

2. THE NARRATIVE DESIGN IN *OMORI*

In this chapter, I will show the narrative techniques used in the narrative design of *OMORI* and explain the influence of the techniques on the player's experience. To reveal the techniques that manifest as unpredictability and trauma-driven narrative in the game narrative, I will use Bal's theory of narratology (2017), as well as the narrative structure framework by Wei (2011) that has an integrated view of narrative and gameplay. Furthermore, I will explain how unpredictability incite immersive horror and trauma-driven narrative develop a sense of emotional connection in the player using narrative tension theory from Bermejo-Berros et al. (2022) and transportation theory from Green and Brock (2000).

2.1 Techniques Used in the Narrative Design

To construct a captivating narrative with psychological horror elements, the game employs techniques that contribute to unpredictability and a trauma-driven narrative. In the game's narrative structure, techniques such as jump scares and unreliable narrators are important for manifesting unpredictability by disrupting player expectations and creating moments of uncertainty and tension. Similarly, the use of metaphors and fragmented storytelling techniques contributes to a trauma-driven narrative. Metaphors in gameplay allow for a poignant and evocative portrayal of the player character's struggle with trauma, while fragmented storytelling effectively conveys the fragmented nature of traumatic memories and experiences. Thus, I will explain the techniques that manifest unpredictability and a trauma-driven narrative.

2.1.1 Implementation of Unpredictability

OMORI employs techniques that manifest unpredictability. In *OMORI*, unpredictability is achieved through various elements. One technique that contributes to unpredictability is the use of jump scares. In relation to unpredictability, the jump scares in *OMORI* contribute to unpredictability through their ordering and presentation in the narrative and gameplay.

The first notable instance of a jump scare occurs in the prologue of the game where the player explores Headspace for the first time and encounters the distorted photo jump scare. In an effort to avoid confusion, I would like to clarify that when I state Omori as a character, it is referring to the player enacting as Sunny's 'alter ego' in Headspace, while Sunny in Faraway Town. Prior to the jump scare, the player plays as Omori and roams around the Headspace with his

friends—Aubrey, Kel, Hero, and Basil. After getting the quest to go to Basil’s house, the player will ultimately get there, which will trigger a cutscene in which Basil takes a picture of the whole group. Kel and Aubrey then fight over the picture, which causes Basil and his photo album to fall to the ground. Upon completing the task of sorting the fallen photos into Basil’s photo album in his house, the development of the jump scare occurs in the form of a gameplay cutscene, in which Basil retrieves a dropped photo from his album and inspects it. The portrayal of the jump scare occurs briefly for a split second, displaying the dropped photograph in a distorted form. The order of this jump scare is noteworthy as it contributes to unpredictability through its timing or placement within the narrative structure. As shown in the pictures below, the player enters the vibrant Neighbor’s Room, then traverses the Vast Forest with its peaceful and upbeat soundtrack before experiencing the jump scare. Due to the portrayal of the Headspace, it is probable that the player has established their expectations for experiencing more of the child-like dream world and, as a result, is unlikely to expect a jump scare. The occurrence of the jump scare results in a contrast between the scene set in Headspace and the underlying terror that revolves around Omori’s friend, Basil. Bal (2017) argues that sequential ordering is not just an artistic convention but also a tool for highlighting, emphasizing, generating aesthetic or psychological effects, creating suspense, presenting diverse interpretations of events, and highlighting the difference between expectation and realization (p. 69). Hence, the thoughtful positioning of the jump scare contributes to unpredictability by creating suspense through diverting the player’s expectations and setting up a stark contrast between the realm of Headspace and the horror sequence.



Figure 2.1 Full Map of The Neighbor’s Room

Source: OMORI Wiki. (n.d). *Neighbor’s Room*. https://omori.fandom.com/wiki/NEIGHBOR%27S_ROOM



Figure 2.1 Vast Forest in Headspace

Furthermore, this jump scare contributes to unpredictability through the organization of its presentation in the narrative structure. Prior to the jump scare, there is a build-up to it, and this sequence contributes to unpredictability by exhibiting anxiety. Throughout this process, the player is provided with information about what is wrong using visual, audio, and textual means. Anxiety is shown through a combination of visible, auditory, and written cues, as outlined below.

BASIL: Hm? That's strange. A photo must have been loose.

Huh? What is this? Did I take this photo?

Something about it seems... so familiar. (ringing sound)

N-no... That can't be...

(warped) MARI... She's....

(*OMORI*, in the game's prologue).

From this build-up of Basil inspecting the photograph, anxiety is clearly portrayed audibly when the pleasant melody of music is replaced by a ringing sound in the ears. This is then followed by a period of silence, during which Basil anxiously murmurs about the photograph. The purpose of music is to establish a mood and convey the psychological and emotional states of the characters. It is frequently used to depict and metaphorize the circumstances of the characters, mirror their character and psychology, and thus influence the viewer's perception of the characters' condition and psychology when experiencing the music (Gao, 2021, p. 139). The absence of music metaphorizes anxiety, and subsequently, the interpretation of the situation leads to the player understanding Basil's condition. In textual form,

Basil's conversation transitions from a state of confusion to one of apprehension as shown by the final text becoming warped. Finally, the pictures provided below illustrate a display of worry through Basil's facial expression in his profile and the presence of a branching shadow around him. The presentational structure of the build-up creates an unpredictable jump scare scene, which in turn builds curiosity in the player regarding the characters, specifically Basil, Mari, Omori, and therefore the story.



