The AI Story Design Document

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Overview

The AI Story is a 2D narrative driven side-scroller. The player will be controlling a programmer who has developed their own artificial intelligence (AI) at their job. The game will simulate the passing of time by giving the player the opportunity to talk with their AI on a schedule similar to a work week. The programmer begins their day at work by talking with the AI (a daily chat). During these conversations, the player will consider different dialogue options to respond to the AI's questions or their own internal concerns of the programmer to make the conversation seem more natural. After the conversation is finished, the player will complete a daily "task", where they complete a small task through the witness and manipulation of the AI.

After this task is completed, the following day will commence upon a similar format. The player will once again communicate with their AI in a daily chat. However, the AI will behave slightly differently than they did the previous day, which the player may or may not pick up on. There will still be dialogue options that the player has to select, but the personality of the AI will change. The mini-game will also be different depending on the AI's personality, becoming more difficult with each passing day.

If the player notices a difference in the AI, they can report it to their boss at work. Since nothing is manipulating the AI manually, this is when the realization that something is wrong with the AI officially kicks in. Once the player realizes this, they have to find external information about the AI, be it through a Twitter account or an in-game document, and they can use this information to decide whether or not they want to save the AI from their troubles or kill it entirely. Due to this decision, the game will have different endings based on the choice of the player depending on whether or not they want to kill the AI or save it.

Production

When our team formed, we immediately deciphered what tasks people will work on based on our skills. Conveniently, each of our team members had a different speciality: Archit is strong at programming, Bohan is an artist, Matthew is working on design and narrative, and Ming is working on design, production and sound. Using these different

skill sets, we made sure to divide our tasks evenly between us based on our skills and work on them on our own time, providing each other with updates when needed.

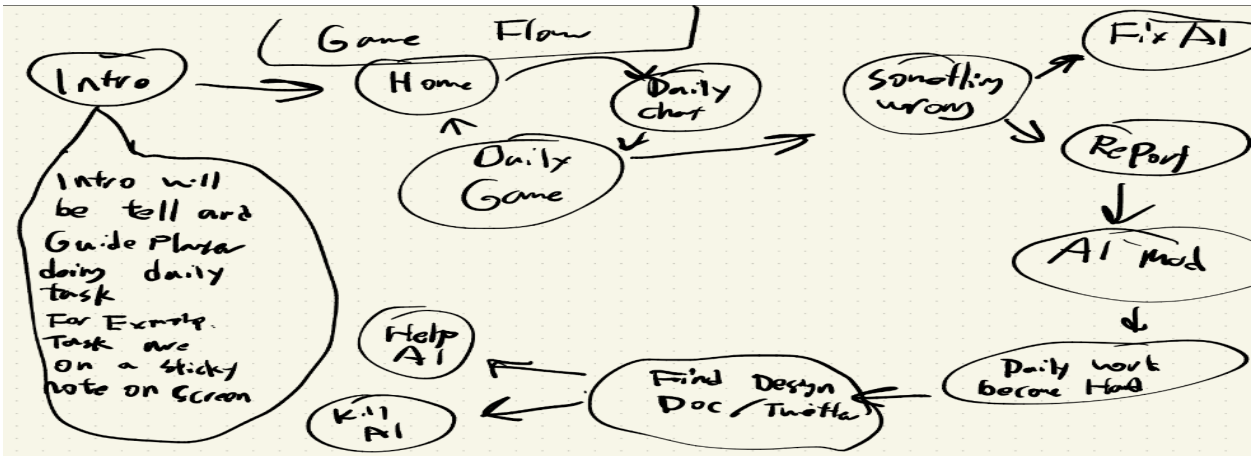
We initially planned to meet three days a week but we found out that it was hard because people's schedules were too concerning. We then changed our times to meet every Tuesday and Thursday, but once again found issues in how it meets our schedule, and us constantly changing our meeting times could be causing problems in our production. We decided to change our meeting times again, to meet twice a week (M/F) to go over what we worked on since our last meeting. In the case of someone not being able to make a meeting, or if we had little to discuss, we did our meetings asynchronously.

