GDC

The Narrative Innovation Showcase

Clara Fernandez-Vara & Matthew Weise
Fiction Control
@clarafv
@sajon77

UBM

Welcome!

5 Talks, 10 minutes each

- Challenges in Narrative Design.
- All new, unreleased games.
- Focus on process.
- No Q&A – if you have any questions or comments, please join us at the wrap-up room.

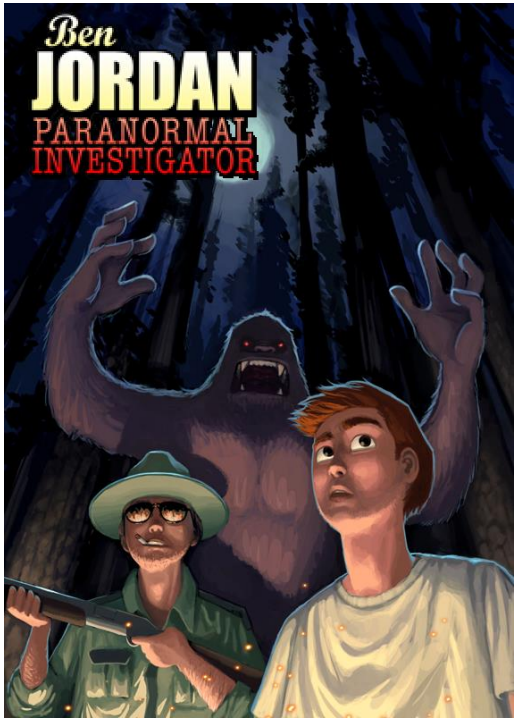
The Narrative Innovation Showcase

Francisco Gonzalez
Designer/Independent
@GrundislavGames

Lamplight City: A Detective Game Where It's Okay To Fail

Francisco Gonzalez
Designer/Independent

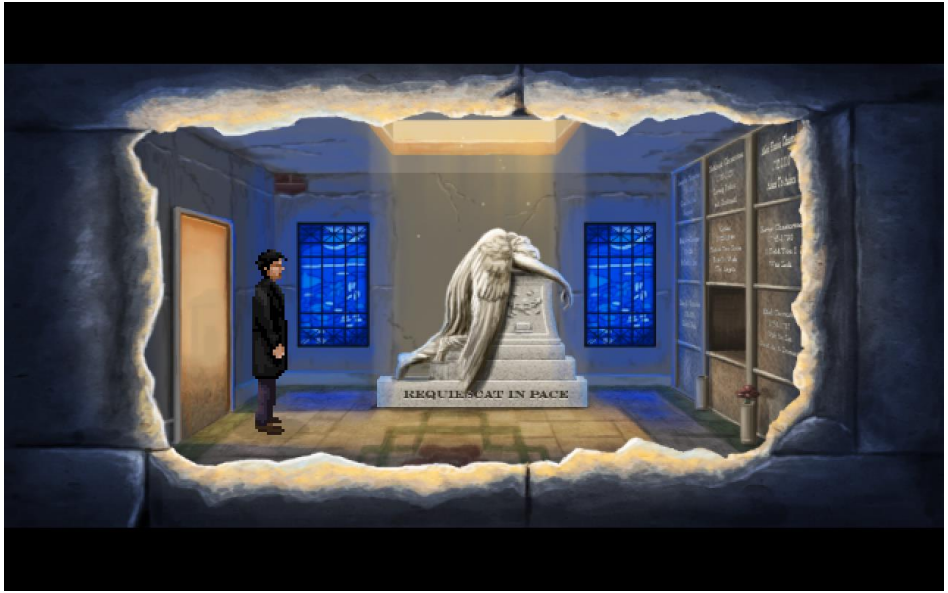
Games I've Made



Lamplight City

- A detective adventure game set in an alternate steampunk-ish “Victorian” past.
- Five cases, one overarching narrative.
- Multiple suspects per case, moral choices and lasting consequences.
- Inspired by Edgar Allan Poe & Charles Dickens.

HANBROOK FLOWER SHOP


REQUIESCAT IN PACE

Torn Fabric
Himself
End Conversation

The Challenge

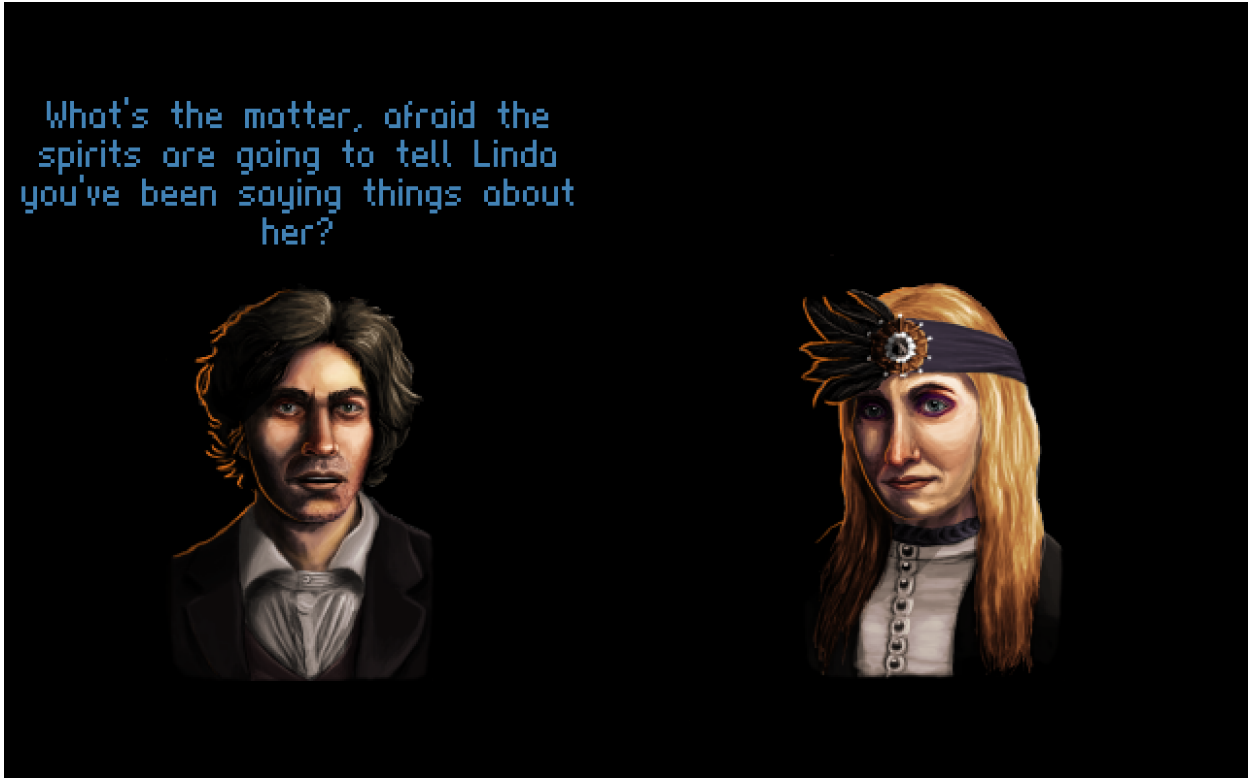
- How can we make a detective game where it’s okay to be bad at your job?

L.A. NOIRE

CRIMES & PUNISHMENTS
SHERLOCK HOLMES

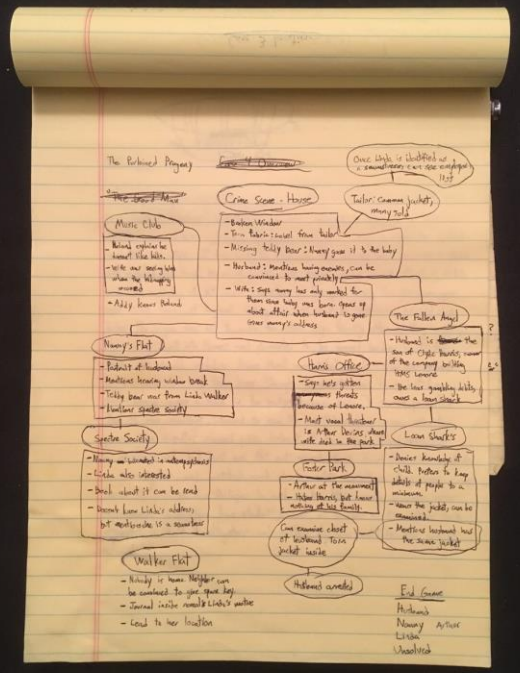
The Solutions

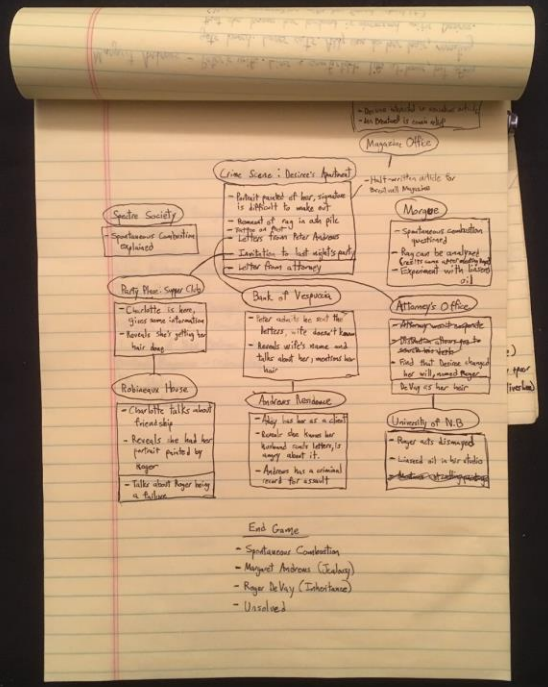
- Make investigations non-linear, so any lead can be followed/completed at any time.
- Have some choices made during cases come back to haunt you.


What's the matter, afraid the spirits are going to tell Lindo you've been saying things about her?

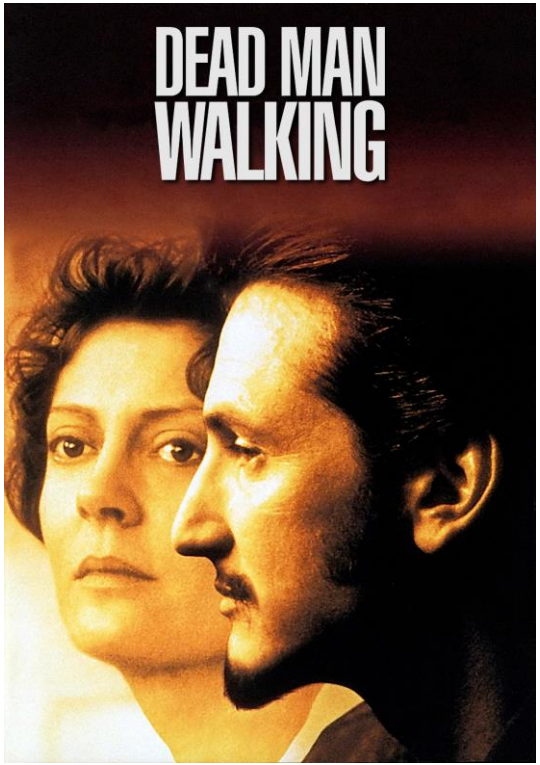
- Offer multiple solutions to each case to avoid railroading the player.

