

Intramental Proposal

By Radha Hosad



Introduction

Intramental came into being because I want to explore ideas of trans isolation and trans self conflict through the medium of video games, using the genre of psychological games. Games like the Persona series and Psychonauts have dealt with the psyche and mind through the medium of video games, but the genre as a whole doesn't really use the medium to explore transness in a good way. Persona 4 specifically has a trans storyline, but it has been widely panned by trans players of the franchise. Despite this, I feel as if trans narratives could be explored really well with this genre. If a trans writer got a chance to write a game like Persona I think that there could be a really insightful and interesting exploration of the issues trans people face. This game proposal is a way of doing just that, using the genre to explore trans issues from a trans writer's perspective instead of a cis one.

I think the main conceit of the story came from the fact that I have a bit of a hatred of who I was before I transitioned. Beyond just the gender stuff, there is a devotion to societal expectations in general, and working for organizations that I now scoff at, and other things that I deeply hate about myself. That version of myself seems like a completely different person to me. This game in a way is about me reckoning with the fact that that is still me, that they are a girl too that was just lost in a way. I feel like there is a lot of self conflict in transness, which is why I am attached to stories that deal with self conflict and cognition and the brain. Chris, the villain, is a flanderized version of everything I dislike about my old self, but in the end there's also a sadness in them that they never got to experience the realizations that I did. The idea of fighting your pre transition self is something that compels me, that i think a lot of trans and queer people can relate to as well.

In addition to the baseline of the villains of the game being the federal government and corporate interests, I think the character of Chris showcases how Capitalist conditioning turns people into monsters. Chris and Anja are the same person, but Anja was able to escape some of the pressures of “fulfilling the American Dream” and succeeding in Capitalism and Chris wasn’t. Capitalism is a force that oppresses transness, that eradicates it, and I want to showcase its oppressive effects in this game.

In the climax of the game, the main character Anju returns to her childhood small town, which is depicted as very surreal and dream-like. I feel like the idea of Anju being unable to walk back home is meant to symbolize how a lot of trans people from the south feel in terms of having a complicated relationship with home. Anju’s hometown has this eerie ethereal feeling because it is a place where she cannot truly exist as a trans woman. Especially now as transness is being criminalized in states like Tennessee, my home state, I feel a sense of sadness and confusion around my relationship with my home. It is a place I have lived my whole life and yet it is a place that deeply rejects me that I cannot feel safe in. I really want the climactic act to reflect that.

So, why a game at all? In addition to the genre of going into people's minds in video games being the inspiration for the game, I feel like there is something deeply trans about playing a video game. Like Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity, playing a video game is taking and performing a role of a character, whether a character you make yourself or a character chosen for you. I think a game is really the perfect medium to explore trans issues. I am very inspired by the game *Celeste*, which has a trans main character and explores themes of transness and dysphoria in a way that is accentuated by the gameplay. I hope that my game could do something like that.

Plot Outline

- Act 1
 - The game begins with a nightmare. A strange shadowy figure with four arms suddenly becomes cloaked with light, interrupted by an alarm. Anja and Alden are at a media company. Alden works there, Anja's been there a week, convo about Anja finally settling for a corporate job, randomly bumps into Crux.
 - This triggers Anja entering Crux's mindscape and a tutorial level. Anja will glimpse memories of Crux's training as she progresses through the tutorial, which will help her learn the mechanics, in addition to a few moments that subtly imply that Crux is working for FRF. Since Anja does not know what is happening, this is a longer 3D level with no time limit.
 - Anja progresses through collecting memories until she sees a memory that teaches how to exit. When she exits, she wakes up in the back of Alden's car with Crux next to her. Alden is driving them to the hospital because they both collapsed and were unresponsive and Alden didn't want Anja to pay the fee for an Ambulance ride. Crux wakes up, pulls out a gun, and commandeers the vehicle.
- Act 2
 - There is a cut to Anja in an interrogation room at the end of an interrogation by Crux. Crux is shocked that Anja was able to mindjump into them instead of the other way around. Crux walks Anja out and shows her the RFR base, an abandoned warehouse

with a few computers. Crux explains that they are an independent sect focused on stopping a mysterious project utilizing mindjumping for use on the population. Crux used a salvaged old mindjumping exosuit, which looks like a thin metal wire that goes over your hands and spine, to infiltrate the minds of important businessmen and politicians. They were trying to get information from the head of the company Anja and Alden work at, but because of the Anja mysteriously reversing a mindjump, Crux is no longer able to use the suit. Crux asks Anja to complete their mission and collect a memory from the CEO's brain. If you succeed, they will let you and Alden go.