Figure 2.1 Build-up of Jump Scare

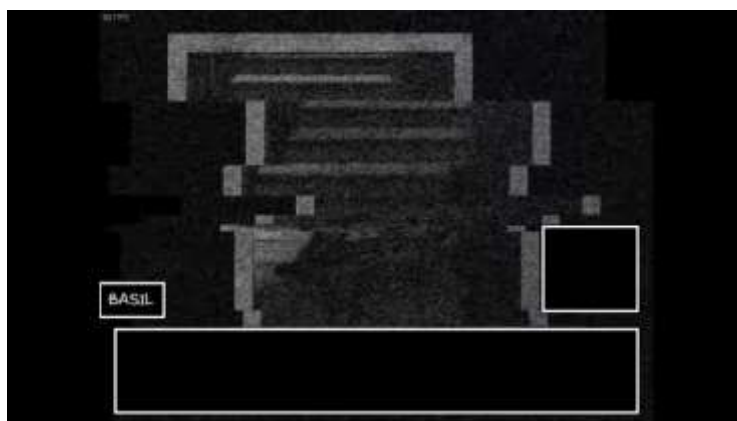


Figure 2.1 Distorted Photo Jump Scare

Source: Morpheus. (2021, March 21). *OMORI - Full gameplay - No Commentary* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmCRo795IBk>

Another notable jump scare occurs in the game's prologue, when the player plays as Sunny in Faraway Town and is prompted to open the door, resulting in the Hellmari jump scare. After Sunny consumes the expired steak in the kitchen and vomits in the bathroom, a loud knocking sound plays. This prompts players to inspect the front door. Upon interacting with the door, it is revealed that Mari, Sunny's older sister, is on the other side of the door. She asks Sunny to open the door, as she has forgotten her keys. The camera then shifts to facing Sunny's back,

followed by the prompt to open the door or do nothing. If the player chooses to open the door, the Hellmari jump scare sequence will occur. This jump scare contributes to unpredictability through its timing or placement within the narrative structure. The timing of the jump scare is significant as it occurs right after players meet Mari in Headspace. The pleasant interaction between Mari and Omori aligns with the scenery and mood of the Headspace. Additionally, the game informs players that Mari is safe by associating her presence with a resting point through integrating a save feature into her picnic basket. This, consequently, condition players to have the expectation of Mari being trustworthy. Therefore, when players sees a figment of Mari outside the door in Faraway Town, they are likely to let their guard down and choose to open the door.



Figure 2.1 Mari's Dialogue About Her Picnic



Figure 2.1 Mari's Dialogue About the Save Feature

Source: Morpheus. (2021, March 21). *OMORI - Full gameplay - No Commentary* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmCRo795IBk>

Furthermore, the jump scare contributes to unpredictability through the presentational structure of its build-up. The jump scare's build-up displays information through visual means. First, the framing of the scene has a noticeable shift. The use of layering, light, and shadow as symbols can effectively establish an atmosphere inside a scene, evoking psychological emotions in the viewer. Sun (2016) states that the interplay of light and shadow can be employed to generate a sense of horror and mystery (p. 901). Prior to the appearance of the prompt, the camera faces the front of the living room while showing Mari outside. It is only after the interaction with Mari does the living room scene fade to black, and Sunny slowly turns one hundred and eighty degrees, thus facing the door, as shown in the picture below. This signifies to players that this decision is imperative; however, they might not comprehend why that is the case, hence causing uncertainty. Next, the appearance of Mari's game sprite effectively deceives players. Color, as an artistic modeling element, holds symbolic significance in semiology due to its inherent symbolism, meaning, and emotional impact. Consequently, colors have distinct symbolic meanings in various creative contexts. According to Sun (2016), colors include emotional connotations, and variations in hues, tonality, and brightness can elicit diverse emotional responses (p. 901). As the player has previously explored Headspace and thus become accustomed to its vibrant presentation, they may perceive that nothing is amiss with Mari's game sprite—a two-dimensional image that is placed into the game environment—resembling one in Headspace, appearing in Faraway Town. To add to that, the game convinces players that it is safe to open the door through textual means. As depicted in the image below, Mari greets Sunny normally, which consequently reduces suspicion in players at the start. With these various forms in the presentational structure working together to weave subtle information for players, it potentially leads them to open the door and witness the Hellmari jump scare. The reveal of the Hellmari jump scare contrasts that to Mari's sprite, which only increases the notability of Mari as a character to the player and establishes a recurring motif involving her in the narrative.



