

Game Narrative Review

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Game: Minit

Platforms: PlayStation 4, Nintendo Switch, Xbox One, Microsoft Windows, Linux, Android, iOS, Macintosh operating systems

Genre: Adventure

Release Date: April 3rd, 2018

Developer: Kitty Calis, Jan Willem Nijman, Jukio Kallio, and Dominik Johann

Publisher: Devolver Digital

Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Kitty Calis, Jan Willem Nijman, Jukio Kallio, and Dominik Johann

Overview

The following sixty seconds are one of many days lived by the player character. In *Minit*, you control a protagonist who is bound by a curse that makes days last only a mere minute. In this action-adventure game, you are stuck in an endless loop for an unknown amount of time and must find a way to break the curse, making the most of every moment in each day.

There's no time to waste.

1. The player dashes out of their home.
2. Outside, they hesitate. Left, or right?
3. Stupid. Of course it's the left.
4. They rush past their mailbox. They have no time to read mail, they've already wasted a second thinking.
5. The player reaches their garden. The two wide rows are all empty except for one neglected plant. No time to tend to that now.
6. A row of ferns blocks their path- these have got to go, and fast.
7. Sword readily in hand, the player hacks the obstacle away.
8. Resheathing the weapon, they resume their hurried stride.

9. A small building by the shore stands before them. There must be something to gain inside. The player enters.
10. A figure stands to their immediate left.
11. The figure wishes there was some music.
12. Who cares.
13. The player turns to the bartender. He wishes for five infamous crabs to be killed.
14. Without missing a beat, the player runs out of the building.
15. Maintaining their pace, they run south, parallel to the shore, ignoring the sparkling sea in their search for crabs.
16. The player reaches a quaint boardwalk, its end extending past their vision.
17. What's down there?
18. Any new mysteries or discoveries?
19. No matter, no crabs will be on a boardwalk.
20. The player rushes to the right.
21. Another set of ferns.
22. Great.
23. Another clean swipe puts them right back on track.
24. Continuing onward, they pass by a boy standing still in a field.
25. Why's he just standing there?
26. There's no time to ask him why.
27. Onward.
28. Alas! While advancing, the player finally finds two crabs.
29. Rushing upwards, they slay the first crustacean, eyes already on the next.
30. They dash to the next crab, but too soon.
31. It pinches them. Ouch.
32. The player retaliates, stabbing the defender. Two crabs down.
33. A little more than half of the day is gone.
34. The unknown path continues. The player walks forward.
35. They reach their house.
36. Their house?!
37. No matter, this loop can lead them to the clearing they made from before.
Efficiency!
38. They rush.
39. Why can't these stubby legs move the player faster.
40. They arrive at the previously shredded bush in their garden.
41. Vaulting through the opening, they reconnect with the seaside building, its exterior populated with strange looking figures. Who are they?
42. The player's curiosity is cut short as they recall the bartender's request and their limited time. Perhaps they'll inquire some other time.
43. The player runs to the northside of the shore, quickly leaving behind the inviting scene.

44. Suddenly, they are met face-to-face with three more crabs and six more pincers to defeat.
45. Dodging to their left, the player goes for a successful strike. One down.
46. Confident, they approach the next, and go for a preemptive swing.
47. They miss.
48. That's not good.
49. The player desperately swings once more.
50. Another miss. Panic. Ten seconds left.
51. Praying, they attack. This time, they land a lucky strike. Two down, one more to go. A loud tick echoes.
52. Maybe there's a chance. The player follows up with another jab towards the incoming enemy. A tock tolls.
53. Another hit! Perhaps there might just be enough time. Tick
54. With all five crabs slain, the player leaves the massacre behind, bee-lining back to the bartender. Tock
55. Five seconds left. Tick
56. The player darts past the soft embrace of land and sea. Tock.
57. The building is in sight. Tick.
58. They anticipate the excited face of the bartender. Tock.
59. Rounding the corner, the player sees the entrance to the building. Can't wait until- Tick.
60. They stop moving. As the clock's intense reverberant ticking has its last tock, the player collapses. Pent up adrenaline is cathartically released, and the world quickly dissipates with disappointment. They weren't efficient enough. They ran out of time.
Press A to continue.
There's no time to waste.

Characters

The characters the audience meets in *Minit* do not have names, therefore for the purpose of this review they are identified by either their most telling physical traits and/or their location. Additionally, the characters listed are highlighted not by their significance to the overall game, but rather their importance to this review.

