Game Narrative Review

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Game Title: *Citizen Sleeper*
Platform: PC, Nintendo Switch, XBox One, XBox Series X, Playstation 4, Playstation 5
Genre: Text-based RPG
Release Date: May 5, 2022 (first platform release)
Developer: Jump Over The Age
Publisher: Fellow Traveller
Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Gareth Damian Martin

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Note: After its release, *Citizen Sleeper* released an additional expansion. As this additional content is free and automatically added into the game, this review assumes that this additional content is the default.

Overview

You are a Sleeper - a human consciousness that has been implanted into a robot body to do menial labour for the Essen-Arp corporation. In a daring escape, you've freed yourself from your indentured servitude and made it onto Erlin's Eye - a space station that has been abandoned by its original creators and repopulated by a diverse assortment of people. However, you are unable to rest. Hunted by Essen-Arp as it seeks to reclaim its property, betrayed by your malfunctioning body, and thrust into the various conflicts that beset the Eye, the situation you find yourself in is a precarious balancing act of managing the various challenges that are thrown your way.

      Citizen Sleeper breaks its gameplay up into "cycles". Each cycle, the player rolls a number of 6-sided dice depending on the condition of their character, and can expend those dice to determine the outcomes of events. Some events carry more risk than others, and some events require more dice to complete than others. This means the player must carefully consider how they want to spend their limited actions as they manage the decreasing meters that represent the condition of their mechanical body.

Factions

Solheim - The bankrupted corporation that originally built the Eye, Solheim is no longer an active player in the narrative by the time the player character gets to the Eye. However, the systems they made - both mechanical and administrative - linger on well after their financial ruin. Like Essen-Arp, they employed dubious labour practices, including creating the equivalent of company towns. These practices would contribute to their ruin, as the overworking of under-qualified employees would result in an accident that destroys a chunk of the Eye.

Essen-Arp Corporation - The organisation that "owns" the player character, Essen-Arp is a major producer of Sleepers. Already trafficking in a morally dubious trade (to put it lightly), Essen-Arp is not above using violence to achieve its ends, employing bounty hunters to capture and retrieve Sleepers that have escaped Essen-Arp control.

Havenage - The administrative organisation in charge of much of the Eye, Havenage is a descendent of the union belonging to the now-defunct Solheim. Though there is no official government on the Eye, Havenage is about as close as it gets, providing most of its law enforcement.

Yatagan - An organisation operating in the Lowend district of the Eye, Yatagan is described by Havenage members as "a gang". Formed due to Havenage's inability to provide security for the Lowend, Yatagan operates as the district's primary keeper of order.

Celis Foundation - An organisation funded by wealthy backers interested in self-sufficiency. They seek to establish a colony far away from the Core Worlds, away from the control of the corporations that control them. To this end, the Celis Foundation is constructing the *Sidereal Horizon* - a colony ship manufactured on the Eye whose workers can be entered into a lottery to eventually be on the crew of the colony ship.

SenetStat - A corporation that specialises in data analytics, they are legally the owners of the solar system in which *Citizen Sleeper* takes place, having bought it during Solheim's collapse. In order to prepare the system for resettlement, they release the Flux, a signal that destroys datastreams and the systems that rely on them - including life support and terraforming equipment.

The Flotilla - A group of refugees that have found their homeworlds closer to the center of the solar system uninhabitable as a result of the Flux, the Flotilla has stopped at Erlin's Eye in order to replenish supplies before escaping the solar system entirely. A mix of refugees from several different moons, the Flotilla struggles with tensions between the colonists as well as trying to convince a wary Havenage to allow them to enter Erlin's Eye to resupply.

Hypha Commune - A volunteer-run commune based in the agricultural sector of Erlin's Eye, the Hypha Commune is an egalitarian group that promises to ensure every member's needs are met, as long as they put in their own fair share of work.

Characters

Citizen Sleeper contains a wide assortment of characters, all of various backgrounds and personalities - there are too many to list all, so the list that follows is a somewhat representative slice of the types of characters the player character will encounter.

Most of the characters are ordinary people just trying to get by - there is the occasional bounty-hunter and politician, but they are relatively rare and take up little of the game's narrative space. In fact, the game is not particularly interested in the typical action-packed exploits of typical science-fiction characters - even when characters have

backgrounds that lend themselves well to traditionally "exciting" escapades like mercenaries and hackers, the focus is never on their exploits but rather their struggles.

