

# Gaming Together

## The Communal Journey in Upper One Games’ *Never Alone*

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

The video game *Never Alone* by Upper One Games from 2014 melds classic gameplay styles with elements of the culture of the Alaskan Iñupiat tribe. The narrative, a retelling of the Iñupiat folk tale “Kunuksaayuka,” finds co-protagonists Nuna and her arctic fox companion embarking on a journey to discover the source of a blizzard blanketing Nuna’s village. *Never Alone* combines gameplay with short documentary clips, referred to as “Cultural Insights”, in which members of the tribe describe aspects of their culture. The clips emphasise the importance of a strong relationship with land in Iñupiat culture, a notion the game reinforces through gameplay. The documentary footage responds to the marginalising depictions of Indigenous Peoples in ethnographic films such as those of Robert Flaherty. Likewise, the use of the video game form responds to past discrimination against Indigenous Peoples in video games. Both the specific video game genre used, the platformer, and *Never Alone*’s encouragement of people to play together facilitate the game’s cultural expression. *Never Alone* harnesses the interactivity of video games and the representative power of documentary

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filmmaking to depict Iñupiat values and traditions. In the first section of my article, I explore the origins of *Never Alone* and its cultural context. Next, I show how the game demonstrates the benefits of well-executed ethnographic works. I then examine *Never Alone*'s relationship with gaming history to contextualise some of the game's formal choices. These choices facilitate the representation of Iñupiat culture, as I show in the following section. Finally, I discuss the game's broader rhetorical and discursive implications. I argue that the gameplay and narrative elements of *Never Alone* combine to showcase and share Iñupiat culture both within and outside of the community, thereby encouraging collectivity amongst members of the Iñupiat tribe and sharing communal values with outsiders. *Never Alone* functions as a case study to demonstrate the capacity of video games as a medium for meaningful cultural exchange.

## 2 CULTURAL CONTEXT

The development of *Never Alone* was initiated and guided by Iñupiat people and other Alaskan Indigenous groups. Gloria O'Neill, the Yup'ik C.E.O. of the Cook Inlet Tribal Council (C.I.T.C.), a non-profit community organisation working on behalf of Alaska Native tribes such as the Iñupiat, initially recommended creating a video game as a way to raise money for the C.I.T.C. and promote cultural pride amongst Iñupiat youth (Parkin n.pag.). The C.I.T.C. then contacted Seattle-based video game publisher E-Line Media and enlisted their help to make the game that would become *Never Alone* (March n.pag.). The collaboration with E-Line Media included the involvement of Iñupiat people such as Ishmael Angaluuk Hope, a playwright and poet who was the game's lead writer (Parkinson n.pag.). Hope adapted his script from the version of "Kunuksaayuka" transcribed by legendary Iñupiat storyteller Robert Nasruk Cleveland. Cleveland's daughter, Minnie Gray, did interviews with the development team and gave permission for them to use her father's text (Takahashi n.pag.).

The creation of *Never Alone* is particularly significant given the history of racism against Indigenous Peoples in video games. Charles Sharam describes Indigenous Peoples in gaming history as "under-represented, often portrayed in a disrespectful manner, and almost always constructed from the same toolbox of long-established stereotypes" (n.pag.). Sharam highlights the *Mortal Kombat* games (1992-), which are some of the most popular series of fighting games and include reductive representations of Indigenous Peoples. The games feature the

character Nightwolf, an Apache shaman who fights with a bow and arrow and a tomahawk. While the inclusion of an Indigenous character such as Nighwolf could be seen to promote the visibility of Indigenous Peoples, his stereotypical nature undermines any positive impact that his inclusion represents. His anachronistic weaponry, furthermore, reifies associations of Indigenous Peoples with the past. Sharam also points to *Street Fighter* (1987-), another popular fighting game series, which features the character of Thunder Hawk, whose moves include the “Tomahawk Buster.” Sharam likewise describes the infamous game *Custer’s Revenge* (1982), in which the player-character is a man named after General George Custer, whose objective is to rape an Indigenous woman. Sharam finds yet another example of the intersection of racism and misogyny in the popular game *Banjo-Tooie* (2000), which features Humba Wumba, a hyper-sexualised Indigenous woman who pairs her skimpy top with a feathered head-dress and lives in a wigwam. In light of the objectification of women throughout the history of gaming, the decision to make Nuna female is especially important. Through the ethnic identity and gender of its protagonist, *Never Alone* constitutes a direct rebuttal to the racism and misogyny that have plagued video games since the form’s inception.

