

PASPERA

Game Design Document

...What a pathetic sight I was me the arrogant sod with the smile that never leaves his face, twitching and swearing, eyes wide open with disbelief as I was watching the croupier take my last set of chips. And how humiliated I felt when I had to ask Tommy for a loan, a loan which I lost that same night on his poker tables. Kicking me out of the club was a bit excessive on his part though, as I was leaving anyway. The few tables I knocked weren't such a big deal to constitute the black eye and that awful pain in the kidneys. You have to understand something here – I don't lose when I gamble. No, no, I never lose is the proper way to say it. I never lose, god damn it! What took the cake was that guy at the roulette tables that looked like John Lennon. Just before my last bet, he brushed past me and whispered "That's a sure lose." He was already gone in the crowd when I turned around to ask what he was talking about.

Anyway, another thing you ought to know about me is that I'm very good at getting over things, as hardly anything can measure up to what I've been through in the past. Two nights I can hardly remember and a day spent testing excessive drinking aftermath remedies and I was ready to find a way to repay my debt.

Here I was, in the foyer of "Paspera" waiting for my job interview. To be honest with you that was the only job that was up to my high standards – no qualifications required, start immediately, and a large sum of money straight away. A stroke of luck you might say.

I was sitting on the sofa; the receptionist was sitting on her armchair; busy working on her computer; me busy watching her. A perfect equilibrium in our own space – her tapping on the keyboard, me tapping in harmony on the arm of the sofa, our breathing in unison, chests shrinking and expanding together. Hers was prettier to look at. Suddenly she stopped and gave me a mordant look. Oh, great, not only you type with 50 words per minute, but you read thoughts as well, darling? She mumbled something under her nose, the only thing I caught was "...64..." My right eyebrow rises a bit when I'm surprised; it was a half-inch higher now. "Excuse me?" I asked. "Nothing, sorry, it's a Beatles song". Still weird. This whole place was weird. I mean, who puts pink furniture in a room with brown walls? I looked at the light yellow sofa and then at the cyan walls. I blinked twice – yellow...cyan. Getting my eyes checked after this seemed like a good idea, I might've damaged myself with all that drink.

"Your next, please, go through the door behind me sir." No one had gone in or out that door while I was there, but fine, if I was next, I was next. I stepped through the door to find myself in the blandest looking room I've ever seen in my life. White walls, a desk and two chairs was everything. Maybe it wasn't an interview but an interrogation they wanted to do. Nice, maybe I'd also get a "good cop, bad cop". Only the two roles would be played by Mr. Lennon from the casino as he was sitting on one of the chairs. Two blinks and I were looking at Buddy Rich. The drummer. If my eyebrows could stretch that high, they would've been somewhere around the top of my forehead.

"Is there something wrong, Mr. Ayr?"

"No...I just confused you with someone else for a second."

"It happens to me more often than one would expect...anyway, have a seat, please."

Before I continue, let me tell you what he looked like. He was wearing a formal suit, underneath which I could see an informal Hawaiian shirt. He had a very formal Buddy Rich face, and a very informal smile on it. Formally speaking I was getting quite an informal feel about this whole business.

I sat down on the free chair facing him and let one of those "hi-i-lost-the-plot" smiles. He replied with one of these "there-is-no-plot" smirks. That was only a minute it took to get me very nervous. Maybe that was a new technique they used to test prospective employees. I mean, I couldn't tell, that was my first job interview.

"There's something on your face, Mr. Ayr."

"Huh...oh, it's a black eye. I had a little incident, nothing serious; I'm not the kind of person that gets into trouble."

"I don't understand you...here have a look."

