SOMA
Crafting Existential Dread

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DISCLAIMERS

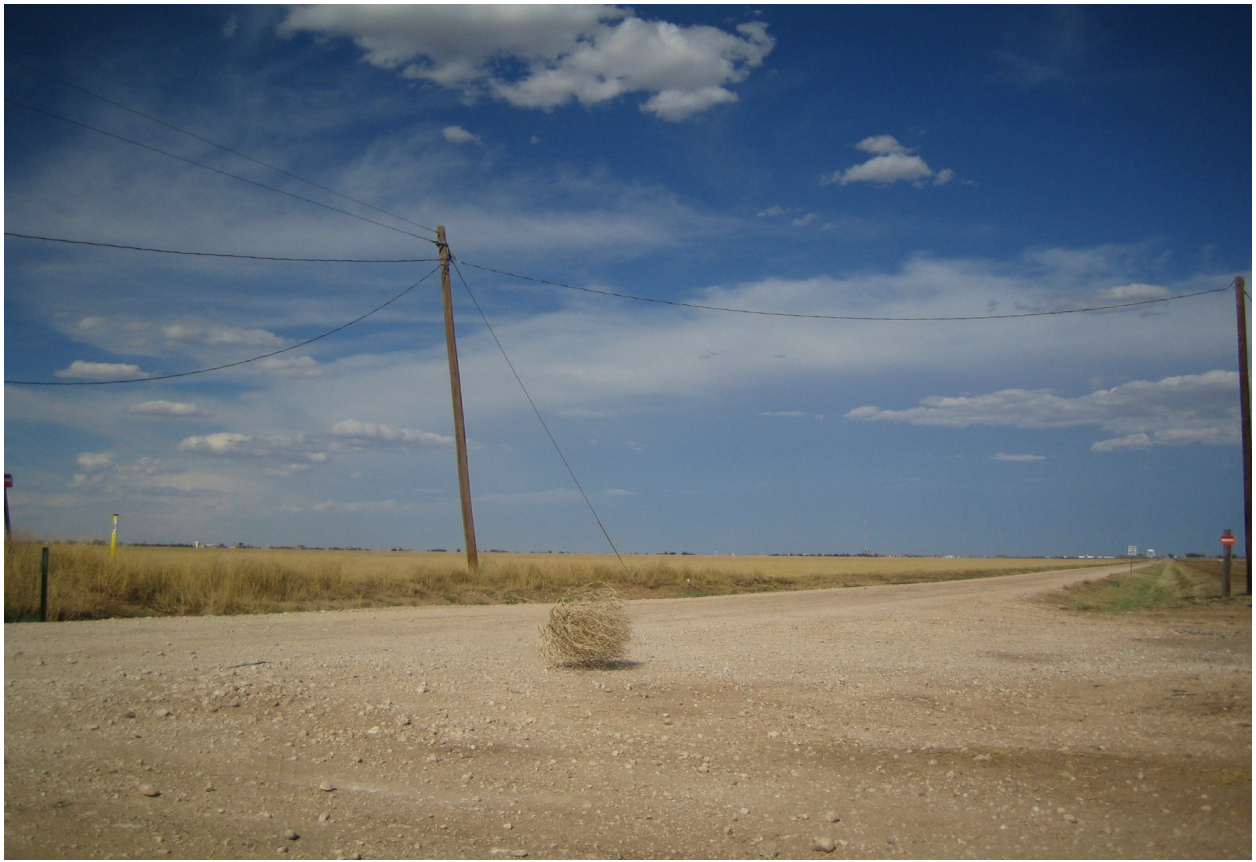
> An entire team created this game.

> This is a simplification.

