

# Never Let Go Of Planning Document

Draft 2.0 – 11/08/15 – For a Twine Text Adventure by Isaiah Everin

## Story Treatment

### Introduction

#### Premise

*Never Let Go Of* is a text adventure game developed using Twine 2.0, playable on any web browser. The game focuses on providing interesting choices and consequences to The Reader, particularly choices driven more by personality-based motivations as opposed to optimal or moral decision-making. The choices that the game offer the Reader-controlled, primary protagonist (Kennelly) center on developing the inter-group dynamics of the main cast of four characters, affecting how they communicate with each other as well as how they attempt to solve problems.

The story is in the genre of a sci-fi, paranormal thriller, and its mood is stark and tense. The four main characters work for a secret agency that protects the world from paranormal artifacts, though none of them is a field worker whose job would put them on the dangerous front lines of these efforts. Instead, they each serve more as Agency support staff, and thus their weekend adventure to find a paranormal object is not informed by previous practice. The group practically bumbles their way through events that go beyond their training, all in search of a wish-granting unicorn that their agency has assumed to be fake.

Thrust ahead by foolhardiness, curiosity, and a bit of insobriety, the group explores an abandoned house despite the apparent danger it presents. Throughout, each of them are eventually wrested from their own emotional, drunken musings and forced to apply their wit and courage to find each other and figure out how to escape. They find that, for unknown reasons, the house bends time, forcing them to meet each other out of sync, and confusing them as they get lost in the maze of its interior.

The resolution of the game ties it to the mythos of a larger story, one that ideally continues in other similar text adventures, but it also wraps up the events of this story on its own, offering a tragic ending to the group of characters in spite of The Reader's attempt to reach a positive conclusion.

### Themes

The story's major theme is the conflict between holding onto the past, focusing on the present, or looking only toward the future. Many choices the game offers put this key theme front and center, encouraging The Reader to make their own conclusions about what is best.

The story's main theme come to a head when the researchers find themselves in a paranormal house that is bending time in all directions. The group gets separated in the house, and finds themselves moving backwards and forwards, meeting different versions of each other, and the solution that Kennelly finds to the problem of escaping the house lies in making The Reader decide between the past, present, or future.

A sub-theme of the story, something that connects all of the four main characters, is how people deal with loss and tragedy. The four characters work for an organization that handles dangerous and inexplicable events, and so this sub-theme is butted up against the concept that many things in the universe have no rhyme or reason, especially when it comes to the most tragic aspects of life. How each of the characters handles this reality is a large part of what defines them and their place in the story.

## Characters

### Kennelly

**Myers Briggs:** INTP

**Concrete Problem:** holding onto a tragedy he could not stop; fearing he does not understand enough

**Abstract Problem:** holding onto his obsession with trying to understand the incomprehensible

**Characteristics:** Theoretical, Curious, Emotionally Detached, Dry

**Career:** Former Particle Physicist, Current Agency Paranormal Analyst

**Theme Connection:** He is the playable character, and how much he holds onto the past, present, or future during the events of the story is determined by the choices that The Reader makes.

### Armen

**Myers Briggs:** INTJ

**Concrete Problem:** holding onto a tragedy he inadvertently caused; fearing he will repeat the past

**Abstract Problem:** holding onto his obsession with his own imperfection

**Characteristics:** Ambitious, Impulsive, Obsessive, Sarcastic

**Career:** Former Aerospace Engineer, Current Agency Grey Projects Engineer

**Theme Connection:** He focuses entirely on the future, ignoring the importance of the living in the present or of acknowledging the impact of the past.

- **Positive:** Focusing on future leads to significant growth and development in some aspects of self.
- **Negative:** Forgetting the present allows for too much anxiety of the future, forgetting the past leads to not learning properly from mistakes.