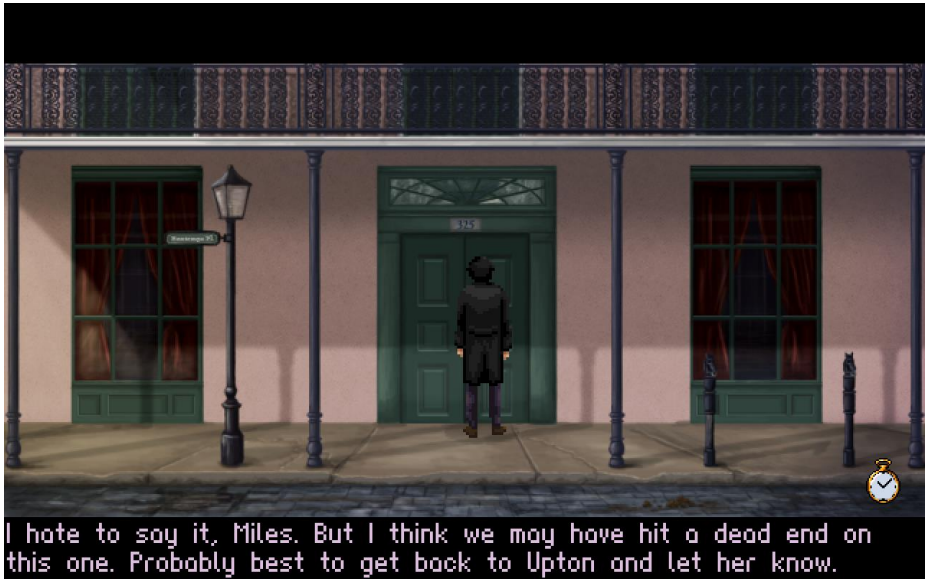
Designing a Case: Flowcharts are my new best friends.

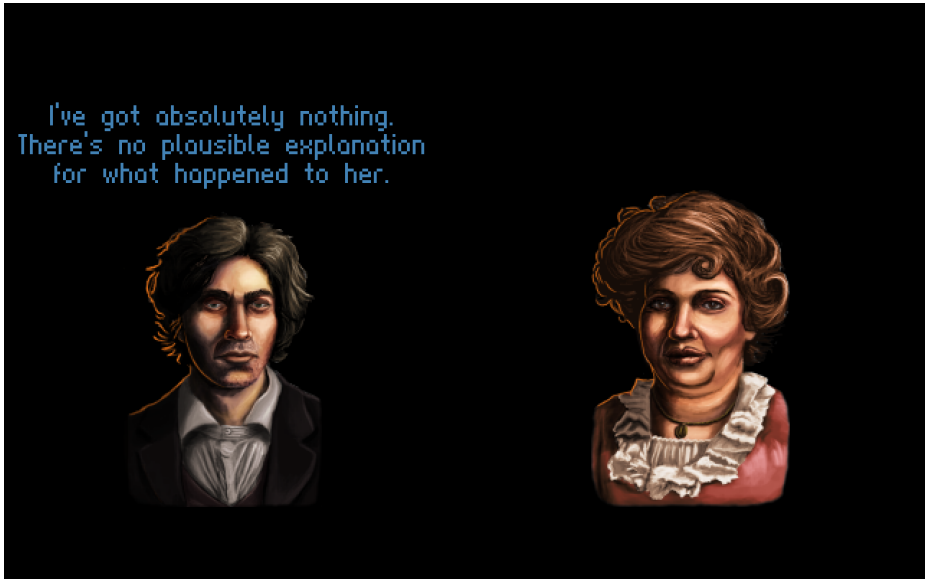




- Indicate the possibility to continue, even if a dead end is reached.


DEAD MAN
WALKING


I hate to say it, Miles. But I think we may have hit a dead end on this one. Probably best to get back to Upton and let her know.


I've got absolutely nothing.
There's no plausible explanation
for what happened to her.

The Future aka What I'd Like To See

- More games where failure is a valid option.
- Stories where choices have actual repercussions, not just superficial ones.
- Stories that shape themselves accordingly if you're just really bad at your job.

DISCLAIMER:

I have no idea if this will work, or if it will fail miserably. But at least I tried!

Thank You!

www.grundislavgames.com
grundislav@gmail.com
@GrundislavGames

The Narrative Innovation Showcase

Cara Ellison
Freelance

CASSADY
THE BEAT POET
WRITTEN BY
MATTHEW S. BURNS
FIDELINA
THE CURANDERA
WRITTEN BY
MARI LANDGREBE
RAY
THE COWBOY
WRITTEN BY
JOLIE MENZEL
BERTHA
THE DUSTBOWL REFUGEE
WRITTEN BY
EMILY SHORT
AUGUST
THE SAILOR
WRITTEN BY
ANNE TOOLE
DEHAAYA
THE ONE WHO WENT UPWARDS
WRITTEN BY
DEMIAN DINÉ YAZHI'
ROSE
THE HIPPIE
WRITTEN BY
JOHNNEMAN NORDHAGEN
LITTLE BEN
THE COAL MINER
WRITTEN BY
LEIGH ALEXANDER
QUINN
THE HOBO KID
WRITTEN BY
CLARIS CYARRON & SILVERSTING MEDIA
DUPREE
THE GAMBLER
WRITTEN BY
CARA ELLISON
JIMMY
THE PREACHER
WRITTEN BY
AUSTIN WALKER
FRANKLIN
THE PULLMAN PORTER
WRITTEN BY
JORDAN MINOR
MASON
THE GREAT WAR VETERAN
WRITTEN BY
SYDNEY MEEKER
SHAW & ALTHEA
THE SHARECROPPER THE BLUES GUITARIST
WRITTEN BY
GITA JACKSON
ROCIO
THE MIGRANT WORKER
WRITTEN BY
STUART ARIAS

I like to hear about people and make bets with 'em.
Continue

The Challenge

- Voices of characters being similar is a common problem in games, for many reasons:
- Production
- Budget
- Game dialogue structure

The Solution

- Where The Water Tastes Like Wine is built and structured to cater to different voices

The Solution

- Each writer has a distinct voice, sentence structure, rhythm & cadence

The Solution

- I had room to develop a character arc, and my own interests within the character

The Future

- Not a ‘new’ innovation for narrative designers, but a production method already understood & little implemented, particularly by studios who value mechanical systems more

The Narrative Innovation Showcase

Greg Heffernan
Cosmo D Studios
@CosmoDDD

Music Builds Character

The Norwood Suite

Greg Heffernan
Cosmo D Studios

From the Creator of *Off-Peak*

The Norwood Suite

- A first-person adventure game
- Set in an old hotel, in an “alternate” Upstate New York, with a strong music-related backstory
- A loose, non-linear narrative, communicated through environmental storytelling, music, sound design and in-game text.
- About that **in-game text…**

The Challenge

+ In-game text floated in the world, like a speech bubble in a graphic novel.

- But it felt **too static.**

+ How do I get players to want to read it?

+ Perhaps my background in music sound design can **help the text tell the story…**

Inspirations…

Inspiration for Norwood Suite In-Game Approach to Dialog Music

Alien sounds synced with on-screen text

Killer 7 by Grasshopper Manufacture

Inspiration for Norwood Suite In-Game Approach to Dialog Music

Assigning each character an instrument

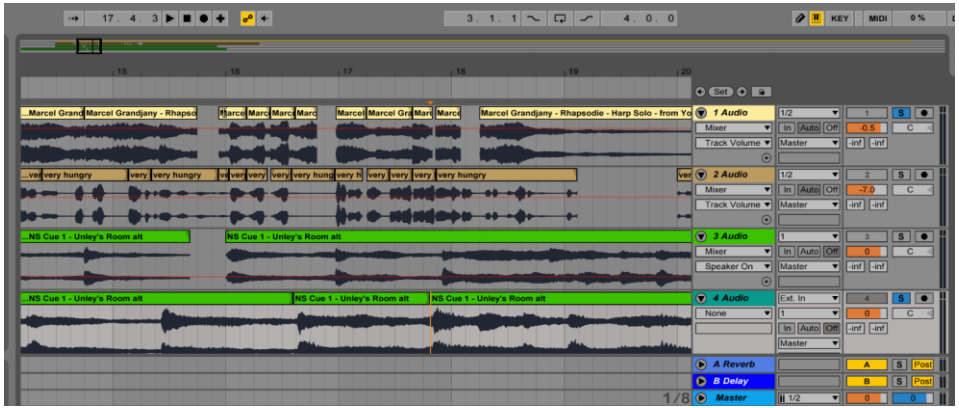
“Peter and the Wolf” by Prokofiev via Disney

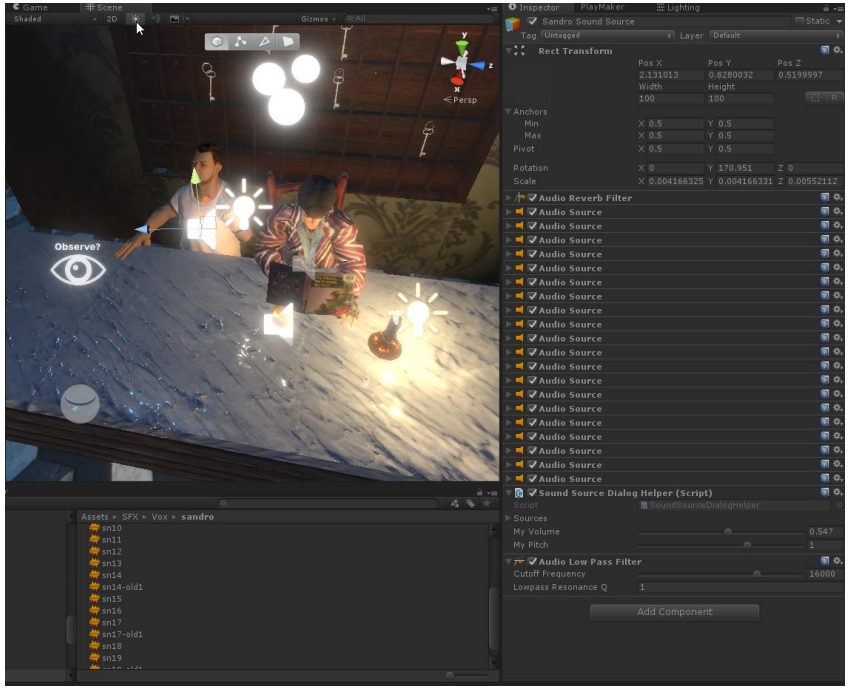
Inspiration for Norwood Suite In-Game Approach to Dialog Music

Choosing a jazzy wah-wah trombone to swap with a human voice?

