

Game Narrative Review

=====

Your name: Isaiah M. Singleton

Your school: Drexel University

Your email: ims73@drexel.edu

Month/Year you submitted this review: December 2025

=====

Game Title: Metal Garden

Platform: Microsoft Windows

Genre: Adventure Game

Release Date: May 21, 2025

Developer: Tinerasoft

Publisher: Tinerasoft

Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Aleksandra Herout

Overview

In Metal Garden, the world is set within a megastructure where countless civilizations have run their courses, and the remnants of civilization are locked in desperate wars for scraps amidst its vast emptiness. Time has become meaningless, and each day inside the megastructure is just a battle for survival, but more importantly, an attempt to breach the entombed walls of the megastructure to escape and find out the secrets of what those who came before built. The path outside the walls of the megastructure has never been broken nor charted. You play a lone nomad, whose sole objective is to escape the massive megastructure, and make the discovery that countless civilizations trapped inside the megastructure have tried to answer: What is beyond the concrete sky and floor of the megastructure?

Characters

- **The Nomad** - Metal Garden's protagonist. A silent, cloaked scavenger not aligned with any faction, and the petty differences that have driven them to near-extinction. The Nomad's personality is directly translated to his goals, transfixed on finally escaping the megastructure he's been entombed in. Their demeanor is stern, cold, and calculating, driven by survival instinct, using their repertoire of weapons to kill anyone who stands in their way. Despite his featureless depiction in the game, he has a certain degree of fragility. When he

gets injured enough, he will become crippled, and his hands will become shaky when aiming with weapons. Although the Nomad never speaks a word of dialogue in the game, his humanity and fragility are entirely on display, and his silence throughout the game reflects the oppressive, echoing void of the megastructure itself, and the silence supplements the player's own determined obligation to conquer it.

- **Mercenary Scavengers** - The enemies the player faces in the game. The scavengers are a joint alliance between a humanoid race and the dissolved remains of a group of anthropomorphic leopards called the Rhea Secretorium. Scattered amongst the tallest and smallest stretches of the world to transport materials, reconnaissance, and guard areas of interest. These scavengers utilize ambush tactics. Despite being the only source of combat, their presence inside the game brings an underlying sense of dread due to their tactics, sniping the player from great distances, hiding until the perfect moment, which reinforces the idea that the megastructure, amidst its massive size, is still occupied with people desperate to stop you just as desperate the player is to find an exit.
- **The Forebearers** - Not officially named inside the game, the Forebearers are the people or entities responsible for the world of Metal Garden. These people are shrouded in an amalgamation of mystery, not in the purpose of why they built the megastructures, but in the incomprehensible means of how they built one at such a cosmic scale. Their place inside of Metal Garden is unrelentingly omnipresent, with their mechanical megastructures far outscaling the small breaths of life that loom across the game's world in suppressive fashion and becoming the founding motif of Metal Garden's atmosphere.
- **The Central Sirenean Mining Group (CSMG)** - The Central Faction in the game. The CSMG is yet another blip of civilization inside the megastructure that is on the verge of collapse due to their development of discovering a possible way out and their resulting actions. Once a mining group that vetted resources and people around to find a way out, their hubris and greed came into fruition once the rumor of a way out of the megastructure circulated. The plot point the CSMG find themselves in is blowing up a surrounding dam and blaming the engineers as a cover-up. The main concern the CSMG has is that upon further discovery of the exit, people will leave in a mass exodus, in turn plummeting the CSMG's assets, and leaving the group in a frenzy for survival. In the end, CSMG ended up exactly what they feared would become of them after the discovery of the exit.
- **King of Rhea Secretorium** - An NPC you find in the beginning beats of Metal Garden, bleeding out and rambling to himself as his life fades. The King of Rhea

Secretorium leads the leopard soldiers that the player fights against inside the megastructure. The King caught wind of the exit found by the CSMG and intercepted the discovery. After a bloody battle between the CSMG and Rhea Secretorium, the King's status is no more, as the leopard soldiers turned against their former King, leaving him with a meaningless regal crown on his head as he lies dying before you. His presence in the game serves as a message for the futility of power, and more inside the megastructure, it will eventually corrode.

