Analysis of Mechanics

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Title: OneShot

Released: 2016

Author: Future Cat, Komodo[1]

Primary Genre: Puzzle

Secondary Genre: Adventure, RPG

Style: Surreal, fantasy, meta

Analysis

Premise

OneShot is an RPG Maker game about a simulation of a long-gone world, in which the player guides the protagonist (a lost child called Niko) through its three main areas, with the task of saving the simulated world from dying out as well. It's an RPG in a sense that Niko and a few other special characters talk to the player directly, seeing them as a sort of deity. There's a clear distinction that the player is *not* the game's protagonist, but is merely accompanying Niko. Some could argue that this sort of interaction also delves into alternate reality gaming, as Niko is implied to come from a "real world" similar to the player's, and has a life outside of the pixelated world of OneShot. Niko also serves as the game world's host, with the player only being able to play the game when Niko is awake: one can save the game by putting Niko to bed. (It's important to note that the first area – in which Niko, controlled by the player but not yet aware of it, finds an important key item – feels very detached from the rest, both from narrative and gameplay perspective.)

Puzzles

It's possible to sort this game's puzzles into three categories. The first category would be the **in-universe** puzzles, which range from fetch quests, crafting and combining items in the inventory similar to Machinarium, and minigames replicating Sokoban and Mastermind. These puzzles are given to the player (and Niko) by NPCs or the environment itself. The second category is the **meta** puzzles, which usually involve interacting with a sprite of a desktop computer, named "The Entity" in-game, who gives the player hints on how to tackle the puzzle (often without Niko's knowledge). Solving it always requires some sort of interaction with the user's actual computer – manipulating the game's window, files in the PC's libraries, or even the wallpaper. It's for this reason that the game recommends playing in windowed mode, and the console re-releases include a small interactive mock-up of a desktop environment. The third category, **clover** puzzles, is functionally similar. Only appearing in the optional Solstice route, it consists of interacting with a separate executable file showing torn-out journal pages with hints, and asks the player to line them up with the main game window, which talks with the clover executable and dynamically updates the currently shown journal page.

Closing thoughts

The fact that the game looks and feels like any other RPG Maker game at first – with its very common pixel art style[2] and other tropes that are easy to spot across RPG Maker games, once one makes or plays a few of them – subverts the player's expectation of what this game is capable of, surprising them with each new meta puzzle. The game heavily leans into this meta interaction between the in-game world and the player's computer, serving as the base for the storytelling narrative. The first hint of this meta interaction is when The Entity speaks directly to the player, referring to them using their actual name saved in the OS. As the game progresses and the meta puzzles get more and more involved, the world starts deteriorating faster, and in the Solstice route, it even plays with the idea of going "out-of-bounds" being the only way to progress.

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[1]Publisher as of 2022 according to SteamDB, previously Degica
[2]There are also some non-pixel art sections, notably Niko's dreams and the Solstice clover journal.