He reached for the inside of his suit and got a small woman's shell mirror out. I took it and slowly opened it

in front of my face. I looked at my eyes. The skin around them was a bit grayish, but not purple. A bit baggy, both of them, but the left one was not swollen. Your standard excessive drinking aftermath look. I spent as much time as I could, looking in the mirror. I needed time to calm myself down. Everything around me was getting from stranger to stranger. I saw what he was talking about. A bit of what looked like char was smothered close to my nose. I wiped it and looked at my hand. Mascara. Just as slowly as I opened it I closed the mirror and handed it back to him. His smile widened as he put it away. Maybe he always looks like his smiling and when he actually does his mouth stretches the way it did now. Like a shark. I don't have to say how unsettling that was, do I? I turned my head away and started examining the empty table. Half a minute into that intriguing activity and I heard his voice again. I was sure that all that time he was looking at me the way those theatrical masks depicting mirth look

"Would you like a cigarette?"

There was no point saying I don't smoke.

"I smoke, but it's very appropriate right now...isn't it?"

"Don't worry, please, have a cigarette."

He reached for his pocket again and got a packet out. His arm stretched and he opened the box. There was only one cigarette in the packet.

"It's your last one, I can't."

"Come on", a smile that sells fast red foreign cars.

I took it and put it in my mouth. He closed the packet and was about to put it back in his pocket when he stopped. In a by the way manner he opened it again and we both looked in it. 20 cigarettes were neatly arranged in three rows. Mr. Rich looked at me and smirked for a second time and then quickly closed and put the packet away. I realized that for the past minute my left leg was moving erratically up and down. God, I really need that smoke.

"Do you have a light?", I really didn't want to speak with him; I didn't want to be sitting in that chair; I wanted to be on Hawaii.

"You don't need a light, Mr. Ayr.", a smile that cuts big fat juicy steaks.

My eyes focused at the tip of the cigarette. There was a subtle red glow and tiny grey weaves were slowly moving through the air like a charmed snake.

"Thank you", thank you? What was I saying?

Oh, yeah, I needed nicotine. A lot of it. I grabbed the cigarette and had a big draw from it. My hand, as if by reflex, moved down towards the ashtray on the table. A big crystal ashtray was sitting on the desk but my finger was flicking the air. There was nothing between my fingers. I didn't move my head, just rolled my eyes in Mr. Hawaiian Businessman's general direction. He was holding my cigarette and was just about to take a draw himself.

"Smoking kills, Mr. Ayr.", a smile that signs cold cruel death sentences. He then inhaled some of the carbon monoxide mixed with nicotine. I stood still for one of those moments people say fell like an eternity. After eternity ended I tried to exhale the smoke. My mouth opened but there was nothing coming out. That's where I lost it.

"What are you doing to me? What are you trying to do?!"

"Nothing you are unfamiliar with, nothing new to you, am I not right?", a smile that praises some almighty all-seeing all-knowing god.

Do you know what it feels like to be hit with a hammer across the head? Well, I don't know either but I'm sure that's what I felt like when he said that. A second later and the sharp pain were gone, but my head become too small for my brain. My head was pounding like someone told it that this is the only time it'll have a chance to do this. And the memories started coming back to me.

I never had a normal childhood. Not because of a bad family or anything similar, I was, well, a weirdo. I turned six and that's when it all started. Whenever I woke up, I did not walk into the same world everyone else walked into. Colours, for instance, were something that hardly meant anything to me. Nothing ever had the same colour, whenever I looked at it. Sometimes everything around me was moving faster, sometimes – slower. The way I saw the world was as if I had a broken TV and VCR set plugged straight to my brain. But that wasn't all. Objects around me disappeared, appeared and teleported and no one but me seemed to no-

tice it. At breakfast, my mother picks up a glass of orange juice for me and when she turns around her hand is empty and the juice is in front of me on the table. She then sits down next to me and proceeds on to buttering toast. I and my dad play football. I'm on the goal. He kicks the ball it flies right in the net and a second later I'm holding it firmly in my hands. My dad then yells "Good catch, son!".