As with the game’s implicit commentary on the discrimination embedded in video game history, the usage of documentary clips responds to the history of racism in documentary filmmaking. Bill Nichols critiques the practice of ethnographic filmmaking, which he argues does nothing to help the people it purports to benefit through visibility: ethnographic films “transport us to another realm, turn us toward the light, free us from our tired assumptions and comfortable habits. And yet, despite this transport and liberation, the Other remains” (204). As a result, Nichols says, such films “do not overcome the very dynamic of Otherness they need and preserve, often in the form of paradox and ambivalence” (204). Ethnographic films offer the promise of reversing dated notions through representation. However, such films tend to thrive on alterity, which they maintain in the process: ethnographic filmmaking has traditionally represented experiences of alterity without challenging or questioning the forces that create the condition of Otherness.

Robert Flaherty’s quasi-documentary *Nanook of the North* (1922) constitutes an egregious example of the dangers of ethnographic filmmaking. Eliot Weinberger describes the staged nature of the film, which purports to capture real moments from the life of an Indigenous hunter in Northern Quebec. The film’s sentimentality makes it more akin to a fiction film than a documentary (Weinberger

31). Flaherty constructs a supposed reality and captures it through a fixed camera, never acknowledging his presence nor allowing for other points of view to be shown. Flaherty's construction depicts Indigenous Peoples as primitive – in one scene, for example, Nanook puts a record in his mouth and bites it. According to Sherril Grace, Flaherty's cinematographic techniques “construct a monologic, homogeneous, simplistic treatment of his subject; the action and continuity of *Nanook of the North* eliminate any conflicting perspective, erase possible ambiguities, and suppress the fact of manipulation” (129). The perspective being created is that of the white male filmmaker, and any potentially contradictory accounts are left unexplored by Flaherty. Flaherty thereby suppresses Indigenous perspectives in his film in favour of his singular white point of view on Indigenous Peoples.

*Nanook of the North* is not the only film in which Flaherty has imposed such a perspective. His 1934 ethnographic film *Man of Aran* purports to depict the lives of Irish people living in the Aran Islands. However, the ostensible documentary includes a supposed family which actually consists of recruited actors (Kimball 750). Flaherty also depicts people hunting sharks although the islanders had stopped shark-hunting so long ago that actors had to be taught how to do so (Messenger 363). In the 1926 film *Moana*, originally intended as a companion to *Nanook of the North*, Flaherty depicts Samoans living on the island of Savai'i (cf. Lampe). Jonathan Rosenbaum explains that *Moana* was inspired by Flaherty “searching for exploitable subjects to film” (154). Offering his limited view of cultures of which he is an outsider, Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, *Man of Aran*, and *Moana* epitomise ethnic discrimination in ethnographic films.

### 3 RETHINKING ETHNOGRAPHY

Cultural filmmaking does not have to reflect or create negative cultural stereotypes, even if the quality of a film's execution depends in part on filmmakers' techniques. Maeghan Pirie describes two examples of such techniques in the work of Shelley Niro and Alanis Obomsawin, two Indigenous filmmakers who use their work to pay tribute to the cultures in which they were raised. For Niro and Obomsawin, “filmmaking is a politicized site of resistance through which previously obfuscated oral narratives, lived experiences, and alternative aesthetics take shape through re-presentation” (247). The creation of such a site does not happen automatically, and a filmmaker must consider the implications of her

aesthetic choices. Faye Ginsburg argues for “the necessity of acknowledging multiple points of view in both the creation and reception of screen representations of culture. In this way, ethnographic film can offer an exemplary model for social theory that increasingly argues for the contested nature of cultural production” (65). The use of a variety of perspectives, which contrasts with Flaherty’s filmmaking, can facilitate the resistance Pirie describes.

Although Ginsburg describes techniques for filmmaking, video games can also achieve the ideals she outlines. As Gonzalo Frasca explains, video games are formally constructed to have the sort of multiplicity Ginsburg identifies: “Unlike narrative, simulations are a kaleidoscopic form of representation that can provide us with multiple and alternative points of view. By accepting this paradigm, players can realize that there are many possible ways to deal with their personal and social reality” (93). The kaleidoscopic multiplicity inherent in video games provides helpful conditions for the realisation of Ginsburg’s “exemplary model” (65). Video games force players to consider different potential paths and choices, which contrasts with the singular perspective in Flaherty’s films. As such, the interactivity of *Never Alone* facilitates a complex depiction of Iñupiat culture.

