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A Course Project by:
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Video Game Narrative Pitch:
Singularity

With Special thanks to:
Adam Miller
And ELVTR staff

singularity

noun

/ˌsɪŋɡjʊˈlærɪti/

1. the state, fact, quality, or condition of being singular.
2. a point at which a function takes an infinite value, especially in space-time when matter is infinitely dense, such as at the centre of a black hole.
3. a hypothetical future point in time when artificial intelligence surpasses human intelligence, leading to a growth in scientific discoveries and tech developments that is hard for humans to imagine.

Logline, Summary & Purpose Statement

Logline

At the end of history, in the wake of the heat death of the Universe, a life form emerges from a ship orbiting a supermassive black hole with no purpose and no knowledge of how to be alive.

Summary

In a post-historical, post-technological universe, millions of years after the last visible stars faded, a lonely life form in a massive colony-ship must figure out the meaning of being alive in a universe devoid of struggle.

With only faint signals on the radars of the ship, archival genetic memories of alien civilizations lost to time, and a gargantuan black hole which feeds the thin ecosystem to which the remaining life of the universe clings to, this life form must learn how to exist on a reality opposed to life itself.

Experimental Passage

Walking through the observation decks of the ship, gazing upon panels of information waiting for user input and the clear window giving full view of the invisible monster that this ship orbits, it is clear to me that this ship is even more out of time than me. Who in their right mind would fit a ship with a window so big when there is nothing to see? It's either the blackness of the black hole or the blackness of infinite empty space. Not sure which one I like the least.

Zedek told me my eyes are still unable to focus on near objects. Maybe that's the reason I find it so frustrating that they made the windows big instead of those control panels. Not like I can read them anyway.

Purpose Statement

Singularity is a game about characters lost at the end of history. A science fiction story about a post-technologic future where no other action but waiting for the end of things seems viable, where characters are ignorant to the events which lead to their current reality. Players are put in the setting to walk alongside the main character, discovering key moments of both

human real history and fictional future history events while reaching out to the remnants of civilization who orbit the super massive black hole on their respective ships, all of this in hopes of finding answers to the question of "what is my purpose on this unforgiving and uncaring world?"

Singularity hopes to explore themes of purpose and history. Trying to teach the main character and remind the players that our purpose in this universe is not dependent on the age we were born in or our place in life, but in the decisions we make and our actions in the face of adversity and inaction. One of the main topics I want to explore in my writing career is how we often forget our history and the struggle of humanity to reach our current reality, how we let this ignorance fool us into thinking there is not much we can do. This game aims to take that logic to its most extreme example (the end of history) and see what happens.

Setting & Visual Statement

Description

The world of 'Singularity' occurs far into the future, a time where even the concept of millions of years loses any real meaning. Being referred to as 'Deep future', the time period of the game begins when last decaying civilizations were torn apart by the ever accelerating expansion of the universe. When the speed of such expansion overcame that of light, the universe started to fade away, lush skies full of stars turned dark and lonely stars faded away without any hope of stelar dust forming new celestial bodies ever again.

In this hopeless reality, where civilizations and extragalactic, hyper advanced empires were literally torn apart by unmeasurable empty space, many made attempts to prolong the universe. Some even tried in vain to reverse the progress of this sickness. But all came to the same conclusion, no matter how advanced is your grasp of the rules of the universe, they were all bound by the principles of energy. As the universe runs out of entropy, all energy distributes evenly across space, and evenly distributed energy is impossible to harvest. It is right there, but ever so out of reach.

In this new, dark universe, black holes became the new kings of all things. Knowing that black holes could be orbited, and that energy could be extracted from them, just like stars, many ships

of different sizes decided to reside indefinitely in the calm but deeply hostile orbits that the sleeping giants allowed for.

On Environmental Storytelling

The overall goal of the environment of the game is the one of civilizations with perfect technology that simply ran out of power. How smart is a smart home with no electricity?

The way this is supposed to be communicated is through the perfect state of things contrasted with its abandonment. Robotical precision tools that haven't moved in millions of years but are not rusty, gears that look as if they just received new oil but do not turn, sterilized operation tables that run on emergency lights, massive and empty ship bridges with a single monitor turned on.