### Natalie

**Myers Briggs:** INFP

**Concrete Problem:** holding onto the loss of her parents; fearing her life can never be normal

**Abstract Problem:** holding onto the idea that she cannot escape feeling like a victim

**Characteristics:** Grounded, Careful, Empathic, Witty

**Career:** Former Psychology Student, Current Agency Psychological Counselor

**Theme Connection:** She focuses on the present, trying not to think of difficulties of the past or worry about the future, but overall wanting to experience peace and comfort in the now.

- **Positive:** Embracing the present leads to enjoying experiences more fully as they happen.
- **Negative:** Ignoring the past creates unresolved mental and emotional issues, ignoring the future means not properly preparing for it.

### Brighton

**Myers Briggs:** INFJ

**Concrete Problem:** holding onto the loss of his husband; fearing that he does not deserve to be happy

**Abstract Problem:** holding onto his anger at why bad things happen to good people

**Characteristics:** Tenacious, Focused, Individualistic, Boisterous

**Career:** Former Novelist, Current Agency Archivist

**Theme Connection:** He focuses on the past, unable to let go of the tragedies that he has witnessed, stuck on the idea that every bad thing that has happened must be recorded, remembered, and understood.

- **Positive:** Trying to understand the past allows us to learn more from it.
- **Negative:** Neglecting the present makes it harder to enjoy life, neglecting the future leads to difficulty in growing and developing as it comes.

## Backstory

### The Agency

This international organization serves to protect the world from and hide paranormal events, people, and artifacts. The Agency and their actions are a secret to the world, they are connected to governments through unknown ties, and they possess far-reaching powers and influence. Members of The Agency live secret lives, secluded in the hidden facilities that they call home.

### Character Histories

Before the events of the story, three of the main characters (Kennelly, Armen, and Natalie) are significantly involved in one another's lives at The Agency, having built friendships over their time of working together. Brighton introduces himself to the group through the events of the story.

A year before the events of the story, Kennelly and Armen were directly involved in a particularly tragic operation of The Agency. In attempting to contain a location codenamed "The Blood Warehouse," actions taken by Armen inadvertently led to the death of over a dozen researchers. Additionally, theories Kennelly had about how the Warehouse operated informed Armen's actions. Both researchers continue to feel a significant amount of regret and confusion over the events that unfolded. For Armen, the trauma has barred his ability to become a full-time field agent due to The Agency doubting his emotional stability. For Kennelly, the mistaken assumptions about the Warehouse have driven him into an obsessive crusade to understand better the fundamental rules underlying a variety of paranormal artifacts.

Natalie was not involved in the Warehouse incident, but has her own sordid history with The Agency. Despite not being a field agent, she has repeatedly ended up involved directly in incidents on the premises of The Agency's facilities, often having to be rescued by other agents. She has continuously attempted to distance her work from dangerous situations while at the same time hoping to conquer her fears and rescue others from tragedy—work she does by being a psychological counselor for The Agency. Further back in her past, Natalie lost her parents to a paranormal creature, events that led to her eventual employment with The Agency, and sewing the seed of her constant sensation of victimhood.

Brighton's past with The Agency goes far back as well, with the loss of his husband to the same paranormal creature that killed Natalie's parents. However, in this case, Brighton was motivated to find and kill the monster with his own hands, actions that drew him to the attention of The Agency. However, in the final moments of his vengeance, Brighton learned from the creature that it did not know or understand how its actions were tragically effecting its victims, being incapable of comprehending humans and their way of life. The strangeness of this conclusion has plagued Brighton, and he continues to foster bitterness towards the arbitrary nature of life that comes to light through The Agency's work.

## Story Synopsis

### Summary

*Never Let Go Of* covers the dramatic events that occur when four paranormal researchers decide to explore a local myth on a semi-drunken lark. Taking some time off from their cloistered, top-secret Agency facility in the arctic tundra of northern Russia, the group goes on a treasure hunt for an object called the Russian Unicorn, one claimed to grant any wish by the locals. Most of the group presumes its nonexistence, since The Agency would certainly have secured a nearby artifact were it around.

