and instead blamed him for simply not understanding how she fault. Her potential response is particularly evident in the endings where the friend group manage to reconcile but Sunny does not reach out to save Basil (thus, leading to his death by suicide). Aubrey immediately blames herself, believing she had driven him to death by relentlessly bullying him. She is frozen on the ground, incapable of anything more than constant apologies and pleas for Basil's forgiveness; an overwhelming sense of guilt strikes her because she caused her friend's death-- even if indirectly. So overcome with guilt and remorse, she could come to believe that, just like Sunny, no matter how understandable the circumstances may have been, "[everyone]'ll abandon [her] like [she] did them... and that's what [she] deserve[s]."

"It would be better" for her "to just die."

"Close Your Eyes And You'll Leave This Dream": How Pain and Suffering Can Push Someone to the Brink

Some believe that death is the gentlest, most peaceful blessing they could receive in their lifetime. But most would disagree, given that everything disappears upon death. Choosing to die would never cross their mind.

Still, it is not just the great pleasures of life that go. It is also the pain and suffering holding someone at a chokehold, leaving them flailing in every which way to find some means of escape. The longer they can't break free, the more death tempts them as a respite. While many are likely to have memories flashing through their eyes, urging them to continue fighting, some simply don't. Even if they do, those memories have all been tainted... tainted by the very existence of the person they belong to.

The melancholy overshadows any potential joy that the person can find, leaving nothing but agony in their wake.

This is the feeling that *OMORI* captures. While the game ends on a very optimistic note with its true ending, *OMORI* goes out of its way to put its players into the shoes of someone struggling with suicidal ideation and who suffers from crippling depression. They experience firsthand how much Sunny wants to escape the pain he's feeling by being conditioned that the only way forward is for Omori to stab himself every time they leave HEADSPACE, to continue the story. Many feel disgust and betrayed by Sunny as they unravel more of the story's mystery, realizing that Sunny was the one to kill Mari and participated in framing his manslaughter as a suicide...

That was his sister, right? How could he do such a horrible thing to her? It does not take long for them to realize that Sunny feels this very same disgust towards himself - the same way Aubrey would be disgusted with herself should Basil die - as Omori spits out scathing words of hate, 'revealing' just how monstrous Sunny is and how much everyone would hate him for what he did. Of course they would hate him. Who wouldn't? More than anyone else, he knows just how detestable and sick of a person he is.

Both of these unbearably dreadful feelings are best captured through a story-required BLACK SPACE door: the CAT DISSECTION. In this room, Omori is told by the Butler that Mewo - Mari's beloved pet cat - has been very, very bad and Omori is prompted to cut Mewo open. More often than not, players are horrified that this is something they seemingly *must* do to proceed.

There must be another way.

There must be, they tell themselves as they comb the room and find themselves empty-handed. Left with no other options to grasp onto, most steel themselves to cut Mewo open. They are then treated to Mewo being blissfully unaware of what is going on before visibly panicking as Omori coldly kills her. Right then and there, he cements to the player and himself that he is just as inhumane and terrible as believed. At least they're able to leave now... but no door has opened. They keep "waiting for something to happen." Anything.

Yet nothing does.

It is then that the player may realize they do have another way of escaping the room. Like the other times they've escaped HEADSPACE, they could have had Omori stab himself. In fact, it is even possible to have Omori stab himself and escape without even cutting Mewo open. A sickening feeling sinks into their stomach as they realize that killing Mewo accomplished nothing. There was always another way.

Omori will always have to kill himself to proceed. It may be before they have him kill Mewo, too horrified at the idea of cutting her up and unable to stomach that they would even consider that an option-- dying themselves without dragging an innocent life in would be for the best. Or it may be after they've already cut Mewo open, crushed by the weight of their actions as they realize it could have all been avoided if they hadn't convinced themselves that heartlessly killing another was their only option.

The game has pushed the player and Omori/Sunny to the brink: no matter what they do, death is the only way forward and it is for the best that they are dead. This is what Sunny and Omori have convinced themselves of-- that they are undeserving of life because of how much hurt and pain they cause others and cause themselves; this is the only way to make all of that pain disappear.