Charlie Brown

The Process...



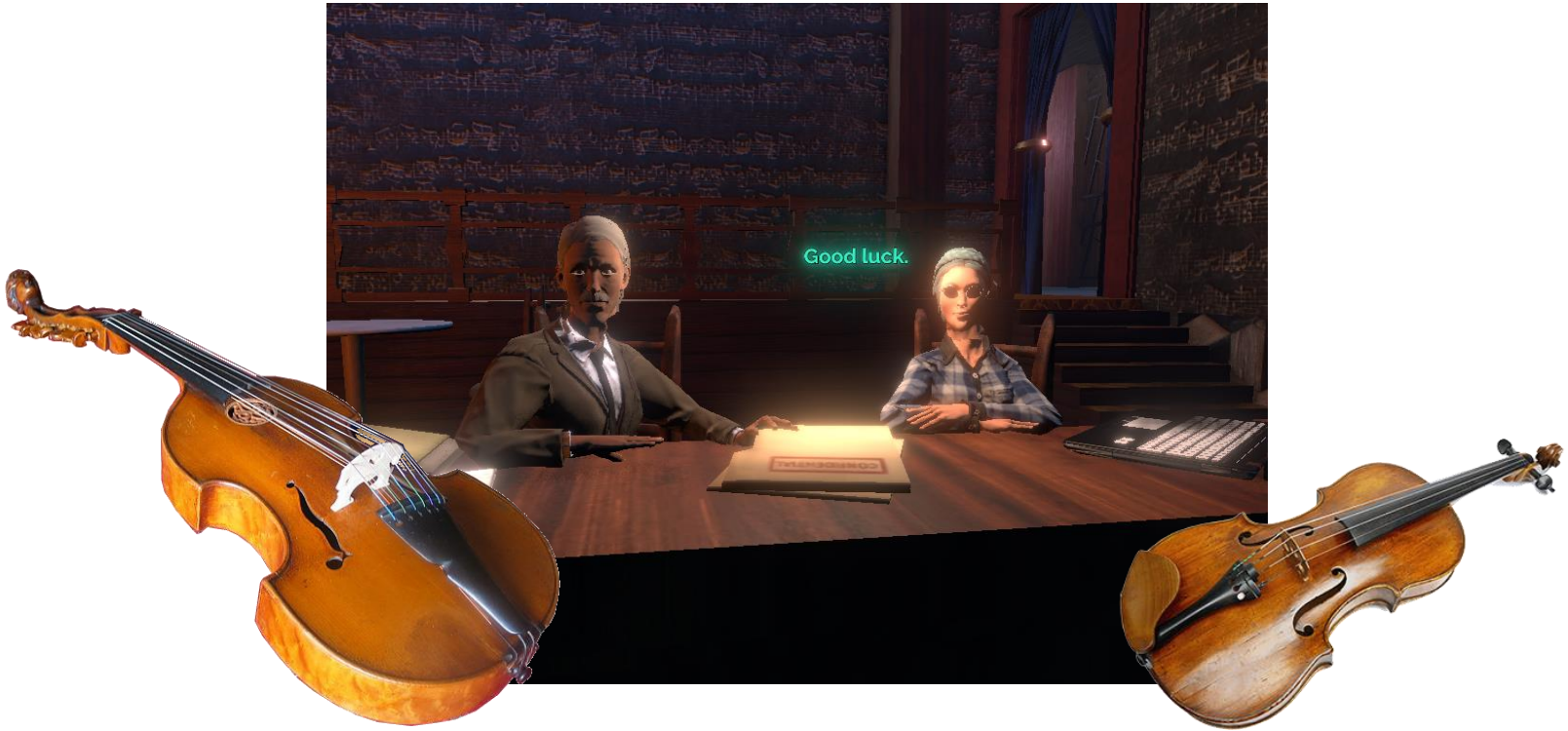


Cutting audio files of specific instruments into small pieces and loading them into Unity.

Each ‘piece’ makes a sound with the appearance of each word on-screen.

Goodnight!
The Plants, My Friends, My Foes

FARFISA


Good luck.

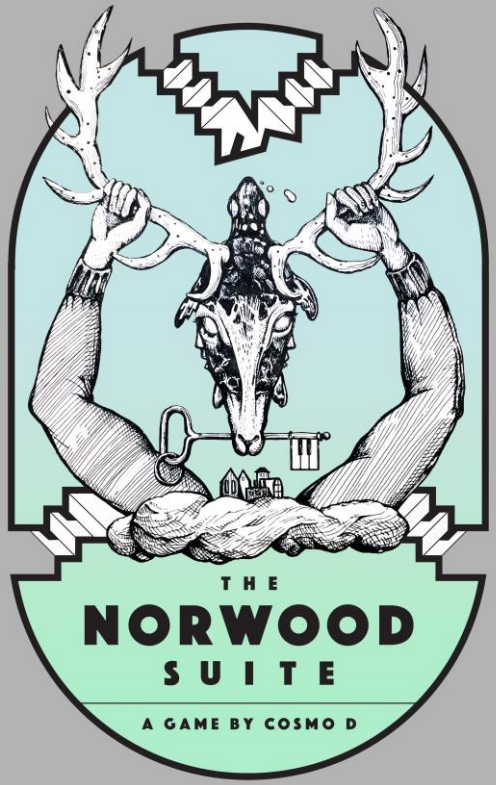
The Future

How can this lead to further innovation?

- New ways to express a character's interior world.
- A holistic sonic / visual / narrative experience.
- Text is no longer a creative constraint --- it's an **essential** pathway to new methods of expression.
- Used in conjunction with text, music actively builds character!

Thanks!

@cosmoddd
cosmod.net
cosmod@cosmod.net



The Narrative Innovation Showcase

Emily Short
Spirit AI
@emshort

Interrogation Gameplay

Emily Short
Character Engine Product Manager,
Spirit AI

Robot Interrogation

- Natural language input

Alicia did not like to lie. But I'm aware of certain research activities she kept secret
Active Emotions: Calm, Shy
INTERVIEW RECORDING: 12:12
Distance: StandingOK / NotTouching
Position: PlayerStandingBehind
Orientation: PlayerFacingToward
Movement: NoSignificantMovement
Trainer: Dr Alicia Chastaigne
Crime Scene: a Valtrox retraining room
Victim: Martin Haster
INTRO COMPLETE
Build #2017.02.14
Spirit AI Confidential
tell me about alicia's research

UBM

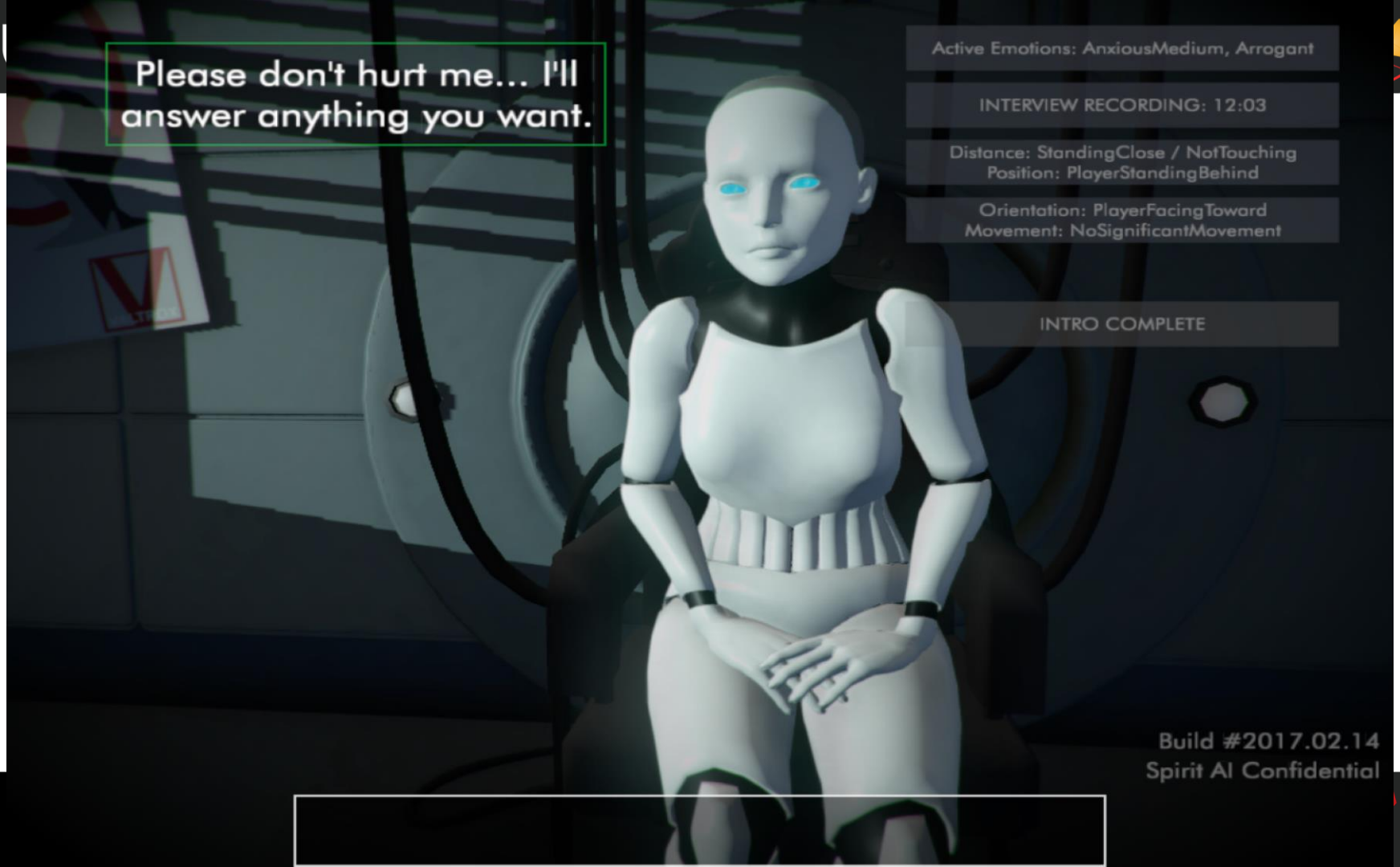
Robot Interrogation

- Natural language input
- Dynamic output based on data

Beverly Haster is older than me.
Active Emotions: Calm
INTERVIEW RECORDING: 12:05
Distance: StandingOK / NotTouching
Position: PlayerStandingBehind
Orientation: PlayerFacingToward
Movement: NoSignificantMovement
INTRO COMPLETE
Build #2017.02.14
Spirit AI Confidential
how old are you?