Figure 2.1 Mari Outside of the Door



Figure 2.1 Prompt to Open the Door



Figure 2.1 Hellmari Jump Scare

Source: Morpheus. (2021, March 21). *OMORI - Full gameplay - No Commentary* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmCRo795IBk>

The next technique that contributes to unpredictability is the use of unreliable narrators. The following narration in *OMORI* contributes to unpredictability through its narrators being inaccurate and insufficient in their recounting. The player characters Sunny and Omori, as well

as the Non-Playable Characters (NPCs) demonstrate the presence of unreliable narrators throughout the game. While Omori is considered as Sunny's "alter ego" by the community, the player plays as both silent protagonists in the segregated realms: Faraway Town (Sunny) and Headspace (Omori). This indicates a probable dubious recounting of the story, especially when one recounting takes place in a dream setting. Nevertheless, the two player characters are considered unreliable narrators from their under-reporting. Under-reporting, from its implication, occurs when the narrator withholds information or fails to disclose crucial details. Sunny and Omori both hide the jarring secret of being responsible for Mari's death, indicating under-reporting. As the player progresses, they are informed through other characters in Faraway Town that Sunny's older sister, Mari, passed away. Sunny kept his role in Mari's passing deliberately a secret until the end of the game.

Correspondingly, I would like to add that game characters present misreporting regarding Mari's death. Misreporting could occur when the narrator or characters provide information that is factually incorrect or misleading. The NPCs' recounting of Mari inadvertently state misleading information, consequently planting the assumption in the player early in the game that Mari's passing resulted from suicide rather than through Sunny's own hands. Although the NPCs are unaware of the truth, through their recounting, they may lead to developing a sense of certainty in the player in regards to the truth. This sense of certainty regarding Mari's self-inflicted death is challenged later in the game, thus revealing that the player's long-held certainty of the "truth" utterly results in a false narrative.

Furthermore, misregarding is conducted by both Sunny and Omori towards his friend Basil throughout the narrative. Misregarding refers to the narrator or characters dismissing or ignoring certain events, facts, or interpretations. In Faraway Town and Headspace, Sunny ignores Basil in particular in almost every encounter with him, which causes Basil to grow anxious.

Overall, the presence of an alter ego character in the form of Omori creates a dynamic where the player may encounter an issue deciphering which information to believe in. One of the general effects of unreliable narration is foregrounding peculiarities of the narrator's psychology (Nünning, 2010, p. 495). In the case of Omori, his recounting may be done to shed light on his psyche. Yet Omori may be considered a "factual" unreliable narrator. According to Booth's framework, "factual" unreliable narrator means that a narrator's recounting of the story has reasons for the readers to question the accuracy of the narrative (2010, p. 496). Due to Omori's trauma, his recounting of events may be distorted or incomplete. Omori's trauma could influence his perception of events, leading to factual inaccuracies or omissions in his narration.

As such, the narrators' unreliable recounting of events, represented by both Sunny in Faraway Town and Omori in Headspace, as well as the NPCs in Faraway Town, renders uncertainty in the player, which contributes to unpredictability.

2.1.2 Application of Trauma-Driven Narrative

OMORI has elements that manifest a trauma-driven narrative. A trauma-driven narrative is achieved through various elements, such as metaphors and fragmented storytelling. *OMORI* uses metaphors inside its gameplay mechanic to convey a narrative that is centered around trauma. According to Steen (2010), amongst three different manifestations, metaphor can be a mode of narration, and hence play a structural role in narrative with respect to arrangement and organization (p. 305). In other words, the narrator may employ metaphors to convey meaning in a more imaginative or indirect manner rather than directly describe events. The game contains specific gameplay features that serve as metaphors with notable arrangement and organization. In terms of constructing a trauma-driven narrative, *OMORI* employs metaphor through its game mechanics to develop a story centered on trauma.

The first instance of gameplay that contains metaphor is the Hangman mechanic in Omori's laptop. This, as well as other gameplay mechanics, relay the information of Sunny's trauma in the form of narrative artifacts and therefore contains embedded narratives. Upon entering Headspace for the second time during the prologue, the player is able to interact with the laptop in White Space. After a brief jump scare, the Hangman mechanic appears. This mechanic informs the player of the objective to find the appropriate keypads in Headspace and fill out the blank spaces, as shown in the picture below. The placement of the keypads hold significance due to their hidden nature. The keypads are scattered across the various areas of Headspace. This fact informs the player that these are perhaps hidden for a reason, that is to metaphorize repression of traumatic memories. This is indicated by the hidden cutscenes and spaces accessible through peering into the cracked surface left by the discovered keypad, as shown in the picture below. What is intriguing is the fact that the cutscenes and spaces pointing to Sunny's trauma are revealed in a non-chronological order. Luckhurst (2008) defines a new "post-classical genre" of film, in which storytelling and suspense rely heavily on non-chronological order of revealing events, and draws a connection with trauma narratives, where temporality is distorted and broken, mirroring the psyche of its traumatized characters (as cited in Kuznetsova, 2017, p. 12). Furthermore, the keypads and their secrets exhibit a form of repetition. This is significant as Alan Gibbs (2014) argues that rather than very literal