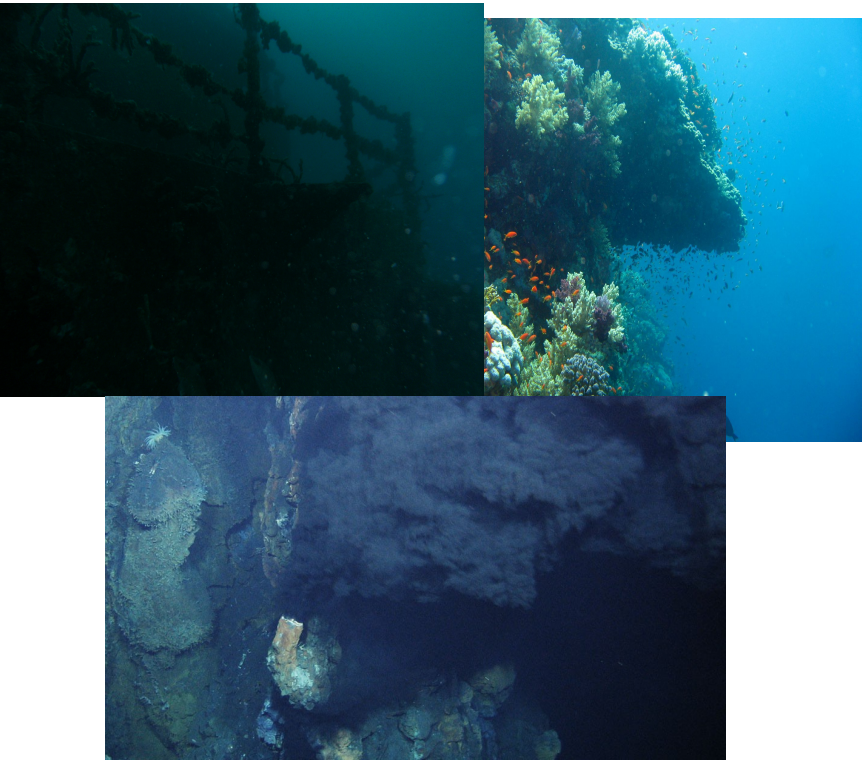
> There will be spoilers!

AMNESIA DAYS

Amnesia
- THE DARK DESCENT -



CONCEPTION OF SOMA



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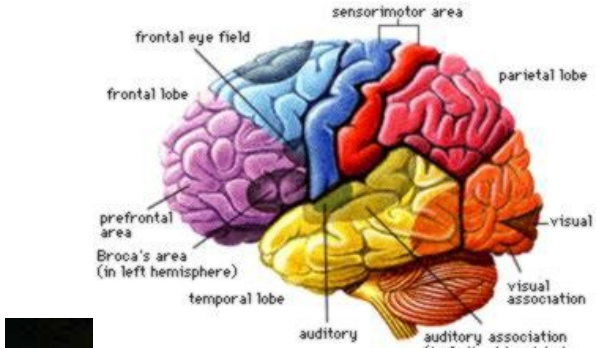
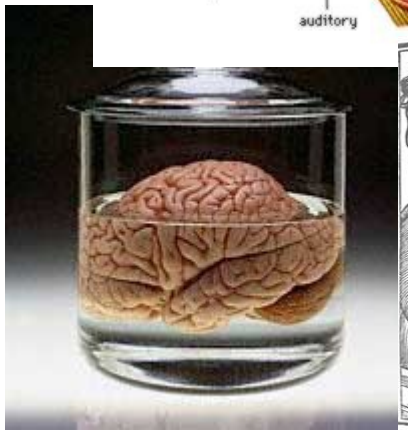
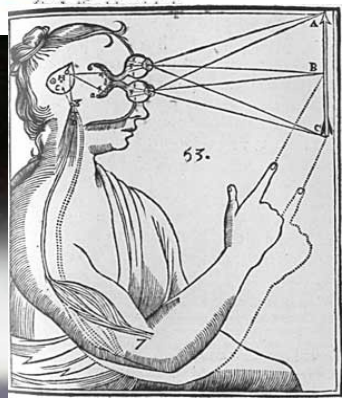

sensorimotor area
frontal eye field
parietal lobe
frontal lobe
prefrontal area
visual
Broca's area (in left hemisphere)
visual association
temporal lobe
auditory
auditory association




53.

THE CORE GAME

> Player starts in the present, gets brainscan, ends up in the future.

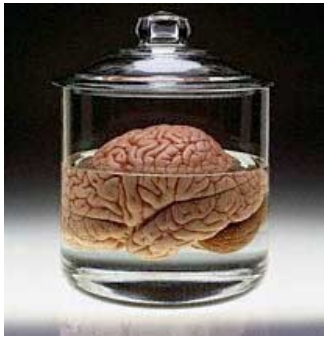
> Rest of game: explore philosophical implications of this condition.