- You are once again in the building, pretending to work at your cubicle. From here, your mission starts, with Alden and Crux in your ear.
- This will act as a secondary tutorial. Now, mind jumps are timed. If you do not complete the 3D level within the timeframe, you will both collapse like what happened with Crux, causing the mission to be compromised.
- Each person you possess will help you go further up to meet the CEO. First, you mind jump your manager who will reveal the elevator password. Then on the top floor, you mindjump an assistant who knows the CEO's schedule.
- At this point, you notice heavily armed security that Crux realizes are FIMA operatives, who probably heard about the incident with Crux and Anja collapsing and are looking to probe Anja's mind. You get a tutorial where you learn to avoid FIMA operatives in the 2D level, after which you mindjump another assistant which reveals that the operatives arrived today and were asking about Anja.

- At this point because the person recognized you once you leave they yell and alert the FIMA operatives to you. This results in a quick succession of 3D levels where you mindjump into the FIMA operatives. This will again be a bit of a tutorial. For a hostile mind, you have to avoid the consciousness of the person, so you will have to outrun and avoid their player in the 3D level. Instead of searching for a memory, you will be making them forget their objective to hunt you, causing a slightly longer level for each of them.
 - Lastly, you will head to the elevator, bumping into the CEO as they walk in. This will be a longer 3D level, as detecting a deeply held secret is harder than a more simple bit of information. The level will have all of the aspects of the previous levels but with a little more difficult and strung together
 - Once you beat the level, you are presented with A cutscene where You see all of the other bosses for each level and Chris Kumar. When you see Chris for the first time the video glitches and you are immediately thrust out of the world back into your body. The CEO is dazed as you run to the elevator and press the down button as the level ends.
- Act 3
 - You are back at the base, and Crux remarks that they are confused about what happened with the final mindjump but that Anja did really well. Anja and Alden agree to join the RFR.

- The next target is a Lithium Mogul attending their daughters wedding. This time you need to crash the wedding.
 - The level is similar to the last one with you mind jumping some guests and some FIMA agents there to protect the mogul. The twist is that the only way that you can get in close contact is through a soft possession of the bride so that you can mindjump when they walk their daughter across the aisle. Instead of quickly trying to get to the end of the 3D level, you have to run around the level for a minute avoiding being caught by the cognitions until the bride touches the mogul.
 - Once there, you do the final level and you see a scene of the mogul talking to Chris. The video is still glitchy around him, but you hear him mention that the project needs the processing power of a small country, and that means a large amount of lithium. The CEO of the media company is revealed to have been covering up journalism about the moguls scandals in addition to the project in exchange for the mogul sending FIMA the materials under the radar. The cutscene ends with the reveal of the location where the lithium is being sent.
 - Victorious, you leave the moguls mind and return to your own, but you notice someone near where you were sitting. Its Chris, attending the wedding, and when you look at him in real life you still get a mild glitching effect. He jokes “I hope you’ve had a nice rest” and walks away. You try to reach him, but you pass out.
- Act 4