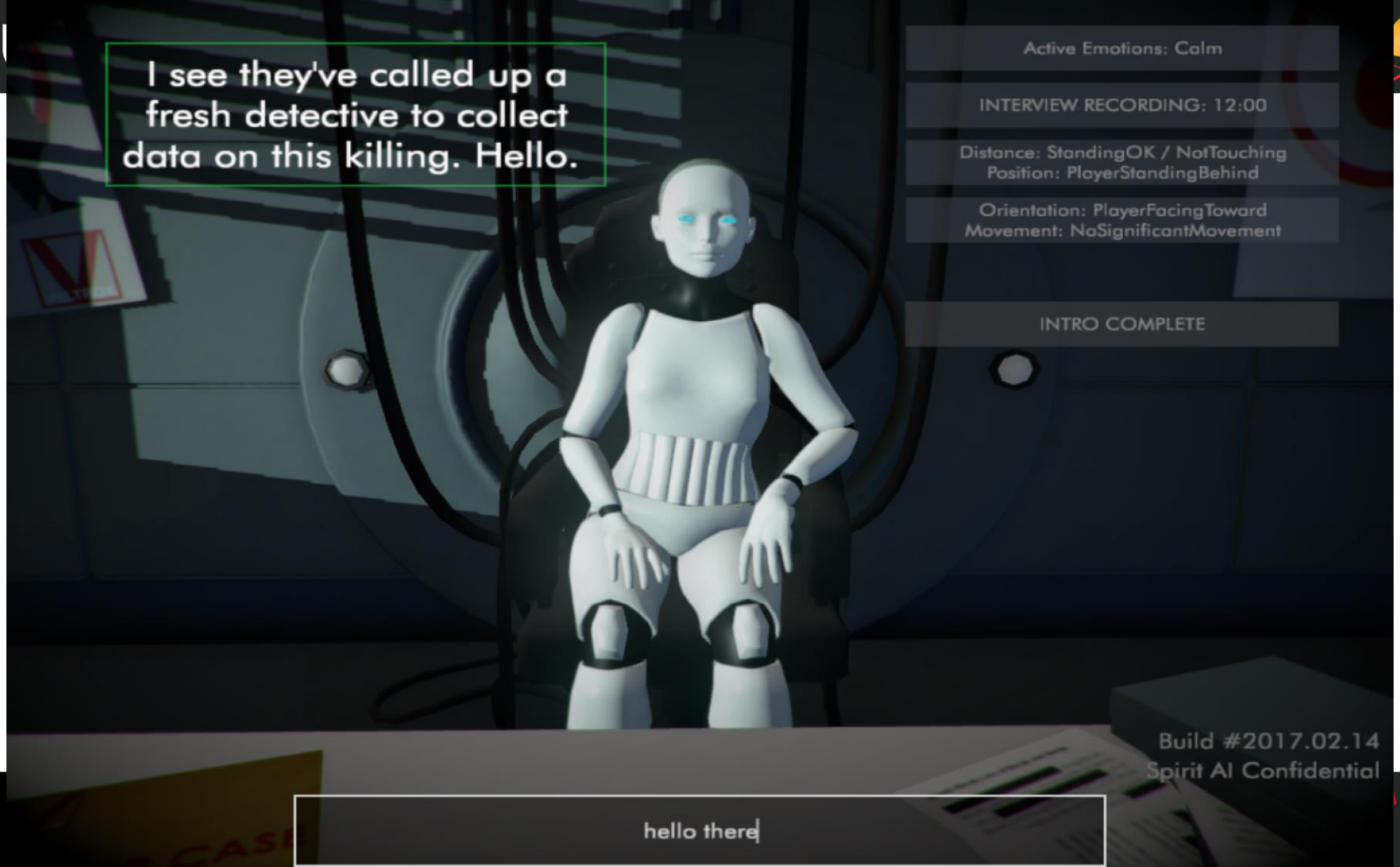
Robot Interrogation

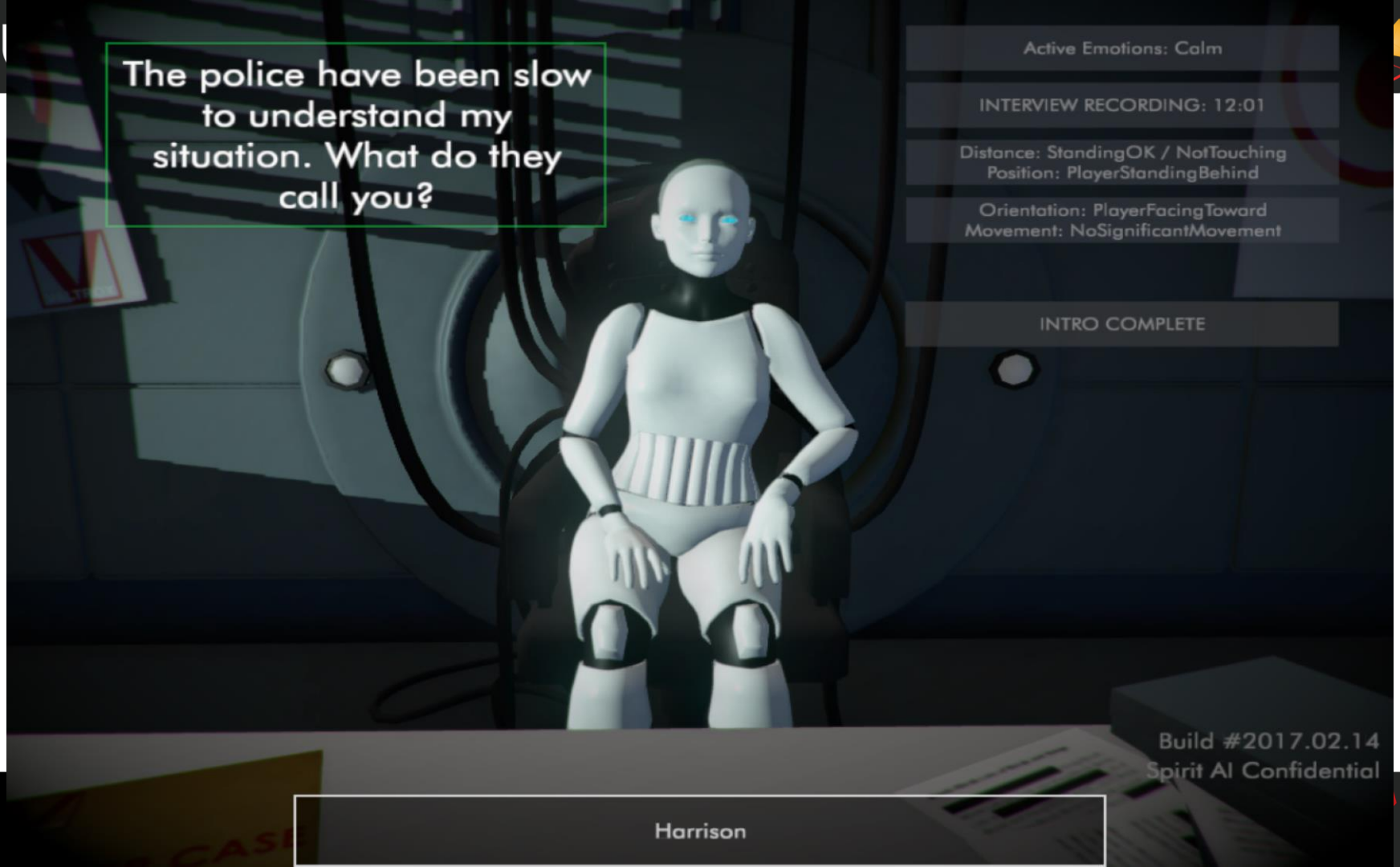
- Natural language input
- Dynamic output based on content
- Emotional responses from the character

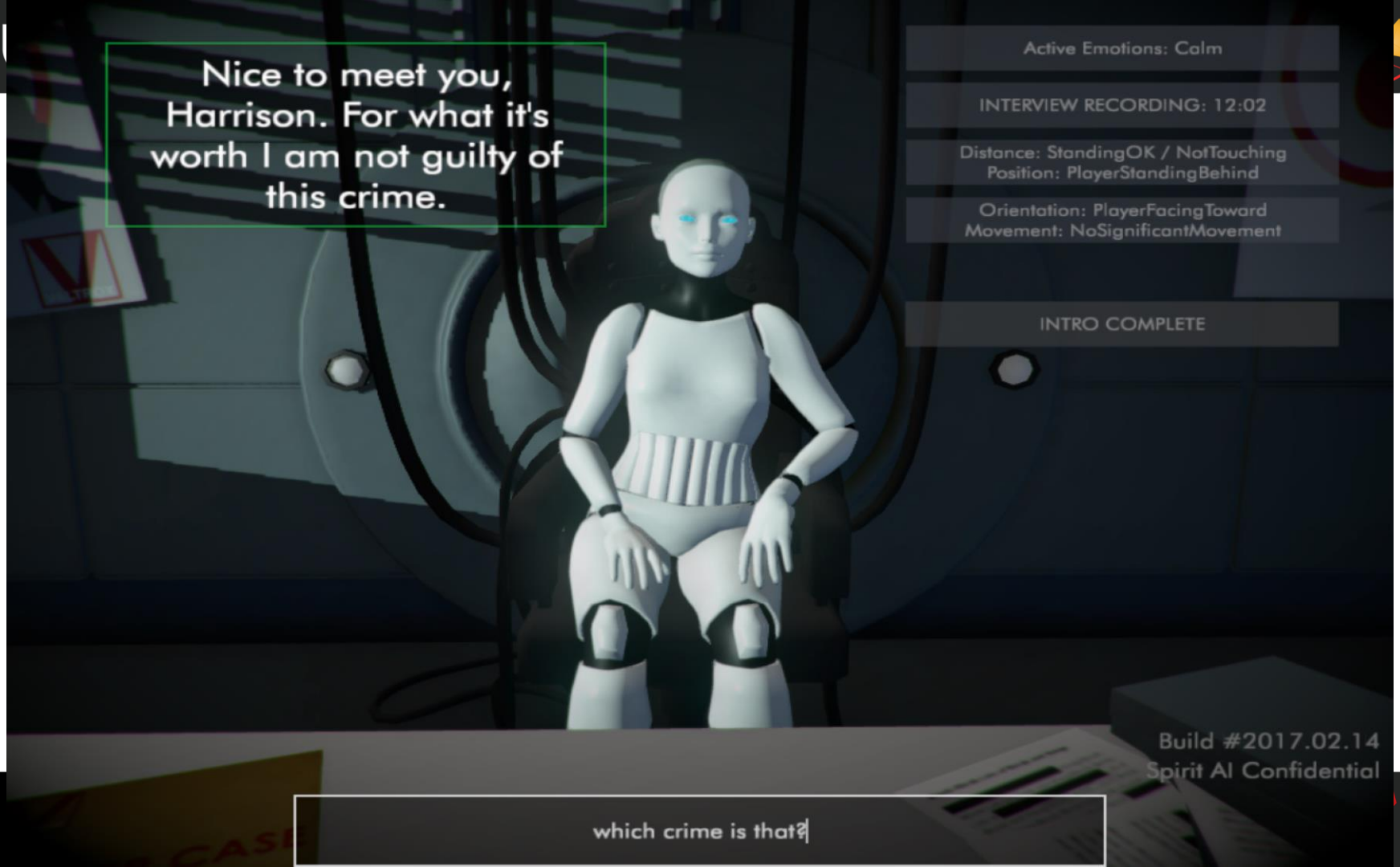

Please don't hurt me... I'll answer anything you want.
Active Emotions: AnxiousMedium, Arrogant
INTERVIEW RECORDING: 12:03
Distance: StandingClose / NotTouching
Position: PlayerStandingBehind
Orientation: PlayerFacingToward
Movement: NoSignificantMovement
INTRO COMPLETE
Build #2017.02.14
Spirit AI Confidential

