



SIMULATION MINDY

A CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE-STYLE INTERNET GAME

This game is available online at <https://simulationmindy.wordpress.com/the-simulation-game/>

Simulation Mindy: Dossier

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THE CONCEPT



“At least one of the following propositions is true: (1) the human species is very likely to go extinct before reaching a “posthuman” stage; (2) any posthuman civilisation is extremely unlikely to run a significant number of simulations of their evolutionary history (or variations thereof); (3) we are almost certainly living in a computer simulation.”

Nick Bostrom, 2003



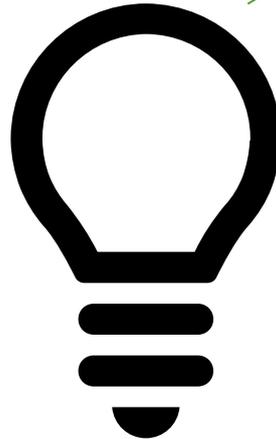
In 2003, Swedish philosopher Nick Bostrom proposed a theory that the world as we know it is a computer simulation. This theory has an abundance of relevance to the way humans interact with technology and the future, particularly as artificial intelligence is evolving to a point of near-human (or post-human) intelligence. This game is based around the implications discussed in this theory, including the collective human lifespan, the ability for humans to produce such a simulation, the desire and ethical implications of doing so, and the relationship between the simulator and the simulated. There are a variety of questions to be addressed, which are listed overleaf.

How much of this sort of experiment would a post-human be able to control?

What are the implications of pushing technology to its ultimate limit: replicating intelligent, sentient human beings?

What are the ethical aspects of science that need to be considered as the definition of “alive” evolves?

Is there a point of no return?



CONCEPTUAL MINDMAP

THE BLUEPRINT

I decided to create a story based on exploring those questions, using The Sims 4.

STORYLINE

Apollo Drake (bottom right) is a gifted quantum computer science with a vision to create an experimental simulated human society. Join him as he pitches his idea to Big Science for funding and makes various ethical and practical decisions related to the construction of this experiment . . . assuming, of course, that humanity survives long enough to make this experiment happen.

Inside the experiment, switch personas over to Mindy Farmer (top right), a digital creation programmed to be evil, insane and genius. How will she react to the stimulus set up by Apollo?

Simulation Mindy: Dossier



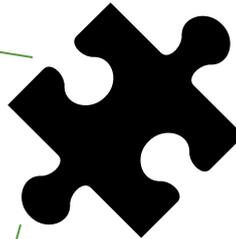
Mindy Farmer



Apollo Drake

MECHANICS

TURN-BASED COMBAT: players make a move and wait for the 'computer' to respond (Samoff 2017). These responses vary depending on which path the player chooses. Several of these dynamically affect the direction of the game.



DEAD ENDS: this allows the player to explore various implications of Bostrom's theory, such as humanity dying out. There's always an option to return to the beginning of the game to explore a new route.

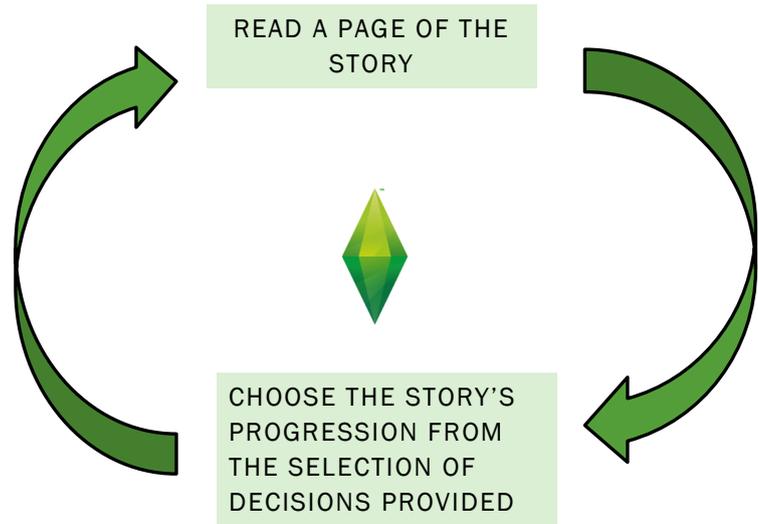
THE INFINITY LOOP: particular paths feature a back-and-forth mechanic which a player can potentially repeat forever, unless they make new choices.

EQUALISED PATHS: for simplicity, several of the options are thematically similar. For example, Mindy makes the choice, unassisted, to kill the two men who cheat on her. The player can choose to carry this out via drowning them or locking them in a dungeon to die of starvation. Neither changes the direction of the game, thus some control remains out of the player's grasp.

GAME LOOP

Simulation Mindy is a one-player game. The intricacy of the loop varies depending upon which paths the user travels down.