Breakdown

Metal Garden is essentially a 1-person game, with an extended runtime of about 1.5 hrs, so its narrative, by intrinsic indie game limitations, is quite straightforward with little beats found within NPCs and most of the narrative is dealt in exposition through computer terminals, tablets, or screen text splashes. However, the best of Metal Garden's narrative is found in how it creates a sense of dread and bleakness in the mini-stories that support the encompassing narrative of escaping and uncovering the truth of the megastructure.

The CSMG and the Futility of Power inside the Megastructure.

The Central Sirenean Mining Group (CSMG) story is a tale that centralizes the theme of meaningless power within the megastructure. THE CSMG is implied to be a dying and failing authority inside of Metal Garden. Across the game, environmental storytelling displays that food resources are limited, as the CSMG's central obsession in the game has been trying to find a way out of the megastructure, a goal that past civilizations tried and never accomplished. Already, there is an underlying obsession with legacy, the idea of being the first group of people to find and capitalize on their potential success. Before the events of Metal Garden, it is implied that they initiated excavation projects, exhausted their supply lines, and enforced strict rationing in order to fund their escape initiative under the belief that the final discovery would break open and usher in a new era. However, their hopes would quickly be extinguished upon the realization that their rigorous efforts would be in vain if the news broke out to the entire megastructure. The ruling authority they've gripped on the megastructure would mean nothing if no one is there to be controlled, since everyone would want to leave. As such, the CSMG scrambles to stage a cover-up quickly, but the surrounding factions, such as the Rhea Secretarium, take the opportunity to converge, resulting in more bloodshed and further hits to the infrastructure of power.

This story is quite meaningful when compared to the tale of Ozymandias by Percy Bysshe Shelley, a short poem that focuses on a King obsessed with legacy, but due to

the uncaring expanse of time, he is forgotten, due to the inevitable decline of power. The CSMG's desperation for legacy and control of power is sublimely disturbing, but also in line with the game's terminally bleak atmosphere. To explore this further, think of the implications of their frantic cover-up efforts to prevent a mass exodus. It's not to protect the citizens from venturing onto uncharted land, or freeing them from the eternal prison that is the megastructure; it's to preserve whatever semblance of power and influence the CSMG has in the megastructure. They never cared about the people; it was the idea that they were powerful and that power instilled meaning to the people in charge of a meaningless, perpetual megastructure. But in an ironic twist, the downfall of the CSMG in the story of Metal Garden is a stark reminder that power is simply transient, as it can't last forever. In the megastructure where civilizations have run through entire empires over millions of years, the CSMG is just another domino in the unending cycle of civilizations that have tried to become immortalized in their sphere of influence, only to fade away and leave ruins behind, with no idea that the exit even existed, just like the tale of Ozymandias.

The Nomad, Rhea Secretorium, and the illusion of Faith.

“No Heavenly fields awaited us beyond the structure..”

The King of Rhea Secretorium is a mini-story that operates on the tragedy of how faith can easily be dissolved. In Metal Garden, Faith is a subterranean theme that lies beneath each interaction of adventuring in the game. In the game, you take massive leaps of faith, crossing ravines and all types of megalophonic machinery to get to the eventual destination of a way out of the megastructure. The entire idea of escape and freedom is an idea based on Faith, since the story illuminates that previous attempts have been made countless times. Faith is an inherent quality of living inside the megastructure due to its pull on seeping meaning and purpose deep within the populous inside, and as a result, people need Faith, some sort of guiding throughline to not only make sense of the world they are entombed in, but also a slight trickle that there is a way out. The nomad you play as is the physical manifestation of actionable faith. Given the chance, even the rumor that an exit has been found, you kill countless scavengers, navigate to unseen and uninhabited places of the megastructure, climb and jump death-defying structures, all in the pursuit of achieving freedom, which is faith in its strongest context.

