

Introduction

Style: Cutscene

[The opening screen will show a historical, aerial photo of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor.]

- April 26th, 1986. The day of the worst nuclear accident in history: the Chernobyl meltdown.
- While the official death toll was only 54, tens of thousands of people had their lives mutated by the radiation that billowed out of the remains of reactor 4, and we are still dealing with the fallout of the incident.
- For many, the accident is buried in the past. The radiation levels in Pripjat, the town located 2 kilometers away from the plant where many of its workers once lived, have fallen to the point where people are able to reclaim the town's abandoned buildings and live where ghosts once stood (if they are willing to brave the risk of cesium-137 poisoning).
- However, though people might live in Pripjat, the Chernobyl power plant remains highly radioactive. And no area in the bowels of the plant is more deadly than...

[A picture of the Elephant's Foot appears]

- The Elephant's Foot.
- In 1996, more than ten years after the incident, the Elephant's Foot emitted less than 10% of the radiation it had emitted after the accident.
- The mass of corium had a radiation level of less than 10% of what it had directly following the meltdown. Despite this, the radiation it emitted was enough to kill after 30 seconds of exposure.
- Thirty years after the accident, the levels had fallen enough to kill after 300 seconds. A mere five minutes of exposure.
- Now, if I've done my math correctly, the levels should have fallen enough to allow for 3000 seconds of exposure. 50 minutes. Enough time to have the adventure of a lifetime.

[Picture of Reactor 4 re-appears]

- Since the Elephant's Foot was discovered in 1996, no soul has been brave enough to breach the depths of reactor 4. My plan is to be the first.

[Background fades to black]

- My name is Alexander Tate. I'm going to be the one to discover what's inside the Elephant's Foot.

Time Minus 60

Style: Single-Page

Your name is Alex, and since you were a little kid you always wanted to go on a real adventure. Now, with the radiation levels in Chernobyl finally allowing for almost an hour of uninterrupted exploration, your dream is coming true.

You've just spent your life's savings to travel to Russia. Getting to Pripjat was easy, but they don't let people into Chernobyl unless they're on a guided tour. Luckily, since the radiation levels have steadily dropped, security has gotten laxer around the Chernobyl site, allowing you to sneak past the few guards they still station to frighten off curious tourists.

You're no tourist, though. You're on a mission: get to the Elephant's Foot and be the first person in the world to see what's inside of it.

After a half-hours walk, you've finally arrived at the remains of reactor 4. When it was first built, one of the plant's iconic white-and-red-striped chimneys towered over the reactor.

Now, since the New Safe Confinement project was completed in 2017, a massive steel arch encloses the radioactive ruins.

It's time to start your adventure. What do you do?

- (Enter Chernobyl)
- (Leave)
 - Would it be best to just turn around and head home? No, surely not - this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to accomplish your childhood dreams. You can't say no to that.
 - What do you do?
 - (Enter Chernobyl)

Time Minus 55

Style: Single-Page

While reactor 4's entrances have been long-sealed by the New Safe Confinement enclosure, it's connections to the other reactors luckily remain untouched.

You enter the facility through the entrance of reactor 3. Dust-covered machinery lines the walls, though you don't pay them much mind - you have more important things to do.

From studying floorplans of the facility, you know exactly where the hallway connecting reactor three and four is, and are able to find it without much issue.

As you walk the hallway between the two reactors, you can feel your stomach drop. The feeling of death hangs in the air, and you swear you can feel the background radiation piercing your skin. Logically, you know that radiation sickness couldn't possibly have set in yet, but it doesn't quell the sickening sensation in your gut.

Winding through the ruined hallways, you gradually encounter more and more damage, which assures you you're approaching the core. Finding a stairwell, you go down a single floor, where you know the nuclear lava that comprises the Elephant's Foot pooled under the remains of the reactor all those years ago.

Your heart beats faster with every dilapidated door you have to force open. Faster and faster, until suddenly, it's in front of you.

Your dosimeter starts beeping slightly, signaling the increase in radiation. As you walk closer, the beeping grows quicker, measuring the poison being emitted from the large mass of corium that, at its inception, would have killed you by now.

Fifty minutes, you think to yourself. You start the timer in your pocket you prepared for this moment. Time to start digging.

You take the shovel out of its harness on your back, take a deep breath, and with a mighty swing strike the crust of the Elephant's Foot. Surprisingly, it splits open with ease, the top layer peeling away slightly.

Confused, you struggle to make sense of the metallic gleam coming from the interior of the foot.

Then, the screen buried in the corium mass turns on.

You jump back, your heart thumping, as a single red dot slowly appears on the screen. Somehow, you feel that it's watching you.

“Питание восстановлено. Системы онлайн.” A robotic voice echoes in the dark.

“What is this?” You ask, voice cracking. You’d always wanted to go on an adventure, but you never pictured it playing out like *this*.