The Sleeper - The player character, the Sleeper, is just one of many. Made by digitally duplicating people's consciousnesses and implanting them into robotic bodies, Sleepers lack rights compared to the humans they once were. In fact, despite having the consciousness of humans, they are specifically classified as an Entity - a non-human being that possesses a consciousness. As an additional control measure, Sleepers have in-built planned obsolescence - without regular doses of stabiliser, a drug that functions similarly to immunosuppressants, a Sleeper's body begins to reject their biosynthetic organs. Naturally, the supply of this stabiliser is controlled almost entirely by the corporations owning Sleepers, and so the problem of procuring stabiliser is a looming issue and source of economic anxiety for much of the game.

Hunter and Killer - A pair of digital protocols created by Solheim whose purpose is to find (Hunter) and destroy (Killer) illegal sentient Entities, including the player due to their status as a rogue Sleeper. However, after being abandoned by Solheim, Hunter and Killer have developed limited sentience themselves. Upon being confronted by this fact, Hunter is trapped in a perpetual search-and-destroy loop while Killer can either share Hunter's fate or be destroyed. Something interesting to note is that they share their name with the hunter-killer class of submarines - a class whose role is primarily to destroy other submarines and naval vessels. This nominative symbolism calls to attention their almost contradictory existence as Entities whose sole purpose is to destroy other Entities.

Lem and Mina - A single father with an adoptive daughter, Lem is a shipyard construction worker working on the Sidereal Horizon hoping to win a ticket on the *Sidereal Horizon*. Struggling to balance working on the Sidereal Horizon with his ability to take care of Mina, Lem relies on the Sleeper to babysit Mina while he is working on his shifts.

Peake and Eshe - A pair of refugees fleeing the Flux as part of the refugee flotilla. Eshe is blunt, headstrong and guarded, while Peake is a bit more polite and sensitive. Both try to help the flotilla in their own ways - Eshe wants to use a supply of weapons in her ship's hold to gain leverage for the refugee flotilla in its negotiations with Havenage, while Peake seeks to learn more about the Flux to better prepare for future Flux events.

Sabine - A former Essen-Arp doctor, Sabine fled after whistleblowing on their practices. Working for Yatagan now, Sabine treats the people of the Lowend District in Erlin's Eye, and supplies the Sleeper with stabiliser for a cost. They have a strong sense of justice and regret their past under Essen-Arp's employment. Their quest involves exposing the leader of Yatagan as a mind controlled puppet of Essen-Arp.

Feng - An engineer for Havenage, Feng strongly believes in the mission of Havenage. Both of Feng's parents were Solheim contractors, and Feng's father was killed during Solheim's collapse. When he finds out that a senior member of Havenage was formerly a senior member of Solheim who played a major part in the Solheim collapse, Feng enlists the Sleeper's help to investigate and expose this person.

Ethan - A bounty hunter sent to capture the Sleeper and return them to Essen-Arp. Ethan is interesting narratively, as he is the game's sole depiction of a class traitor - accordingly, he is not portrayed particularly charitably, showing that he is a selfish, manipulative and duplicitous character. Upon finding the Sleeper, instead of returning them immediately to Essen-Arp, he coerces the Sleeper into paying his bar-tab. From here, Ethan's story can go several ways - none of which are good for him. Essen-Arp either pulls his contract after failing to return the Sleeper - or, he is killed by another bounty hunter also tasked with capturing the Sleeper.

Breakdown

Citizen Sleeper is a game about the ways people survive the cruelty of unfeeling systems. Inspired by the lives of ordinary people under capitalism, particularly those whose financial calculations operate on the day-by-day as opposed to the month-by-month, *Citizen Sleeper* places a magnifying glass on those who cannot affect the world a great deal, but must live in it all the same.

Synopsis/Structure

Citizen Sleeper has a number of arcs and stories that the player can progress through - each arc is a series of events, with each event unlocking the next in the series. As a result, there is no set order to how the player progresses through each storyline - although some arcs have deadlines, there are arcs that can be completed to near completion before being set aside to be completed later.

What this means is that the player can progress through different arcs simultaneously, and in fact is encouraged to do so - some events will require the player

to wait a certain number of cycles before they can progress, thus directing the player to make progress on other storylines in the meantime. There is a franticness to this - each cycle the player is often bouncing between tasks as they consider where their actions might best be spent, much like the gig work that served as a source of inspiration for the game.