The Player: A nameless 1-bit dog owner, the audience plays as an individual cursed by a sword that limits their days to sixty seconds each. Journeying across the map one day at a time, the player stumbles across many different people as they find new places to call home. These homes act as a checkpoint for the player, respawning at

the last homestead visited after their sixty seconds run out. In the player's frenzied rush, they blindly complete tasks and help others without a single second given to ask who, what, and why, as the player only has sixty seconds to spare.

Old Man at the Lighthouse: Peacefully staring out to sea, the player finds an old man standing beside a lighthouse. Upon walking up to him he begins to speak very slowly, explaining his love of the ocean. His enjoyment of the scene ultimately takes up an entire day (one minute) to finish his sentence, to where the patient person is rewarded with information on how to avoid peril and find treasure.

Sword Factory Owner: As the player reaches the end of the game, they learn of the origin of the cursed sword: a sword factory. After some exploring the player will realize that the building is very odd, containing many conveyor belts carrying swords which bare a resemblance to the player's cursed one. Deep within the factory is where the Sword Factory Owner resides. It is here where they throw jeers at the player, bragging about their product's curse and weaponizing them by wearing the swords as armor and utilizing them as a weapon.

Dog: Living comfortably in the player's home, the player's dog remains stationary, never leaving the home. The player has minimal interaction with their pet, having their importance not known until the end of the game in a cutscene.

The Ferryman: Found stuck in a desert and begging for water, the Ferryman provides the player with a safe trip across the ocean to an island after receiving help. When on the island, the appreciative Ferryman shares how they admire the scenery, and might enjoy themselves with some fishing.

Breakdown

In *Minit*, the audience plays as a nameless victim to a curse that ends their day after sixty seconds. Playing like an old-school action-adventure game, *Minit* is retro-ly fashioned with a 1-bit art style and a soundtrack outfitted with chiptune melodies that play as the protagonist runs about. When first booting up *Minit*, the player will find themselves in their humble abode, where a dog warmed by a cozy fireplace rests. The only instruction they are given is how to walk. From there, they are free to roam and leave their home. As the player walks around outside, they will notice that there are many paths to the outside world blocked by ferns. Eventually they will find themselves funneled down alongside a seashore, where they must helplessly avoid killer crabs to continue onward. Successfully escaping, the player character will arrive at a beach where

a washed-up sword twinkles with just a little more luster than seafoam in the sun. When the player walks up to the enticing sword, they pick it up, and a victory chime begins to play. However, the happy tune quickly becomes warped in pitch and becomes sinister. With no immediate negative effects, the player can ignore the strange sound and turn back to the threatening crabs, deciding to show them how it feels to be helpless.

Leaving the seaside battlefield behind, the player moves onward to their home's backyard, and use their new power to cut through the ferns that once hid the world from their eyes. As the player enters another clearing, they begin to hear a clock's intense ticking. Distressed, they walk around, bumping against the confines of the simple field populated with a single mine shaft and waterfall. After ten confusing seconds, the player drops dead, and are told "Time's Up!". Respawned in their home, the player notices a timer in the top left corner starting at sixty, and then going down to fifty-nine.

Within the first few minutes of the game, the player comes to understand that the strange noise signified the start of the sixty second curse, forcing them to quickly adapt to the new constraint put on their gameplay. By starting the game off with no time limit, the player takes for granted their brief moment of control, and instead rush head on to the sword. To enforce this dynamic, the level design forces the player to go straight to the sword's location, as exploration is entirely limited without it. Additionally, the game rushes the player by placing crabs that can attack and kill them, further pushing them to stumble upon and pick up the cursed sword. Once obtained, it is here that the player can now broaden their horizons by slaying enemies and hacking through level-blocking barriers. However, the player is only able to enjoy their new liberties for very brief moments of time, causing a stress induced rush to maximize time and be the most efficient. By tying *Minit's* core mechanic very closely to the narrative, the designers highlight the increased opportunity and enjoyment that comes with obtaining new skills, and give a harsh reality by juxtaposing the new freedom with the very limiting cost of time, nullifying the opportunity to fully bask in the newly obtained joys.