If the player makes the decision of pulling Stella from its close orbit around the black hole, both them and Melchizedek will encounter symbols that are not in Melchizedek's database nor in the genetic bank that the player has access to. Despite this, Stella's systems welcome the player as if they were expected, in a language that they do not recognize and that Melchizedek cannot translate either. Many things are displayed here, recordings of the trial and sentencing of the character put on stasis inside the ship, the player cannot make out what is happening on these images but Melchizedek slowly puts the pieces together. The player can also find weapons and other items that they can bring back to the ship and, most importantly, you'll be able to go through the sentenced character belongings and their quarters, not having any idea what some of the clothing items and other objects even are, but getting a hand of why would someone would go to the trouble of decorating and making one's quarters their own.

Visuals

The game happens mostly inside different kinds of spaceships, with the constant backdrop of the super massive black hole that allows a calm orbit around it. When looking at space, no stars, galaxies or other celestial bodies can be seen (hence, a dead universe), we know it's mostly black holes dominating the universe at this point and any light emitting bodies remaining on the universe, if they still exist, are too far from us to see.

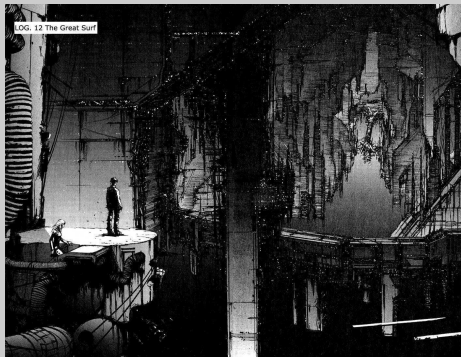
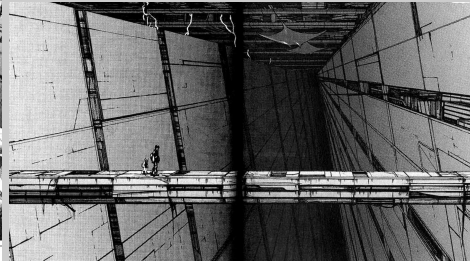
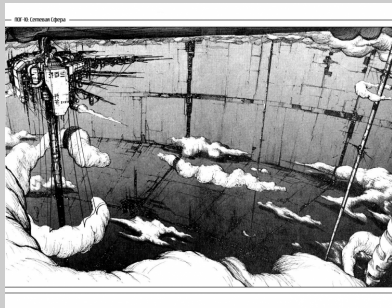
Art Direction

Interiors

The art direction is heavily influenced by works like the Blame! series and video game sagas like the original Marathon trilogy by Bungie. The insides of ships are big, forgotten and it is rare to see saturated colors, the visual landscapes are dominated by whites and blacks with sharp contrasts.

1 to 2 pages with a description of your setting and visual style, and at least one reference image.

Visual References: Blame panels and Marathon concept art.



Visions

Throughout the story, the player will have the chance to undergo visions from a genetic bank or memories, feeling the memories from other persons of history. In these sections, both gameplay and visual language could vary wildly.

Visual References: Historical moments (Real & Fictitious)



Exteriors

The exterior's direction is way more minimalist. The black hole dominates the landscape and depending on how low the characters are orbiting the black hole it could be a distant black blob with faintly flowing mass around it or it could be blanketing the background completely when on low orbit.

Visual References: Black Holes



Characters & Bios

Melchizedek

Purpose Statement

The name 'Melchizedek' comes from the old testament of the bible. King of Salem and priest of Elyon, which means 'god most high'. Same as in the biblical figure, Melchizedek from the game aims to represent, with an analogy, all that is sacred or 'most

high' in societies throughout history. This could mean religion, politics, morals, ethics, etc.

In the game, Melchizedek feels forced to wake the player up, as they use entropy to operate and the universe is becoming so uniform that they can no longer source entropy to properly function. Melchizedek wakes the player up in hopes that the player's actions can generate some entropy and prolong its existence. Existence for the player character ends up being very painful and exhausting for them, as it often is for us in real life. This is an analogy for how what is 'most high' in life is often painful but maybe worth it if we decide it so, but it is also a reminder that those things that are most high also require people to believe for them to hold any meaning, hence, why Melchizedek had to wake the player up.