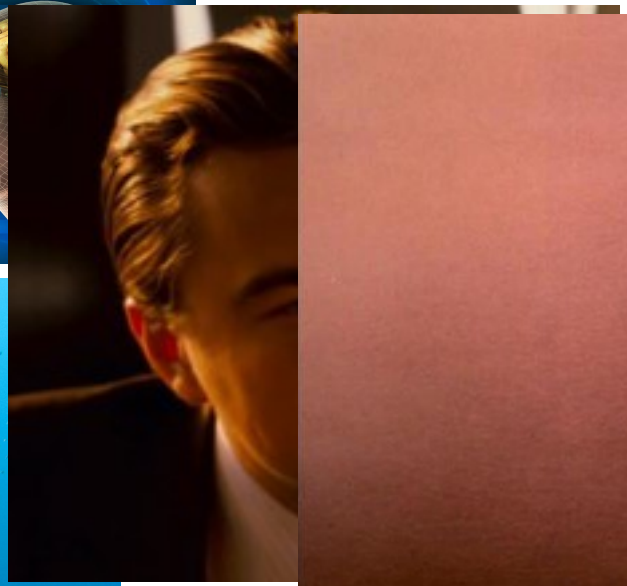
> A few key moments, eg:
Swap body and kill a cute robot.

> No Gameplay loop.

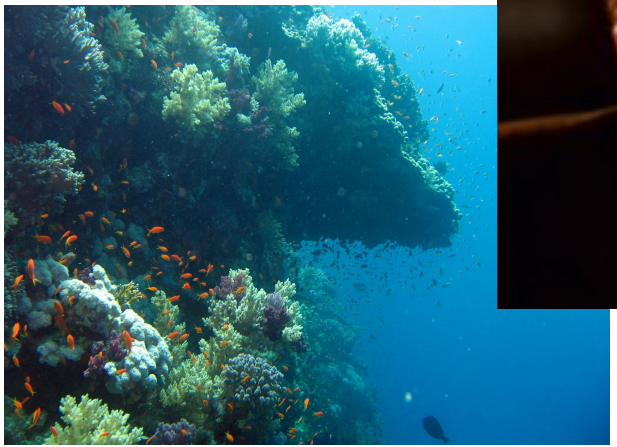
> No Mechanics.

> Not sure if horror.





DO
NOT
OPEN
TIL
XMAS



SOMA

EARLY RESEARCH

THEMES

You fumble with the loose doorknob and slump inside, gingerly pulling yourself along the grubby carpet to your room, wary of waking a flatmate. Collapsing into bed, you wait for the spinning world to dissolve around you as you fall into relieved sleep.

The Chinese Room

A philosophical text adventure into the green valleys of silliness, by H Giles and J Jones
Release 1 / Serial number 070930 / Inform 7 build 4U65 (I6/v6.31 lib 6/11N)

The Chinese Room

(Note to all first-time players: inexperienced players may wish to spend some time reading the About and Help menus, accessible by entering the HELP command. All players should absolutely at the least read the ESSENTIALS available from the opening menu.)

You wake up, body aching and head split in two by a hangover. Blinking the sleep from your eyes, you roll over, cracking your bones on the concrete.

Concrete? You realise something is very wrong. Pushing yourself to your knees, you look around you.

You find yourself in a strange room. It's a plain concrete box, equipped only with desk and chair. A computer sits on the desk, casting an insipid electronic glow over a stack of cards sitting by the keyboard. There's a slow drip from a damp patch up on the ceiling. Some grubby light seeps through a high window across onto the poster that dominates an entire wall. Across the top of the poster huge bold letters read "THE CHINESE ROOM". Underneath -- a string of Chinese characters.

You have never seen this room before in your life, and the whole scenario is entirely beyond your understanding.

>

CORE ISSUES

> Lack of Presence.

> Over-reliance on puzzles.

PRESENCE

HEAVY RAIN
THE ORIGAMI KILLER

Rules of Presence

> Constant Input

> Agreeable Action Outcome

> Deterministic Mechanics

> Minimal Repetition

> Consistency

PRESENCE = valuable design framework

Lesson

Maintaining presence is great for getting themes across.

Extra Lesson

Frameworks are great for filtering design choices.