representations of a belated, temporarily forgotten memory, trauma is more authentically portrayed through constant synecdochal returns, where a small detail associated with trauma reappears over and over again to represent traumatic memory (as cited in Kuznetsova, 2017, p. 16). Thus with each keypad encounter, may allude to the player of Sunny's trauma through the synecdochal returns of scenes containing small details associated with Sunny's trauma. Furthermore, it is important to note that the keypads symbolize keys to unlock Black Space, a realm that holds further information about Sunny's trauma. As such, these keypads also play a role in advancing the narrative. Players are unable to progress further and reach specific endings until they complete the Hangman mechanic and enter Black Space. Thus, the keypads contribute to a trauma-driven narrative through its vital role in portraying the player character's trauma in a poignant and evocative manner.



Figure 2.1 Hangman Mechanic

Source: Morpheus. (2021, March 21). *OMORI - Full gameplay - No Commentary* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmCRo795IBk>



Figure 2.1 Keypad in Vast Forest

Source: OMORI Wiki. (n.d.). Photo Album. <https://omori.fandom.com/wiki/HANGMAN>

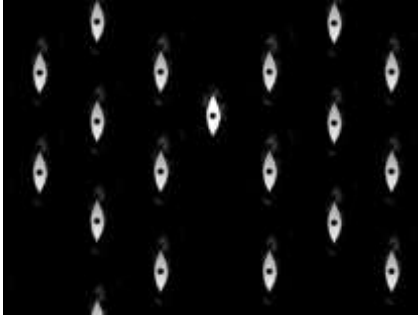


Figure 2.1 Hangman Cutscene of *Something*

Source: OMORI Wiki. (n.d.). Photo Album. <https://omori.fandom.com/wiki/HANGMAN>

Another example of embedded narratives is Basil's photo album mechanic. There are three kinds of photo albums that the player will encounter in the game, as shown in the picture below. The first presented album (purple) depicts Omori's friends in Headspace in a wholesome manner. The second album (green) contains the events of Sunny and his friends in Faraway Town. Finally, the third album (black) contains Sunny's trauma, and is only accessible in Black Space. The order of this depiction is noteworthy as it leads to an epistemic plot. The presentation of the purple album and its content depicts Omori's friends having fun and enjoying a picnic. This presentation sets up the presumed status quo or normalcy. Likewise, the second album containing the photos set in Faraway Town informs the player of a similar event, but with the backdrop information from other characters' dialogue of Mari's death. With each interaction of the photo album, the player enters the photo album mechanic and sorts the photos in their respective order. This interactivity helps players become mentally active in the process of sorting clues pertaining to Omori's past prior to the traumatic event. This culminates in the final album in Black Space. Narrative tension is formed through the force of revealing the information slowly through collecting the photos as the player explores Black Space. Ultimately, the embedding of the narrative in the photo albums creates narrative tension through epistemic plot.



Figure 2.1 Photo Albums

Source: OMORI Wiki. (n.d.). Photo Album. https://omori.wiki/Photo_Album

Furthermore, *OMORI* contains elements that contribute a trauma-driven narrative through fragmented storytelling. In this study, fragmented storytelling refers to conveying the fragmented nature of traumatic memories and experiences, with the existence of deliberate breaking up or fragmentation of narrative structure. Fragmentation can serve various purposes, including reflecting the psychological state of characters, conveying the complexity of the story's themes, or mimicking the fractured nature of memory or experience. An instance within the game that is a component of fragmented narrative is the use of liminal space. Critics and narrative theorists alike have come to recognise that features of narrative space are far more relevant than expected. Indeed, a great number of staple critical terms—foregrounding, gapping, isotopy, center, liminality, margin, migration, transgression, transition, etc.—are spatial metaphors (Buchholz & Jahn, 2010, p. 551). The concept of liminality as a spatial metaphor is employed within *OMORI*'s narrative through the segmented storyworlds.

In *OMORI*, the segmented storyworlds hide key elements that alludes to Sunny's traumatic event. Omori is forcibly relocated to White Space with each encounter of the mysterious entity called *something* or anything that reminds him of his trauma, namely Basil. This instance is noteworthy as White Space is treated as a hub, and a liminal space. The forced transition back to Faraway Town through self-directed injury by Omori becomes significant later on in a dilemmatic sequence in one of the rooms of Black Space. The disorganization of order present through the sudden transition in space is essential to Caruth's (1991) understanding of non-linear traumatic memory in which "the future is no longer continuous with the past, but is united with it through a profound discontinuity" (p. 184). Thus, *OMORI* conveys the fragmented nature of traumatic memories and experiences through liminal space.

