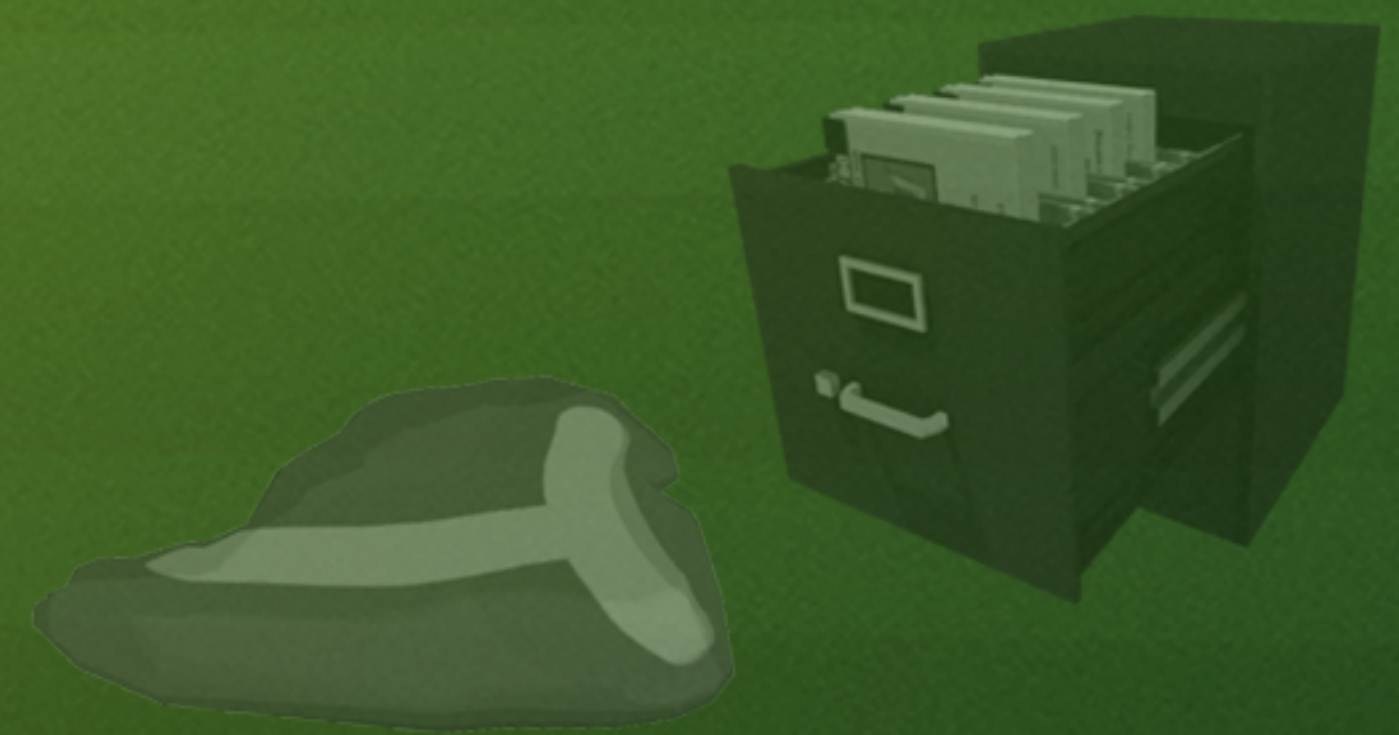# Spatial Storytelling Lessons from 'Job Simulator' and 'Rick and Morty VR'

Owlchemy Labs

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Job Simulator

- Sandbox game filled with physics interactions
- Guided linear task flow
  - Each task is its own micro story
  - Players can do tasks, or ignore current task and play with the world
- Overarching premise ties world together
  - A robotic future where jobs are extinct
- Players roleplaying 4 different jobs

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Rick and Morty: Virtual Rick-ality

- Sandbox elements and task flow mixed with overall story progression
  - Overarching story that feels like an episode of the show
  - You're a clone of Morty on an adventure with Rick and Morty
- Challenge of blending sandbox with narrative progression

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VR Storytelling

- **Widely misunderstood**
  - Especially Hollywood / corporate world

- **We aren't experts**
  - Beware of people who proclaim to be

- **Why is VR storytelling so different?**

What makes VR storytelling different?

