Meta-Game Introduction Scene

In a near-future, Earth-like world, humanity has adopted a new and seemingly more humane form of imprisonment: medically induced comas. During their sentence, prisoners remain unconscious, detached from society as they serve their time. Advances in medical technology have made these comas nearly risk-free, a stark contrast to the high risks and potential damage they carry in our time. In this era, prisoners can be safely kept unconscious for years, with minimal harm and without the psychological toll that traditional prisons often impose. This approach is seen as a safer and more efficient way to house prisoners, reducing the risks of violence, overcrowding, and mental deterioration.

This is the fate of the player as they are convicted of treason and confined to a coma-like state. Under this new system, a life sentence is essentially a death sentence in terms of experience; prisoners convicted of severe crimes lose the entirety of their lives unless they win an appeal or serve out extremely long sentences. The player, sentenced to 50 years to life, faces the loss of 50 years of experience and consciousness if all appeals fail, effectively severing them from the world.

The game begins with a blank black screen, representing the player's unconsciousness. Slowly, simple text appears, simulating a message reaching them through a brain-computer interface (BCI). The BCI is so primitive that the player can only see text on a black screen with no ability to even pause or make choices-truly a digital novel at this point. This actually is still a real innovation for the use of the BCI as it could only roughly stimulate brain regions so the comatose prisoners’ brains would stay intact enough to function when and if they were ever woken up. The BCI stimulates the brain so the comatose prisoners were essentially having an extremely vivid dream of experiences much like the real Earth, but not completely as the stimulation was only approximate and not capable of truly simulating features on purpose etc. I am use this explanation to explain why the player is living their real life outside the game. What they think has been their real life up until the year they thought was 2024 was really just this primitive BCI stimulation meant to keep the brains intact during their imprisonment. This also explains why the player will still seem like they are living their real life when they are not playing as they are going back to the coma when not participating in the simulation. Prisoners typically do not remember much of their past before imprisonment, BCI surgery, and being induced in the coma as the brain’s neuroplasticity loses the stored information after much disuse per the actual scientific way this happens. Some memories call be recalled later but this should only be hinted at now.

they’ve been granted a unique opportunity: to participate in a clandestine government research project aimed at researching and developing more and more invasive forms of BCI in an effort to fully capture exactly how the brain is working to develop a highly advanced artificial general intelligence (AGI). This groundbreaking BCI, when fully developed over iterations and deeply integrated with the prisoner’s brain, can capture an unprecedented level of real-time cognitive data—rich decision-making patterns and nuanced emotional responses that will help train the AGI with unmatched sophistication.

The choice is stark: the player can accept the offer and face a screening test to qualify for the project, or decline and resume their coma sentence, leading inevitably to loss of most, if not all, or their lives. Given their unconscious state, declining the offer would mean an immediate and most likely a final end.

Should the player accept, they'll first undergo a screening to prove their suitability for the project, competing against other volunteer prisoners. Success in this test means formal admission into the program. Other prisoners will be admitted into the program as well, and they’ll join competing research teams tasked with training the most effective AI possible.

The ultimate incentive? A commutation of their sentence, contingent on fully meeting the program’s requirements and training the best AGI among the different research teams. This will include helping their research team achieve their objectives and fully participate in all aspects of the project through 100% completion.

However, there’s a significant risk involved. To make the experience more interactive than the initial text-based communication, the project would require an experimental, and progressively more invasive BCI system. While the process is designed to be reversed, it remains unproven and carries a high risk of permanent damage. The technology is so risky, in fact, that even a desperate government behind this project has turned to prisoners rather than regular research volunteers. Due to how invasive the full BCI system is, the sensory experience will intensify gradually, scaling up if the player proves their ability to navigate and excel in the initial stages of the project.

Overview

Requirements for Introduction Section of Game:

1. Fundamentally, I want to weave all my game making efforts into one “meta-game” with some kind of plausible reason those elements are all connected into one sandbox experience with an over-arching goal.
2. I want the game I am making to not just load into a menu and present itself as a game. In fact, I wanted a way to bring the player into the game that was immersive as possible within the technical limitations of my current ability.
3. I currently have no technical capability, so I need to start as small as possible within my game design constraints. A quick synopsis of my overall game design constraints is that I am making a Sandbox Simulation Strategy RPG. The simplest RPG is going to be text-based.