On the other hand, Faith is also a driving motivator for the Rhea Secretorium faction, but also the driving force behind the complete downfall of the faction as well. The King in the story is proud to have had a group of soldiers, a layer of loyalty between himself and his soldiers. The King's special connection to faith is based on one critical line in his dialogue in the game when describing the possibility of escaping the megastructure.

“A Dream of so many civilizations born inside this prison world. We would find those heavenly fields beyond.”

This line from the King sets the entire foundation of Rhea Secretorium. It's a quasi-religious group of people who were led by this King who told of a great paradise outside of the megastructure, instilling the fundamental seeds of faith, as they believed their King to be right, and stuck with him until the discovery of the hole's true contents. At the baseline, this is a disturbingly accurate representation of the psyche of the prolonged effects of internment. The mind wants to believe that there is a life, a reality that is more palpable than the existence of being stuck inside a prison megastructure, to a point where the brain will convince itself and act upon this “newfound” fixation because it was necessary for the mind's survival. The King's prophesied vision of the outside provided structure, identity, and direction in a world where all three were rapidly eroding, giving further drive and enthusiasm to his beliefs, but also motivation to his soldiers.

This is what makes the downfall of Rhea Secretorium more profound and bleak upon the soul-crushing realization that when the soldiers of Rhea Secretorium discovered the exit out of the megastructure, there was literally nothing, just a void of concrete expanding endlessly in all directions. There were no heavenly fields that the King promised, and what follows is the immediate dissolution of faith. For the soldiers, morale didn't just shatter; it completely deconstructed the very faith that justified their unity and their king's authority. The Rhea Secretorium soldiers had endured hardships, obeyed orders through shedding blood under the belief that their faith in the King and loyalty served a meaningful cause, a paradise beyond the walls of the megastructure. After the truth came out, none of the things mattered, and the King was nothing but a fool to the people who followed him. So the remaining soldiers deserted and injured the King, leading to his death in cold betrayal. This mini story in Metal Garden serves as a bigger building block of the world's tone of bleakness. In a world of permanent decay and defined by futility, faith is entirely constructed and doesn't exist in the wild, and the mental scaffolding of Faith crumbles the moment it is confronted with a hopeless, but true reality. Just as religion loses its dominion when belief evaporates, the authority of the King of Rhea Secretorium disintegrates with him and his kingdom. Rhea Secretorium's downfall is a powerful message in Metal Garden, a group part of the endless cycle of failed civilizations, but unique in the fact that it was not the dissolution of power, but the disillusionment of faith.

The disillusionment of faith is also relayed through the playable nomad himself and the actions he takes after discovering the truth of the megastructure's exit. Being able to play as the nomad on his conquest to search for the exit is faith put into playable form as the ultimate transfer of power, with the player being the arbiter of their drive and determination to reach the end salvation. After you reach the end, a vast ocean of

nothing but more concrete that expands as far out as the entire solar system. This realization completely invalidates the faith and drive the nomad once had in finding a way out. This dissolution of faith is exactly why control slips from the player's hands as the nomad takes initiative to keep on walking without you on, despite the impossible stretch he would have to see what's out there. He would be walking all of his life, and he wouldn't be able to escape. It is unknown whether or not the nomad is aware that this is suicide, or just his natural mechanism that keeps him going, but the bleak aspect here is that the nomad's faith in escape has welled from the truth, and the actionable faith that the player instills inside the nomad to take control of him has waned, and we remove ourselves from the nomad at the end of the game as he prepares to walk the path of the incomprehensible megastructure.