Dependent on the paths the player selects, he or she may reach a dead end, or a “game over” page. These pages effectively end the story, in various ways, however they also provide the player with an option to rewind to an early point in the Simulation Game and choose a different path, to travel further in the game or simply to explore a different route, or the implications of a different decision.



THE RULEBOOK

DISCLAIMER

As the story grew darker and more intense, it became necessary to write a disclaimer early in the rulebook to deter audiences who may be potentially offended or scarred by the content discussed in the story. A screenshot of the disclaimer, as discussed on my blog, follows this paragraph. The rule book is opposite.

Disclaimer

This game contains sexual references, extremely coarse language, murder, infanticide, graphic violence, suicide, child neglect and themes of existential dread.

Simulation Mindy: Dossier

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Simulation Mindy

A digital choose-your-own-adventure narrative



Players:
1

Story:

Join quantum computer scientist, Apollo Blake, in his quest to build a simulated human society. Will he do it ethically? Illegally? Will humanity even survive long enough to build this technology?

Inside the simulation, will Mindy ever discover the truth? How will she react?

How to Play:

Work your way through the short narratives on each page. At the end of each will be a fork.

Choose one of two options to build the story your way.

Happy exploring!

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GENRE

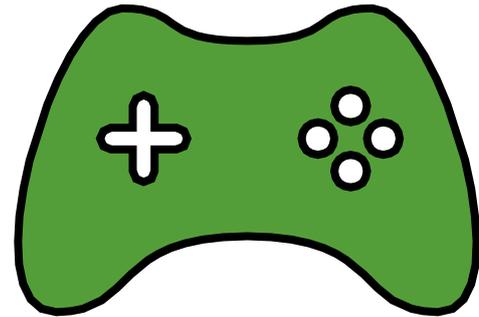
Choose your own adventure (CYOA) style games first became widespread throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Woodward 2014). They're characterised by second-person narrative style and are written in present-tense, allowing the responder to assume the persona of the protagonist and make judgements which affect the conclusion of the story. These stories traditionally appeared in children's paperback novels.

Nowadays, this genre has grown from paperback books to the digital landscape, commonly appearing in apps and video games (ibid).

CYOA games themselves are the product of the "hybridisation of genres" (Salter et. al 2017). They are a combination of conventions from a variety of games such as euro games, war games and role-playing games (RPG's) like *Dungeons and Dragons* (ibid).

Simulation Mindy: Dossier

Narrative is traditionally incorporated into games via design techniques and themes, rather than mechanics (Salter et. al 2017). However, CYOA games are changing this and consider narrative as a mechanic for gameplay.



ARTWORK & DESIGN

The images used in telling the story are currently screenshots I captured during my *Sims 4* gameplay. Although it might be effective to eventually replace these with illustrations designed by an artist, the theme behind the game relies on it being as strongly correlated to simulation theory as possible.

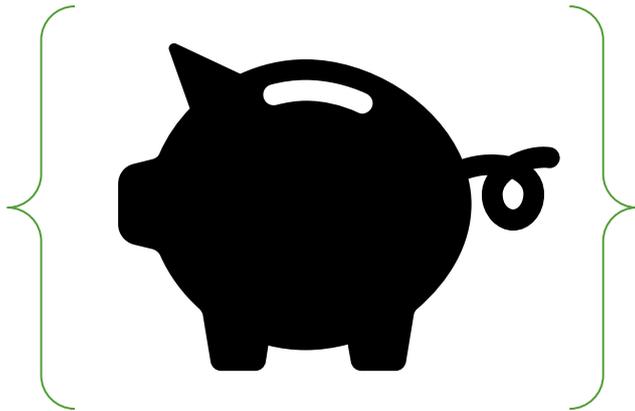
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS OF EA GAMES

Electronic Arts maintains intellectual property rights over the Sims logo, which I've been using to establish the presence of this artefact online.

Although it would be desirable to eventually create this game outside of the intellectual property restrictions of using a base game that already exists (*The Sims 4*), not using *The Sims* would take something away from the theme of the game.



COSTING & BUDGET



Simulation Mindy was not an expensive game to create.

MARKETING & DISTRIBUTION COSTS

If I choose to distribute it online, injecting funds in the project could help me to grow an audience for both this game and future chronicles. This would involve making the base website appear more professional, such as having a custom URL rather than a WordPress-based one.

POTENTIAL FUTURE COSTS

Potential future costs include purchasing intellectual property rights to artwork outside *The Sims*, which I am unlikely to do for reasons discussed on the previous page, or investing in a new platform to produce this game on – such as virtual reality technology.