OMORI delivers a visceral experience of how it feels to be tortured by your own existence. Players are left sickened by what they've done and by themselves. In turn, they begin to understand why those suffering from depression may be driven into suicide. They understand that the people suffering don't choose suicide out of selfishness or out of cowardice. Rather, it is because they have become convinced that the world would be better off without them. They are completely and utterly alone.

With the way *OMORI* captures self-loathing and suicidal ideation, players are then going to fall into two categories. There will be those who better understand the suffering and pain of those struggling with mental health. And then there will be those who realize that they are not as alone as they thought; there are people who know how they feel and can relate to their experiences. No matter which camp *OMORI*'s players fall into, one thing is for certain: the game showcases a painfully realistic insight into depression and urges people to connect with one another in a way that few stories have managed to accomplish.

Strongest Element

Still, what *OMORI* has accomplished in portraying depression is something that other stories have also done. Stories about the impact loss has on people that it comes with, is not something unique to *OMORI*. What makes *OMORI* stand out from the crowd is the way it plays with the player's expectations. Because players are quickly told that Mari is dead and can see the effects her death has had on their friend group, they come to believe that *OMORI* is another story addressing trauma and grief-- that all of Sunny and Basil's pain is due to survivor's guilt and how the two hadn't done enough for Mari. While the pain of loss plays a pivotal role in *OMORI*'s story, that is not all the game tackles. It can't be, because Sunny and Basil's self-loathing go deeper than that.

Compared to other games that tackle the issue of suicide and guilt from loss, Sunny and Basil challenge the player's willingness to empathize with them when the truth is revealed. Even if it was an accident, Sunny still actually killed his sister. Even if it was out of good intentions, Basil helped Sunny frame Mari's death as suicide. The two have every reason to be consumed by guilt and hate themselves because they aren't actually innocent. They did something that was objectively horrible and wrong, causing everyone around them to suffer in turn. Still, they were and still are children. Can't they be given another chance to make things right?

Thus, on top of the already well-done themes surrounding grief and depression, *OMORI* truly stands out by expertly subverting the player's expectations and adding a layer of nuance that other games shy away from: it is possible for someone to do terrible things without being terrible people themselves; given the chance, they can learn to forgive themselves and change.

Unsuccessful Element

As a concept, HEADSPACE is just about everything Sunny could ask for: an assortment of bizarre and wacky characters, little to no stakes without much conflict, and a boundless sense of fun and adventure to be had. But for a game? HEADSPACE is the primary source for *OMORI*'s major issues.

Of these many issues, HEADSPACE largely contributes to the game's poor pacing. By design, Sunny's imaginary world is supposed to be a place where Sunny can run away from the truth, and by extension, the plot. As a representation of our protagonist's unwillingness to confront what he has done, every visit to HEADSPACE brings the story to a complete halt. Nothing moves forward or progresses while Sunny is in HEADSPACE, and the fictitious plot of HEADSPACE is just a dream. Nothing in HEADSPACE is really relevant to the plot until the final act, but the player has to spend hours upon hours of time there with REAL WORLD segments being short and limited.

That is not to say that HEADSPACE itself has no relevance whatsoever-- a multitude of hints and clues to the overarching story are littered all throughout HEADSPACE. Some sections, such as the LOST LIBRARY, are mandatory to continue the story and plant major information (such as Sunny's broken violin being in the toy box) that fully comes to light by the final act.

But a majority of the game's foreshadowing is hidden away and easily missable unless the player goes out of their way to look for it (ex. the hidden LOST FOREST where Daddy Longlegs divulges information on how HEADSPACE came to be and how Sunny is unable to run away forever). Furthermore, the breadcrumbs in HEADSPACE are quite minimal. It is entirely possible for a player to go a handful of hours through the game without actually learning more about the overarching story. And as players realize that most of what is required in HEADSPACE is irrelevant to the story and many of the optional side-quests add little to the story, they start rushing through HEADSPACE. Thus, the schism between what Sunny wants and what the player wants heightens even further.

It is only after HEADSPACE becomes BLACK SPACE under Omori's control that HEADSPACE affects the story, for this is one of the scarce few moments that Sunny makes an active decision in the game: the decision to confront the truth and face himself once and for all, leading Omori to directly oppose Sunny. Yet, the final act's pacing is just as dragged out, with players being confronted with 18 doors to enter before they are finally shown the truth in full.