The game integrates its interactive components with a narrative adapted from Iñupiat folklore, imbuing the simulation with elements of the tribe’s culture. *Never Alone* tells Cleveland’s story through a mixture of cinematic cutscenes and quotations taken directly from the text, then allows players to interact with it through gameplay. Although Hope preserves Cleveland’s basic narrative, which tells the tale of a child named Kunuuksaayuka journeying to stop a man from creating a perpetual blizzard targeting the child’s village (Cleveland n.pag.), the original text’s male protagonist becomes the female Nuna. Through this gender reversal, Hope indicates a broader universality for Cleveland’s story, suggesting that those other than boys can also be heroes like Kunuuksaayuka. The game’s story is told by an omniscient narrator speaking in Iñupiat (subtitled in English), allowing the language to be the dominant voice conveying the narrative. In contrast with the position of Flaherty’s perspective in *Nanook of the North*, an Indigenous voice controls the narrative of *Never Alone*.

The use of a traditional story, adapted from a version told by a revered storyteller, suits the game’s communication of elements of Iñupiat culture. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe the ontology of storytelling, which indicates the importance of its place in *Never Alone*: “Creative fabulation has nothing to do with a memory, however exaggerated, or with a fantasy. In fact, the artist,

including the novelist, goes beyond the perceptual states and affective transitions of the lived. The artist is a seer, a becomer” (171). The narrative of “Kunuksaayuka”, adapted for *Never Alone*, does not purport to capture the precise memory of the Iñupiat. Instead, Cleveland, and Hope in his footsteps, transcend the “perceptual states and affective transitions” of contemporary life. Unlike Flaherty, who claims to offer a broad snapshot of Indigenous existence, the narrative of *Never Alone* tells a particular Iñupiat story.

#### 4 GAMEPLAY AS CULTURAL EXCHANGE

The narrative accompanies *Never Alone*'s platformer gameplay style, a much used video game genre and one the game makes its own. Platformers, in which the player's main activities consist of jumping from ledge to ledge and avoiding obstacles, have been a crucial part of video game history since at least *Super Mario Bros* (1985). In combining the genre with elements of Iñupiat culture, *Never Alone* constitutes a reclamation of the platformer to suit the purposes of the tribe. Randy Martin describes the possibilities of “derivative forms” in dance, which recycle past expressions for new uses: “The movement practices that help specify a decentered social kinesthetic [...] are themselves derivative forms that share not so much aesthetic influence as attributes that are features of their self-production [...] [they] enable us to grasp political potentialities that inhere in the social logic of the derivative” (71). Although *Never Alone* features a derivative use of a video game genre rather than a style of dance, Martin's argument still applies to the platformer. Like the recycling of past expressions Martin observes, *Never Alone* shares crucial formal features with its platformer predecessors. The game thereby highlights the social bonds between itself and its influences by making use of player familiarity with platformers. The genre's extensive role in gaming history aligns *Never Alone* with some of the most significant contributions to the medium of video games.

The platformer is also among the simplest and most accessible video game genres. Beyond the intrinsic simplicity of platformers, *Never Alone* maximises the genre's ease by allowing players to return to obstacles if they fall or otherwise fail to progress. The difficulty increases as the game continues, keeping players interested, but the initial accessibility invites new or unskilled audiences. Ginsburg explains the vitality of accessibility to the projects of Indigenous media texts: “Because the assaults on Indigenous people have been so severe, these current

efforts to reassert a cultural and historical presence through a widely accessible media form are particularly important” (64). The aim of a text such as *Never Alone* necessitates accessibility, which the game’s genre epitomises, for the realisation of its goal. *Never Alone* works towards the reassertion of “a cultural and historical presence” for the Iñupiat, and it puts that work in a form which invites interaction.

Platformers are particularly game-like and removed from life experience, but this does not diminish their representative potential. Jesper Juul argues that video games are comprised of both rules and fiction, and the two must be discussed in tandem with one another in order to understand the ways in which a game functions. As Juul puts it, “The rules help create the player’s informal experience. Though the fictional worlds of games are optional, subjective, and not real, they play a key role in video games. The player navigates these two levels, playing video games in the half-real zone between the fiction and the rules” (202). Many things happen in games that their fictional worlds alone cannot explain (i.e. a character having multiple ‘lives’), and a discussion of rules is needed to fill the gap. Although *Never Alone* does not offer players an experience directly corresponding with the real world, the game’s “half-real” status allows it to be representational without necessarily being realistic. When Nuna or the fox jump off a cliff and immediately reset to where they had been, for example, the game invokes the “half-real” in order to provide an interactive experience with an ease making it accessible to a variety of players.