There are many storylines in the game - for the sake of brevity only a few are included:
- The evasion of a digital protocol that seeks to erase the Sleeper.
- Removing a tracker before bounty hunters can find and capture the Sleeper.
- The construction of a colony ship that could potentially take the Sleeper and their friends to a better life on an exo-planet.
- A refugee crisis caused by a mysterious phenomenon that wreaks havoc on vital electrical systems.
- The reinforcement of the Eye using a mysterious gardening AI to mitigate the impact of said phenomenon.

Through these arcs, themes begin to emerge that reveal much about the game's message and purpose, each reinforced with a combination of narrative and gameplay elements.

Social Murder and (non)Characterisation

One idea that *Citizen Sleeper* seeks to hammer home is the way systems abstract away the responsibility for their results. There are a *lot* of human-caused problems in *Citizen Sleeper* - almost every remotely significant conflict, in fact - however, there are very few humans shown in the game who those problems can be traced directly to. The Sleeper's failing body is the fault of a large scale corporate initiative to strong-arm a cheap and expendable labour force into existence; the Entities hunting after them are the leftovers of an old "security" system made by a long-defunct corporation; a plethora of characters can be met who have been harmed immensely by the large-scale, coordinated actions of a company, whether it be physical maiming, threats of violence, or economic damage.

These actions and programs clearly harm people - and it is incredibly obvious even in foresight that these actions *would* harm people. However, the actual people they harm are abstracted to the point of dehumanisation, reduced to numbers in a powerpoint. For the most part, the conflicts in *Citizen Sleeper* are not caused by interpersonal disputes, petty grudges or personal slights - they are caused by people who could very well see the harm in their actions, but choose to ignore it. They are not confronted with the people they hurt, nor is it even likely they end up seeing them.

The way *Citizen Sleeper* chooses to portray these people - the CEOs and leaders of corporations whose decisions lead to the conflicts in the game - is very interesting. It *doesn't*. This decision is perhaps the most potent single narrative choice in *Citizen Sleeper*. It tells the player in no uncertain terms that there are no problems that can have their origins traced to a singular antagonist - these problems are systemic, and trace their roots to deeply embedded constructs. There is no singular Big Bad whose defeat means the reversal of all of their negative actions and the destruction of their evil system. The *system* is the villain.

To reinforce this, even when these corporations are represented by characters, these characters are lower-order agents in their companies hierarchies. In the game, the Sleeper never meets a character that is truly powerful - every character either answers to somebody higher in the food-chain, or the group they lead lacks institutional power. Ethan is an excellent example of this - he is the first apparatus Essen-Arp uses as part of a wider program to capture and return Sleepers - however, when he fails in his task, Essen-Arp discards him without a second thought, an insignificant part of a broader initiative.

In this way, *Citizen Sleeper* directs the player's attention towards the true root of the problems of the world - the root cause of these problems cannot be found in individuals (although many individuals are certainly culpable), but rather in the foundation of a system that was built this way. *Citizen Sleeper* does not focus on those at the very top of the hierarchy - despite being in charge of the groups responsible for these actions - because it simply does not matter. This point is furthered and contrasted by the diverse cast of characters the Sleeper *does* meet, who are overwhelmingly victims of the system. By giving those in power absolutely no characterisation, *Citizen Sleeper* leaves one powerful message: the corporations that cause this world's problems will behave the same way regardless of the individual at the top - it is just how they are.

The Alienation of Everything

Citizen Sleeper's narrative depicts many aspects of Marx's theory of labour alienation. Under this theory, estranged labour is defined by 4 aspects.

- Alienation from the product of their labour.
- Alienation from their own activity.
- Alienation from their own species-being, i.e their relationship to their own humanity.
- Alienation from other humans.

Of these, the aspects which *Citizen Sleeper*'s narrative engages with most significantly are the first 3.

One story-arc stands out for the way it encapsulates the first aspect - the construction of the Sidereal Horizon. Previously mentioned was the lottery workers could enter to win spots on the crew - what was not mentioned however, was that only a few long-time Havenage members were even entered into the lottery, meaning that most workers did not even have a chance being drawn. Those who had won a spot were still alienated - after all, the Sidereal Horizon is still owned by somebody else - however, those who were left behind were robbed of even having the *opportunity* to have a relation to their product.

"Camaraderie, care, focus, progress. Shifts like this give you energy, especially when you look back at the Sidereal Horizon, growing impossibly."

"Progress is a daily grind, but every weld brings the Sidereal Horizon closer to completion. The sense of scale can be exhausting."

"A rough shift in cramped conditions. You can feel the wear this work is imparting on your body. You wonder if it will all be worth it."