Fortunately, only 8 of the 18 doors are actually required for the player to progress through the game. Unfortunately, players may miss out on significant characterization as later doors serve as symbolism to Sunny's state of mind. This set-up essentially punishes players for skipping the

other 10 doors and reflects the pacing issue that HEADSPACE has presented throughout the entirety of the game.

What then, can be done? Doing away with HEADSPACE is not an option, as the setting is the focal point in representing Sunny's escapism. Rather than removing HEADSPACE or altering how it works at its core, it would be better to highlight a little-utilized aspect of HEADSPACE. Have HEADSPACE change in reaction to Sunny's interactions with his friends in the REAL WORLD, at least during the true route. Given that HEADSPACE abruptly changed to accommodate for Sunny overcoming his fear of heights in the REAL WORLD with no fanfare, it would only make sense that Sunny choosing to leave his room for the first time in four years and come in-contact with his friends again would cause dramatic changes to his safe space. The versions of his friends in HEADSPACE could have jarring clashes or strange discrepancies to better reflect Sunny's conflict in clinging to nostalgia and not wanting things to change from before versus how reality has caused his friends to dramatically change. Does his mind actively fight against these changes by trying to ignore them? Does he try to amend or come to terms with these changes by haphazardly combining the two versions in his head? Or does he subconsciously accept these changes and HEADSPACE incorporates these changes without bringing notice to them? In other words, how does Sunny respond to his friends changing like this?

Not only would this add onto HEADSPACE providing insight into his generally absent thoughts (as a silent protagonist with little to no internal dialogue), but it would also add onto the unsettling and jarring atmosphere encompassing HEADSPACE. These changes could occur and simply be accepted as if they have been there all along. The player will also be forced to accept it, no matter how random or discomfiting it may feel. Most of all, it will make HEADSPACE more 'real' and 'dynamic' by connecting it to the main story and the reality that Sunny has to face: no matter how much he tries to suppress it all, the truth will find a way to slip through the cracks and catch up to him. He cannot run away forever.

Highlight

OMORI inevitably peaks at the final boss fight. It is the moment when Sunny picks up his violin and resolves to face the truth. In doing so, he takes on a fight against the manifestation of his depression and crippling guilt that was meant to protect him from his pain and suffering: the titular character, Omori.

But just how far can that resolve go in a fight against the darkest parts of himself?

Omori is someone who will not succumb, no matter what is thrown at him-- a trait that players are more than familiar with after their lengthy journeys in HEADSPACE. Only now, they are on

the receiving end of it, exemplifying just how difficult it is for someone to fend off their suicidal ideation and pain.

It is a harrowing task, given how Omori is intimately aware of everything Sunny is afraid of and how he feels because he is Sunny. He always stabs Sunny right in the heart with his words as he tries to erase Sunny from existence. There is no sugarcoating any of it because Sunny knows there's some truth to it: he has always been a passive individual who bottled up his feelings and didn't communicate with his loved ones until it was too late; he ran away from the truth and abandoned his friends; he constantly hides behind others and lets them deal with the consequences of his actions, never owning up to his mistakes. What he does - the flawed traits he has - are detestable. He is a detestable person who would never be forgiven by his friends. For everyone's sake, he would be better off dead.

Still, these feelings are ones that Sunny has been surrounded by for the past four years. He has heard and told himself these horrible things for so long that they have become 'normal' or 'manageable' to him. Omori's words aren't enough to break him and stop him from fighting, even as the fight grows visually unsettling with the red hands appearing in the background-- the very red hands that Omori uses to control HEADSPACE and hands that Sunny pushed Mari down the stairs with.

With their appearance, this battle of attrition has started to fall into Omori's control. Sunny unknowingly begins losing ground by accepting the vitriol Omori throws at him as the truth, even if just by a little. Omori continues to slam Sunny with everything he's got, manifesting a hellish image of Mari in the background to remind Sunny of what he's done amidst Sunny's attempts to recall his friends' warmth and support.

Eventually, Omori's relentless onslaught works. Omori forces Sunny to confront the cruel horrible truth: "You killed Mari. She loved you and you killed her." Sunny becomes afraid, and the battle distorts into something even more hellish. Omori's appearance grows nightmarish. The silhouettes of his friends, hung by the neck, cast a shadow over the battlefield, signifying the fear that Sunny has over hurting them all further. And finally, the once peaceful violin in the back is now accompanied by painful ringing in his ear and mangled sounds born from his intensifying stress, forcing Sunny to relive the moment he killed Mari.