- **Infinite input**
  - Head
    - Looking at the world from any angle/ position
  - Hands
    - Directly affect the world around you

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Interactivity and Motion

- **A totally different animal**
  - **Linear narrative in VR is not a guaranteed thing**
    - **Content can have an overarching narrative**
  - **Interaction is fundamentally incompatible with "pure singular creator vision"**

DIRECTOR

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Interactivity and Motion

- People will do crazy things when given hands
  - Whether context appropriate or not
- Humor can be a tool!
  - Humor will happen whether you like it or not
  - Job Simulator and Rick and Morty use this to their advantage

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User Driven Storytelling

- **Get out of users way!**
  - Users will tell their own micro stories
  - Help facilitate user storytelling
  - Encourage players to become actors in their own story

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User Driven Storytelling
Healthy meals / extra bites

User Driven Storytelling
TP scene

User Driven Storytelling
Cubicle decoration

User Driven Storytelling
Cubicle decoration to the extreme

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Macro Story and Micro Story

- These micro stories driven by users
  - Users could create their own micro stories through systems we built
  - Stories they'd tell their friends
- Macro story ties everything together
  - Macro story was the overarching world and premise
  - The reason players want to continue forward

World arrangement to facilitate roleplaying

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World arrangement to facilitate roleplaying

Narrative Pacing

- Don't punish users for not advancing the narrative "fast enough"
  - Give people the freedom to do what they want when they want

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Pacing in Job Simulator

- Each task led to next task immediately
- Can divert at any time from the task at hand to play around
  - No time limits or fail states
  - People felt rushed regardless!

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Pacing in Job Simulator

- People generally have been trained to do the task at hand as fast as possible
  - The existence of a current task led to stress/pressure
  - A feeling of "this is my life"
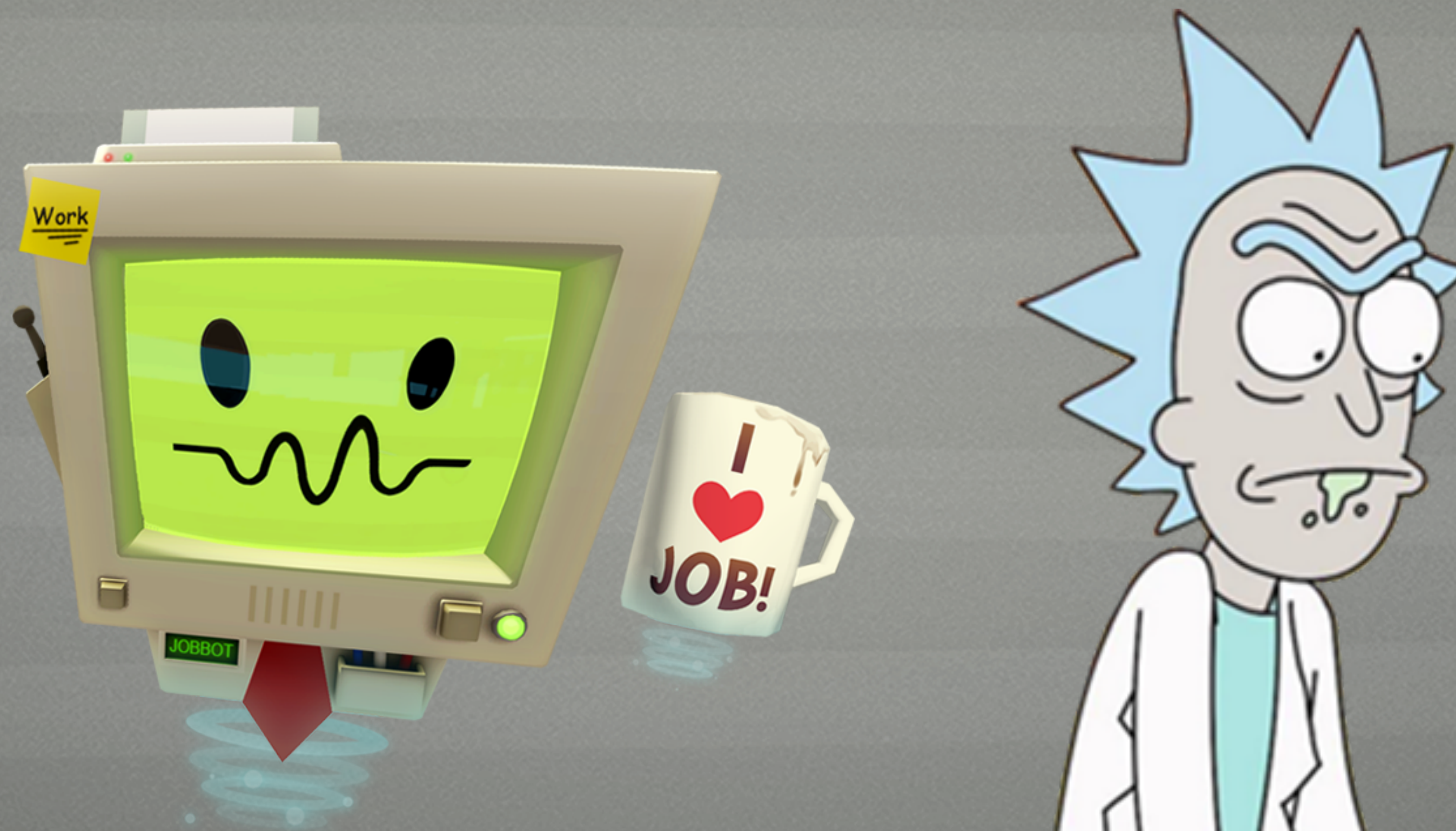 - Needed a way to put the agency / pacing in the player's hands more directly