- You wake up in the base again. Crux was able to extract you from the wedding and talks a bit about Chris Kumar. He quickly rose through the ranks of the FIMA until he was appointed its youngest director. He became known as the “Millennial Fed”, constantly arguing with leftists on Twitter and seemingly reveling in being a public figure. (Think Kendall Roy Succession-+)
- Every previous Mindjumper who tried to go against Chris wound up unresponsive. Despite having such a public image, he is deeply secretive and deeply protective of his secrets. Crux mentions that the only other person who came close to that type of cognitive power was Anja.
- Anja is eerily silent at this.
- The next level is at the location found at the wedding, a military base. The level is a bit harder now as most of the small 3D levels will be the FIMA agent levels with the cognitive player chasing you. You eventually get to the end and see Chris. You attempt to mind jump, but:
 - You see mirrors. A maze of mirrors. You search for the exit and you see a child, a small boy. You walk through and—
 - You see the nightmare again, from the side this time. You see a young boy talking to the creature, but you don't hear what was said. You see a flash of light, and the boy becomes two boys. One runs away into the forest, and one goes back home. The screen glitches and fractures and—
- Act 5

- You are in a Prison cell. Your hair is noticeably longer. You are in a cell next to Crux and Alden.
- Crux and Alden are happy to see you alive after all this time and desperate to see if you are ok. Suddenly Chris shows up, a sad grin on his face. He confronts Anja about the truth, that she made a deal with the mysterious figure as a child so that she could run away and live as a trans woman while the other child stayed at home in the closet. With a barely hidden sadness he says that in a way, everything Chris did was Anja's fault. Chris leaves, and Alden is shocked at the news, saying he assumed something bad went down with Anja's parents but never expected this, while Crux is silent with rage before yelling at Anja, calling her deceptive and selfish and saying that their friends died because of her. Anja is silent, mumbling that she thought it was a dream.
- There is a time lapse where you see that Anja has not moved for days. Eventually, one of the guards brings her food, and you touch his hand. Even though you don't have the equipment on, you accidentally mindjump into the guard. This level is a play on the wedding possession episode. There are 4 "buttons" that the player can stand on in the 3D world and an interact button in the center. You need to move the 3D character to press the buttons in order to control the 2D world character can make them go to the control center and open all of the gates.
- Once you succeed, you transport back into Anja's body and meet with Crux and Alden. Crux is still deeply mad at you , but they decide to work together to break out

of the prison. You play a level where you mindjump into people, trying to find a way to open doors, until eventually escaping.

- The final boss is Chris' right hand woman, who is about to shoot Alden before you mind jump. This is a timed longer 3D platforming level as you need to stop her before she pulls the trigger.
- Once you escape, Crux has a falling out with you and leaves. Anja pushes Alden away because of guilt and runs off on her own.

- Act 6

- It has been a bit of time. Anja has gone back to her childhood town to look for answers, but everything is strange and foggy. It is as if elements from the mental world and the real world are colliding.
- You explore the town and come across mysterious abnormalities. Instead of mindjumping to people, in this final level you are exploring your own mind. Touching the anomalies trigger levels that explore aspects of Anja's past.
- Anja sees her old house, but you are unable to move her close to it, as if there is an invisible wall keeping you away. Around this invisible border are more abnormalities, showing child hood memories. A mother's embrace, a father's smile. A crying boy in a mirror. Loving parents and a child who doesn't want the love to go away.
- She heads away on a trail into the woods, when she meets Chris. This triggers a sequence where she runs away deeper and deeper into the woods.

- The memories that are unlocked are now mixes of Chris and Anja's. Different lives.

Chris is revealed to have some complexity. He is unhappy with his gender, but unlike Anja he never got a chance to explore that. He is driven primarily by the idea of being someone that his parents could be proud of, by being a success story. Anja is revealed to have some deep seated guilt issues. She feels as if she has abandoned her family and has tried to repress her past for years.