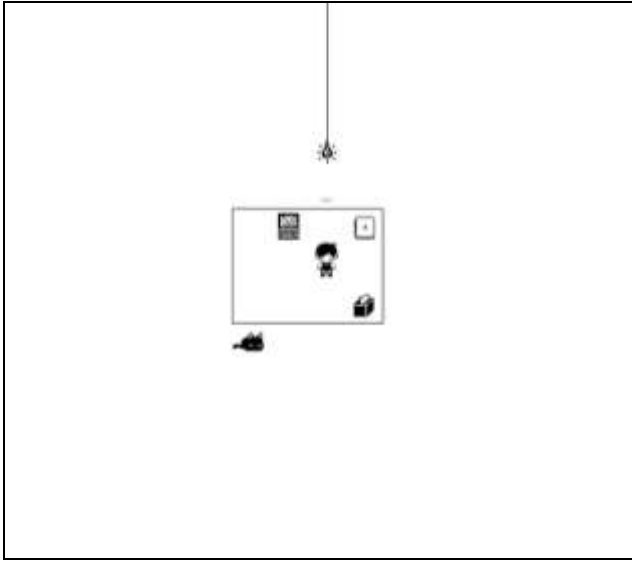


Figure 2.1 White Space

In this section, I have shown the notable techniques in OMORI that manifest unpredictability and a trauma-driven narrative. The presence of jump scares and the use of unreliable narrators play a crucial role in contributing to the game's unpredictability, creating a persistent feeling of uncertainty. The placement and presentation of these components create suspense, subverting the player's expectations. The build-up of the jump scare has significance as it conveys the underlying conflict by eliciting anxiety through auditory, visual, and textual elements. Furthermore, the unreliable narrators in Sunny and Omori, characterized by the capacity to under-report, misreport, and misregard, create a sense of doubt and uncertainty in the player. Moreover, the techniques that manifest as trauma-driven narrative consist of using metaphors in gameplay, namely hangman and photo album mechanics, to depict a narrative centered around trauma. The gameplay is employed as an embedded narrative and it is characterized as depicting in a non-chronological order, hidden nature, repetition to reflect the nature of trauma towards the psyche. Embedded narrative through the photo album mechanic creates narrative tension through epistemic plot. Lastly, segmented storyworlds through liminal space conveys the fragmented nature of traumatic memories. Thus embedded narrative and liminal spaces contribute to a trauma-driven narrative, functioning as plot progression and portraying the character's trauma in a poignant and evocative manner.

2.2 Inducing Immersive Horror and Emotional Connection

From the identified techniques that contribute to unpredictability and a trauma-driven narrative, the game can induce immersive horror and emotional connection in the player's experience. The techniques that contribute unpredictability disrupts the player's expectations. The lack of information may lead to feelings of uncertainty and tension in players. Additionally, the techniques that manifest a trauma-driven narrative gives a portrayal of the player character's trauma in a poignant and evocative manner, which potentially renders emotional connection to the characters. Thus, I will explain how the previously identified techniques may create a sense of immersive horror and emotional connection in the player.

2.2.1 Inciting Immersive Horror

The previously identified jump scares in *OMORI* can incite immersive horror by creating a sense of uncertainty. These jump scares, with their unique temporal and presentational structure, create narrative tension. According to Baroni (2007), narrative tension is a phenomenon where the interpreter of a story is enticed to wait for an outcome, characterized by an anticipation tinged with uncertainty (as cited in Bermejo-Berros et al., 2022). When the jump scare's structure is investigated, it is revealed that the player may experience a false sense of certainty as a result of narrative tension.

To start with, the distorted photo jump scare can trigger curiosity. Bermejo-Berros et al. (2022) assert that curiosity serves as a tool for organizing the information presented in the story as it unfolds. Furthermore, curiosity manifests through cognitive processes such as interrogation, uncertainty, and incomprehension, as well as the emotion of curiosity. Considering its presentational structure, the player has become accustomed to the vibrancy of Headspace, thus providing a sense of certainty through familiarity. However, with such a brief appearance, the jump scare abruptly shatters that sense of certainty. The split-second occurrence of the jump scare may cause the player to experience thought processes of interrogation, uncertainty, and incomprehension. These cognitions may be marked by the player questioning the significance of the jump scare, pondering its unpredictable nature, and ultimately reaching thoughts of confusion. Given the stark contrast with the vibrant Headspace, one might assume that this creates enjoyment for players. However, Bermejo-Berros et al. (2022) argue that curiosity alone is insufficient for experiencing narrative entertainment. The researchers suggest that suspense and surprise are crucial elements in creating experiences of enjoyment and entertainment. When these emotions are effectively engaged and resolved in a narrative or event, they

contribute to the audience's overall enjoyment. Nevertheless, curiosity drives the audience's engagement by creating cognitive and emotional tension. This tension contributes to other cognitive-emotional tension states, like suspense and surprise, as the audience anticipates future developments in the story. In relation to the distorted photo jump scare, it is one of the jump scares in the game that, by triggering curiosity in the player, leads to the emergence of suspense and surprise, which may subsequently captivate players into the narrative. Therefore, the jump scare may incite immersive horror through narrative tension.