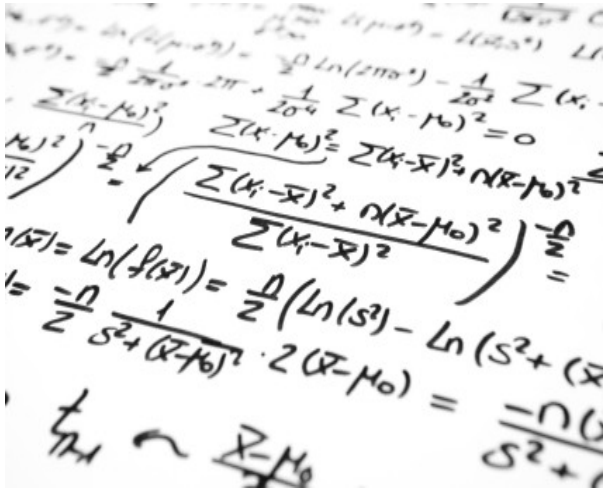
PUZZLES AND SCENES

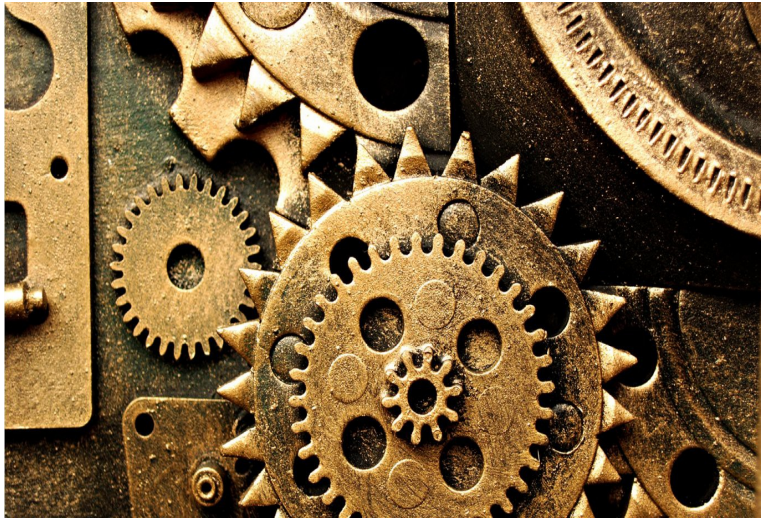
The Scene Approach

LOST
CONFUSED
UNSURE
UNCLEAR
PERPLEXED
DISORIENTED
BEWILDERED

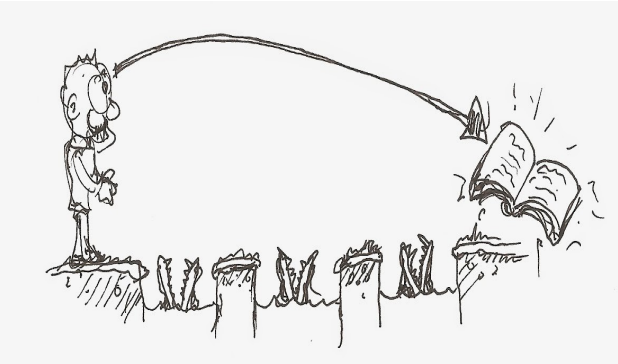
Lesson

Without goals and structure, no engagement.