- Positive, neutral, and negative outcomes respectively for the Sidereal Assembly action.

The lack of possession is not the only way a worker can be alienated from their product - as Rahel Jaeggi (2014) puts it in *Alienation*, alienation can mean that "her specific contribution to the production of the pin…does not fit for her into a meaningful whole" (p. 13). In real life, this is often used as a critique of the nature of the hyper-specialised, compartmentalised work in a supply-chain, where workers cannot see their work in a final product. During the Sidereal Horizon's construction, this can be seen in the flavour text accompanying the various outcomes that can occur - the more positive the outcome, the more the player can recognise their own contribution to the greater project, showing the game's positive framing of identification with one's labour.

The second aspect is the one most obviously connected to *Citizen Sleeper*'s gameplay systems. According to Marx (1844), labour is alienated when "It is…not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it." (sec. 23) Of course, this is what gameplay *revolves* around - doing various jobs to get the resources required to replenish the meters that are required for you to live. The Sleeper isn't doing these jobs for their intrinsic values - they are doing it because they are forced by their

circumstances to do so. Through the precarious gameplay that becomes a balancing act of pursuing their own drives and acquiring the currency required for them to survive, the player is confronted with the coercive nature of their circumstances.

The game uses a rather overt device to illustrate the alienation of one's own humanity that defines the third aspect of estranged labour - the player character's very existence as a Sleeper. The player character, as a result of signing away their own body, is quite literally not human. They have lost their human bodies, and their minds are technically only copies of the original. This dehumanisation is further reinforced by the fact that in the world of *Citizen Sleeper*, Sleepers are not afforded the same rights as human beings. Marx's contention is that to do alienated labour is to alienate oneself from one's own humanity; in *Citizen Sleeper*, in the process of becoming a Sleeper, one alienates oneself from their own humanity in order to do labour. Ultimately, this device serves to reinforce the dehumanising nature of the work under the systems *Citizen Sleeper* presents.

By depicting in detail the various aspects of estranged labour, *Citizen Sleeper*'s narrative seeks to confront the player with the Sleeper's relationship with their labour - how it affects them, and ultimately how it defines them. This reinforces *Citizen Sleeper*'s broader critiques of the capitalist system and its dehumanisation of the least fortunate under it.

Environmentalism and Technology

> *The work is both unforgiving and frustrating, and the bright attitude of the members irritates you. Is this place really so great?*
> - Negative outcome for a repeatable action in Hypha Commune.

Despite the fact that the player does not even see a hint of greenery until around the final third of the game, the relationship between the environment and technology is a surprisingly important theme in *Citizen Sleeper*. *Citizen Sleeper* is not shy about detailing the pitfalls of an overreliance on technology - the second-hand story of the Bonesuit drillers, the rogue malfunctioning Entities in the dataspace of Erlin's Eye, and the Sleeper's own plight are all examples of this.

Meanwhile, the locations and events associated with nature (or as close as one can get to nature on a space station) are overwhelmingly framed as forces for good. Most of this framing revolves around the anarcho-communist utopia of the Hypha Commune, a volunteer-run community based in the functional section of Erlin's Eye's agricultural sector. Compounding this, none of the actions in Hypha Commune are truly

negative from a gameplay standpoint - even the "negative" outcomes for actions do not result in a loss of resources like others might, reinforcing the utopian feel of the location (though not in a way that unbalances the game - the rewards for these actions aren't particularly large, and do not contribute to the progression of the story beyond a certain point).

This is not to say that technology is overly vilified in *Citizen Sleeper*'s narrative - in fact, it is a combination of technology and nature that solves two of the biggest conflicts in its narrative.

The first is the Sleeper's most personally pressing concern - the procurement of enough stabiliser to survive. Up to this point, the player has only one source of stabiliser - and it is *very* expensive to obtain. However, the laboratories of Hypha Commune offer an alternative solution - one that is far cheaper and more sustainable. After completing a quest involving mushroom research, the player unlocks the ability to use particular mushrooms to synthesize stabiliser themselves, freeing them from having to pay the exorbitant cost of their current stabiliser supply. It is also around this point that the player begins to realise that from a gameplay perspective, they have nothing left to worry about - a point that will be explored further in the next section.