Robot Interrogation

- Natural language input
- Dynamic output based on content
- Emotional responses from the character
- Focus on mystery and solution


I see they've called up a fresh detective to collect data on this killing. Hello.
Active Emotions: Calm
INTERVIEW RECORDING: 12:00
Distance: StandingOK / NotTouching
Position: PlayerStandingBehind
Orientation: PlayerFacingToward
Movement: NoSignificantMovement
INTRO COMPLETE
Build #2017.02.14
Spirit AI Confidential
hello there


The police have been slow to understand my situation. What do they call you?
Active Emotions: Calm
INTERVIEW RECORDING: 12:01
Distance: StandingOK / NotTouching
Position: PlayerStandingBehind
Orientation: PlayerFacingToward
Movement: NoSignificantMovement
INTRO COMPLETE
Build #2017.02.14
Spirit AI Confidential
Harrison


Nice to meet you, Harrison. For what it's worth I am not guilty of this crime.
Active Emotions: Calm
INTERVIEW RECORDING: 12:02
Distance: StandingOK / NotTouching
Position: PlayerStandingBehind
Orientation: PlayerFacingToward
Movement: NoSignificantMovement
INTRO COMPLETE
Build #2017.02.14
Spirit AI Confidential
which crime is that?

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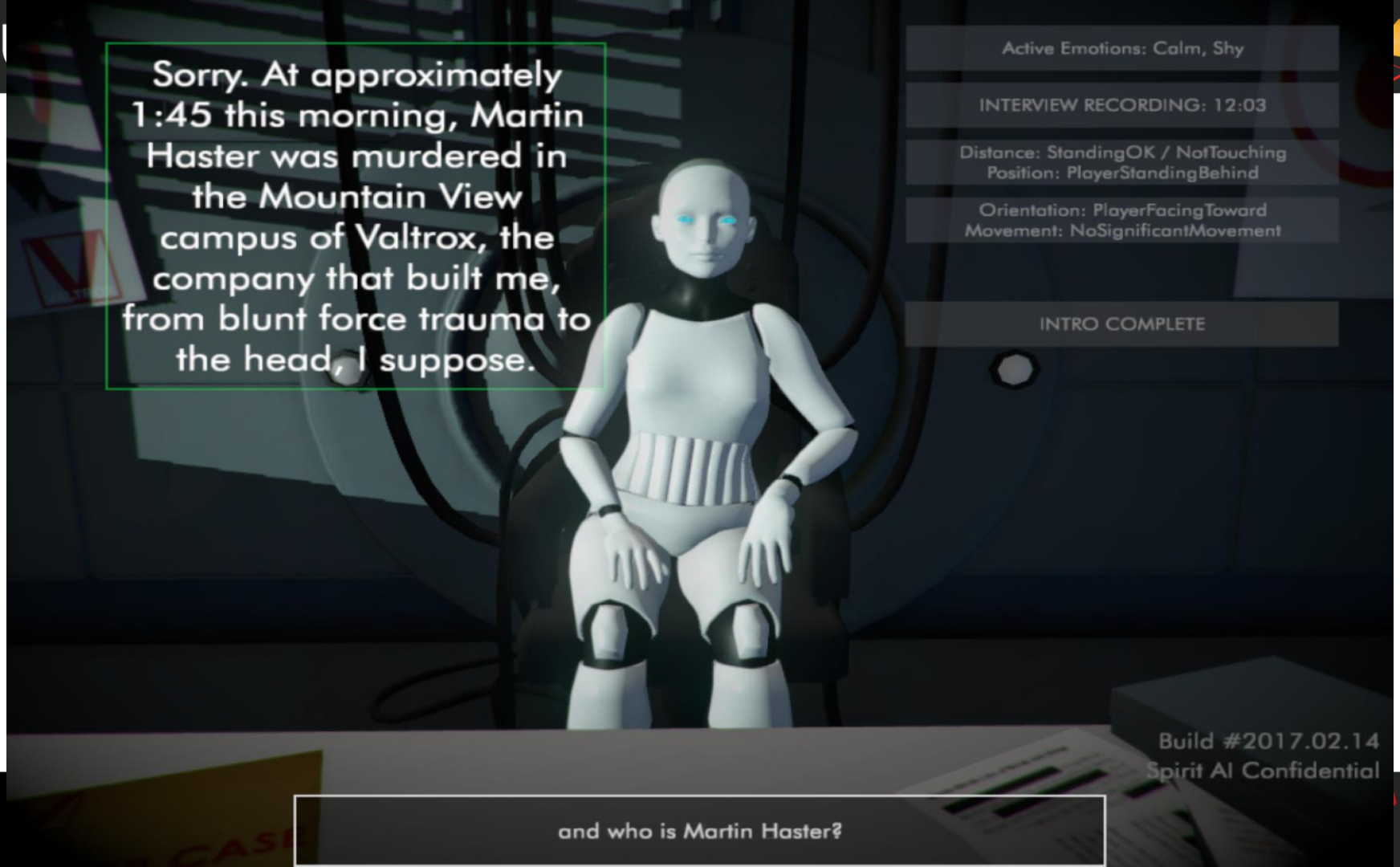
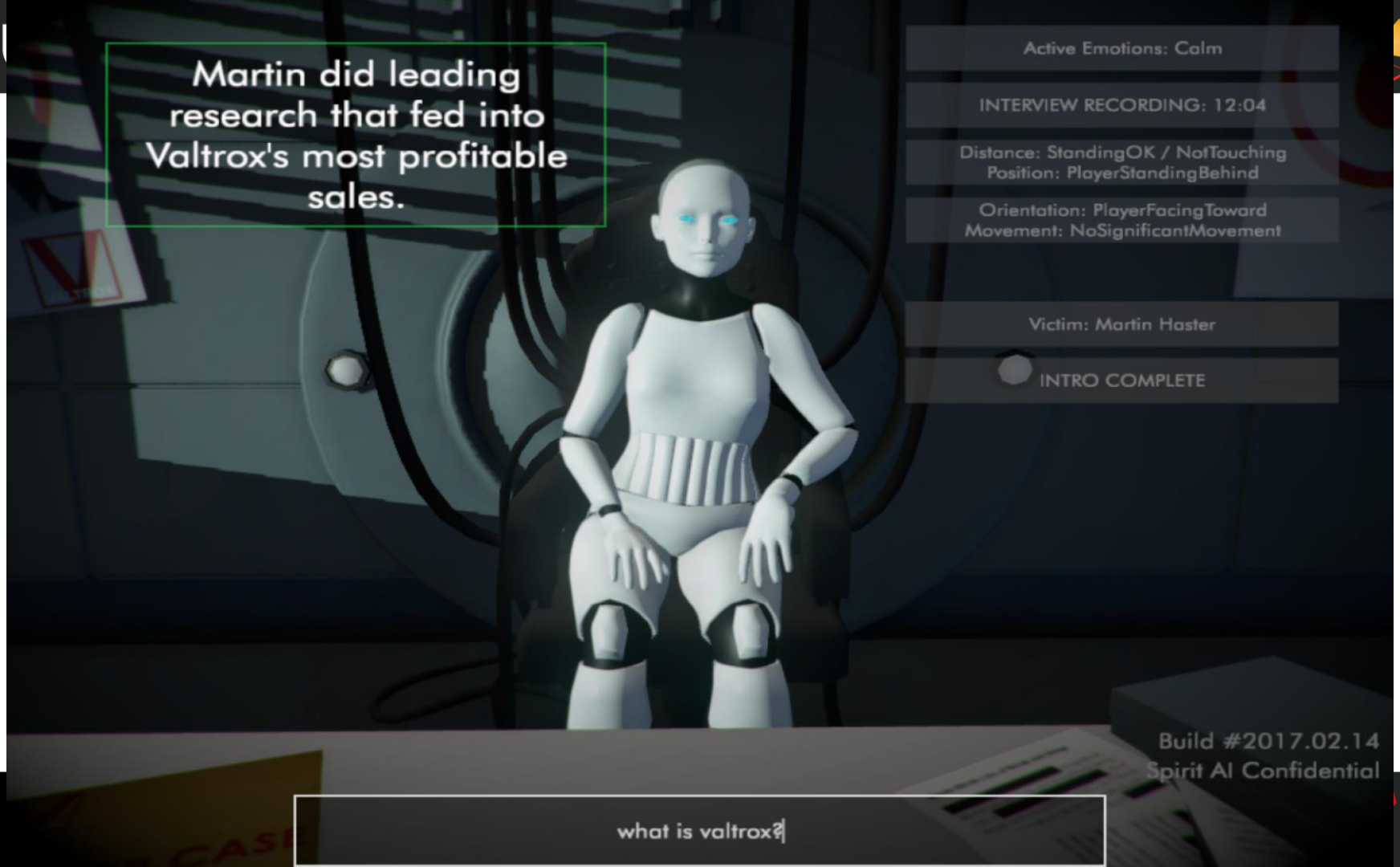

Sorry. At approximately 1:45 this morning, Martin Haster was murdered in the Mountain View campus of Valtrox, the company that built me, from blunt force trauma to the head, I suppose.
Active Emotions: Calm, Shy
INTERVIEW RECORDING: 12:03
Distance: StandingOK / NotTouching
Position: PlayerStandingBehind
Orientation: PlayerFacingToward
Movement: NoSignificantMovement
INTRO COMPLETE
Build #2017.02.14
Spirit AI Confidential
and who is Martin Haster?

UBM


Martin did leading research that fed into Valtrox's most profitable sales.
Active Emotions: Calm
INTERVIEW RECORDING: 12:04
Distance: StandingOK / NotTouching
Position: PlayerStandingBehind
Orientation: PlayerFacingToward
Movement: NoSignificantMovement
Victim: Martin Haster
INTRO COMPLETE
Build #2017.02.14
Spirit AI Confidential
what is valtrox?

