

Narrative Structure

The "narrative" of the game follows the Caretaker (player character) retelling the story of what happened while they were taking care of the Old Man. This explains the roguelike randomness as they struggle to re-remember what happened every time they tell the story (i.e. why the items are different, the rooms are different, etc.) This also plays into the reality of gaslighting in narcissistic abuse, as they have to re-confirm with themselves that what happened to them actually did in fact happen. Then as the playthrough goes on, the narration (e.g. expressed through textboxes from the Caretaker POV) can change tonal/emotional style as they realize the Old Man was actually terrible to them. Thus the narrative elements start in naivety and end in lucidity of the situation.

The elements of the game (ghosts, possessable items, etc) represent the "emotionally damaging" agents of narcissistic abuse. The player's knowledge of these elements and how they act represent the Caretaker's journey through reflection to understand the mechanisms of the abuse and how they affected them. For example we can consider possessables as a "conversation," with different parts potentially being weaponized into attacks towards the Caretaker. A new player may not be familiar with how they can get blindsided by an argument that they didn't see become weaponized (possessed; charged with emotional energy), but an experienced player - representing someone familiar with narcissistic abuse - realizes that these "attacks" may come from any part of the "conversation" (all nearby possessables) that they have identified are nearby, even if they're not watching it.

Caretaker States

DEAD - this represents the emotional storm of self-doubt rising to the surface, where the Caretaker is overwhelmed by everything that is happening and disassociates. The revival at the Old Man shrine represents that their emotions and life-force belong to the Old Man and they must navigate through the high-intensity storm of their own emotions to return back to their grounded, healthy self in the LIVING state. Thus, the activation of other shrines shows the Caretaker has "grounded" themselves at another emotionally "safe space" away from the Old Man that they can start from when trying to recuperate themselves.

Ghosts

The ghosts can represent the “emotionally damaging” agents of the relationship that exist between the old man and the player that manifest in the Caretaker’s psyche. When the Caretaker has full vitality, they still exist even though they can’t directly affect the Caretaker. When the caretaker has partial vitality, they start to “swim” in their emotions that are brought to the front of their psyche as they become more vulnerable to their overwhelming emotions. When they become overwhelmed and enter the DEAD state, they cannot fight off these agents and can easily be overtaken by them, succumbing completely to the abuse (game over).

Possessables

The possessable items can represent arguments or disagreements between the Caretaker and Old Man. While in full vitality, the Caretaker cannot see the driving force underneath the arguments, but can still manage to avoid being hurt by them if they’re careful. However, if they’re not careful they can be caught off-guard by an argument and get hurt by the “emotional damage” of the abuse, reducing their vitality and moving them to DYING state. If they’re already hurt, this “emotional damage” puts them over the edge into the DEAD state where the “emotional damage” becomes so overwhelming that the arguments aren’t even affecting the Caretaker anymore.