The story comes to a head in the final act, when the Flux threatens to wreak havoc on the systems of Erlin's Eye. However, working with Peake, the Sleeper finds a solution. By letting the Gardener - an old farm administration AI that has since evolved sentience - loose, the Gardener can interface the technological systems of Erlin's Eye with the resilience of the plant-life already living on it. Although this is a risky endeavour, given the difficulty of predicting how biology behaves as opposed to technology, it is ultimately successful - in the epilogue it is shown that Erlin's Eye survives the ensuing Flux events, and grows to become as resilient as the fungi it plays host to.

In this regard, *Citizen Sleeper* is somewhat unique - the narrative's focus eschews the leafy plants that are the typical stars of utopian depictions of nature in favour of placing a focus on the hardy and prolific fungi. This focus is interesting, as it results in a rather unique depiction of nature; by primarily associating the environment of *Citizen Sleeper* with fungi, the environment takes on the qualities of fungi - resilient, prolific, and not all too fussy about environment.

As a result, nature plays a far more active role in the narrative - instead of being a passive agent that requires the protection of humans, nature becomes the protector. It does carry the same connotations that most depictions of nature have as a source of life and sustenance - however, the implied resilience conferred by the narrative's focus on fungi over plants, as well as the role it plays in the narrative in protecting Erlin's Eye from the Flux, adds a new depth to its characterisation. *Citizen Sleeper* stands out for its

portrayal of nature as something more than an exploited resource - it gives pause to the common trope of nature vs technology and offers in its place a desire for a more nuanced understanding of their relationship with each other.

Sustainability Through Community

Perhaps the game's best moment of ludonarrative harmony comes in the end-game, when the player finds that they are no longer struggling to scrape together the resources they need to survive. Although this would result in stagnant gameplay in a resource management game (and it is certainly less gripping than the early game, when the player is struggling to survive), it works from a narrative standpoint.

 Citizen Sleeper is all about building networks and support systems - completing tasks for characters results in unlocking their aid in the future. Certain locations first require the player to first ingratiate themselves within a community to earn their trust - the most notable example being the aforementioned Hypha Commune. Once ingratiated, the player has access to certain very profitable actions - the ability to buy/create certain items, easy ways of earning money, and alternative ways of replenishing their meters. Access to these actions turns survival on Erlin's Eye from a tight balancing act to a simple matter of routine.

 This *does* result in less compelling gameplay - though the gameplay was never particularly gripping in the first place compared to the game's narrative. Here, the change of pace in gameplay is representative of the player's transition from a precarious and volatile living situation to a comfortable and safe routine. By building a support network and finding community, the Sleeper manages to escape the anxieties and troubles they had when they first set foot on Erlin's Eye.

Strongest Element

Citizen Sleeper's focus on ordinary people is a very compelling one. It means that the characters found in *Citizen Sleeper* are much easier to relate to, allowing for the player to feel more invested in each character's storyline. As a result, this characterisation allows for a far more potent critique of the systems the game's narrative presents. By placing the player on the ground level with the victims of these systems, *Citizen Sleeper* offers the player a deep-dive into the real impacts of these systems. By depicting the effects of the system through these characters that the player has grown invested in, the game's narrative turns negative impacts of exploitative systems from something vague into something very, very tangible.

Unsuccessful Element

The structure of the narrative as a composition of simultaneous smaller stories allows for a more grounded, intimate experience than others – however, this does result in a less cohesive overall narrative. Oftentimes during play, when juggling so many stories at the same time it becomes difficult to keep track of each individual story. This is an issue that does not have a simple fix – as the root cause of this issue is also what makes the narrative so compelling. There are certainly things that could be done to mitigate this – a log of what has happened so far for each individual story would at least provide a way to remind the player of the story.

Highlight

> *"I release you Peake. You are free of me." – Eshe*

The characters of Peake and Eshe are introduced practically bundled together. Met when beginning the refugee flotilla storyline, Peake and Eshe are two very different people, tied together by their childhoods and present circumstances – as a result, although they care for each other deeply, they often have very different perspectives, resulting in friction. This friction can be encountered through the storyline – as Peake tries more diplomatic avenues while Eshe desires more forceful approaches, both of their approaches begin to interfere with each other.

 At the end of the storyline, the flotilla is ready to leave, and the Eye is in disarray – as some residents of the Eye attempt to join up with the flotilla so that they too can escape the Flux. During the commotion, the player encounters Peake and Eshe having an argument – tired of running, Peake wants to stay on the newly reinforced Eye, while Eshe does not want to live under the power structures that exist on it. As a result, Peake attempts to plead with Eshe to stay with them – Eshe ultimately refuses, and she leaves.