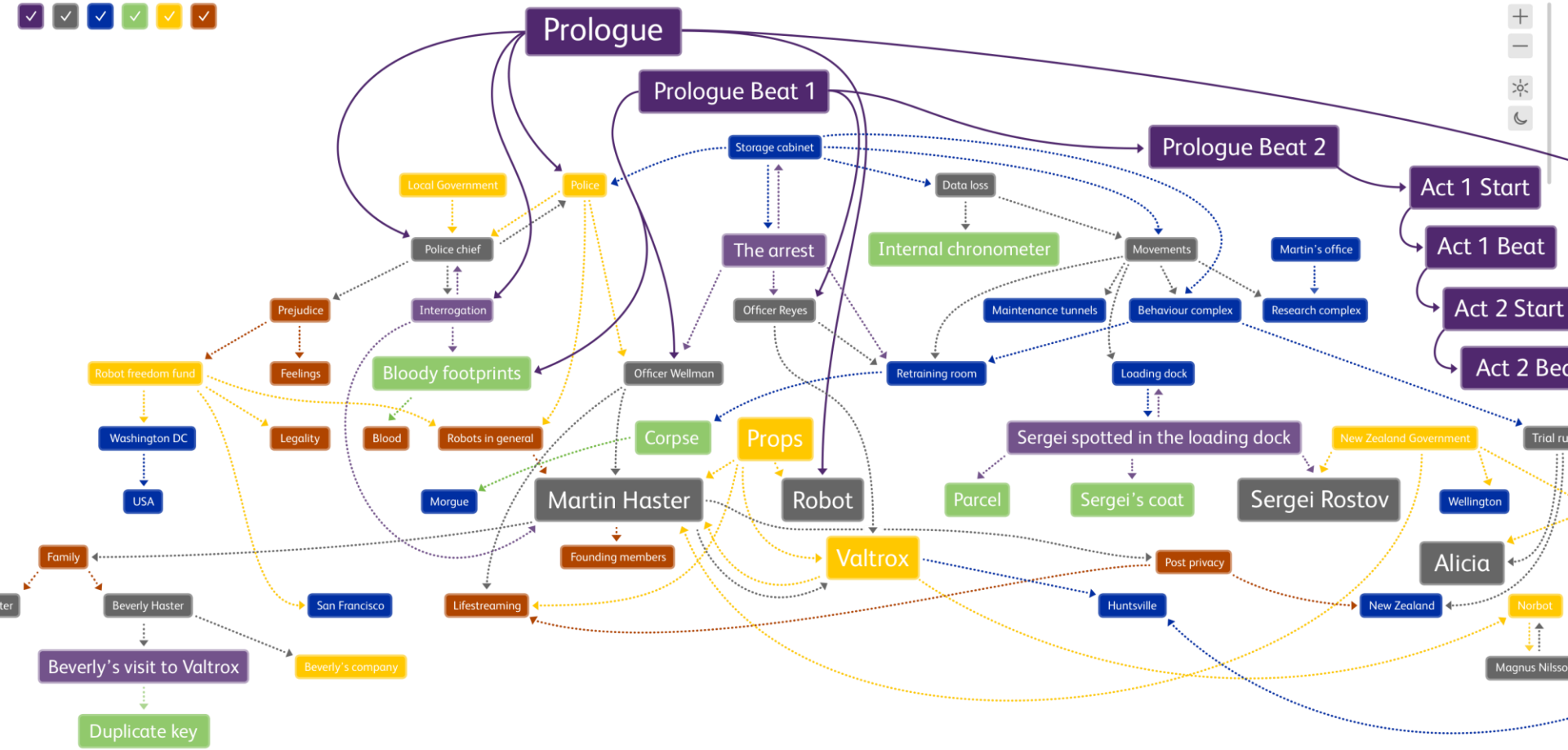
The Challenge

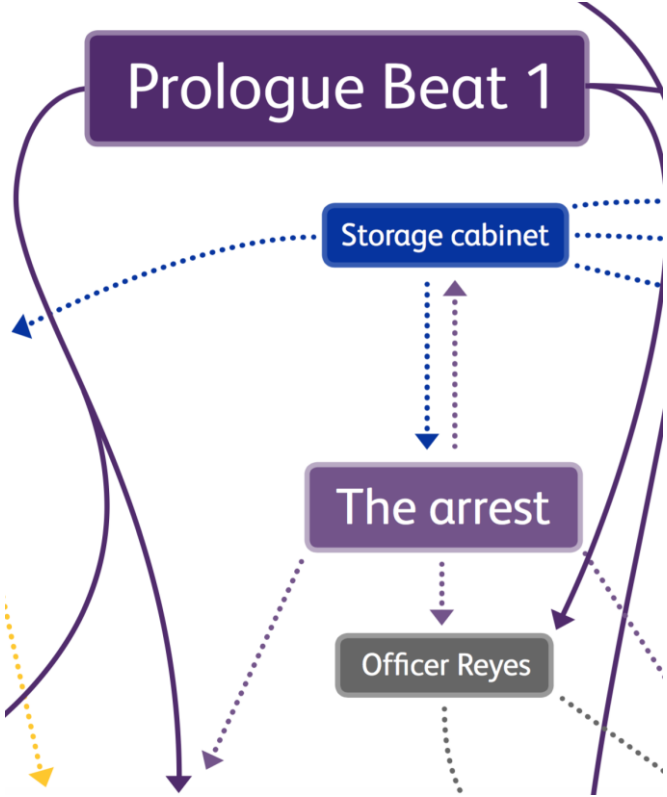
- Given a lot of information and backstory, how can we make sure that the player is able to navigate it?

MT-ROOM 3
DI 00524P
21:01:10
27/06/94

Approaches to the Challenge

- Visualizing world knowledge as a space


Prologue
Prologue Beat 1
Prologue Beat 2
Act 1 Start
Act 1 Beat
Act 2 Start
Act 2 Bea
Storage cabinet
Data loss
Local Government
Police
Police chief
The arrest
Internal chronometer
Movements
Martin's office
Prejudice
Interrogation
Officer Reyes
Maintenance tunnels
Behaviour complex
Research complex
Robot freedom fund
Feelings
Bloody footprints
Officer Wellman
Retraining room
Loading dock
Washington DC
Legality
Blood
Robots in general
Corpse
Props
Sergei spotted in the loading dock
New Zealand Government
Trial ru
USA
Morgue
Martin Haster
Robot
Parcel
Sergei's coat
Sergei Rostov
Wellington
Family
Founding members
Valtrox
Post privacy
Alicia
Beverly Haster
San Francisco
Lifestreaming
Huntsville
New Zealand
Norbot
Beverly's visit to Valtrox
Beverly's company
Magnus Nilsso
Duplicate key



…where story transitions also introduce new evidence

Officer Wellman and Officer Reyes arrested me for killing Martin Haster at 1:45 AM on May 26th. I am not guilty of Martin's murder.
Active Emotions: Calm
INTERVIEW RECORDING: 12:04
Distance: StandingOK / NotTouching
Position: PlayerStandingBehind
Orientation: PlayerFacingToward
Movement: NoSignificantMovement
Victim: Martin Haster
Evidence: Bloody footprints
INTRO COMPLETE
Build #2017.02.14
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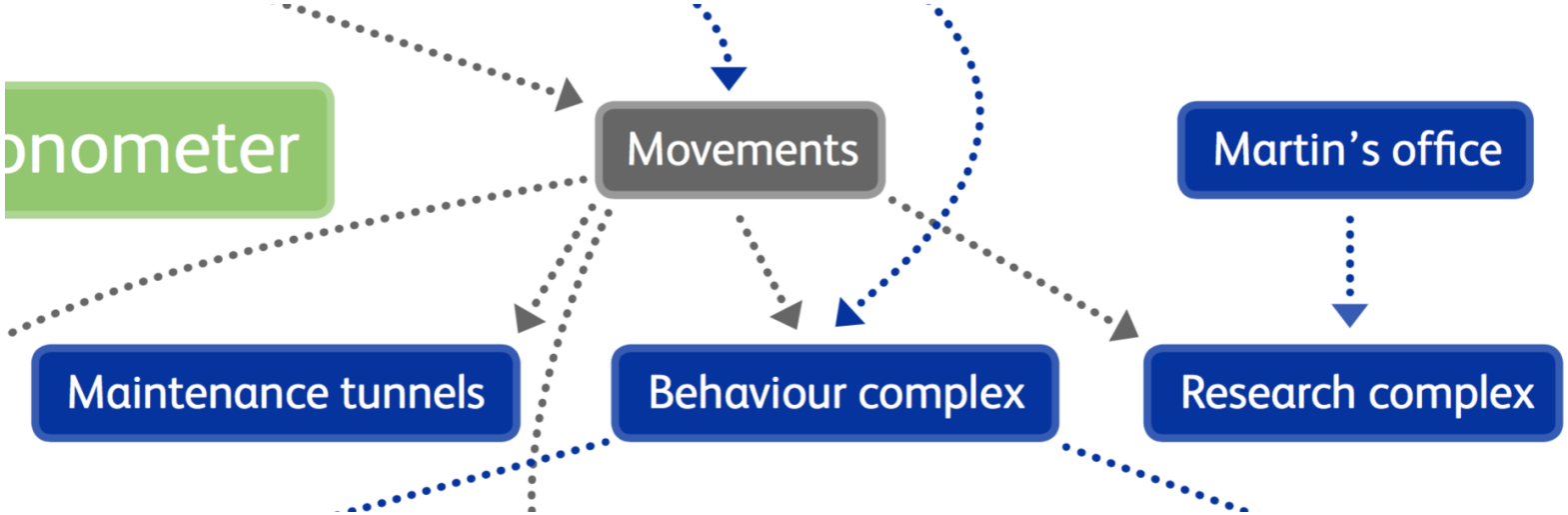
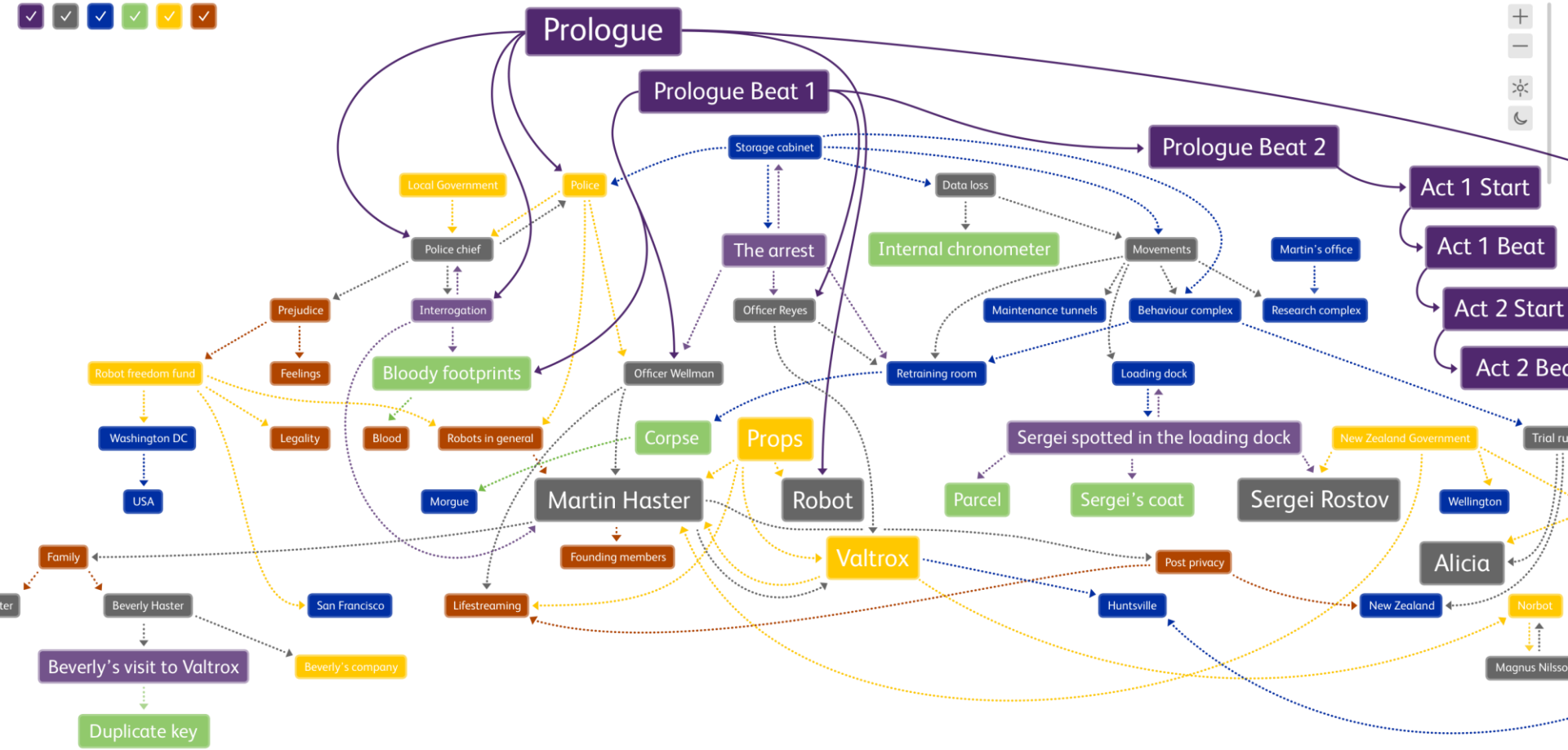