4-layer's approach



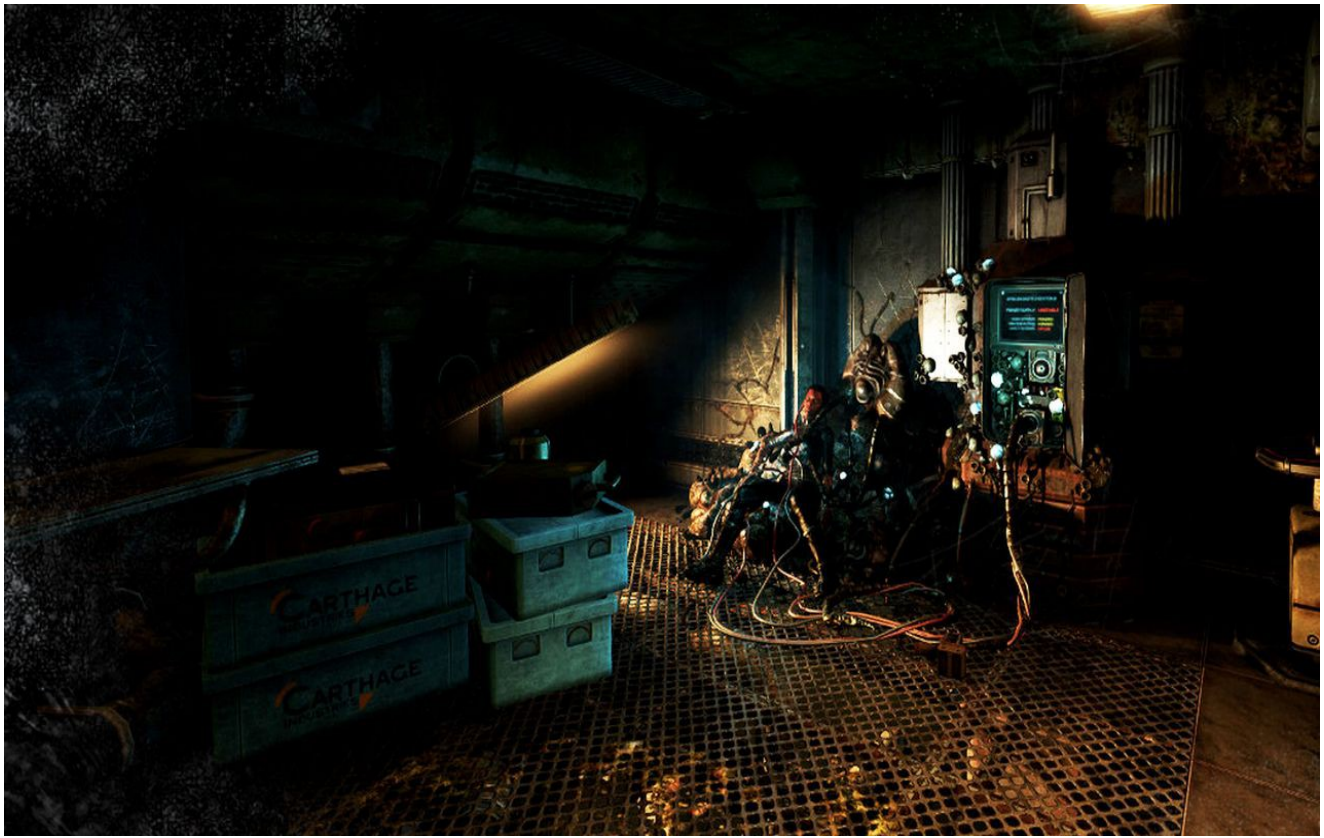
Sim Upstairs
Sim Lambda

Lesson

Puzzles, etc. must be part of the storyTELLING.

CHOICES

60
M4A1


CARTHAGE
CARTHAGE

Lesson

Forcing players to consider events

=

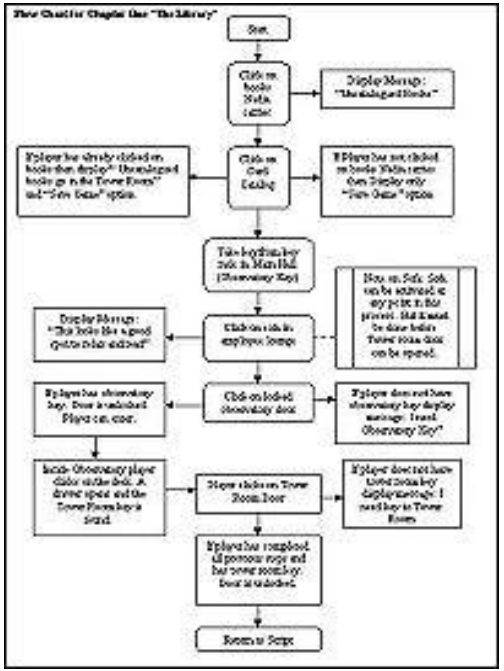
Better emotional response

Extra Lessons

> Everything is obvious in hindsight.

> Small tweaks can make a world of difference.

TECHNOLOGY



Dynamic Dialog:

> Massive workload.

> Characters often acted stupid.

Branching Dialog:

> Workload is still massive.

Simple System:

> Still lots of work!!

Lesson

Focus on what matters for achieving your goals.