Similarly, the Hellmari jump scare, characterized by its peculiar temporal and presentational structure, may incite immersive horror due to its significant capacity to influence players. Specifically, it may affect the player's crucial decision on the first day. The Hellmari jump scare occurs in the same setting where the player faces a pivotal decision that diverges the narrative into distinct paths: Hikikomori and True route. Opting to ignore Kel would steer the player towards the Hikikomori route in the following narrative. Conversely, opening the door leads to the True route, where a good ending is achievable. Notably, the decision involving Kel mirrors the presentational structure of the Hellmari jump scare. First, Mari's sprite in the jump scare sequence mimics the quality of Kel's sprite, as shown in the picture below. Second, the exact sounds of loud knocking as the one in the Hellmari jump scare echoes through the house the moment players exit Sunny's room. Third, the framing of the camera shifts the same way as in the Hellmari jump scare. Finally, the dialogue prompts the player to open the door. Kel states that he wishes to see Sunny before he moves out of town.



Figure 2.2 Kel's Sequence

Source: Morpheus. (2021, March 21). *OMORI - Full gameplay - No Commentary* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmCRo795IBk>

The presentation of this sequence with Kel resembles that of the Hellmari jump scare down to its visual, audio, and textual presentation. The similarity in presentation suggests that the Hellmari jump scare could lead players to be more cautious, possibly causing them to deviate from the True route to the Hikikomori one, in which players experience a narrative mostly centered around Sunny isolating himself in the confines of his house and mind. Although the Hellmari jump scare may instill caution in players, it does not dictate their behaviors. Naturally, there is the possibility that the player might opt to open the door despite the jump scare. The horror from this instance may become apparent only upon reflection while examining the parallels between the two sequences. Nevertheless, the Hellmari jump scare covertly instills dread, perhaps without the player's realization, by mirroring the following Kel sequence.

When examined further, both the distorted photo and Hellmari jump scare may induce immersive horror by rendering uncertainty through an affective-cognitive gap. According to Bermejo-Berros et al. (2022), the affective-cognitive gap refers to the interrelated connection between thought and emotion in the process of narrative tension. These thoughts and emotions make the story enjoyable, motivating players to uncover what happens next. The stress trigger can manifest as cognitive, linked to the story's events, or emotional, arising from a startling image or sound. During the course of the story, the viewer experiences various cognitive and emotional responses that serve the purpose of anticipation, diagnosis, or retrospection. Based on the discourse structure, one of these functions will ultimately prevail. As a result, diagnosis and retrospection might have prompted players' emotional and cognitive responses to the two jump scares. Players may engage in diagnosis to discern the unfolding events and the reason behind them. Subsequently, retrospection is done to reflect on what has happened in the story. Because jump scares are inherently sudden and unpredictable, this unpredictability likely enabled the diagnosis process, leading to the subsequent retrospection function after the jump scare. Ultimately, narrative tension persists, potentially captivating players in the horror narrative and thereby possibly inducing immersive horror.

Furthermore, the use of unreliable narrators in *OMORI* may incite immersive horror by making players doubt their understanding of the narrative. This is done through an apparent incongruence of information about Mari in Faraway Town and in Headspace. Identifying the peculiar aspects of the narrators, the existence of under-reporting, misreporting, and misregarding throughout the narrative may create narrative tension. First, there is repetition about Mari's death. The narrator Sunny and NPCs in Faraway Town made the player know about

Mari's death, albeit in a vague manner, as shown in the picture below. This may trigger curiosity in players regarding the reason for Mari's death.



Figure 2.2 Kel's Remark on Mari's Passing

Source: Morpheus. (2021, March 21). *OMORI - Full gameplay - No Commentary* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmCRo795IBk>

It is important to note that the NPCs merely describe Mari's passing based on their own knowledge. While Sunny and Basil knew the truth, everyone else was under the impression that Mari had taken her own life. In Faraway Town, players are constantly reaffirmed that Mari's death is caused by suicide. However, this supposed truth is constantly challenged by what happens in Headspace with Omori. The dichotomy between the narrative in Faraway Town and in the dream sequence may render an affective-cognitive gap. First, there is a lackluster discussion about Mari's death in Headspace. Mari, in Headspace, seems to be unscathed. This discrepancy of Mari's existence in one realm may serve to hint players that something is amiss. Thus, players might question which narrator—Sunny, in Faraway Town, or Omori in Headspace—is telling the truth. Among the cognitive and affective responses upon processing this aspect of the story, the player may mostly engage in prospection—anticipating what will happen next in the story—as they might ponder the truth of Mari's passing, and Sunny and Basil's involvement in her death. This, then, concerns the narrative, as shown through the presence of nightmares through the intrusions of symbolisms pertaining to Mari. Additionally, it is a point of concern that Omori may be considered a “factual” unreliable narrator as his perspective of the narrative takes place in a dream sequence. As such, Omori's recounting of the story has reasons for the readers to question the accuracy of the narrative. In actuality, it is not until near the end of the game that the truth is revealed. The existence of the above makes the plot twist—that Sunny and Basil played a role in Mari's passing—all the more horrifically shocking. Therefore, through the

unreliable narrators' incongruent telling of events, players feel uncertain about the truth, potentially inciting immersive horror players.