How The Introduction Presented Meets These Requirements

1. The coma and brain interface combination explains very well why the player is only seeing text at the beginning and sets the stage for a slow technical logical ramp-up for the game By tech ramp up I mean: starting with text only, moving to UI elements, basic graphics, and on; all while expanding the set of actions, features, and mechanics available to the player.
2. We start the narrative from the first screen of the game as I wanted. More importantly, I can introduce typically out-of-game elements like menus and UI as in-game elements necessitated with how the comatose prisoner interacts with the simulation. More broadly this is going to lay the narrative groundwork for the completion tracking and procedural mechanics of the sandbox of the meta-game.
3. Additionally, the player's motivation is established clearly: to achieve 100% completion and outperform other participants to secure their freedom. Within this framework, specific in-game objectives will drive players to explore and experiment with all that the sandbox offers, underpinned by this overarching goal.
4. This opening also allows the player to meet the lead researcher of the project they join. The lead researcher is going to serve a “game master” type that will narrate at times and introduce the player to game elements etc. Rather than just being a tutorial interface, the researcher will serve as character in the story who should feel personal to the player.   
     
   Ultimately the researcher is really going to be a version of myself. I will present the researcher as a very young, promising candidate who needs to learn everything about making a simulation sandbox world from the ground up. This way I can progress the player through the complexity of the sandbox gradually according to my actual abilities and present my point of view as I am making the game. The slow-up technological ramp-up of the game is also backed up by the narrative that the brain computer interface needs to gradually be ramped up as it essentially it needs to be discovered how to do the BCI more and more and then developed over time not to mention how the need for a slow ramp up due to its invasiveness that increases over time.
5. This part of the game is essentially a digital novel outside of the player choosing to participate. If the player says no there, the game will close itself after a double check. The test in the narrative if the player chooses to participate will slightly ramp up the complexity of the game by introducing choices for the player to make, then allowing more options, then UI, then stats and mechanics, then primitive graphics etc.
6. The text adventure will be some form of the player competing against other prisoner candidates to earn a spot in my researcher’s simulation. Other simulation projects will have their own competitions for their spots in their simulations.

Character Progression System

Overview of Learning

The character begins the game with no abilities, skills, or knowledge as a newborn; they cannot even move on their own. The player must “Learn” in the game to be able to start the path of accessing all the actions and features of the game. The game feature of “Learning” is the complex process which I will detail step by step below. The result of “Learning” presents a new range of actions and assets for the player to use in the sandbox with some usage requiring procedures, training, equipment, structures, and personnel to fully implement as the subjects can get very complex to develop and implement even if the character understands the new actions or assets well through learning.

The Foundations of Learning-Subject Words

Learning begins with the player acquiring words or very short phrases we are going to call “Subjects”. “Subjects” are words that represent broad areas of knowledge that do not lead directly to new actions and assets, but rather serve as means of organizing the words underneath that subject area where the player can actually learn about new actions and assets. Subject words have several hierarchical levels allowing the player to have an organization system of understanding the relationships between all the different words.  
  
Example: A very young player educated about war in school. They learn the subject word “Combat” from this experience. Combat is such a major subject of the game it happens to appear on the top level of the hierarchy. Because the player does not understand anything about combat, the only thing they gain from this round of learning is awareness of the subject word “Combat”. Later the player has their dad teach them about fist fighting in case they need to defend themselves. This teaching unlocks the subject word “Hand-to-Hand Combat” which is a subdivision of “Combat”. “Hand-to-Hand Combat” is not actionable enough on it’s own, so more sub-subjects will be required under “Hand-to-Hand Combat”. The player goes to a tournament and sees a Judo competition. The player learns the subject word “Judo” from watching the competition. The subject of “Judo” is now refined enough to allow the player to move to the next kind of words which allow the player to truly learn how to perform the actions of Judo. Some areas will have more than 3 levels of subject words to get to action or assets.

The Character Brain  
  
Every character in the simulation begins with a “brain”. The “brain” is many things, but in it’s simplest form it is a list of words we will call in the game “keywords”. There are many different classes of keywords that have different relationships to each other. The keywords serve as nodes with connections between the nodes representing different kinds of linkages to the words. The player will eventually see a 3D cloud of words with various connections to other words represented the synaptic type connections of the real brain. As the player gains more awareness of keywords more synaptic nodes will appear, but connections will need to be made by the player to actually see the synaptic map of connections between the nodes.

Keywords