I was old enough to have some basic idea about how the world functions and that wasn't it. Two weeks later after it all started and I was seeing the best doctors around. Needless to say, when you are seeing things no one else is and stuff that shouldn't happen, everyone else safely assumes that you are, plainly speaking, certifiable. Months and months of therapy dragged on, medication after medication, even a few weeks in a "recreational center". Nothing was helping. But one day I woke up and everything was gone, just as suddenly as it appeared. I got off my bed and the grass green again, the sky was blue, the birds did not fly in short bursts of speed and the toilet flushed downwards. But the memories of what it used to be like were still there and I didn't even want to remember that let alone come back to it. I spent the rest of my childhood trying to shove them deeper and deeper in my mind, somewhere dark and inaccessible where I couldn't reach them and they – me.

Here I was, sitting in a room of a company called "Paspera" and everything was flooding back. One blink, the room was upside down, another one – I was looking at myself and I seemed to be Buddy. Blink, blink, blink, all pitch black; all in water; all ablaze. Blink, blink, blink, I have a gun in my hand; I have a doll; I have orange juice. If my senses were working probably I would've felt the sickness crawling up my throat. I might've felt the cold sweat coming down my neck and forehead. All I felt though were the bonfires in the man's eyes, drilling deep in my brain. The smile was gone, no more cars, steaks, contracts and gods, just an ugly scowl. I passed out. The last I thing I heard as the floor was coming closer and closer was "It's OK, Mr. Ayr, you'll be fine when you wake up.

And I was. I opened my eyes and everything was calm, full of serenity. They told me everything I needed to know. They told me about the sub-conscious entities; about the control they have over the material world; about the good ones and the bad ones. "Paspera" tries to stay on the good side. I, being a human with the rare talent to communicate with my entity, was offered to work for "Paspera" as one of their agents. Didn't really see it as a choice or an offer.

The rain is slowly falling down. Drops are hitting the ground, the car and, the pedestrians as they hastily walk down the streets. My coat is dry, no raindrops fall on me. Street number 36, door B. That's the place. Cecilia. An art dealer. It's not art she sells really, just trash, but she is really good at making people believe that what they see is the ultimate piece of art. Clever girl, I must say, probing minds and interpreting everything she read to create imagery that suits only that particular person. I have to find out how she does that, before I destroy that little con artist living in her mind. I am curious how you can tell what someone's vision of an abstract non-existent, non-describable object is. Anyway, off to work.

Game overview

Paspera is an adventure/quest game telling the story of a young man, Noel Ayr, who is the host of an entity that exists only in his sub-consciousness but is able to manifest itself in the material world in many different ways and forms. Because of his gift(or curse) Noel works for the organization “Paspera”, whose purpose is to control other gifted that abuse their powers. The core game concept revolves around the character and “the other him” coexisting together. The player will take control of this entity, also called a “resident”, and unlike most adventure games will only control it, not Noel himself. His character will be governed by the game itself and the player will have the ability to only influence his action through manipulation of the game environment, as seen through the hero’s eyes. Players will be able to utilize different psychic powers ranging from probing minds, implying thoughts on others, creating illusions, alternation of the material world, seeing through other “gifted” characters tricks, etc. Noel’s behaviour in the world, on the other hand will be controlled by the game’s AI, he will respond to different changes in the environment, seeing them as signs and clues that guide him to his current goal.

The game will be set on modern day Earth, mostly in cityscape locales, that will span big cities like New York, San Francisco, Prague, Oslo, Hamburg, St. Petersburg, Tokyo, Johannesburg etc. The character will have to travel around the world to solve mysteries with a different story and theme tied to every one of them.

Story

What if sometimes a human is born different from the rest of us? Different in the sense that under her consciousness and under the many layers of her sub-consciousness a different form of an sentient being exists, a being that literally only exists in her mind, but has powers that can alter reality. It is said that we only use a few percent of brain power consciously, the rest is all sub-conscious. What if those “resources” were all tapped into that entity? Noel Ayr is one of those people, there are more than his embarrassing moments and happy memories lurking in his mind. He and his symbiotic friend can not communicate with each other directly, but they both see through the same eyes. And that’s how the resident speaks to him. It manipulates the world around its host, using it as a whiteboard to send messages to Noel. But not only that, the resident would not like his host to die or even be in bad physical shape and that’s why it also takes care of him. It helps Noel in life, protects him. He needs money to live happy and he likes to bet. Making sure that Noel always leaves with more money than he came and making sure it never looks suspicious is nothing hard. But recently things have changed. The resident has bigger plans for its host. It wants him to join “Paspera”, an organization that makes sure that its kind doesn’t do exactly what the two of them do. Sometimes, a host and a resident manage to achieve a very clear link between each other, and those are the ones “Paspera” looks out for the most. There’s three options – either work for “Paspera”, don’t do anything to anger them, or live an interesting life and probably be destroyed by the hands of “Paspera”. Without giving Noel any vote, the resident chose that they will serve “Paspera”.