2.2.2 Developing a Sense of Emotional Connection

Trauma-driven narrative in *OMORI* may develop emotional connection in the players by forming a sense of attachment to the characters. From examining the gameplay mechanics that render a trauma narrative, they contain information of events surrounding the characters. Green and Brock (2000) state that because characters are the driving force in fiction, attachment to characters may play a significant role in narrative-based belief change. Video games that explore trauma narratives use game mechanics to immerse players in the characters' experiences and events. This immersion is achieved through interactive storytelling, emotional difficulties, and decision-making processes based on the characters' traumatic experiences. As players go through these aspects, they get a better understanding of and empathy for the characters' hardships and emotions. Based on the investigation of the gameplay mechanics' structure, the player may develop an emotional connection to the character as a result of developing an attachment to them.

Both the Hangman and photo album mechanics develop a sense of attachment to characters by making the player feel sympathetic to the character. Bopp et al. (2019) used the term 'sympathetic alter ego' to characterize situations where their study's respondents felt sympathetic towards characters, believing they had similar personal experiences. This instance of sympathetic alter ego may be prominent in *OMORI* as the gameplay mechanics provide an affordance to support the case. First, the Hangman mechanic presents the nature of trauma and grief in the character's psyche. As I established that the Hangman mechanic becomes a metaphor for trauma repression through embedded narratives, it allows the player to directly experience the after-effects of trauma. Specifically, the nature of traumatic memories that linger in the psyche. In the study done by Bopp et al. (2019), players expressed how, after identifying similarities, they felt understood by characters. Perhaps the combination of the lack of agency, non-chronological presentation, and synecdochal returns present in the Hangman mechanic results in making the player feel understood, especially those who perhaps struggle with traumatic memories that still linger in their psyche. All of which may instill a message that gives a deeper understanding of the nature of trauma, which may render empathy and critical thought in the player.

Secondly, the photo album mechanic deepens players' knowledge of the characters. The photo album mechanic gives players an opportunity to learn about the player character's past. This is made further effective through the existence of interactivity and epistemic plot. The picture album mechanic's capacity to provide interaction, or lack thereof, is significant. It is noteworthy that the first viewing of the first album lacks interactivity. The player can only passively browse the photographs. The static nature of the first album perhaps reflects Sunny's psyche. Through his alter ego, Omori, the photos' static nature showcases memories of what his past was like before Mari passed away. This may be an attempt at escapism and avoidance of his reality where Mari is no longer in his life. On the contrary, interactivity with the photographs occurs within the second album in Faraway Town. This may suggest that real-world experiences are more relevant since they are not restricted by Omori's escapism. It can provide an avenue that brings one closer to the truth. However, the second album alone is insufficient in providing the complete truth. I have identified previously that the presentation of the photo albums leads to an epistemic plot. The epistemic plot challenges the audience by hiding the truth before the plot reveals it. The combination of interactivity and epistemic plot have players conduct an active mental process of sorting through clues. This is evident through the final album in Black space. Unlike the previous photo albums, the final album in Black Space depicts the hidden narrative only with visuals, leaving players to infer the narrative themselves. The photo albums' affordance for interactivity can transport the player into the narrative as they are actively enacting as either Sunny or Omori when sorting the photographs.



Figure 2.2 Photo Album in Headspace



Figure 2.2 Photo Album in Faraway Town



Figure 2.2 Photo Album in Black space

Source: Morpheus. (2021, March 21). *OMORI - Full gameplay - No Commentary* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmCRo795IBk>

Furthermore, the ordering of the photo albums may cause players to sympathize with the player character, Sunny. The first album's outline of events before Mari's death allows players to understand the initial status quo. Afterwards, the second album allows players to deconstruct the first album's account, perhaps through noticing irregularities between the two narratives in the albums. Lastly, the third and final album allows players to unveil the long-hidden truth pertaining to Sunny's traumatic event. The truth is revealed through visuals alone in the form of photographs that are scattered in Black Space that the players need to collect. With each collected photo, players have a better understanding of what truly occurred in Sunny's past. As players sort through the monochromatic photos in the final photo album, they process the unfiltered account of Sunny's traumatic event: During an argument with his sister, Mari prevented Sunny from leaving, resulting in Sunny accidentally pushing Mari over the stairs and causing her death. Basil, who happened to have witnessed it, suggested that Sunny stage Mari's death as suicide by hanging her body on a tree in Sunny's backyard. Consequently, players

realize that the recurring motif of the entity, something, is none other than the last thing that Sunny saw before he returned inside his house: Mari's opened eye, glaring back at Sunny, as shown in the picture below. Evident from the existence of epistemic plot, as well as the subsequent presentations of Sunny struggling with guilt, grief, and trauma, players may identify with Sunny. Certainly, not every player will fully resonate with Sunny's story. As stated by Bopp et al. (2019), the extent to which players feel related to the sympathetic alter ego is strongly dependent on how much the character's experiences resonate with the players' own personal experiences. Nevertheless, due to the universality of grief and trauma, to an extent, players can sympathize with Sunny's experience. Therefore, the amalgamation of narrative presentations of Sunny's past and present situation may result in players feeling sympathetic towards the character from shared experiences with trauma and grief.