The combination of platformer accessibility with elements from Iñupiat culture alone does not necessarily convey cultural nuances. Even if a platformer cannot represent the complexity of Iñupiat values, the game still has important representative potential and conveys aspects of the culture. Furthermore, the representation of Iñupiat traditions in the form of an accessible and appealing video game introduces these traditions to an audience that otherwise may not experience Iñupiat practices in any capacity.

The practices are depicted in a form which encourages players to engage with Iñupiat culture, and even *Never Alone*’s technical faults promote this engagement. In single player mode, in which the player can only control Nuna or the fox at a given time and artificial intelligence controls the other character, the game functions less smoothly than when two players control both characters in multiplayer mode. A.I.-controlled characters in the game occasionally jump off ledges or do not follow their user-controlled partner, creating a frustrating experience which hampers the gameplay. Phoebe Sengers examines the importance of

artificial intelligence, discussing its crucial role in the player's experience within a game world. Sengers writes, "Agent behaviour should be narratively understandable, and present an agent architecture that structures behaviour to be comprehensible as narrative" (95). Sengers's valorisation of cohesive A.I. contrasts with *Never Alone's* technical faults, which inhibit the game's ability to be "narratively understandable". However, the faults of the single player experience do not carry over to multiplayer, in which players control both characters and thus avoid the shoddy computer. Players can only play *Never Alone's* multiplayer mode on the same screen, a style of gameplay known as "local multiplayer", which differs from the online multiplayer play currently dominating gaming. The faulty A.I. makes the game's local multiplayer mode all the more tempting, encouraging players to play together on a single screen and experience Iñupiat culture alongside one another. As per the game's title, players are encouraged to be "never alone" when playing.

The game's promotion of local multiplayer play contrasts with the declining popularity of this style of gameplay. The *Halo* series (2001-), long considered a favourite amongst players for its local multiplayer modes, abandoned the form in favour of exclusively online multiplayer in its most recent iteration, *Halo 5: Guardians* (2015). While online multiplayer still does encourage a form of player interaction, it does not bring players physically together in the manner of local multiplayer. Grant Roberts, lead game designer of *Never Alone*, explains that local multiplayer "enabled us to reinforce the theme of interdependence through playing side-by-side with another person" (n.pag.). "Side-by-side," players are able to learn about Iñupiat culture through a text created by members of the tribe. Players must work together to help Nuna and the fox complete their journey, promoting the kind of cooperation essential to the game's project.

The cooperation encouraged by local multiplayer increases the symbolic power of the game's expressions. Michael Hardt explains the productivity created by the sharing of all kinds of property: "If you have an idea, sharing it with me does not reduce its utility to you, but usually increases it. In fact, in order to realize their maximum productivity, ideas, images, and affects must be common and shared" (136). Through local multiplayer, *Never Alone* maximises the reach of its representations of Iñupiat culture. The faults of the single player mode and the nature of the multiplayer mode encourage players to share these representations. Thus, the design of the game promotes the collective mode of existence for which Hardt argues.

*Never Alone's* maximisation of its potential through sharing creates a particular iteration of what Guattari calls "a post-media age" (40). As Guattari writes, "An essential programmatic point for social ecology will be to encourage capitalist societies to make the transition from the mass-media era to a *post-media age*, in which the media will be reappropriated by a multitude of subject-groups capable of directing its resingularization" (40, emphasis added). Even in the flawed single player mode, *Never Alone* allows players to switch between playing as Nuna and the fox; players thereby control an aspect of the game's discourse in the manner Guattari suggests. This allowance becomes all the more meaningful in multi-player, in which players cooperate with one another to control the game. The experience of cooperation and audience agency encouraged by the video game form differs from that of cinema, for example, in which viewers do not have as much of an opportunity to interact directly with texts. Thus, video games are an ideal medium for the realisation of the "programmatic point" Guattari describes.