At the start of the story, Kennelly gets a paper cut, and a drop of blood falls on a strange red box that he's studying—an artifact left behind from a tragic event that haunts both him and Armen. The box seems to glow when his blood touches it, but something in his mind convinces him that it's just a trick of the light just as Armen barges into the lab to complain about being rejected for Agent status.

Kennelly and Armen are close friends at the Agency, and upon figuring out the birthday of another friend, (Natalie) is soon, they decide to surprise her with a night out at the pub of the nearby town. An animated Scotsman, Brighton, is in the room when they make the plans and invites himself along. Armen hints that he has a surprise for Natalie, and while Kennelly thinks that sounds like a bad idea, he finds himself saying that it's a great one. That night, the four take one of the Agency's self-driving cars to the small town.

Out at the bar, Kennelly feels like he shouldn't drink, but his mind is easily changed by the others. Armen brings up the Russian Unicorn, and the group discusses the myth. While they all work in one way or another with paranormal objects and events, none of them believe that anything could literally grant wishes. They talk about what they would wish for and how they would decide how to make a wish all together. The various attitudes and motivations of the characters begin to come to light.

Outside the bar, Armen reveals he procured a map that supposedly leads to the unicorn. Kennelly's gut for some reason tells him that this is a horrible idea, but he somehow can't manage to say so. The group is dubious, but Armen convinces them to go on the quest. Their self-driving jeep takes them to the trailhead, and they head off into the snowy woods in search of the fabled treasure. Getting almost lost once or twice, the group manages to make their way to an abandoned house that appears to be the intended destination of the map.

The interior of the house seems initially innocent, simply decaying to time and the cold, but Kennelly's instincts scream at him to leave even though he can't seem to bring himself to stop. However, as the group makes their way deeper in, they find that the hallways and rooms don't seem to stop at any point. When they try to find their way back out, they get unintentionally split up from Armen. The others dash to find him, and when they do, he is covered in blood and screaming a warning at them before dying on the floor. Within seconds of walking away, the group runs into Armen again, now clean and safe. They suddenly become sure that something unnatural is occurring in the house.

With a few more occurrences like this, Kennelly realizes that the house is somehow warping time, sending members of the group backwards and forwards for inexplicable reasons. Kennelly is even faced with a future version of himself, who offers a cryptic warning that anything he chooses is a mistake. After that, the house begins to summon paranormal beings and artifacts that the other members have worked with, including the monster that killed Natalie's parents and Brighton's husband, putting the group to trial repeatedly at the whims of these dangers. Kennelly is goes through three rooms, watching each one of his friends suffer and die, only to have time rewind and everything wrong to go shortly back to normal.

Eventually Kennelly ends up alone in a room that looks like his office, but with a mirror and three doors. Sitting on a desk in front of the mirror is the red box from the start of the story. After Kennelly picks up the box, his reflection in the mirror starts to talk to him. The reflected self's eyes have strange irises—one that is black with a red pupil, and one that is white with a red pupil. This other self vaguely explains to Kennelly that it is seeking entertainment for itself and its "audience," and that the group's desire for adventure and emotional resolution drew it to them. It goes so far as to allude that it is responsible for many of the tragic paranormal events that the Agency contains, though Kennelly doesn't believe this.

The reflection being reveals that there is no unicorn, it is not powerful enough to grant any wish, but that The Reader has one final choice to make. They must decide which of the three rooms they walked through to turn into reality—the room Brighton died in, the room Natalie died in, or the room Armen died in. The Reader might presume that they can change their decision in that room and save all of the characters, but it turns out that the person dies in that room regardless of what The Reader chooses.

Kennelly faces his past self and warns him that no matter what he chooses, it will be a mistake. Finally, the reflection being faces the remaining characters, both antagonizing and praising The Reader for the various choices that they have made, telling them to focus more on the past, the present, or the future depending on what decisions they made, and finally absolving Kennelly for any blame he might feel. The remaining characters just begin to let loose their outrage towards the supernatural being before it impatiently forces them out of the house, and the story abruptly ends.