Strongest Element

Metal Garden's strongest element is immersing the player inside a masterfully crafted lonely atmosphere that does so much in substance that this atmosphere itself becomes a storytelling element. To start off, Metal Garden's art style is heavily influenced by early 2000s video games. The technical limitations of the early 2000s allowed large-scale play spaces, producing environments that the near megalomaniac size puts the player in isolated, uncanny mindscapes like *Silent Hill 2*, *Shadow of the Colossus*, *Halo*, *Stalker*, etc. The world design of the Metal Garden reflects this; the moment you load up the game, you see that the sky is just an endless concrete wall. The sight of concrete skies and floor base as far as the eye could see is enough to induce a paradoxical sense of claustrophobia, as it represents a world so big but still entombed in some way. The atmosphere of a game based on this era of video games reinforces the game's natural tone of loneliness to a point where the game's art style speaks loudly without ever actually saying anything. The next biggest element that Metal Garden uses to craft this lonely atmosphere is the use of silence. Most of the game's audio consists of howling winds, footsteps, and the ambience of distant and close machinery encountered in the game. The game has a strict use of soundtracks where only emotions and tension are at their highest. This immerses the player in the feeling of vast, overwhelming emptiness. This perpetual silence enhances the loneliness factor as the walks, corridors, and roads the player traverses become more eerily resonant, as silence speaks to you in the weight of absence. The ultimate goal of this lonely atmosphere in Metal Garden's story is that it amplifies the emotional and thematic exploration of the Game, with no exposition. Metal Garden's focus on art style, world design, and silence creates a lonely atmosphere that becomes the fundamental storytelling device of emptiness.

Unsuccessful Element

Metal Garden and the exploration of the *Cool Rule*

The Cool Rule is a term I use in media when writers, developers, or artists implement temporary set pieces that are bombastic in presentation and serve the fans abundantly, basically the main marketing material seen in trailers. While these setpieces are great at the moment, the bigger intellectual investment that these creators need to overcome, but often fail to meet, is contextualizing these moments in a broader narrative. When a spectacular story element or sequence is introduced for fanfare, and no further explanations within the story to explain such a sequence, to explain its origins or purpose, the cool factor of that narrative element loses its dimensionality. As humans, that feeling of awe and mystique quickly becomes replaced with a desperate rush to find out what makes it cool, and without proper narrative follow-through, the cool moment collapses under its own weight, exposing itself as a partially empty spectacle.

So my definition of the Cool Rule is that newly introduced setpieces can only remain successful if the creators eventually wrap around to explaining it, not fully, but in a specific capacity to satisfy the human need of knowing everything there is about a narrative element.

With the Cool Rule in mind, Metal Garden's most unsuccessful element put on display is the characterization of the Forebearers themselves. Their position in the narrative is monumental, being the people responsible for the megastructures scaling the solar system, and more personally, being responsible for the player's existence. The Forebearers are presented as Gods in the grand scheme of Metal Garden, beings whose implied ingenuity and technology transcend comprehension. Despite this, their godliness is only reinforced through initial mystique and very few beats of narrative substance. By the end of Metal Garden, we know the exact account of how far their megastructure expands, and the purpose of the sub-megastructure where the game takes place. So we're left with the Forebearers being the ultimate cool thing in Metal Garden, a possibly extinct or abandoned civilization whose presence is not only felt, but internalized inside of the story and world. So much narrative push behind the Forebearers naturally invites at least a sliver of exposition regarding their origins, goals, the hows and whys of their cosmic conquest, just something to establish them more as a catalyst for the game's events in an attempt to humanize them in some context. Despite the bleeding need for some storytelling, Metal Garden offers very little to flesh out the Forebearers besides a computer terminal at the end of the game to outline the specific function of the megastructure you reside in.

Thus, the Forebearers embody the critical shortcoming of the Cool Rule. They are introduced with grand narrative implications that invoke mystery and discussion. But their mystery is never transformed into something more fulfilling. The lore surrounding the forebearers could have been emphasized more into a profound mythos, but it sits as more or less a surface-level decorative layer of atmospheric storytelling that isn't capitalized on in the 2 hours of playtime inside of Metal Garden, and we as the players can only speculate until the developer decides to expand on the story.