MARKETING & DISTRIBUTION

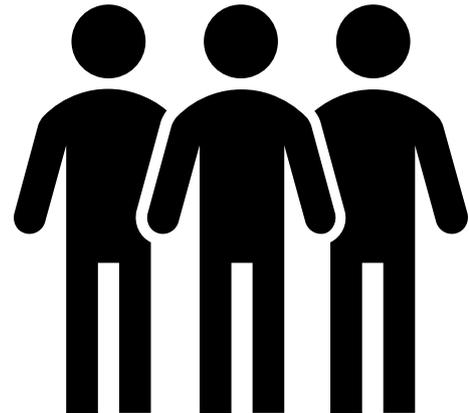
TARGET MARKET

This game is designed to attract a teenage to young adult audience. However, I am aware that some of the game's themes are unsuitable for certain ages. Therefore, I will place a guidance rating of MA 15+ on this game, for graphic violence and sexual references.

DISTRIBUTION

Simulation Mindy exists online on its own platform, so at this stage I am not on the lookout for a physical distributor.

Potentially my game could be featured on an online game site aimed at young people, such as BGames or Mafa, which could increase exposure to my audience.



PLATFORM

OPTIONS

WORDPRESS

Although WordPress is not specifically designed to support a CYOA project, it is possible to create one using hyperlinks.

TWINE

Twine supports CYOA media. It includes design elements beyond URLs, such as the ability to click on objects to proceed from one passage of the story to another.

INKLEWRITER

Inklewriter is designed as a platform for CYOA writers to give their stories new dimensions. It provides an easy template in which to write a story and link parts together. It will shut down in August 2018, however, so is not a viable option in the long-term.

Simulation Mindy: Dossier

FINAL CHOICE

Ultimately, I chose to use WordPress as the platform for this game. I'd already begun my game by the time I realised that software existed specifically to aid in the creation of CYOA games, so it made little sense to backtrack. Also, because *Simulation Mindy* is just one segment of a digital artefact I've been working on for two years across four different subjects, I prefer each instalment of the world on the same website.

PROTOTYPES

Initial prototypes were mind map-styled narrative points which outlined the main plot points. As I moved through the creation of this game, I established a beta-style working prototype which was available on the *Simulation Mindy* website. This allowed me to edit the game as I saw fit, work on it at my own pace, and allow others to playtest the game to give me feedback on it throughout my process of creation.

Initially I constructed a typed outline to track the game's progress, but I found it difficult to follow and link to at times. I then replaced this document with blank paper and a pen and drew a variety of mind maps and squiggles that were easier to follow. From my brainstorming I could then draw the final outline for the game design, which is pictured overleaf.

Opening Scene

1. Scientist (a new character, Apollo Drake) wants to use quantum computing to create a simulation society to run experiments. Strong 'futuristic' sort of plant design, very high-tech
2. TEXT MESSAGE:
 - a. Asteroid incoming (see 3)
 - b. Big Science with an opportunity to listen to Apollo's simulation pitch
3. Possibility 1: The extinction: An asteroid is on track to collide with earth
 - a. It hits earth
 - i. Humanity is wiped out (game over)
 - ii. Enough humans survive to continue humanity – go to (bij), but a plethora of vital resources are wiped out
<https://simulationmindy.wordpress.com/2018/04/23/game-over-2/>
 - b. It misses earth
 - i. *survive to next phase of science story*: development of quantum computing and artificial intelligence
 - ii. Global warming/natural disasters leave the earth's resources severely compromised
 1. Starve to death (game over)
 2. Fight for resources – war, animalistic etc.
4. Possibility 2: The Simulation
 - a. Quantum computing reaches the point where a simulation is possible. Apollo prototypes and presents to the board at Big Science.
 - i. Turned down by board

PLAYTESTING & ITERATIONS

My initial plan was to purely focus on Mindy's story. After early feedback, I decided to combine the stories of Mindy, the product of the experiment, and Apollo, the designer of the experiment, to create a holistic universe.

At this point I struggled with making it clear which character was in the lead. I managed to combat this through a visual switch between the two with an image of Mindy living inside a computer screen to highlight her existence as being inside the simulation.



I was also aware, from early playtesting, that the beginning quarter of the narrative was not as exciting as the rest. Although I took this feedback on board, I found that I had little room to deviate from my plans in that beginning phase, because I needed to set the foundation for the rest of the story. Instead, I tried to make up for this by increasing the excitement of the rest of the story.

Toward the end of my game construction, I received feedback from several people which suggested I had gone a little too far in my attempts to make the game fun. Specifically, when Mindy attempts to murder her child, I allowed several methods of doing so from which the player could choose from. One of which was “inject the child with a fast-tracked HIV virus”. This was deemed potentially offensive to my audience, more so than other options such as drowning or starving. In the end I replaced it with “stab in the guts”, which – interestingly – people found much less offensive.

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