

Game Concept Document

Working Title:

Sthenos: Define Insanity

Concept Statement:

After escaping an underground bunker, two young women with supernatural abilities called “sthenos” find themselves on the run from the government and their own minds. Follow Elizabeth Cole and the enigmatic “Blue” as they sneak and fight their way to finding answers and saving their loved ones in a world where their own insanity may be their biggest obstacle.

Genre(s):

Psychological Horror, RPG, Action/Adventure, Stealth, Experimental

Target Audience:

The darker nature of the game is designed for a mature audience, and the two female playable characters are particularly designed to engage a female audience. Women 17+.

Unique Selling Points:

- action-adventure sandbox game
- Two dynamic female playable characters
- In-game conflicts that reward variety of solutions
- Multiple, player-driven storylines and endings
- *Unique “insanity bar” interface that gauges character’s mental stability and consequential changes in audio and visual elements*

Player Experience and Game POV:

The game’s intent is for the player to feel emotionally invested in the characters and story progression while allowing them to explore the unique elements that come with playing characters prone to hallucinations. This element is intended to confuse and enrapture the player simultaneously: to be used as a mechanism for driving story and providing character information in a cryptic and engaging manner that keeps player wanting more.

The player starts the game as a teenaged Elizabeth Cole, a few years before she was captured. This part of the game takes part in her suburban California neighborhood, and acts as a low-stakes tutorial zone while establishing critical world concepts, mechanics, and emotional ties to important characters. The end of the sequence is disrupted, however, almost like a corrupted file or as though reality itself were fraying. In a cutscene, we get several glimpses into what appears to be domestic dispute, blood, and Cole’s family and friends in mortal danger- possibly dead. Before the player can discern what happened, the scene is cut, and the player wakes (now several years older) as Elizabeth Cole in an underground cell. This marks the official beginning of the game.

From there, the characters’ story takes place just outside of Phoenix, Arizona and expands to other areas and cities. The surreal beauty of desert scenes coupled with the chaos of the big city showcases a variety of immersive environments while giving the games most defining feature (the visual and audio effects of “insanity”) opportunity to shine in ways that are both beautiful and disturbing. Sometimes, entire cutscenes are

nothing more than a flashback or delusion that plays off of character's past/fears. Even interactions with NPCs are altered. As insanity level increases, imaginary noises, voices, etc. weave their way in to distract and disturb player before visual disturbances come in. Starting with slight disturbances in atmosphere and light, eventually delusions both ridiculous and sometimes indistinguishable from reality both enhance and interfere with gameplay.

These are all intended to encourage a sense of disquiet in the player, to keep them just grounded enough that the constant blur of time, space, and reality only leave them asking questions and wanting more of both the game and the characters.

Visual and Audio Style:

A style primarily grounded in gritty realism. Basic audio consists of everyday sounds of city life woven artfully with music, sound effects as naturalistic as possible, however... this all changes according to insanity levels.

Think "What Remains of Edith Finch", but if all the art styles began to compete and blend into one another as insanity increases. Sounds and colors/textures slowly become distorted. Colors and shapes become more stylized, imaginary images and sounds toy with the senses, and some delusions are completely intangible. Think disembodied voices and a heart thumping bass, a sky swirling with color, desert silhouettes of cactus-men, and streetside mailboxes that crawl and gape.

Game World Fiction:

A government agency has declared people with powers, "sthenos", to be a threat to public safety and claims that they are prone to insanity. Playable character Elizabeth Cole is one such individual, and finds herself on the run with a young girl named Blue after escaping captivity in a bunker. They discover their loved ones, Elizabeth's close friend and Blue's twin brother, are held in another facility across the state. The two are determined to save them. To do so, they must evade capture through clever use of their powers and whatever else is made available to them, all while trying to maintain levels of sanity. The more they use their powers, the more pronounced their delusions and more warped the world becomes. Elizabeth's ability to reanimate the dead and sense the living are particularly taxing on her sanity meter. Blue's arc in particular allows the player to talk with bugs, stop people/objects in time, and see NPC's true thoughts, though the reality of these abilities could be called into question.

Core Loops:

interact with NPCs and environment → interactions illicit quests/tasks/achievements → completion of quests/tasks/achievements unlock rewards and regain sanity → use rewards to unlock new areas → interact with NPCs/environment

The game rewards exploring the environment and interacting with NPCs through quests that allow player to master skills while unlocking rewards and reducing insanity. Gaining new skills and objects allows the player to progress to new areas and providing information that gets them closer to the ultimate goal of freeing their loved ones and uncovering the conspiracy behind "insanity".

Objectives and Progression:

Game mechanics are first learned from the POV of Elizabeth Cole, in a playable scene that takes place several years before her capture. Through this sequence, the player is allowed a low-stakes introduction to the game's mechanics while providing insight and emotional connection to both Elizabeth Cole and the friend she is desperate to save. Where this tutorial sequence encouraged the player to experiment with sthenos and get to know the world premise, the bunker sequence encourages the player to interact with the environment and gather

the objects required to escape when their powers don't help. This sequence lets player know that there are ways to solve obstacle without powers. It also introduces how to utilize Blue before she becomes a playable character, while forming an emotional bond with her.

Gameplay following these tutorial-like scenes relies on quests to direct the player. They remind the player of their objectives while the game's unique visuals and dialogue paths encourage the player to explore and interact with their surroundings at length.

Interactivity:

The goal of this game is to keep the player engaged with the environment and interactive elements of the game while allowing them to move forward at their own pace. The game setting allows players a chance to directly interact with surroundings through use of their powers, but it also features indirect interactions through the effects of the "insanity bar". Using powers extensively or encountering exhaustive triggers also contribute to character "insanity". This can influence surroundings, cutscenes, and storylines, but also encourages player to pursue alternative methods of completing goals.

To that end, the player is thus encouraged to move throughout the map when not engaged in certain main-story questlines. The gameplay is designed for third-person view with a 'first-person zoom' feature that allows close-up views at player's discretion. However, combat/stealth situations and high "insanity" causes third-person camera view to edge closer and lock behind player character to evoke sense of urgency and serve as additional visual cue to player. Dialogue cues can be triggered outside of cutscenes to enhance character relatability. For instance, if the player as Elizabeth Cole tries to enter combat with a delusion caused by high insanity, Blue might become concerned or frightened, asking what Elizabeth is swinging at. Dialogue options that player can pursue also have an effect on NPC interactions and can open/close opportunities to gain information or allies. In turn, these can affect the outcome of quests and storylines.