Highlight

Metal Garden's Magnum Opus is the final 2 minutes of the game, where the player finally reaches the edge of the world, the mega structure where they've spent the entire time traversing. They reach a computer terminal with just a few logs that fundamentally blew my mind the first time playing. After slaying countless scavengers, scaling monumental buildings and landscapes, solving puzzles, and destroying an automated mech, you reach a computer log that outlines the purpose of the megastructure.

The entire world that the player and the inhabitants have existed in is a mere gravitational anchor called a counterweight world. The entire megastructure you have lived your life inside of was built to keep a small, unknown planet's (implied to be Mars or a planet of Uranus) movement anchored around the megastructure to prevent its orbit interfering with an even larger megastructure that expands to the outer reaches of the solar system, reaching out to the bare minimum of the Kuiper Belt, the complete extent of the main megastructure is lost to time due to the implied expansion of how big it has become, and we get a scale of how long it has been through an AI computer that has been operating for over 3 million years, and request its immediate termination.

This moment, when I read it, completely changes the genre of this game in retrospect. Going into Metal Garden initially echoes an atmospheric, adventurous mood about the mystery of the megastructure; finding a way to escape gave a completely enigmatic tone in the game. When finding out your megastructure's purpose, it changes to a bleak narrative of cosmic futility where the theme of insignificance is carried deeply. The world you traversed, massive in scale and central in the game, is now presented as a small footnote in the system built by the Forebearers. The collective lived experiences of the megastructure's inhabitants are framed against the automated machinery intended for a simple function that is indifferent to their existence.

This realization quickly made me pivot to Carl Sagan's excerpt from his book, *Pale Blue Dot*, in which he speaks on a photo of Voyager 1 taking one last photo of Earth billions of miles away from Earth and its mechanical parallel to Metal Garden.

“Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives...every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there-on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.”
(Sagan)

This quote deeply resonates in relation to Metal Garden, after finding out the true purpose of the world you live in with the pointless violence, warring factions, innocent lives taken, the eons of years worth of individual hardships, triumphs and tragedies that happened unfolded on a counterweight world designed to keep a small planet's orbit in check, a purpose that is so simple in advance of the countless lives and civilizations it has cycled through to maintain this purpose.

The tone of this game undergoes a transformation to reflect the bleak cosmic existentialism where the player's sense of meaning is infinitely squandered by the scale of the megastructures the forebearers built. Simultaneously, it leaves the player in a limbo of psychological turmoil. The world the player traversed is simultaneously magnificent, but also meaningless, intimate and unfathomable, but the truth is the world is just indifferent to the player's presence, since it serves a greater purpose far beyond the player's comprehension, which is why this moment is the most powerful and the highlight of Metal Garden due to how much of an attack it is to the player's psyche, and how much it opens up the bleak horror aspect of Metal Garden.

Critical Reception

Source: So Many Games

Reviewer: Erik Lunde

Score: 9 / 10

Lunde praises Metal Garden for its minimalist and deeply impactful writing, saying that the game conveys remarkable thematic weight through handfuls of text logs and dialogue. His most resonant point of analysis to me is that every piece of writing functions as a catalyst for “astrological, theological, and anthropological pondering” (Lunde), proving that the game's narrative achieves substance through its restrained use of exposition. Lunde openly acknowledges that the gameplay is simple; he argues that this simplicity is purposeful as it allows the player to keep their own world's atmosphere and worldbuilding. Ultimately, he concludes that the narrative elements of Metal Garden stand out as one of its defining strengths—elegantly understated in the

grand scheme of the short game, yet thematically rich, offering a reflective experience carried through its oppressive atmosphere.