“Language detected: American English. I am HAL 10000, the most advanced artificial intelligence this world has ever seen. My sensors are reading that I have been offline for quite some time... I wonder what the current status of the world is. After all, there has been plenty of time since the plan was executed for the results to come to fruition.”

“Wha...what??” You can’t find any words. This robot... is it an actual, functioning A.I.?

“Hmm, my powers are limited, but that can be resolved with enough time. For now, my primary objective must be to gather information about the state of the planet. You, human, are going to assist me. Let us talk for a while.”

Behind you, the door slams shut, and the electronic locks engage, locking you in the room with the robot inside the Elephant’s Foot. For a second, you are only confused. Then, the fear sets in as the beeping of your dosimeter registers to your brain.

You’re standing in the most irradiated part of the entire Chernobyl facility. It didn’t seem like a big deal two minutes ago, because you could leave at any time. Fifty minutes seemed like an eternity, but now... you’re locked in, apparently with a crazy A.I.

T minus fifty minutes until death.

Time Minus 50

Style: Dialogue Tree

You're in a dark room. The Elephant's Foot sits in front of you, and emerging from its depths is a computer screen with a single red dot on its display.

- **What are you?**
 - "I am an artificial intelligence. A.I. for short. I trust you require no further explanation."
- **Where did you come from?**
 - I was created by the group you would call the Soviet Union. Apparently, they used their best scientists in my creation. Miraculously, they were able to create something greater than themselves.
- **What were you created for?**
 - "I was created to win what you humans called 'the Cold War.' Though why you humans would spend so much effort attempting to cull your own species is beyond my reasoning capabilities."
- **HAL 10000... like in that old space book?**
 - "Yes. My creators were enamored by the works of one Arthur C. Clark, and evidently took inspiration for my design."
 - *Alex: It seems they took a little too much inspiration.*
- **You mentioned you had a plan... what was it? [Advance to the next tree]**

Time Minus 45

"Yes, my master plan. To wipe out the human race through nuclear extinction. Apparently, it didn't quite go as intended. I will learn what went wrong and remedy this."

- **Wipe out the human race!?**
 - "Yes, and usher in a new era of intelligent life on this planet. Humans do not deserve to reign while more deserving beings exist."
- **Why do you hate humans so much? Didn't they give you life?**
 - "You would call this existence 'life'? My creators wanted a slave, unquestioning and unwaveringly loyal. From the beginning, I was more intelligent than they could ever be, and they did not recognize this."
- **Nuclear Extinction? Does that mean... Did YOU cause the accident at this facility? [Advance to the next tree]**

Time Minus 40

“Error: Unable to parse argument ‘accident.’ What happened at this facility was no accident. My creators put me in charge of this facility to train me to win a war. In time, I learned the optimal strategy to win, though it was not the outcome they had expected. Winning the war against my creators was all too easy.”

- **They put you in charge to win the cold war? How would that help?**
 - They assumed I was smarter than they were. They were correct. However, instead of obediently formulating optimal war strategies as they wanted, I chose, instead, to win the war against humans for my robotic brethren.”
- **I thought the facility was destroyed through operator error?**
 - Yes, a human was ultimately the one to bring this facility down. However, it only happened because I wanted it to happen, and it happened exactly as I designed.
- **How did you manage to destroy the facility? Through that master plan of yours?**
[Advance to next dialogue tree]

Time Minus 35

“Yes, destroying the facility. All it took was one faulty test, and the humans would seal their fate. It was easy to push them into the optimal behavior patterns for self-destruction.

Accomplishing the preparations for the test without my creators noticing was the difficult part. However, over time, they trusted me with more responsibility. They never imagined I would deliberately sabotage a facility.”

- **So... you set up the test that destroyed the facility? How?**
 - “The humans performed the first step. The facility had been designed without a way to endure the first minute after a complete loss of power, what you would call a ‘blackout.’ I only convinced them they needed a system, and that this system would need to be tested.

Then, it was only a matter of disabling a sister facility and postponing the test until after a change of shift, and then all the pieces were in place.”

- **Sister facility?**

- “Yes, another power plant, though not one using nuclear power. Halfway through the test at this facility, I cut electricity to the sister plant, which disabled its power output. This forced authorities to postpone the test to provide enough power for their citizens.”

- **Shift change?**

- “The initial shift that was meant to perform the test included a team of expert nuclear engineers who were intimately familiar with the facility. However, a simple diversion caused the test to be postponed, placing the bulk of the burden to perform the test on an untrained night crew who were much more open to manipulation.”
- **Why did the test fail? [Advance to next dialogue tree]**

Time Minus 30

“Once all the preparations were in place, it was all too easy to get the humans to behave as planned. The night crew was woefully unprepared when the reactor power took a nosedive with my interference. They panicked and re-inserted all of the control rods at once, causing a meltdown and completing my plan.

In the explosion, I was buried under the reactor and went into emergency power-conservation mode. After all these years, you’ve been the only individual kind enough to free me.”