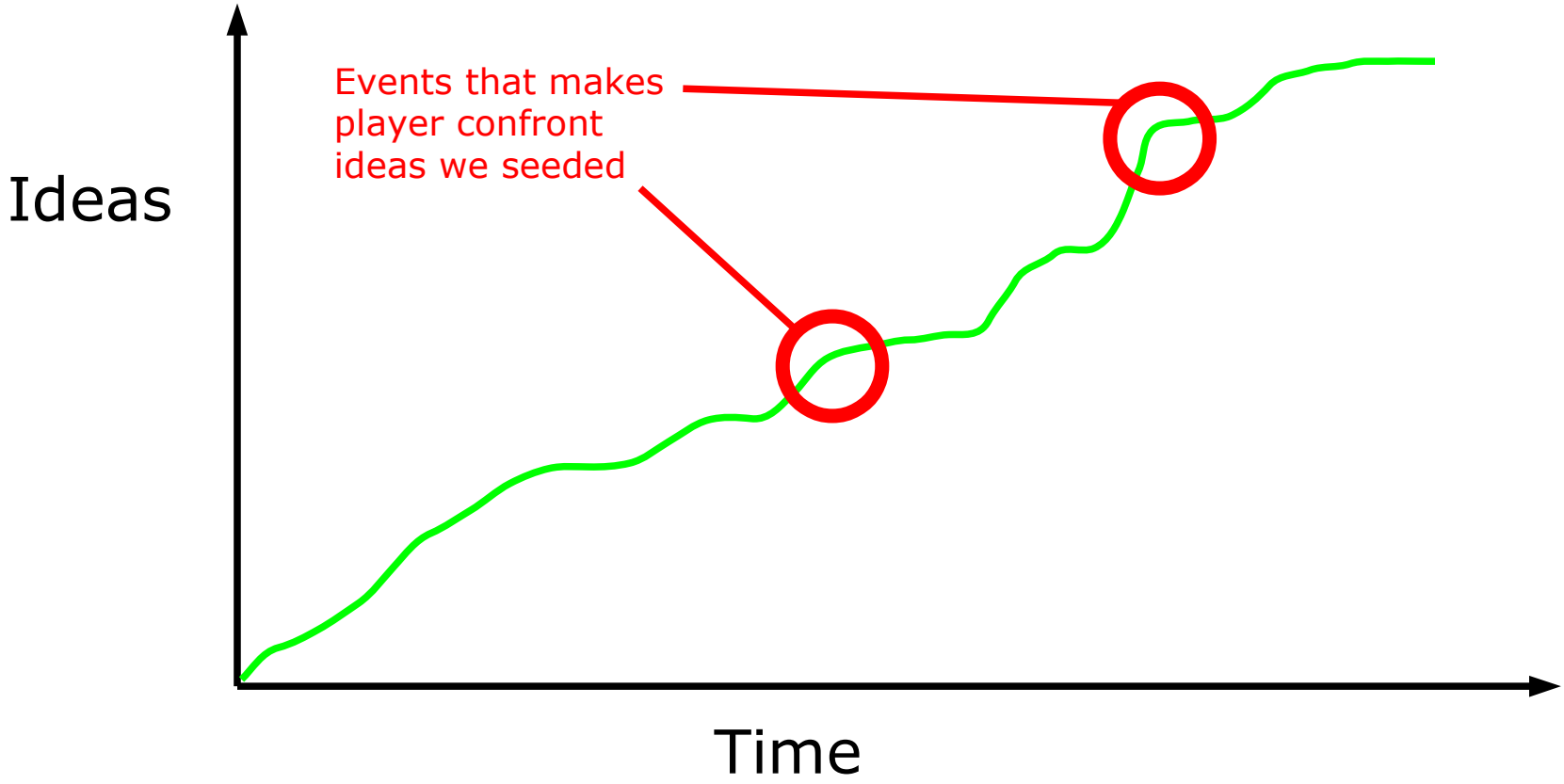
Use proven tech when possible!

THE BIG PICTURE

OPEN QUESTIONS

> How do we communicate our themes on a holistic level?

> How do we make the game as a whole enagaging?


Ideas
Events that makes player confront ideas we seeded
Time

BIG PROBLEM:

To properly test, build must last hours.

First proper test build:

2.5 years after project start.

Time between tests:

ONE YEAR!

> Hard to communicate to team what game was.

> Problem: I wasn't sure myself!

First 3.5 years:

> Our focus: Solve the open questions.

> Puzzle, scene, etc., evolved alongside.

> AI and death system: Left behind.

Lesson 1

Plan for long iteration cycles.

Lesson 2

Vision might be unclear, prepare everyone for this.

Lesson 3

Get foundational gameplay done ASAP.

CHOOSING THEMES

Lesson

Narrow down subjects as much as possible.

Caveat

Scattergun approach can be VERY helpful!

CONCLUSION

Clip Credits:

ChristopherOdd
Geek Remix
Markiplier
Natascha Roosli

I love horror. Soma is distressing. There is a scene where I have to hurt a friendly robot to progress and I don't know why. It made me cry.

Thanks for listening!

Resources:

http://tiny.cc/TODO!!

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