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User-Activated Tasks

User-Activated Tasks

Interacting with NPCs

Interacting with Robots – Anthropomorphism

- Providing a connection!
- Anthropomorphism
  - Expressions via waveform and eye replacement
  - Feedback on hit
  - Simple costumes

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Interacting with Robots - Height

- **Dynamic height**
  - Robots match your height
  - Increases connection with that character
  - Looking up to a taller character can be intimidating

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Interacting with Robots - Empathy

- **Empathy / Connection**
  - Surprising amount for rigid robots
  - Players often wave to bots

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Interacting with Robots – 3D Audio

- ## 3D Audio
  - Using spatial audio to encourage player to look
  - Ex: Throwing items into other cubicles
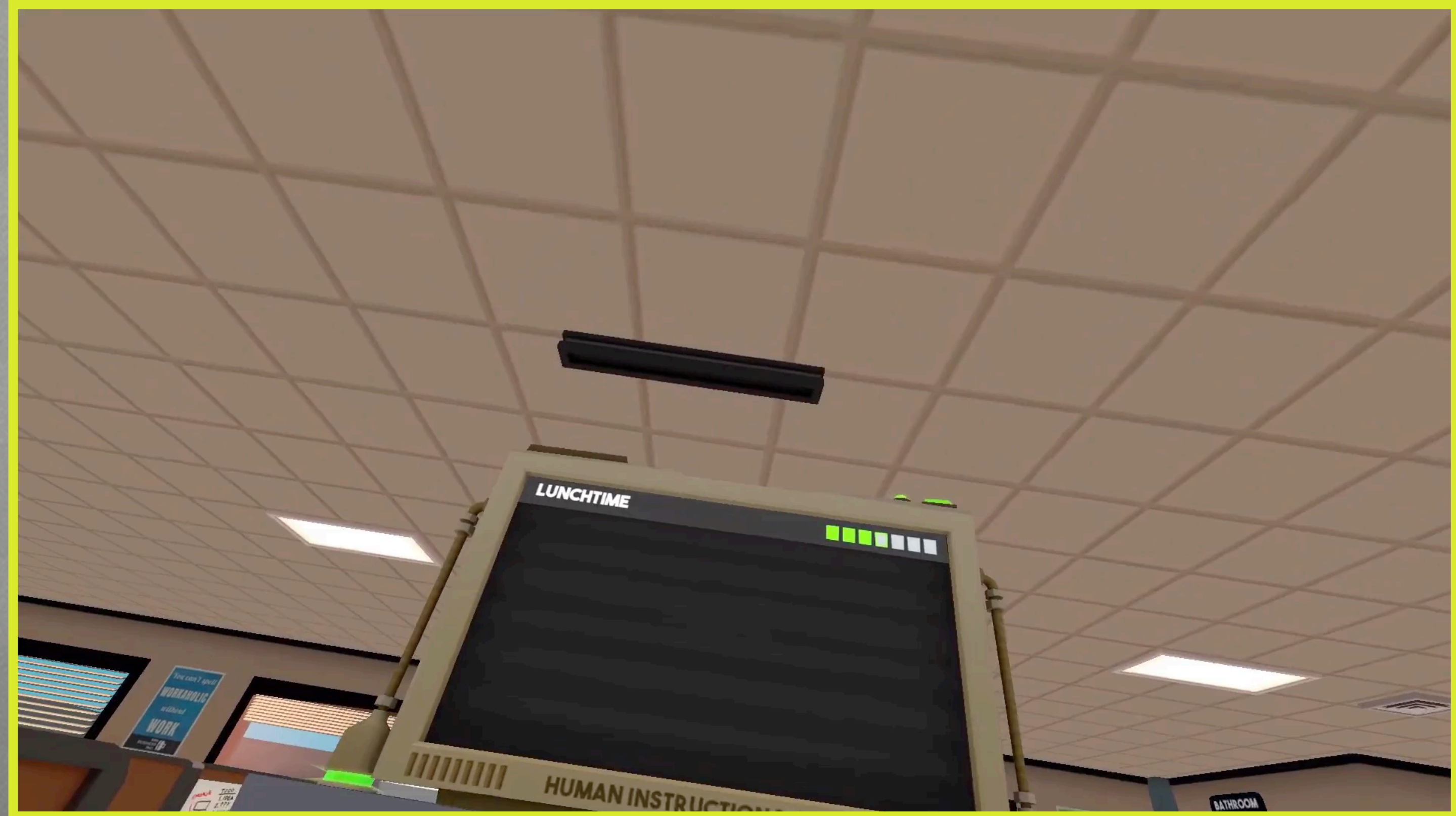
Interacting with Robots – 3D Audio