### Choices

The game features five major forms of choices, with each section of the story featuring at least one of each. There are smaller dialog choices that change the flow of the story, but these five types of choice have the largest impact on the story and the experience of The Reader.

1. **Frozen Choice:** Each section of the story is punctuated with one of these choices. These are core to the overall plot of the story, communicating to The Reader that Kennelly no longer has full control over himself. Each frozen choice is Kennelly's attempt to stop the story in its tracks and take a safer route, but the supernatural being that is possessing him subtly changes his thought process such that regardless of whichever option The Reader chooses, Kennelly changes his mind and goes along with the more dramatic path of the story.
2. **Key Choice:** These are important theme-related choices. The three options presented to The Reader each represent focusing on the past, present, or future. There's no "correct" answer, with all of them having validity depending on The Reader's mindset.
3. **Action Choice:** These are binary choices where The Reader can choose one path or another and the choice actually affects the actions of the characters directly. Every action choice has a notable consequence on the events of the story.
4. **Inter-Group Choice:** These choices affect the group dynamics of the cast. They generally take the form of Kennelly offering an opinion that affects how the characters see him or one another. They have noticeable ramifications on dialog, as each of the other characters has a considerable level of respect for Kennelly and his opinions on life and the Agency.
5. **Exposition Choice:** These are opportunities offered to The Reader to learn more about the characters and world of the story if they so choose. The Reader has the option of moving on and not taking on this extra information, but it is always information that could influence the choices they make moving forwards in the story.

## Structure

The Reader controls Kennelly throughout the story. Each section of the story serves to further ramp up the dramatic tension of the tale being told, with different aspects of each character creating psychological tension that is counter-pointed by the paranormal events that unfold. The story also follows a typical dramatic arc, creating a self-contained narrative with a strong build up and payoff. Though the conclusion is subversive in not delivering a complete sense of resolution, the finale is relevant to the core themes of loss, moving on, and a lack of comprehension in the face of the tragic nature of the universe.

- A. Introduction to the story, establishing the cast of characters; Armen vents to Kennelly about still being on probation, Kennelly is focused on his work trying to figure out a mysterious cube; Kennelly reveals that he found out Natalie's birthday and they decide to take time off to go to the nearby village and have drinks with her as a surprise; Brighton happens to be around and invites himself along, Armen agrees regardless of Kennelly's opinion
  1. (Frozen Choice) Armen says he has a surprise for Natalie.
    - (i) Not a good idea
    - (ii) Have a bad feeling
    - (iii) Can't see how that could go well
  2. (Inter-Group) Do I approve of Brighton joining us?
    - (i) Yes
    - (ii) Unsure
    - (iii) No
  3. (Key Choice) What's most important to me right now?
    - (i) Understanding past incident
    - (ii) Enjoying this night with friends
    - (iii) Future discoveries
  4. (Exposition) Read personnel files on the group to understand them better
  5. (Action Choice) Can risk borrowing one thing from lab.
    - (i) Camera
    - (ii) Notebook
- B. Introduction to the "call to adventure," the group goes to the bar, talks about getting away from the Agency and Armen brings up the unicorn; Kennelly is convinced into drinking with everyone (due to their jeep being self-driving); group talks about the logic of wishing and what they might wish for, all of them think a wish-granting mechanism isn't possible; old woman approaches, says Kennelly looks grave and give him a good luck charm
  1. (Frozen Choice) Offered to drink.
    - (i) Need to watch car
    - (ii) Not interested in drinking
    - (iii) Back to work in the morning
  2. (Exposition) Ask Brighton more about himself while drinking
  3. (Key Choice) What would I wish for?
    - (i) To change the past
    - (ii) Present happiness
    - (iii) Immortality.
  4. (Inter-Group) How do we decide who gets to make the wish if only one person gets to make it?