 Already a tragic ending, the emotional impact is reinforced by the fact that this argument is ultimately about the same question posed to the player – should the Sleeper stay on Erlin's Eye, with the communities they have found and the friends they have made, or should the Sleeper leave with the refugees, seeking greater freedom and new beginnings?

 The arguments made during Peake and Eshe's exchange reinforce the dilemma of the player's own decision – which the player must decide practically immediately after. Regardless of their decision, the Sleeper will end up parting ways with some of their

friends - a difficult choice to make, given how invested the player is made in their storylines throughout the game.

Critical Reception

Citizen Sleeper was received with acclaim. Narratively, critics praised the superb writing of the various characters found within the game, as well as the way the game portrayed important social issues. Notably, many of these reviews were written before the content update was released, which means that they played a version of the game that did not have an ending in which the Sleeper could choose to remain on the Eye - as a result, many reviewers expressed a wish that they could simply stay on the Eye, having built a life worth living for their Sleeper. The comfortable routine at the end was also a source of mild criticism - once the tension of the early game had faded, the pacing became much more lackadaisical as the player could finish storylines at their own pace.

Destructoid - 9/10 (2022)
Eric Van Allen praises the game's characters who "hail from many different walks of life", specifically mentioning Sabine, Lem, and the down-on-her-luck mercenary Ankhita. Van Allen noted the same thing that this review did in that during the end-game the game did not feel nearly as frantic as the first.

PCGamer - 80/100 (2022)
Writing for PC Gamer, Jody Macgregor praises the writing, particularly the focus on the mundane, which "[made] the occasional glimpse of something profound feel potent". He notes that he accidentally stumbled upon storylines he could tell he was meant to have discovered sooner, and "it started to feel like [he] was sequence-breaking *Citizen Sleeper*". Macgregor noted that "[he] didn't want to leave", having built a life that "[he] wanted to keep living".

The Guardian - 4/5 (2022)
Lewis Packwood criticised the game's lack of originality in the science-fiction concepts that were presented - however, he praised the "convincing portrait of life aboard a creaking space station" in spite of the fact that the game is populated with its fair share of well-worn science-fiction tropes. Packwood also criticises the lack of end-game tension, finding that "the tension inherent in the first half of the game is largely removed by the end, as you gradually find solutions to your synthetic body's various problems".

Lessons

Grounded, ordinary realities can be just as engaging as fantastical stories

A significant portion of *Citizen Sleeper*'s appeal is the way it parallels real life - the Sleeper is essentially a gig economy worker, working various odd jobs to stay afloat in a system that is hostile to their existence. There are many moments in the game where it feels like the game took a story from real life and simply painted it with a science-fiction sheen - and it is better for it. The game deals with many of the anxieties and troubles facing people in real life - and through the lens of fiction, allows players to engage with them in a safe place. By grounding itself in problems that face people in real life, *Citizen Sleeper* is made to feel very real and relatable, providing an additional vector through which the player can be made invested.

Simple mechanics can still have narrative significance

Citizen Sleeper's mechanics can best be described as minimalist. Despite this, the mechanics reflect the narrative strongly. The Sleeper's situation is felt by the player as they watch their Energy and Condition meters tick slowly down with each cycle, managing their minimal inventory as they attempt to scrape together the resources required for them to survive. At the end, when these needs can be met comfortably, the player feels a strong sense of relief, having settled into a comfortable routine.

Feeling small does not mean feeling unimportant

Oftentimes in *Citizen Sleeper* the player is made to feel small - the player is not some major player in a galaxy-spanning event. They don't even sniff the same air as the truly powerful agents in this world - the player is, for the most part, just trying to survive the machinations of corporations that are far bigger than the player could possibly be. Despite this, the narrative does a very good job of not making the player feel unimportant. By focusing on the relationships the player character cultivates with others on Erlin's Eye, and the big impacts the Sleeper can have on their friends and communities, the game manages to make the player feel empowered in their own, localised environment, despite having little control over the greater events that are affecting the world. Thus, the game manages the delicate task of making the player feel both tiny *and* important.

<u>Summation</u>

Citizen Sleeper has been much praised for its writing for good reason. Although it doesn't break any new ground conceptually, it uses existing science-fiction ideas to craft a compelling world and populate it with a cast of even more compelling characters. The gameplay complements a narrative that is grounded in real-world anxieties, and its themes reveal a thoughtful, nuanced story. Through these elements, *Citizen Sleeper* does something that science fiction is not known for doing frequently – it creates a story that is tender and intimate.

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