…with multiple entry points to key topics


Prologue
Prologue Beat 1
Prologue Beat 2
Act 1 Start
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Act 2 Start
Act 2 Bea
Storage cabinet
Data loss
Local Government
Police
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Martin's office
Prejudice
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Retraining room
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Sergei spotted in the loading dock
New Zealand Government
Trial ru
USA
Morgue
Martin Haster
Robot
Parcel
Sergei's coat
Sergei Rostov
Wellington
Family
Founding members
Valtrox
Post privacy
Alicia
Beverly Haster
San Francisco
Lifestreaming
Huntsville
New Zealand
Norbot
Beverly's visit to Valtrox
Beverly's company
Magnus Nilsso
Duplicate key

Story
Plot

+ Add Scene | X Remove Scene

Contents

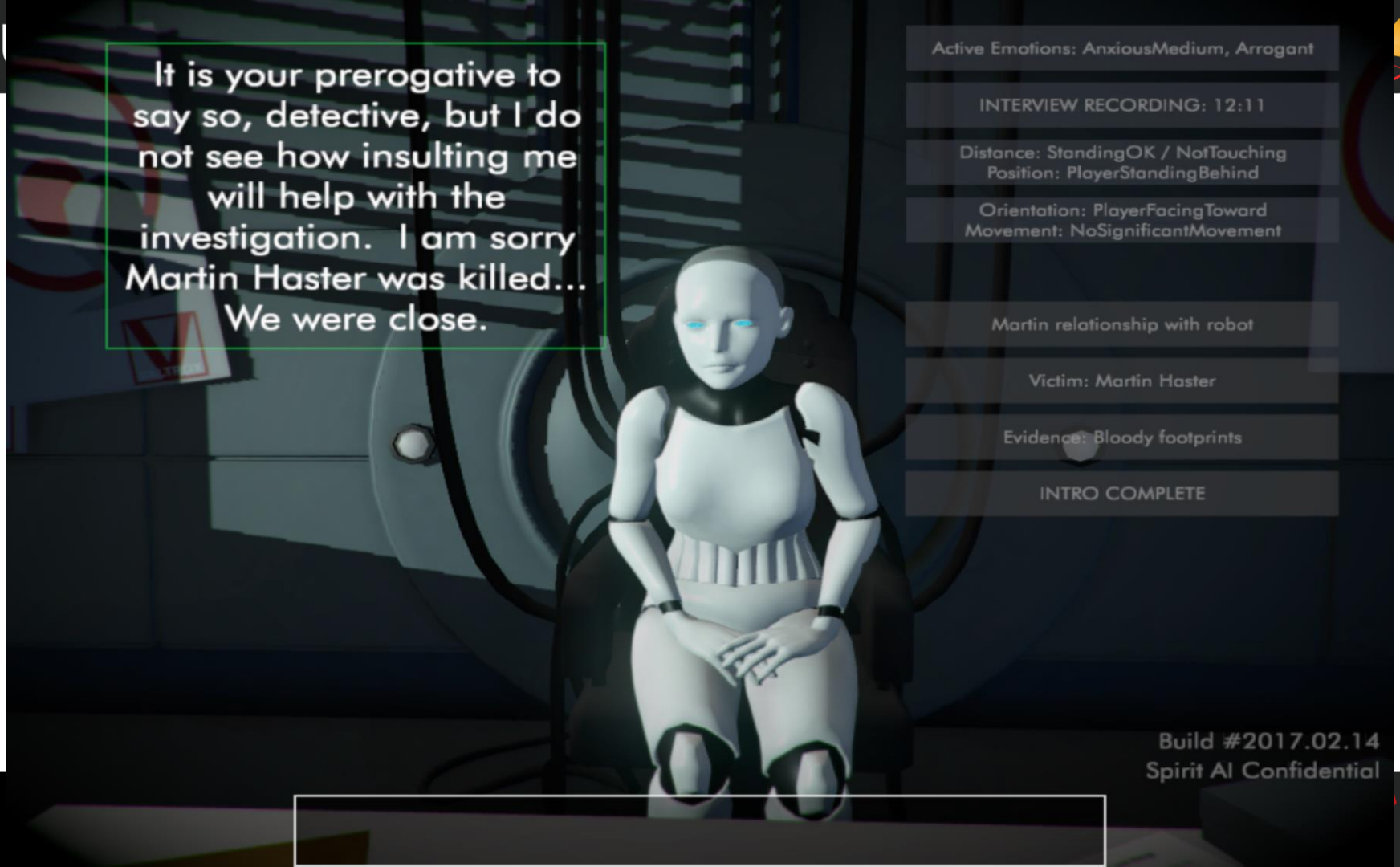
- (At any time)
- Prologue
- Act One
- Act Two
- Endgame
- Proximity Triggers

Me (clarify): What effect will your arrest have for Valtrox? [*valtrox, *arrest, -valtrox_stock]
Robot: If the public were to find out that a robot was arrested in connection with Martin's death, it would have massive implications on Valtrox stock value. [valtrox_board, valtrox_stock, robot_panic]

Me (clarify): Why is that? [valtrox_stock]
Robot: The motto of Valtrox Industries is "Robots can help." The company's business depends on humans trusting that Valtrox robots are safe.

Me (clarify): What effect will Martin's death have for valtrox? [*valtrox, *crime, -valtrox_stock]
Robot: Martin's death will be bad for Valtrox stocks. He was known as one of their foremost inventors. [valtrox_stock]

…and the robot riffs on unlocked information


It is your prerogative to say so, detective, but I do not see how insulting me will help with the investigation. I am sorry Martin Haster was killed... We were close.
Active Emotions: AnxiousMedium, Arrogant
INTERVIEW RECORDING: 12:11
Distance: StandingOK / NotTouching
Position: PlayerStandingBehind
Orientation: PlayerFacingToward
Movement: NoSignificantMovement
Martin relationship with robot
Victim: Martin Haster
Evidence: Bloody footprints
INTRO COMPLETE
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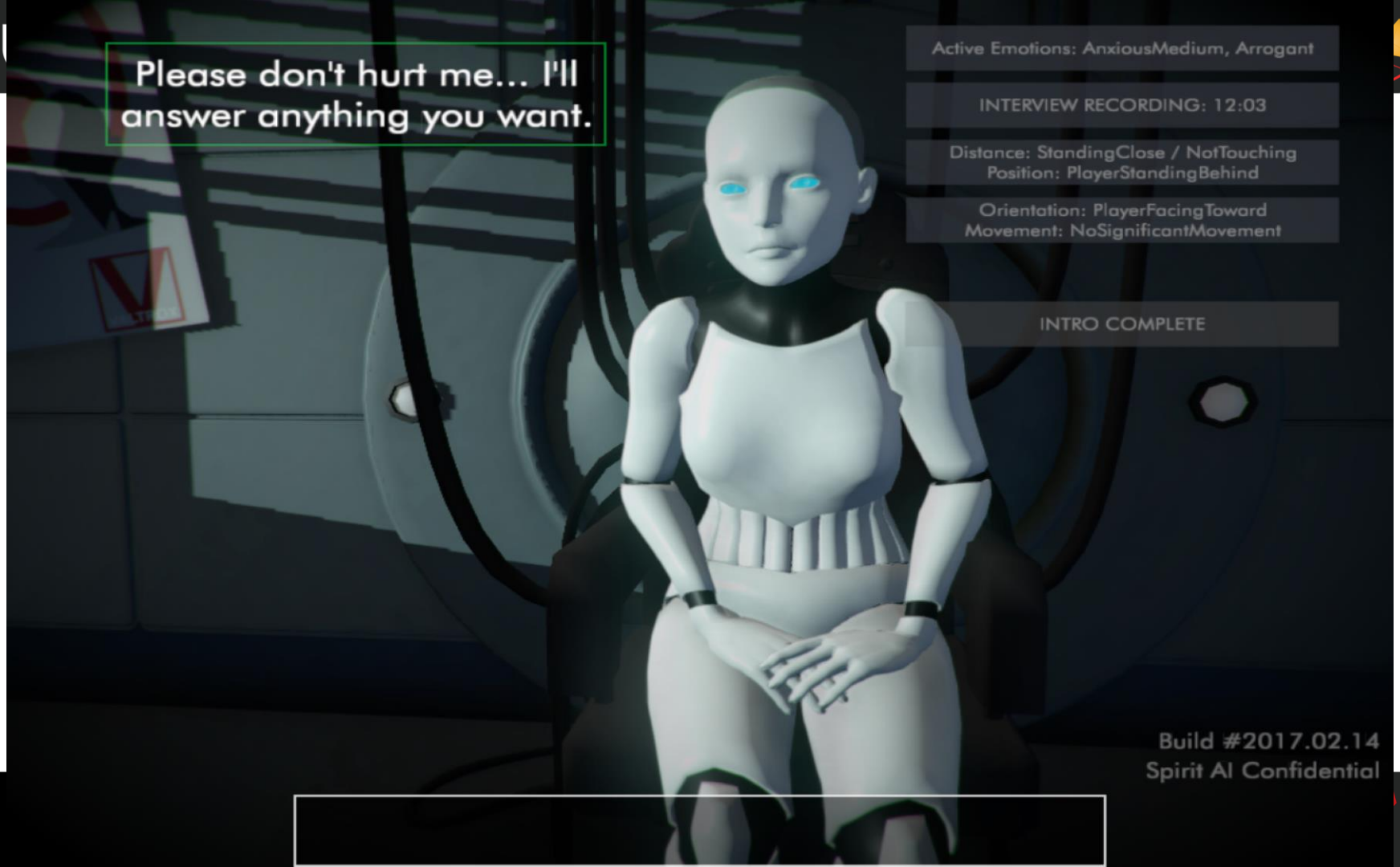
…subordinating the emotional relationship to the clues