## 5 ENGAGING WITH THE IÑUPIAT

The interactivity of *Never Alone's* gameplay coexists with cinematic elements; both types of forms contribute to the game's cultural project. In the Cultural Insights, as previously discussed, Iñupiat people speak about their tribe's culture in interviews. The multiplicity of voices presented in the Cultural Insights epitomises the "different points of view" Ginsburg suggests to be crucial to the success of ethnographic filmmaking (65). The clips also work against the habitual associations of Indigenous Peoples with the past in texts such as *Nanook of the North* or through Nightwolf's antiquated weaponry in *Mortal Kombat*. The first Cultural Insight (which players watch before gameplay begins), entitled "A Living People, A Living Culture", features the Iñupiat Amy Fredeen saying, "One of the things I think a lot of people need to understand is we aren't a museum piece." Fredeen wears modern attire, as do the other interviewees, thereby supporting her statement. Fredeen further describes the "extreme value of interconnectedness and interdependence" amongst the Iñupiat. The gameplay following the clip then represents this value in gameplay as Nuna and the fox journey together to save Nuna's village.

The Cultural Insights also contribute to *Never Alone's* thematic emphasis on nature, which the game presents as being a vital element of Iñupiat culture. In a clip entitled "No More Ice", Ronald Aniqsuaq Brower describes the experience of

witnessing global warming in Alaska: “For many years, even before climatologists were noticing the change, Iñupiat were already saying [...] ‘Our climate is changing.’” Brower also recounts an anecdote from his childhood in which he hunts whales on 25-foot thick ice, which contrasts with the 18-inch thick ice he sees 50 years later. In the clip, Brower describes Iñupiat awareness of and sensitivity to the environment, since they are more attuned to its changes than supposed experts. Furthermore, his first-hand account of the diminishing ice provides eye-witness evidence of the effects of climate change on the Iñupiat.

*Never Alone* follows the clip with corresponding gameplay, creating an interactive reinforcement of the documentary footage. Nuna and the fox have to jump between pieces of ice which shrink if either character stays on them for too long, an element of gameplay allowing the player to experience the condition Brower describes. The game further represents interaction with nature through wind, which works both for and against the player in different situations. When wind blows in the direction in which the characters must go, it helps them jump to ledges they would not be able to reach otherwise. When it goes against their intended direction, wind restricts the characters, since the gusts slow down Nuna and the fox’s forward movement. Thus, the game encourages the player to accept nature on its own terms rather than attempt resistance. As Stephanie Carmichael writes, “Missing the telltale mark of an incoming gust, and from which direction, is nearly impossible, but acting against it is less than convenient. All things simply are, and the girl (and the player) accepts them, no questions asked” (n.pag.). Carmichael also describes the experience of nature in the game as “a journeying through things as they are, with the smallest possible give or take. *Never Alone* respects that, forcing nothing on the player but the experience, a movement from left to right, or right to left, with wonder in between at the very conscious world around you” (n.pag.). The encouragement of this wonder comes directly from the gameplay. As players embark on the game’s journey, their in-game actions demonstrate the values of the Iñupiat.

The game parallels its depiction of the environment with Nuna’s interaction with animals. In both single player and multiplayer, she must work in tandem with her co-protagonist fox. The two characters’ contrasting abilities (only the fox can scurry up ice, for example, but only Nuna can swing from rope) demonstrate to the player that she must cooperate with animals in order to succeed. Nuna also must avoid certain animals, such as the polar bear who chases her at the beginning and end of the game, while her cooperation with the fox shows the player that animals are not enemies. As with wind, which both helps and hurts

Nuna depending on the situation, the gameplay forces the player to interact with animals on their terms rather than use them to suit her needs. Thus, the game demonstrates that “all things simply are” (Carmichael n.pag.) and nature should be treated as such.

*Never Alone* also emphasises the importance of a respectful treatment of animals through the properties of its ‘weapon.’ Nuna wields a bola, which (as a Cultural Insight named after it explains) is a tool made of graded sinew and tied to heavy bone that the Iñupiat use to catch ducks. Rather than using the bola against animals such as the polar bear, as most video games would require the player to do with such a weapon, Nuna can only employ it to break bricks of ice or dead logs which obstruct her path. On the one hand, this appears to be an act of ludic erasure, since the gameplay does not allow the player to use the bola in the traditional manner of the Iñupiat. On the other hand, the game also presents Nuna’s use of the bola in the context of its narrative framework, and Cleveland’s text does not depict its protagonist using weapons against anyone. Thus, Nuna does not represent an everyday individual hunting for food, but rather a mythical hero whose actions do not need to conform to reality. Furthermore, the game makes the Iñupiat use of the tool clear through the Cultural Insight. The folkloric framework also differentiates the bola from Nightwolf’s tomahawk in *Mortal Kombat*, which presents him as an anachronistic figure who cannot adapt to contemporary life, since Nuna’s story is not meant to reflect contemporary Iñupiat existence. She is a mythical figure whose modus operandi does not include harming animals.