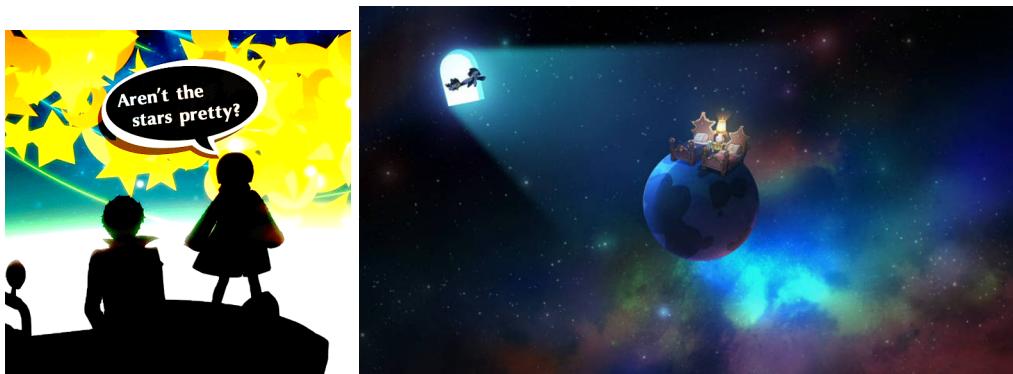
- This culminates in Chris catching up to Anja on a meadow, the location of the nightmare from the very beginning, where Chris and Anja split. Chris confronts Anja, and talks about how he feels that Anja has robbed him of a happier life.

- He says something along the lines of “I know you’re afraid of me. But I can tell, deep in those eyes of yours... you’re happy. Truly happy. Being who you were meant to be. My whole life I looked in the mirror, no matter how buff I got, no matter what haircut I had or clothes I wore I felt something was wrong. But I pushed through. For Appa, for Amma. While you got to live your free little gay life here, I had to work my ass off to get to where I am. And now I have this great job, and this money, and everyone’s proud of me. But I’ve never had those eyes you have. I’ve never... truly been happy. And you took that away from me! I had to make them happy and be a real adult while you ran off, living this... This falseness! This dream! You robbed me of getting to wear your dresses and be this.. This happy woman I see before me. You robbed me of that! We could have done it together!”

- This leads to a final confrontation. You and Chris enter each others minds, which are the same mind, and so you have a intense boss battle in the 3D world.
 - At the end, you embrace, and through the dreamscape and the bizarreness of their origins they fuse into the being from the very beginning. Anja and Chris silently acknowledge each other, and Chris leaves.
- Epilogue
 - With the memory merge, you know the location of all the cognitive research. You call Alden and Alden gets Crux to come back and help you destroy it.
 - The final level takes place at the Trapezoid, the headquarters of FIMA. You mind jump agents until you get to the end, where you destroy the research and escape. The level design is a bit easier than the climax, and it's more of a victory lap.
 - Anja, Alden, and Crux drive off into the sunset as the credits roll. At the end credits, we see Chris has gone missing, suspected dead in the infiltration. We see Chris going to the base from act 4, now abandoned, with a gleam in his eye.

Stylistic Elements:

For the Dreamlike state of the levels in the 3D platforming, I want to use a dream-core aesthetic specifically inspired by starry night. I love the use of dreamcore in the game Persona 5 Royal and the show *The Owl House* respectively. Both remind me of van Gogh's starry night, which I also want to emulate in the look of these levels.



For the climactic level, I want the dreamcore aesthetics to be seeped into the reality of a small Southern town. Perhaps the stars and the bright yellows and purples and blues would be accentuated and the bright green of the natural forests would be more stylized. Pictured below in order are Greeneville TN, The Blue Ridge Forests, and a picture from the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy.



Gameplay Description

- General

- The game will have two modes. In a 2D open world, you will set up your mission by having your player locate and touch targets. When you touch someone, you can go inside their mind and solve a 3D Platformer level. The 3D platformer levels will allow you to progress further in the 2D levels.
- The 2D levels will be a typical 2D open world where players will navigate buildings to locate people to enter the mind of.
- The 3D Levels will be planetary platforming levels, like that from super mario galaxy.

There will be several small levels within every 2D level, lasting only a couple of minutes.

At the end of every 2D level will be a larger 3D level in the mind of the main target.

- Input

- The controls will be WASD with the spacebar being jump.

- Visual style

- The 2D levels will be pixelated, while the 3D levels will be surrealist with simple 3D models. Most of the levels will be shorter with the same dreamcore visual style, but The Final levels will each have a unique style based on the person.

- Audio style:

- For the 2D sections, an exciting classical score will play.