Please don't hurt me... I'll answer anything you want.
Active Emotions: AnxiousMedium, Arrogant
INTERVIEW RECORDING: 12:03
Distance: StandingClose / NotTouching
Position: PlayerStandingBehind
Orientation: PlayerFacingToward
Movement: NoSignificantMovement
INTRO COMPLETE
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The Future

- Graph of knowledge transitions is not just for natural language

The Future

- Graph of knowledge transitions is not just for natural language
- Research style games can benefit from a conversational presentation

The Future + a little manifesto

- Game writers are designers too
- Making a tool is a creative act
- Building a big content graph is a creative act

The Narrative Innovation Showcase

Navid Khonsari
Founder – iNK STORIES
@NavidKhonsari

INK STORIES
NEW YORK CITY

Navid Khonsari

Founder/Creative Director

RESIDENT EVIL
biohazard

BLINDFOLD
A VÉRITÉ VR EXPERIENCE

BLINDFOLD

A VÉRITÉ VR EXPERIENCE

- A choice driven Virtual Reality experience where you play as a journalist charged with creating propaganda against the regime. You must respond to the interrogators questioning and navigate the moral dilemmas that will shape your fate and that of another prisoner.

The Challenge

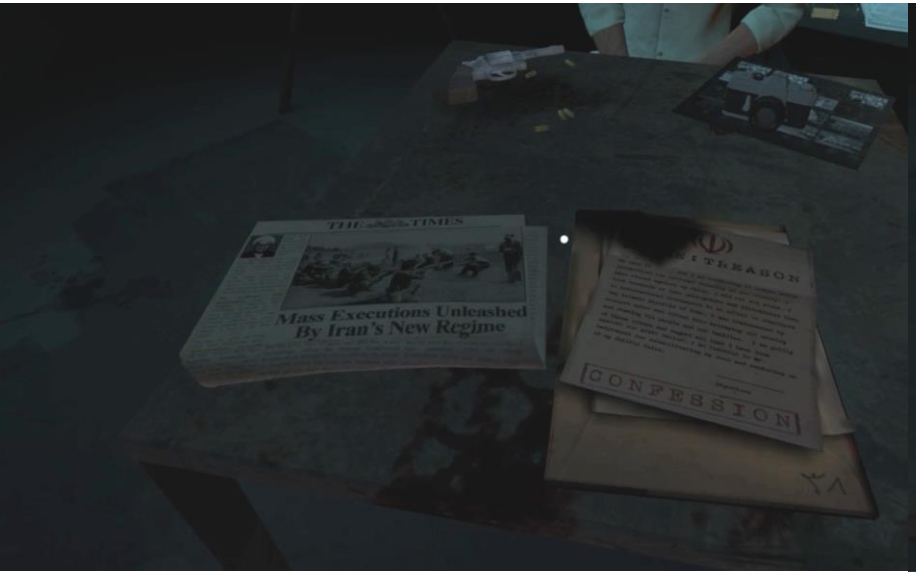
- How to provide exposition & interactive choices without UI and in a 360 world where you can look in any direction - while giving value to the choices you make?

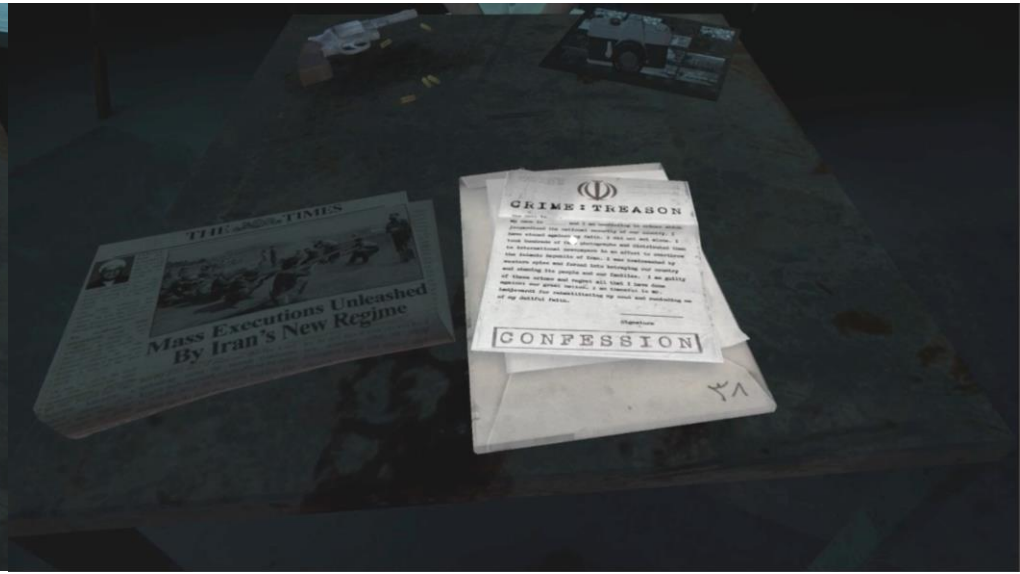
The Solution to the Challenge

- Timing Triggers (Player Feedback)
- Memories & Props triggering Exposition

BLINDFOLD

A **VÉRITÉ VR** EXPERIENCE





The Future

- Interactivity and choice is necessary and key in creating deep emotional experiences

- Look to technical solutions like voice activated and retinal recognition to get greater feedback from AI.

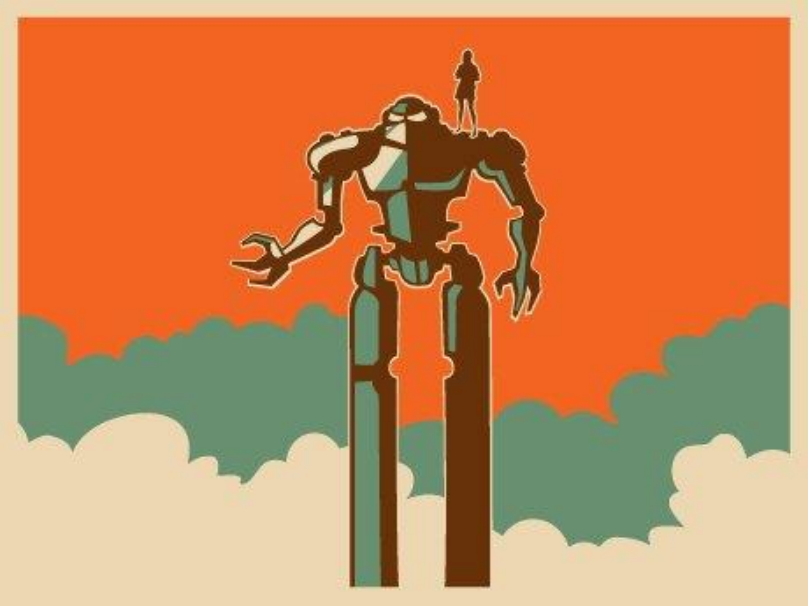
BLINDFOLD

A VÉRITÉ VR EXPERIENCE

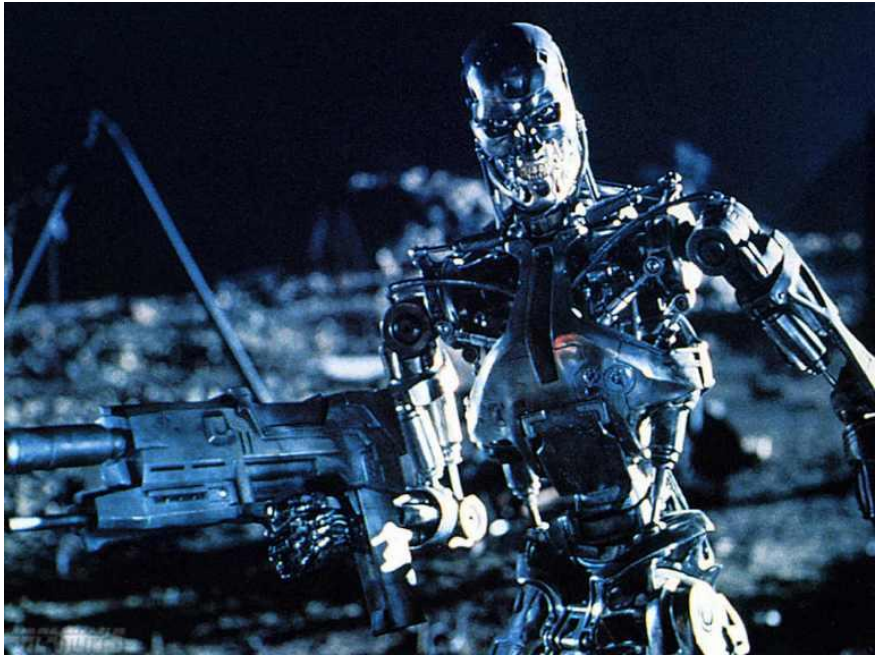
EXPERIENCE vs GAMEPLAY

What we learned today:

Innovation is based on previous work and practices.



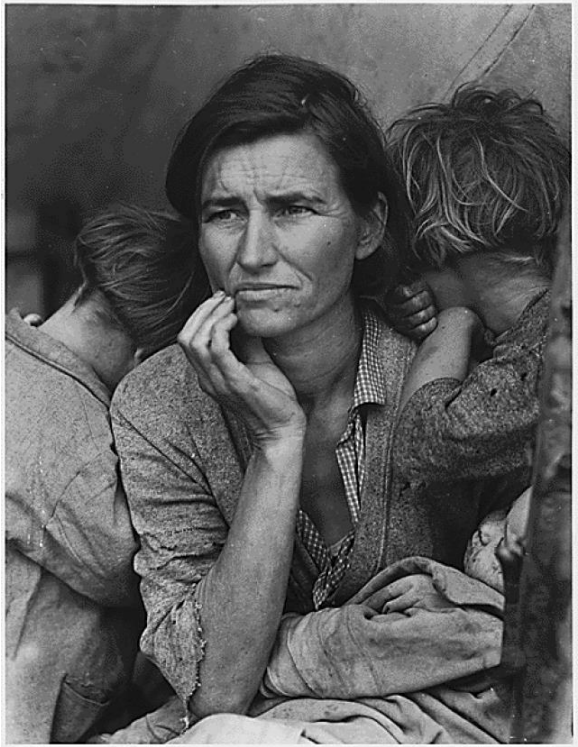
The technology may be the problem, not the solution.



Instead of focusing on plot, offer choices that the player cares about.

Narrative Design includes all disciplines

Not all game stories need to be about winning.



Questions? Comments? Come to the wrap-up room!

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