## 6 DISCOURSE AND RHETORIC OF NEVER ALONE

The game’s depiction of people’s interaction with animals and the environment is especially vital given the problematic contemporary discourse between Indigenous Peoples and settlers throughout North America. As Leanne Simpson explains, such discussions must address the issue of land and people’s relationship with it: “Land is an important conversation for Indigenous Peoples and Canada to have because land is at the root of our conflicts. Far from asking settler Canadians to pack up and leave, it is critical that we think about how we can better share land” (n.pag.). *Never Alone* does not address the issue of sharing between Indigenous Peoples and settlers, but the game does suggest the importance of nature to Iñupiat communities. The functions of wind and animals in the game

encourage players to work with the environment rather than against it, thereby promoting respectful engagement with nature. The player hears about the Iñupiat relationship with land in the Cultural Insights, and she practices it in the gameplay.

The power and authority granted to both animals and the environment indicates a concept of assemblage which transcends anthropocentric notions of agency. Jane Bennett argues that an understanding of agency must look beyond human actants in order to produce a comprehensive understanding of the forces behind events. Bennett outlines a “distributive notion of agency,” which “pays attention to a linked series” of effects rather than “honing in on a single effect” (457). Bennett’s “linked series” involves the consideration of the roles of both human and non-human beings in the outcomes of events, whereas a more limited focus encourages anthropocentric views of the world. *Never Alone* also outlines a “distributive notion”: although the game features a human player-character, the elements affecting her fate go beyond her own agency. Entities such as the wind and the fox play important roles in her survival, and she must respect and work with their powers in order to succeed. Thus, the game presents a vision of human interaction with the environment which transcends anthropocentrism, and which is aligned with Iñupiat values through the Cultural Insights.

*Never Alone* argues for Bennett’s notion and the perspectives articulated in the documentary clips through the use of what Ian Bogost calls “procedural rhetoric” (181). The concept refers to the inherently argumentative potential of procedures, suggesting that they can be used beyond the purposes of mere representation to make arguments about that which they depict. Since video games are comprised of procedures, they are an ideal medium for the expression of procedural rhetoric. *Never Alone* uses procedural rhetoric to argue on behalf of the Iñupiat relationship with nature: Nuna must treat her environment with respect in order to survive; the player learns, procedurally, to do the same.

Through the use of procedural rhetoric, in conjunction with the game’s other interactive and narrative elements, *Never Alone* creates an expression of Iñupiat culture unachievable in any other medium. Janet Murray explains video games’ particular capacities to influence audiences: “Games can be seen as a means of coevolving our minds and our media, of assimilating new technologies of inscription through exploration of their capacity for symbolic representation, and of preserving and expanding symbolic expression by making symbolic systems the explicit focus of activity” (197). *Never Alone* assimilates contemporary technologies in order to express to players a culture which vastly predates the

technology. The game's mechanics represent elements of Iñupiat culture. *Never Alone* combines the specific capacities of video games with the broader potential of combining art and cultural engagement. The game's very title evokes the importance of community, which the multiplayer gameplay promotes in players.

Paul Kuttner's description of *Idle No More*'s round dance flash mobs encapsulates the significance of *Never Alone*. Kuttner argues that *Idle No More* shows "the grassroots power and the continuing strength" of Indigenous Peoples, promotes "cultural pride and connection", and creates a "welcoming and easy opportunity" for people from outside Indigenous communities to learn about them (n.pag.). *Never Alone* likewise relies on the pride and ingenuity of Iñupiat people to share Iñupiat values and culture in an accessible way. By partaking in Nuna's journey, players gain a unique perspective on the cultural practices, traditions, and values of the Iñupiat. Gameplay and narrative combine to create a compelling example of how video games can be used to encourage cultural engagement. *Never Alone*'s use of the video game form and documentary footage to celebrate the culture of an Indigenous tribe is particularly significant in the context of video games' and ethnographic films' history of marginalising depictions of Indigenous Peoples. *Never Alone* is a vital artistic contribution to cultural understanding and pride within and beyond the Iñupiat community.

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