Figure 2.2 Portrait of Mari



Figure 2.2 Portrait of *Something*

Source: Morpheus. (2021, March 21). *OMORI - Full gameplay - No Commentary* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmCRo795IBk>

Finally, the segmented storyworld might affect players' belief and attitude by taking away their agency. I suggest that the repeated occurrence of stabbing the player character may cause players to get used to the behavior. I noted that the player character's forced return to Faraway Town via self-directed injury is crucial later on in a dilemmatic segment in one of Black Space's rooms. One of Black Space's most infamous spaces has Omori's cat, Mewo. There are accounts of players expressing strongly to this sequence (*OMORI - Cutting Open MEWO*, 2021). Their reactions are presumably justified given the room's presentation. In the room, there is a butler and Mewo, who is bound to a table. When the player interacts with the butler, they simply say, "MEWO has been very, very bad." The player appears to be unable to exit this room. Players may realize that killing Mewo is the only option to progress the narrative. Fortunately, players can reject that option by accessing the menu and stabbing the player character instead, as shown in the picture below. However, that option is fairly subtle, and most players reported not knowing it existed in the first place until they noticed the 'stab' option in the game's menu. Players may express relief when they find they can use the 'stab' option to avoid having to dissect Mewo. However, this may be followed by the distressing realization that players choose to kill the character they are enacting rather than that of others. This realization may spark a change of belief through a disturbing yet visceral experience from this sequence in Black Space. Players may find that this experience alters their perception of people who suffer from suicidal thoughts. This instance poignantly demonstrates the distinct nature of games that differs from other media like films and literature. In my research, I have come across a quote by Burdick (2006) that succinctly conveys this profound emotional impact from play:

People talk about how games don't have the emotional impact of movies. I think they do—they just have a different palette. I never felt pride, or guilt, watching a movie (as cited in Isbister, 2016).

Undoubtedly, the moment in which players are confronted with a feeling of powerlessness to dissect Mewo, not only confuses them, but also triggers feelings of guilt.

Although it is possible for the player to find the 'stab' option through desperate efforts, unfortunately, some players may not be aware of this choice and instead choose to dissect Mewo. The disheartening conclusion that cutting Mewo yields no results may evoke feelings of guilt in players. This indicates that, despite recognizing that the event is imaginary, players still have strong feelings about it. Transported readers may experience strong emotions and motivations, even when they know the events in the story are not real (Green & Brock, 2000). Furthermore, the presence of characters can significantly influence players' beliefs. As players

continue to play as Sunny and Omori, they may develop an identification with the characters. The transportation effect is particularly strong in terms of persuasion as identification with narratives may prove more compelling for audiences than messages lacking stories (Green & Brock, 2000). In the end, players' belief and attitude may shift due to the preconditioning of self-injury to escape the liminal space, or, more poignantly, to escape the helplessness caused by trauma.



Figure 2.2 Prompt to Cut Open Mewo

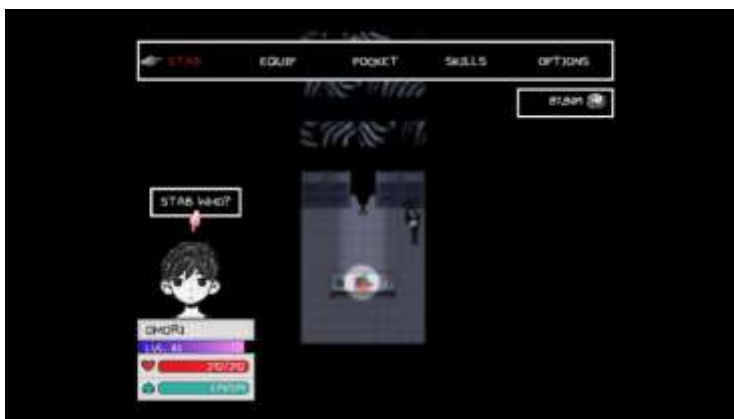


Figure 2.2 Option to Stab Omori

Source: Morpheus. (2021, March 21). *OMORI - Full gameplay - No Commentary* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmCRo795IBk>

In conclusion, I have explained how the notable techniques used in *OMORI* that manifest unpredictability and a trauma-driven narrative can evoke immersive horror and a sense of emotional connection in players. Jump scares may induce immersive horror by creating narrative tension, potentially causing players to experience affective-cognitive gaps as the narrative advances. Furthermore, unreliable narrators may incite immersive horror through conveying conflicting information, which creates a sense of uncertainty and causes players to question.

Moreover, trauma-driven narrative techniques create emotional connections by causing the player to sympathize with the player character via photo album and Hangman mechanics. Finally, the conditioned action of the forced transition within segmented worlds may cause players to reflect the message of guilt and trauma.