- (i) Draw Straws
    - (ii) Group Wish
    - (iii) Competition
  - 5. (Action Choice) Offered good luck charm.
    - (i) Keep it
    - (ii) Give it to Armen
- C. Start of the adventure as the group travels into the woods to find the house; they stop on the edge of the woods, Armen reveals the map to the unicorn; they seem resistant at first, but the group decides to go out; the walk into the woods is relatively quiet and somber as the mood shifts away from the fun and brightness of the bar; they start a conversation about some anecdotal incident at the Agency (memory wiping device)
1. (Frozen Choice) Armen reveals the map.
    - (i) Should just go back to the Agency
    - (ii) Could be dangerous
    - (iii) Probably a waste of time
  2. (Inter-Group) Who should navigate with the map?
    - (i) Armen
    - (ii) Natalie
    - (iii) Brighton
  3. (Key Choice) Would I erase my dark memories?
    - (i) Yes, some things have no reason to be remembered
    - (ii) What I experienced made me who I am now
    - (iii) Past knowledge is needed to figure out future problems
  4. (Action Choice) At a confusing crossroads.
    - (i) Trust paper map
    - (ii) Trust GPS map
  5. (Exposition) Ask Natalie more about herself, trying to figure out if she realizes that we're doing this for her birthday.
- D. The group enters the house and begins to explore, initially seems innocuous; the group discusses paranormal locations they've researched before; lots of jokes about how the house seems creepy but totally innocent, so they decide to split up; when they meet up again, it seems some of them are remembering events out of order, bringing up things the others don't understand; these things are mostly brushed off due to the drinking until Armen shows up covered in blood screaming "you have to stop it from happening"
1. (Frozen Choice) Enter the house.
    - (i) We should leave now
    - (ii) Something bad is going to happen
    - (iii) This was a mistake
  2. (Exposition) Ask Armen how he feels about going out on this adventure.
  3. (Inter-Group) Whom should I follow when we split up?
    - (i) Brighton
    - (ii) Natalie
    - (iii) Armen
  4. (Action Choice) *(Some choice that focuses on "future" theme)*

5. (Key Choice) What should we do next?
  - (i) Head back the way we came
  - (ii) Investigate immediate surroundings
  - (iii) Push further onwards
- E. The group becomes split up unintentionally, panic sets in; they attempt to reassemble; Kennelly focuses on trying to figure out the nature of the house, but only finds various time-shifted versions of the others through total accident; first Kennelly runs into another version of his own self, who tells him that no matter what he does, it will be a mistake; next he finds Natalie and Armen being terrorized by a strange monster, and then Brighton breaks in, recognizes the beast for being the one he's killed before, and attacks it head on; next he runs into Natalie, frozen in terror, watching as an alien corpse twists in the air before her; last he finds Armen, who attacks him, blaming him for what happened at The Blood warehouse; each of them die regardless of Kennelly's choices
  1. (Frozen Choice) Natalie asks if I'm all right.
    - (i) Not in control
    - (ii) Something inside me
    - (iii) Trapped inside myself
  2. (Choice) Brighton is attacking the monster, and Natalie and Armen are bleeding on the ground.
    - (i) Help Brighton
    - (ii) Help the others
  3. (Choice) Natalie is frozen in fear and I can't manage to move her.
    - (i) Attack the creature
    - (ii) Run away
  4. (Choice) Armen is attacking me, antagonizing me, blaming me for him not being an Agent.
    - (i) Fight back
    - (ii) Try to reason with him
- F. Kennelly ends up in the final room alone, faced with his possessed reflection.
  1. (Unfrozen Choice) The reflection speaks to me.
    - (i) What do you want
    - (ii) Why are you doing this to me
    - (iii) How did you take control of me
  2. (Exposition) Ask the reflection if it is responsible for the events at The Blood Warehouse.
  3. (Action Choice / Inter-Group / Key Choice) Which friend should I try to save?
    - (i) Brighton
    - (ii) Natalie
    - (iii) Armen
- G. Conclusion; one of the three dies (whichever the player chose); Kennelly, defeated, warns his past self; the remaining characters are faced with the strange reflection being, who offers little resolution, and then it banishes them from the house