Once wielding the double-edged sword, the player is free to navigate the game however they desire. Despite this, it is still hard to avoid the main quest's objectives and path. The player will find themselves journeying close to their home, where they will discover a building resembling a bar. Here is where the player gets their first direction, requiring them to slay five crabs at two ends of the shoreline in under one minute. The player here is forced to zoom past the seaside scenery, interested only in the completion of their objective. After slaughtering the five beach dwellers, they return to the bar and are rewarded with coffee. Ecstatic, the player lifts the item into the air, as a screen-filling pinwheel circles around their new reward, glorifying their efficiency. Now they will be able to do more in less time!

The rest of the game follows a similar pattern of the player running around until bumping into more work to do, frantically figuring out how to accomplish their next goal and earning items to access new areas. Following the acquisition of the coffee, the journey takes the player to the top of a lighthouse where they are given a flashlight in

order to descend to the depths of a snake-laden cave. Thereafter they are pushed to explore a multitude of different terrains, throwing themselves through an endless arid desert and eventually stumbling upon an individual begging for water. After satisfying their quench, the player must tread through a waist-high swamp in order to receive their reward, which ends up being more work. Desperate for direction, this reward is what the player finds themselves to truly most desire, happily continuing from job to job.

Soon after, the player will find themselves on a ferry ride with the Ferryman to a nice island. However, the journey takes many seconds, leaving the player to become impatient and itching to be deployed to have full autonomy again. When arriving with less time, the player frantically runs around, bumping into the confines of the small island as they panic, slashing and destroying anything possible to find some objective to complete. Soon, they will realize how the island has a new home and checkpoint, meaning that they have time to explore the location. To contrast this dynamic, the Ferryman says he loves the place, and that he “might go fishing in a minute”. This stark contrast is another moment where the player is reminded that they are not enjoying themselves but instead, are always working.

The island will lead the player to stranger places, having them discover a submarine and laboratory. After commandeering the underwater vessel and teleporting around a strange laboratory, the player will find themselves back on the mainland, making their way to a hotel. Upon entering, the person at the front desk asks for help in finding all their missing hotel guests, sending the player back to a hectic rush. From here, another set of random locations are visited, as the player dashes through a graveyard, fights off forest dwellers, and sets off bombs in a mine. Even stranger, upon finding every missing hotel guest, the player never engages in conversation with them, only hearing that they are on their way back home. The lack of inquiry makes the player feel even more disassociated with the world around them, pushing them onward with no interest in the strange guests they had just met.

When the player finds all the hotel guests, they are drawn to enter a factory, which they quickly discover produces swords that are identical to the cursed one the player brandishes. With roads of conveyor belts in the factory, the player follows the veins to the machine’s heart, whereupon they find the final boss: The Sword Factory Owner. In order to defeat them, the player must first run around the factory and systematically shut down its machines one by one. Once all are destroyed, the player can face the final boss, who attacks them with a flurry of swords encircling his menacing body. After a bullet-hell-esque boss fight with evading and counter attacks, the player must land a final blow to their adversary, with their killing strike breaking their sword, and in turn, the curse. The irony in this is masterful, as the player slays the final boss with their own creation. When the Sword Factory Owner boasts about their product to the point where they adorn it in a fight, they become a deformed conglomerate of materialistic ambition. Here, *Minit* warns the player about the dangers of being

excessively ambitious and self-absorbed, displaying how one's own ambition can be their own demise.

Minit takes the player through an eclectic variety of locations, ranging from the deep sea, to an empty hotel, to a cursed sword factory. The nonsensical chaotic path and lack of cohesion is purposeful, as the player's desperate rush disallows them from taking the time to acknowledge where they are and how they got there. The player is never given the chance to form a connection with the characters and places they visit, as their self-reflection is hindered due to solely focusing on their current task before time's up. In doing this, *Minit* masterfully captures the dynamic of the daily twenty-first century frenzy, and instead of just telling the player about it, the game has them experience it firsthand.

After defeating the final boss, the player will be directed to a bathroom, where they will flush their broken sword down a toilet. As they watch the once cursed object sink to the bottom of the ocean, passing by rising bubbles in its descent, the statistics of the game will flash before the player. This is where they will discover that even though they completed their quest and broke the curse, they have only completed less than 30% of the game. This leaves the player only to wonder, what have they missed? After some credits roll down, a cutscene begins to play, showing the player walking back into their home with the timer paused. They crawl back into their bed and sink into the sheets. The dog joins the player character, and for once, they both rest together, and do nothing.