It is at this very moment that players who have been disgusted with Sunny and the twist that he was responsible for Mari's death realize that Sunny is every bit as disgusted with himself as the player is with him. That was his sister - his sister who had always been there for him and practically raised him with so much adoration and care - and he *killed* her. How could he *ever* forgive the monster who killed her? That person "should just die."

Everything becomes too much for Sunny and so, Omori triumphs over him in battle. Sunny knows he can't keep going on like this. He can't fight and beat Omori at all. But in spite of knowing he can't win, Sunny chooses to get up and keep going. He keeps going - not to try and win a fight against himself - to take a step forward on a new path and give himself the closure he's always needed. Sunny performs the duet he never got to perform with Mari, reminiscing on all of the memories and love she gave him and their friends over the years for one final journey together. Even if she is truly, wholeheartedly gone and will never come back, she will still remain as part of the warmth in his heart. And that is something Sunny is now willing to accept-- just as he now accepts and embraces Omori as a part of himself. Painful a part it is, this is something that he will have to carry for the rest of his life.

But that is something Sunny has resolved to manage. Rather than trying to fight it, he will instead make new memories and grow around it. With enough time and care, that once painfully large part will become smaller in comparison. He can forgive himself and change.

Everything about Sunny's final confrontation with Omori rings true to the struggles I've also faced.

So many think it is easy to 'beat' or 'win against' depression, but that's simply not the case. Depression takes root deep within a person's heart, eating away at their entire being until it feels as though dread is all that remains. While it is possible to ignore it, some trace will always fester. Running away will only give temporary respite, for true escape is impossible. Thus, it is better to grow around it and properly care for it so that the pain does not spread. Care for it so that the person may persevere, in spite of everything.

For *OMORI* to convey all of these feelings I once struggled with and - to some extent - still do, I will always hold this fight and Sunny and Mari's 'Final Duet' dear to my heart. These feelings aren't okay, but it's still okay to live.

Just remember...

"Even if you try to bottle it all up... it all comes out somehow. I want to say that everything will be okay. That we have no choice, but to carry on. But... that's up to you."

Critical Reception

Rachel Watts' Review on *PC Gamer*: 8/10

In her review, Rachel Watts likens *OMORI* to many of the prior RPG maker horror classics of the early 2000s, particularly in the way its horror elements "wade into the dark waters of mental health and the story gets a little grim towards the end." However, she finds that "certain

decisions made in the game's climax" end up "undermin[ing] some of the game's main story beats" and it "nearly slips into the trope of everything being solved with 'the power of friendship.'" That is not to say that the writing quality is too poor or cliché. On the contrary, Watts ultimately concludes that *OMORI*'s "heartfelt moments are backed up with great storytelling and characters you really for," woven by the passion and love that the Omocat team poured into making the game.

Patrick Hancock's Review on *Destructoid*: 8.5/10

Similarly, Patrick Hancock comments that *OMORI*'s main draw "is the emotional plot" with its story being a treat for anyone fond of story-focused games-- one that they will never forget after experiencing the final act. His main complaints for the story lie in how he wished "the gameplay and story meshed better together" as he found some sections of the game poorly paced and ultimately wanted nothing to do with the battle system. To put it simply, "[t]here is so much to love in *OMORI*, though it feels like the unlovable items do their best to get in the way as much as possible." Yet, Hancock is more than willing to look past all of the game's issues, sharing that his criticisms "are *almost entirely wiped away* by virtue of the perfect finale" that makes everything worth it.

Nic Reuben's Review on *TheSixthAxis*: 9/10

Nic Reuben points out how *OMORI* tends to lean into its nostalgic feeling, utilizing "the player's experience with other games... [with] riffs on design language that use [the player's] own familiarity to toy with [them]." This is something that is quite fitting with the game's overall themes of reminiscing and childhood nostalgia. And within these lighthearted themes, "the breadcrumb trail leading to the final moments is so carefully spread" and makes it clear that the story is "dedicated to exploring trauma" in a way that makes its difficult moments feel earned. "*OMORI* is a sad game that made [the reviewer] smile a lot," with a sense of personal and relatable emotions that makes the game's story truly stand out.