Now Ayr works as an agent, traveling around the world, uncovering the schemes that people like him have come up with, and destroys the residents in their heads. One might say that that’s not really just, but that’s how it works. No point trying to change it. And apart from that Noel doesn’t mind his job. It is certainly exciting, and traveling a lot is great. Good wage as well, as in – not having to worry about money at all. And this is where you come in, resident...

Game Mechanics

The game mechanics revolve around the concept that the player is not in control of the main character of the game, but of a sentient being residing in his mind. As such, the player will be able to see the world through the eyes of Noel, as he is going on about his business. Noel himself will be controlled by the game's AI and some pre-defined behaviour. The player will then be able to use supernatural powers to influence the world around the hero, in order to get different responses from him or the people he encounters; to create or destroy objects in the world. There will be no inventory system like in most point-and-click adventure games. All the puzzle-solving will be executed by manipulation of the game world. The idea behind the puzzles and challenges that the player will face is that they are oriented around sensory perception and how it could affect someone's actions. Most adventure/quest games put the players in situations where they have to find some pre-defined logic to a given situation and solve it in a form of chain causality method, with one thing leading to another in generally linear way. The challenge for the players comes from keeping this flow going. "Paspera" attempts to break from that linearity by allowing the player to choose their own logic.

As the game concept is that the player will be immersed into world that she sees through the eyes of a character, that's not her in-game alter ego, the GUI will be put to the bare minimum, that is – none for the actual gameplay state. Players will use the mouse pointer to draw gestures on the screen, that will activate corresponding super powers. A good example of this method is the game "Black and White", where the lack of a detailed GUI enhances the player's feel that they are gods in the game world.

Another concept is that the actual game character is just a physical host for the real "detective", and is in the whole business just for the ride. As Noel doesn't really care about what's going on most of the time, he would tend to be sloppy, lacking concentration, less aware and unmotivated. Most of the time players will have to find ways to imply to him what he has to do. They would be encouraged to study his personality as that would give them more flexibility when trying to influence him.

The Psychic Powers

The powers that the player will be able to utilize will range greatly in their actual application and effects. Initially powers will mostly affect the main character's senses, but as the game progresses, players will be able to choose more complex powers that affect other or even manipulate the material world.

A rough list of the powers is:

Powers that manipulate visual perception of the main character.

Lighting manipulation – through the use of this power, the resident can alter light sources, making them shine brighter or darker

Colour manipulation – the dominant colour of an object is changed to another one.

Conceal – this power conceals an object from Noel's view.

Powers that manipulate the auditory perception of the main character.

Noise – create a noise in a certain direction, that might make the character turn in that direction.

Music – imply a certain song to the character which he links to certain emotions.

Silence – prevent the character from hearing certain noises or speech.

Other power that affect the character perception

Temperature – a power that makes Noel feel either hot or cold

Powers that affect others

All the Host powers can now be used on others

Probe mind – let's the player probe another persons mind. This gives information about their current feelings and needs.

Time Stop – creates a "Bullet-time" effect. This power gives the player more time to examine the environment.

Players will invoke those super powers in game by using mouse gesture and creating patterns. Those patterns will represent words and players will actually be able to create different word combinations that might invoke the same power if there is logic to their actions. Players will be able to check a full dictionary of the patterns that could be drawn and their meaning. Learning new powers will be done between missions in special training sessions where the player will be given a hint as to what the new powers might be and then try to invoke it by creating a meaningful combination.