Strongest Element

What would *Minit* be without its one-minute timer curse? Without the curse, the player will never feel the sense of urgency of making the most of their day. Without the curse, the player would never rush past the placid environment. Without the curse, the themes of the game will never be shown. The curse catalyzes the entire narrative with its ability to grant the user more power at a cost, serving as a physical manifestation of our ambition and the consequences that come after. This makes the curse the strongest element in *Minit*, as it highlights how people react to their limited time and desire to accomplish more. Its omnipresence is relatable, as every person who plays the game experiences the same exact limit in their real lives, pressured to do more in an ever-changing world. With the narrative's marriage with the core mechanic, *Minit* flawlessly weaves in this real life dynamic disguised as a mechanic, making the delivery of a bleak reality more digestible in a simple, fun, game.

Unsuccessful Element

Although the world's characters are supposed to act like everyday people, their lack of acknowledgement of the player's frenzied rush causes the audience to not focus on the crucial themes that *Minit* portrays. The characters' behavior suggests that they are normalized to ceaseless work, making it difficult to identify the themes in the game. When the player's rushed playstyle is not directly addressed, they can begin to believe that conducting life in such a way is entirely acceptable in the game's world, which is modeled after reality. In doing so, the player can miss the important lessons in the game, and instead begin to adopt the behavior that *Minit* is trying to discourage. If the non-playable characters were to give more attention to the player's never-ending urgency, the player would begin to recognize an issue in their playstyle. With an increased awareness of the odd situation, the player would have a better chance in understanding the deeper themes that *Minit's* narrative and gameplay provide beneath its apparent simplicity.

Highlight

No moment encapsulates what *Minit* is about more than listening to the Old Man at the Lighthouse. Early in the game, the player obtains a key to the lighthouse, suggesting that they go to the seaside tower. After walking across a pier, the player will arrive at the lighthouse's entrance, open for them to go inside and scale the building. Next to the base of the lighthouse is an old man staring out to sea, watching the traveling waves with complete stillness. When approaching the old man, he begins to speak very slowly. Immediately, the player will be taken aback, only accustomed to the snappy short sentences blurted by characters as the player runs by. By the time players reach the old man, they have approximately forty seconds remaining in the day, which is just enough time for the old man to get through his entire sentence. If choosing to spend the rest of their day listening and being patient, the players will be rewarded with the most impactful moment of the game. Slowly, the old man greets the player, and proceeds to speak of how lovely the ocean is, indulging in its sounds, and that he sometimes likes to wave at the boats passing by. It's not until the very end of his sentence does the old man reward the patient player, instructing a secret way to reach treasure on an island offshore. By sitting with the old man for the entire day, the player demonstrates that they are willing to take the time to listen and allow his pacing to slow them down, taking in the world for a moment. It is here that *Minit* asks the player to spare a minute of their time, having them take the day off and enjoy the world. It

teaches the player that people are worth the time, and by indulging in the world around them, they can find a treasure otherwise forever unknown. Mechanically, the designers cleverly reinforced this idea by having the players gain a coin if they follow the Old Man at the Lighthouse's instructions, serving as a double meaning with its treasure, both literally and figuratively.

Critical Reception

Minit has received positive critical acclaim, receiving a 79% on Metacritic¹.

Jeff Ramos of Polygon ranked *Minit* the 15th best game of 2018, stating how “mundane tasks turn into monumental undertakings”². He recognizes *Minit*'s skill in mimicking the banal tasks and limits of daily life and manages to deliver it in a digestible fun form.

Stephen Tailby gave *Minit* a 7/10 on Push Square, noting that *Minit* is “cleverly structured” and has “straightforward design”³. Throughout his review Tailby muses over *Minit*'s design, reiterating how straightforward the designers made the game to be, allowing for players to be incredibly receptive to the themes present.

Metro gave *Minit* an 8/10, hailing that the “central premise is exploited perfectly”⁴. In the entirety of the review, they speak of how the game does a great job of standing as its own, borrowing just enough from games like *The Legend of Zelda*, while preserving its unique indie charm.