- ## 3D Audio
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Interacting with Rick and Morty

- **Characters entering the space?!**
  - UNSOLVED!
  - Characters encroaching on personal bubble can get messy
  - Just like Job Simulator
  - Interaction exists at the bounds of the play space

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Interacting with Rick and Morty

- Dynamic head look
  - No brainer

Interacting with Rick and Morty

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Interacting with Rick and Morty

- Dynamic pointing

VIRTUAL
RICK-ALITY

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Interacting with Rick and Morty

- Dynamic pointing

Directing focus in VR

- **Very hard to call attention to various places/things**
  - VR provides TONS of stimuli
- **Provide multiple types of feedback**
  - Audio, visual, strobing, etc
- **Hard to guarantee someone paid attention**

Directing focus in VR

- Users more likely to pay attention to VO if they initiated it
  - VO that came out of nowhere can feel like an obligation and be an interruption
  - Event-based VO feels like you're authoring the story rather than being dragged along

Interactions and Voice Over

- **On-demand voice-over**
  - Grabbing a lever, picking up an item, etc!
  - Challenging to implement
- **Priority system**
  - Which storytelling moment is more important?
  - Should we interrupt the current VO?

Job Simulator - 2 levels of depth

- From afar, environments seem like their real-world counterpart

Job Simulator - 2 levels of depth

- Up close, environmental storytelling comes alive

How to approach writing

- **Rick and Morty VR and Job Simulator**
  - **Everyone on the team is a writer**

Writing for Job Simulator

- Building a believable premise and world
  - Get a theme that's easy to convey
  - Everything you build in that world must fit the premise
  - 90s physical buttons
    - Ex: Keyboard in office

Writing for Rick and Morty VR

- Existing universe
  - Wrote an original overarching story
    - Should feel like a episode of the show
  - Tasks to complete in any order, followed by pinch points
    - Section A -> Pinch point -> Section B

Writing for Rick and Morty VR

- Fantastic IP for VR
  - Can change things around in VR and make it work
  - Less rigid IP than many others

How to approach writing

- **GDDs and Scripts**
  - We gave up on those a long time ago
  - Have to iterate FAST
  - Every part of the game is so interconnected, updating documents becomes counterintuitive
  - Just get across the premise and world

Silent Protagonist in Job Simulator

Hello Human!

- **Gendered pronouns**
  - Removed all 'he' + 'she' from Job Simulator
  - "Human!"

Silent Protagonist in Rick and Morty VR

- Gendered pronouns
  - "Morty Clone" instead of "he"
  - Need to re-inforce the character you're playing as

Silent Protagonists in VR

- People in VR are themselves!
  - Taking on a specific role, that's role play
  - But you're the one roleplaying
  - It's never been as big of an issue pre-VR
- Harder when you're roleplaying a specific pre-defined character with properties
  - Height
  - Gender
  - Set of experiences

The Marriage Proposal

The Marriage Proposal

The Marriage Proposal

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