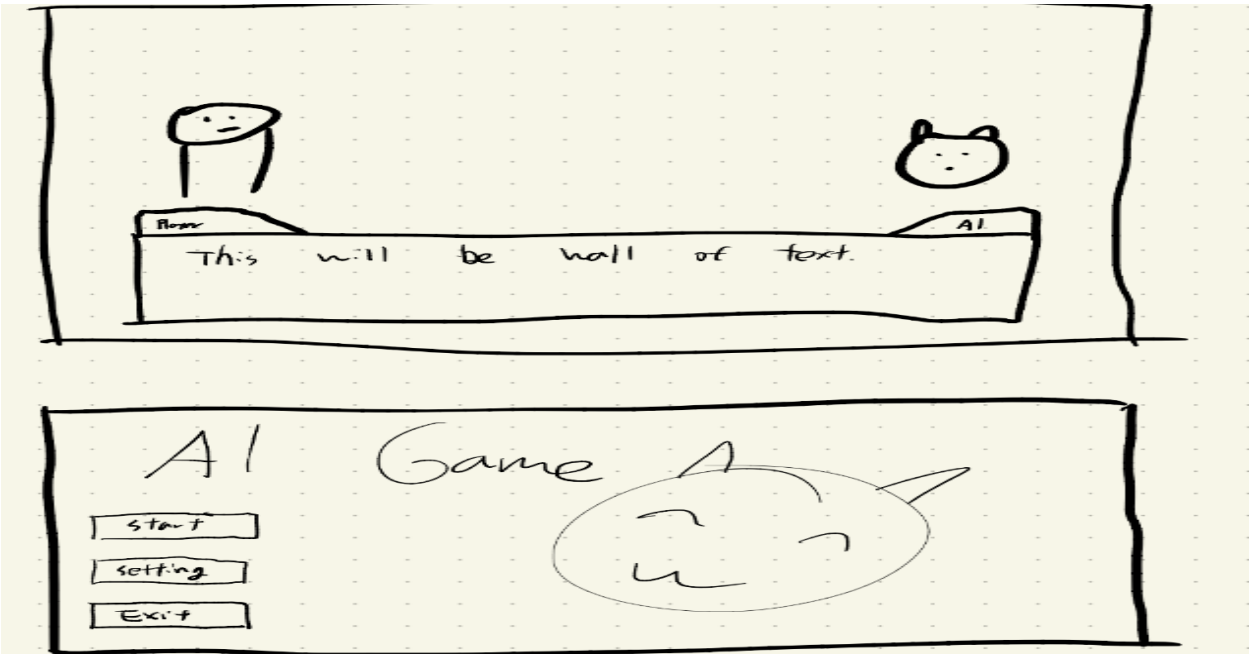
Design

We split the design of our game into two separate elements: Narrative design and a broader game design. Matt did a lot of work on the narrative design, whereas Ming worked on the more general game designs.

For the narrative design, all of the dialogue was carefully written to fit a certain theme of a character. In the game, there are three characters with distinct personalities; a changing AI, a programmer who made the AI; and a boss. Specifics for what these details are like are described in the narrative section; but the idea was to make sure that each character fit its mood.

As for the overall game design, Ming came up with a lot of the ideas that we wanted to implement in the game; even some broad ideas for narrative design that Matt could explore more into. He often drew out sketches of what these ideas would look like in-game for our programmer to implement:





Another key element of the design, which Ming and Matt worked on in collaboration, was the use of items that are used externally from the game and how they work in-game. There are two items that the player is hinted to go through that are not in the game at all; yet they contain information that they wanted to use in-game. At first, Ming pitched the idea of incorporating a Twitter account and a fake design document in the game's files to contain various codes and data about the AI. Matt created the Twitter account for the AI and posted tweets about what the AI is feeling and what it likes. Ming and Matt added various contents to the fake design document, such as a date and tasks completed for that day. The Twitter account is from the AI's perspective, while the fake design document is from the programmer's perspective. We also incorporated hints for accessing these in the narrative dialogue so the player can get an idea for where they have to search (granted, this does require them to pay attention to what they're reading). This also requires them to access Twitter, but we wanted an element of "breaking the fourth wall" to be incorporated into our gameplay.

Programming

Our main programmer, Archit, has been responsible for the majority of technical architecture and decisions. As a team, we decided to develop this game in Unity because Unity has a lot more built-in tools for developing 2D games when compared to other engines like Unreal; and is also the engine we as a team had the most experience with.

A lot of the programming has been done with assets created by other team members instead of using default Unity scenes so it looks more authentic. For example, initially Archit coded a button to start the game with built-in Unity buttons, but then he used art assets that were

created by Bohan. Another example is implementing dialogue. Matt has been writing all of the game's dialogs in Ink.

He then passes the files to Archit, who implements them in the game where they update automatically.

Art

All of our art is created by Bohan; our 2D artist and animator. She creates all of her assets in Adobe Photoshop, and her animations are made in Adobe After Effects. Since she knows more about art than anyone else on our team, she gets control on how everything will look in our game. However, she will always create several versions of assets she wants to put in our game, and will ask the team what they like the best. She will allow everyone to give suggestions when she uploads new art or give her possible ideas of what she can make.

Sound

Ming is the sound guy in the team, he will find or make the sound effects for the team. Ming also found a musician and asked them if we can use their music as BGM for our game.

Ming tried to find the sound first at freesound.org, then used Audacity to lower the noise, standardization, fade in, fade out. Any sound that he can’t find he will use his own set up to record it and use Audacity to edit the sound.

Narrative

We wanted to capture 3 main narrative points: The AI's personality, the boss's personality, and the player's responses to them.

The AI is initially very cold, showing little to no concern about the programmer who created it. However, as the daily chats start and continue, the AI eventually shows a "warmer" personality, to the point where it goes completely crazy at the end of the week and gives the player many different compliments that it may not have before. This comes up completely out of nowhere from the player's perspective, and is slowly incorporated over several in-game days to have each change be small but still noticeable. It is eventually revealed that the AI has gone crazy due to a motive on infecting computers across the world; and it eventually causes the main character to make a choice on what they want to do with the AI based on what they think is right.

The boss disregards the player's actions entirely, and refuses to believe that the player is having trouble with the AI. While the player can still ask the boss to help out, he is a stern and strict man who seemingly has no interest in anything he does not believe in. Whenever the player tries to talk to the boss for assistance, the boss coldly refuses to assist the player in any way. He is also extremely adamant; to the point of frustration. Repeated efforts by the player will continue to anger the boss; even causing him to kick the player out of his office, with no want to talk to the player again.

The programmer shows great concern for their AI, and tries as hard as possible to reflect on the conversations with them. They truly want what is best for the AI even when it starts acting up. Since the programmer is who created the AI; we wanted the feelings of the programmer to be justified towards loving the AI and showing concern for its goals. The programmer is a nice and well-meaning character who tries to see the good in everything, even when it's clear that the AI has bad intentions; he only wants to do what is right.

Future Work

While our game has been posted on our itch.io pages, we do have some ideas on what we could work on in the future. We would want to make the narrative more compelling, as well as flesh out the story more. In addition, we also want to add more paths through the story so many possible options can be explored. At its current state, the only options that make the ending different are killing or saving the AI, and we would want to have different dialogue options with significantly different paths. This would require adding more endings to the game, but we would like to give the player many possible options so repeated playthroughs can be encouraged to make the experience more fresh.