Lessons

- **Balance out high-tension scenes with low-tension moments:** Though *OMORI* tackles heavy topics such as depression, suicide ideation, and other mental health issues, the game never comes off as overly bleak. The game accomplishes this by carefully balancing and spreading out its emotional beats. For all of the hard-hitting or serious moments in the story, there are also plenty of lighthearted, comedic, and/or calm scenes where the characters and player are given an opportunity to breathe. Everyone is given the time they need to process the events of the story. This then gives the characters a chance to behave and interact outside the confines of the overarching mystery, letting them feel more like actual nuanced people instead of generic set pieces in a story. The contrast then leads lighthearted moments to feel more cheerful and serious moments to

feel more grave, making the story and people in it feel real. That sense of ‘realness’ is the key to stirring the audience’s hearts.

- **Weave storytelling into the gameplay:** Of the ways *OMORI* excels, the way it weaves storytelling into gameplay is clever. From the way photos are a consistent visual motif throughout the game to the emotions system reflecting how the characters grieve, *OMORI* makes use of gameplay to tell its story. But *OMORI*’s combat is something players actively want to ignore so that they can advance through the story more quickly. Only *OMORI*’s final fight is as strong as it is due to how skillfully it utilizes the emotion’s system, the player’s immersion, and story beats. It justifies why that moment is best told through games and shows why weaving storytelling into the gameplay is crucial. If the story and game feel too disconnected from one another, then it begs the question as to why the story couldn’t be a movie or TV show instead. Take advantage of the elements that make storytelling in games unique and use them to enhance the story and characters. A story-focused game can have a wonderful story, but it can amount to little if the gameplay isn’t also enjoyable; story-focused games should still be good and fun games.
- **Don’t make crucial/significant story or character moments easily missable:** Many significant events in the game are easily missable and can detract from the player’s experience or understanding of the characters. One example of these completely optional and missable moments is when Hero finally makes peace with Mari’s passing and visits her grave for the first time, allowing him to reconcile with Kel and move forward alongside the others. Missing these events may weaken the sincerity and hopeful feeling that the game tries to end on, as the player will lack the substance that makes it work. While it is important to reward players who go out of their way to explore, the reward shouldn’t be something that would have worked better as a part of the main story.
- **Don’t frustrate players with poor pacing:** *OMORI*’s ludonarrative dissonance is one of the key features that makes its story unique and stand out among many similar story-focused games. However, the game often takes it to an extreme and ends up frustrating players who want to advance. The cause of this extremity lies in how much of the game is spent in HEADSPACE, an area practically dedicated to ignoring the plot by narrative design. Either cut down on excess filler and/or better plant information throughout to avoid excruciatingly slow pacing; reward players with information relevant to the story and characters for the time they invest into the game.
- **Explore other storytelling structures and use one that best complements the story you are trying to tell:** Compared to many of the other popular or mainstream media (particularly in western media), *OMORI* takes a different approach to storytelling by utilizing *kishoutenketsu*. This is to the game’s benefit, as the three-act structure and hero’s

journey actively clash with the concepts and ideas that *OMORI* wants to explore. Furthermore, the three-act structure and hero's journey aren't the only story structures to exist. Stories from various cultures throughout history have been told using other structures such as the *johakyu*, robleto, or daisy chain/spokeswheel storytelling. So use the story structure that best complements the themes and messages you want to tell or take creative liberties to do so. The three-act structure and monomyth are not strict formulas that must be used for a story to be well-written.

Summation

OMORI is far from the first to address themes of guilt, grief, suicidal ideation, escapism, depression, and other similar mental health issues. It is also far from the best-executed or most highly-acclaimed work of the sort, weighed down by many valid criticisms that leave much to be desired from both its gameplay and story. But *OMORI* still captured the hearts of many. Why? What about its story writing and characters made people so willing to be like a sunflower, always seeing the game's bright side in spite of its imperfection? What about it made those struggling with their mental health feel seen? These are questions best answered through an in-depth narrative analysis of the game. After all, people are drawn to *OMORI* because of its story elements and characters. In analyzing the game and experiencing it all anew, anyone would find it difficult to walk away from *OMORI* without a newfound sense of hope. The game may be an imperfect mess. But it and the people it has touched are worthy of love all the same.

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