Game flow and pacing

The game will be separated into chapters, each one being a different story and setting. The chapters will be broken into scenes usually consisting of one room. Scenes would not progress in a linear fashion, depending on what the character does the game might take different twists and turns.

Sample gameflow

Noel has to go to a bar where he is to spy on his target, in order to gather more information about him, as this time there is hardly any background intelligence about the offender. Noel walks into the bar; looks around to see his target but doesn't spot him straight away. His attention then turns to the bar. He then hesitates whether to go to the bar or just stand in one of the darker corners of the bar. After a few moments he spots on the blackboard that one of his favorite cocktails is served in that bar. He decides to go up to the bar and have a drink. If the player knew what Noel's favorite drink is (which players would be able to learn from reading his extensive bio and diary between missions), he could've spotted it before him and concealed it by either directly erasing it from the board or by dimming the light of the lamp that illuminates the board. Our hero goes to bar where he orders his drink. He then turns around and leans against the counter, looking around again. One of the people sitting across him is a beautiful woman dressed in red. As Noel doesn't see his target again his eyes turn on the woman. Again, this is unwanted for the player as he wants Noel to keep looking for his target. Had the player made the woman less noticeable (maybe changing the color of her dress to black or by dimming the lighting around her), Noel wouldn't have concentrated his attention on her. Soon someone gets up from a table next to the one the woman is sitting at. That person couldn't be seen before because of poor lighting, but now that he is up the player sees that this is the target. Noel doesn't though as he is busy looking at the lady. The player fails to quickly find a way get the hero's attention to the man and he walks out of the bar. Possible game over or just transitioning the player to next scenes but with no information gathered from the previous one.

Same situation, different flow...

Noel walks into the bar, the player notices the board and quickly erases the cocktail off it. Noel decides to just stand somewhere else. He looks for a place to stand and sees the woman in red. The player

chooses (or just fails to) to react and Noel goes close to her. He then starts to look for the man. As he is standing closer to him this time, the player spots more easily that there is a man with white hair sitting close to Noel (the target has white hair), but his face is not clearly visible. The player quickly adjusts the lights around the person which both gets Noel's attention in that direction and reveals the target's face. Scene completed successfully.

Basic Controls and User Interface

In order to create a more immersive experience there will be no GUI. All the information the player will need will be presented using alternative ways. The player will be able to tell the hero's mood by his behaviour and not by bars representing percentages or something similar. An important part of the gameplay will be the Slow Time power, which player's will use have to use sparingly. The power will be limited though. Players will be able to tell how much time they have to use it before it needs to recharge as the player's field of view will keep shrinking as a "dark cloud" will start expanding inwards from the edges of the screen.

The only user input that will be used in the game is the mouse and as there will be no interface all commands will be given using a gesture system, like the ones employed in other games such as Arx Fatalis and Black and White. Upon pressing the right-mouse button, the player will go into gesture mode, and as long as she keeps the button pressed, she will stay in gesture mode. Then she can press and hold the left key to draw a pattern. Releasing the left key will finish the pattern and upon pressing it again a new one will be started. Releasing the right button will exit the gesture mode. Patterns will then be interpreted by the game engine and compared to a pattern dictionary which will determine if a valid combination has been drawn and what it is. Some patterns will be more difficult than others. A few examples to illustrate this are – if a player wants to create a darkness effect they could use the "light" symbol and then draw the "darkness" symbol. Another way of doing it would be the "light" and "down" combination. A third option will be the "moon" pattern, which will be harder to draw. In the same manner, a rise in temperature could be achieved by drawing "temperature" and then "red" or "down" or by simply drawing "fire". Later on, more obscure but potent powers will become unlocked and invoking them would require more abstract or longer combinations. The difficulty curve would increase not in forcing the player to draw more complex shapes that could turn into a tedious task, but testing his memory and quick thought in remembering a good power to use and drawing a meaningful pattern for it.