Lessons

There are Two Sides to Every Coin: Be careful for what you wish for. Whether that be begging for that new promotion, or crossing your fingers and toes to be accepted to a top university, we often overlook the new problems that can arise with newfound power. We won't think about how that recent promotion requires you to travel internationally, forcing you to leave your family for most of the year. We won't consider the sleepless nights and mountains of work when studying at the highest caliber. Instead, we only begin to regret our ambition in hindsight, suffering from the blind hunger to have more, see more, and be more. In *Minit*, this lesson is taught to the player from the very beginning. The core mechanic of resetting each day every sixty seconds is the price to pay for more power, allowing the player to do more in the game while the curse hides within the sword, being representative of the guise that power and ambition wear. The grass may be greener on the other side, but expect that the lawn must be maintained.

Wave at the Boats: *Minit* is a champion of simplicity. Its lack of identity in its characters and context makes it easier to insert the player in the shoes of the cursed, as their twenty-first century minds wield the sword. With the stressful limit of sixty seconds per day, players are left with the impression that they are forced to rush through the game and its levels. However, there exists no limit on how many times they can have their day restart. It is only the player who assumes that they must complete the game as quickly as possible. If going for the quickest run, the player will discover that they only have collected less than 30% of the things in the game. By completing the game with such a percentage, it is indicative that the player hardly took the time to explore the world and interact with the game's characters. *Minit* offers the player more chances to see more of the world by continuing from their "completed" game, pointing out that if one rushes an objective, they will often miss out on most things. Extending this to real life, *Minit* calls out those who only work. The game outright tells the player that they did not take the time to digest the world around them, giving no care to the secret beauties that the world had to offer. It tells the player that they did not listen and give the time to the characters who provided new adventures to go on. Essentially, *Minit* suggests that the player should "waste" their time by seeking hidden treasures, saying that there is much more than completing the main quest in life. The final boss can still be defeated in under twenty-five runs or a thousand. It is with this percentage that the designers tell the player that in order to live life to the fullest, they should take the time to stand and look around, maybe sit with the Old Man at the Lighthouse, and listen to the ocean as they wave to the boats.

Don't Find the Meaning, but the Measure of Meaning: For much of *Minit* the player is unaware of what is really going on. From the myriad of places that they visit to the absurd boss fight at the end, the entire journey that the player takes seems to be entirely nonsensical and only built for fun. When the player defeats the final boss, they end the game by flushing their now broken sword down a toilet. This causes one to ask, "is that a metaphor for something grand?" The lack of elaboration answers this question by simply leaving the non sequitur as an absurd moment. Instead, the game ends on a touching cutscene that plays afterward, showing what the focus is truly on. In it, the audience watches the player's home as the clock keeps ticking down until finally stopping at forty. Right after, the player enters the home and is greeted by their excited dog. They both walk to the bed and lay down, and with eyes closed, both comfortably submit to a deep slumber together. The player did not slay the final boss and embark on an entire adventure to seek some sort of understanding of themselves or the universe. Instead, they simply wanted to break the curse, and return to the things in life that they really cared about. This rather simple and underwhelming truth is further complemented with the straightforward art style and design of the game, as *Minit* embraces the beauty of the modesty in life. We may never know the answers as to what

or why things are, but we do know what is important to us and worth returning to, and allow that to drive the arduous yet righteous tasks we undertake every day.

Summation

Today's standards will always be higher than yesterday's. Waking up in the morning, you'll scroll through the news and read about the next miracle child and the newest innovation in technology. Expectations are heightened, and what once qualified as a good day's work is now underperforming. Morning commutes have to be a little faster and lunch breaks need to be a little shorter, with each and every day pushing these boundaries further and further. But what happens if one can't keep up? In *Minit*, this crisis is brilliantly depicted in its speed-ran narrative designed to be a simpler adventure game, akin to the old-school *The Legend of Zelda*. However, this design choice does more than just create a charming lower scoped indie game harkening to a simpler time of our lives, but instead accentuates the themes it showcases, having its barebones be open for the entire world to see. It shows the player how we behave with time constraints and responsibilities in life, demonstrating how we miss out on the people we meet and places we visit as we tunnel vision on the micro tasks at hand. Similar to life, we have our heads deep to the sand, examining every individual grain, and rarely look up to see the grand desert. We are so worried and pressed by how much we can accomplish in a single day that we forget why we even started in the first place. Like the cursed sword, when we are provided with an opportunity to do much more with our lives, we can become too absorbed in our ambition, eventually forgetting to focus on the lovely things in life. And that is why sometimes, we must sit, and take it all in, for just a Minit.

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