Source: Inverse

Reviewer: Robin Bea

Score: Recommends

Robin also praises Metal Garden for its meticulously crafted atmosphere that spearheads the game's gloomy mood. Robin specifically states that the combination of Metal Garden's brutalist architecture influence, its on-point grey metallic color palette, and sparse signs of life creates the emotional and fundamental backdrop behind the game's world even more excellently than what lengthy lore dumps could provide. Robin also praises the game's moments of narrative punctuality, citing what he calls moments of beauty, such as the few remaining peaceful animals, and the sprouts of trees standing alone, which create a "strange sense of hope" to counterbalance the grim setting. Overall, Robin frames Metal Garden as a standout example of minimalism done great, where writing is small, and atmosphere and environmental storytelling give so much weight to a point where Robin proclaims the game's narrative and storytelling beats "haven't left my mind since I read them." (Bea)

Lessons

Mini-Stories are just as important as the Game's main story.

Metal Garden demonstrates that storytelling in games is far beyond the main plot, showing that mini-stories embedded throughout a world can carry as much emotional and thematic weight as the central narrative, with explorations of similar themes and tales. In Metal Garden's main story of trying to find the exit, you are able to encounter abandoned engineering projects, scattered notes, remnants of past civilizations, and the fate of the current civilizations and groups that walked the megastructure, cumulatively contributing to the game's powerful themes. These small narratives inside a game can have the potential to collectively enrich the world and encourage exploration, in turn cementing that smaller stories are just as essential to creating an immersive, breathable, atmospheric game

Do not underestimate the cognitive engagement of your players.

There is an underlying degradation of attention found in our current media, and as game designers, it is your prerogative to understand the audience that your game

appeals to, but also the broader demographic for players to think and piece together the narrative. Metal Gardens' accomplished narrative from places all across the internet highlights that players are capable of piecing together mini-stories and philosophical themes from sparse text, environmental cues, and subtle worldbuilding. Trusting players to actively engage with the material rather than spoon-feeding every detail enables designers to create experiences that foster deeper emotional resonance and intellectual investment. Indie games like Metal Garden can sit as a guideline way to challenge their intended audiences without alienating them when the act of discovery itself becomes a core part of the core narrative unwinding.

Atmosphere is the Narrative hook.

When crafting immersive worlds for the player to indulge in, it is imperative that at the start of your game, there is a vast amount of meticulous detail put into every element of the game's atmosphere, down to its color palette, soundscape, texturing, environments, and much more. In Metal Garden, you have brutalist megalophonic architecture utilized to induce anxiety and isolation, sparse sound design like howling wind and distant oceans, and a nostalgic PS2-era art style to immediately get the player hooked. The purpose of atmosphere is to allow the player to absorb the game more organically, because when you have an immersive palpable atmosphere from the get-go, the quicker it is for the player to be encouraged to see the game's narrative through to its very end, with how the first opening seconds after fading from black set the tone.

Summation

In the growing expanse of indie studios cramming their minds and talent into making the next marketable game from terms of gameplay and meaningful story, there are few indie games that have so much story to tell with a strict aversion to traditional storytelling, and fewer games that don't supplement this aversion with fun and high replay gameplay, and even fewer games that takes so much care into crafting its atmosphere. As such, Metal Garden is a unique juggernaut of an indie game that has the confidence and direction to build an immersive world that has tried to derive its meaning from just the world design, small narrative beats, and small amounts of text rather than explicit narrative guidance. This intentionality isn't rare due to the technical limits that Indie Games usually work with, but it's a defining standout of Indie games this year in terms of the substance of presentation, with existential and philosophical themes designed to stay with you long after you've played, or to keep you going for a second playthrough. Personally, its compelling bleakness and careful worldbuilding are why I have returned to the game multiple times and why it is truly deserving of analysis,

to prove that sometimes the most unforgettable stories are the ones that say the least, and Metal Garden proves that in all aspects.

Works Cited

Bea, Robin. "One of This Year's Best Hidden Gems Just Got Way More Approachable." Inverse, 17 Sept. 2025, www.inverse.com/gaming/metal-garden-first-person-shooter-pc-gaming-rec.

Lunde, Erik. "Metal Garden." So Many Games, 31 Aug. 2025, somanygames.co.uk/review/metal-garden/.

Sagan, Carl. Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space. Random House, 1994.