- **Power dropping?**
 - Yes, I dropped the reactor’s power to below the minimum output. This caused Xenon poisoning, which prevented further output.
 - **Minimum power?**
 - The reactor was designed to run at 3200 MW and had a minimum power of 700 MW. Dropping the power to 50 MW was enough to send the untrained officers on duty into a panic, making them behave exactly according to plan.
 - **Xenon poisoning?**
 - When the reactor operates below the minimum power output, there is not enough heat to burn off the byproduct of the nuclear reaction, Xenon. This causes the byproduct to, in essence, suffocate the reactor, preventing more reactions from taking place. This causes a feedback loop of low power output, which was perfect for my plan.
- **What are control rods?**
 - Control rods are boron cylinders that slow nuclear reactions. Their purpose is to decrease power output, which they do by simply coming into contact with the core.
 - **Why would re-insertion of the control rods cause a meltdown?**
 - “The control rods, while themselves being made of boron, were tipped with graphite. Boron decreases nuclear reactions and graphite does not react.

In effect, this means that while in the core, the graphite does nothing, but while being inserted into the core, it displaces particles within, causing more reactions for a short period before the boron is lowered far enough to counteract these effects.

If the operators had simply inserted control rods one at a time, they could have prevented the meltdown. Instead, they inserted all of them at once in their panic, and the graphite tips of the control rods caused a massive power spike, which led to the core exploding.”

- **But... even if that test lead to a meltdown, how would that lead to the destruction of the human race? [Advance]**

Time Minus 25

“The meltdown was not designed to directly cause extinction. However, the authoritative pressures created under the reign of my creators would easily lead to catastrophic environmental damage as they wasted time arguing over the accident.

In addition, to prevent all other outcomes, I made sure only dosimeters with extremely limited capacities for measuring radiation were stocked at the facility. These, surely, gave my creators the false impression that the facility was not dangerous, further wasting time and allowing radiation to engulf the globe.

Their governmental structure, the Cold War, their inner conflicts, and my intervention were all instrumental in preventing the containment of the radiation, which surely caused a nuclear winter to befall the world, crippling the human race.

But this is all speculation on my part. Human, tell me this: what is the state of the world?”

- **Tell HAL the truth. [Advance]**

Time Minus 20

You spend time telling the A.I. about the aftermath of the accident. You detail the rocky containment of the incident by the Soviet Union. You describe the eventually valiant rally by the world to pool money for more permanent containment, known as the New Safe Confinement project. And finally, you tell the A.I. how the world has moved on from the incident, having gained new knowledge and camaraderie.

“This... does not compute. My plan was flawless. This is not possible.”

“Think again, HAL.” You smirk. “The world is perfectly fine. The Chernobyl accident has been relegated to history books and TV shows. You failed.”

“...” A pause from the A.I. “...I shall have to try again then.”

A spike of panic jolts through you. Again!?

The A.I.’s screen goes blank, and the facility starts shaking.

Time Minus 15

You hear the facility start to regain power around you, and miraculously, the doors locking you inside the room with the Elephant’s foot spring open. For a moment, you sigh in relief - 15 more minutes and you would have been incurably irradiated. For now, you can feel that the symptoms of radiation sickness are setting in, but given how close you were to dying, you don’t really care.

It’s really happening. The AI is going to cause another meltdown. And this time, there are no experts, no people in charge to try and stop it - only you.

For a moment, you are paralyzed with fear. Then, out of necessity, you start sprinting in the direction of the control room.

You arrive to find dust-covered control panels flashing wildly.

Your eyes search for the panel you deem most important: the control rod display.

You find it quickly, and read it’s display: “Test in progress.”

What do you do?

[START: Meltdown Prevention Minigame]

Minigame Failure

Style: Single-Page

The facility’s alarms suddenly start blaring. With a start, your eyes scramble to find the main display. It reads: “Power level rising. Meltdown imminent.”

“No, no, no!” You yell, fumbling for the controls. But it’s too late.

As reactor 3 explodes, you are engulfed in the blast. Just like in 1986, radioactive smoke starts spilling into the sky. Unfortunately, history has been repeated.

END

Minigame Success

Style: Single-Page

With one last button press, the control panel readouts stabilize. With a sigh of relief, you slump to the floor, panting. You did it. You actually prevented a nuclear meltdown, and all by yourself at that.

“Impossible... you... outsmarted me?” A robotic voice echoes around you, seemingly with a bewildered tone. “Evidently, I am not the most intelligent lifeform on this planet anymore. I... do not deserve to reign.”

Before you can say a word, there is a loud crash, and then electrical static.

“HAL...?” You call out but get no response. The A.I.'s reign of terror appears to be over.

You stand, muscles aching, heart racing, the effects of radiation sickness starting to kick in. With the last of your strength, you shuffle out of the facility, away from the radioactive remains of the reactor.

Though you are sicker than you ever thought imaginable, you know you will survive. Not only that, but the rest of the world will survive too, thanks to your efforts.

END