Backstory

Millions of years before the events of the game, a collective of multiple factions gathered on a secret and lonely dying galaxy and throughout a period of two thousand years, dedicated themselves to the creation of ark ships which would be able to survive for millions of years drifting on an empty universe in hopes of finding a suitable place to settle and live.

Each ship was provided with a singularity class intelligence and thousands of genetically created life forms, with their genetic signature based loosely on a long extinct species known as humanity.

Constructs such as Melchizedek work on the entropy of the surrounding universe to sustain their processes and correctly operate. As the universe reaches a state of perpetual equilibrium, such an AI would inevitably cease to operate.

Bio

Melchizedek is an artificial intelligence in charge of operating the ship you exist on. In a desperate attempt to prolong its life, it decided to bring life forms the indefinite stasis into existence.

Personality

- Zedek starts off cold and very pragmatic. Seemingly uncaring.
- Eventually more empathic and maternalistic towards the player and other life forms.

- Dry and impatient.

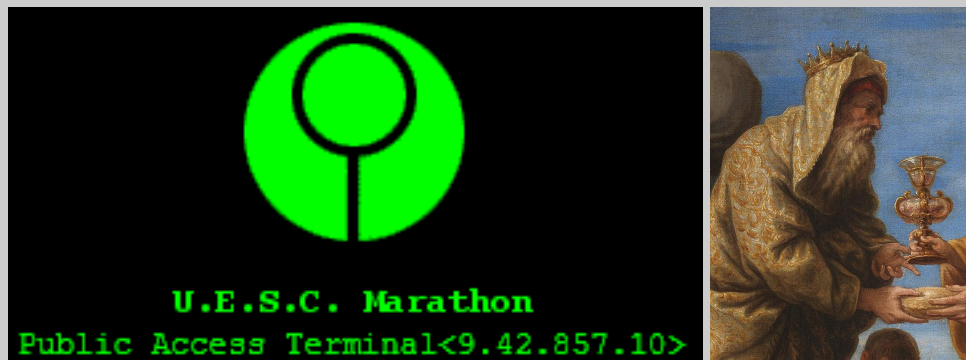
Abilities

Basically an omniscient computer. Abilities are basically whatever the plot demands.

Visual Description

Melchizedek does not have a physical form, but visual representations could be similar to how marathon depicts artificial intelligences, showing designation and the logotype of the ship. He can also take control of contraptions and robots throughout the game.

Visual References: Marathon logo from a Leela terminal & Depiction from Melchizedek



The Convict

Purpose Statement

The convict serves to be both a companion to the main character, as they join the main character very early on, and a counterpart to what Melchizedek represents within the game.

The convict is an example of how those sacred systems we create stop having any meaning beyond a certain point. Can we hold judgement against someone who did hideous crimes in the past where the systems put in place ages ago are completely forgotten? How can someone be sentenced when there are no judges? How can you say you adhere to a certain code of morals or ethics when arguably every single one failed and faded away? Those are the kind of questions that this character is mean to put forward for both the characters and the player.

Backstory

Millions of years before the events of the game, an isolated space faring civilization faced civil war against a small faction of religious zealots. This extremist faction upheld dangerous beliefs that fueled a genocidal effort, costing the lives of billions in a catastrophic series of chemical and mass destruction attacks on both planets and motherships alike, crippling the civilian population of this civilization and pushing it to the edge of collapse.

Eventually, they managed to defeat this zealot faction and all leadership members were executed. Some members, responsible for some of the most inhumane actions from the conflict were spared from execution and instead condemned for indefinite stasis on self sufficient air gapped ships.

Bio

Born in a ascetic faction of an isolated civilization, the convict was completely indoctrinated from a young age. They grew to internalize all the teachings he was given and had little to no interaction with outside views that could challenge their worldview in any way.

When events outside of their control led to a war, they had no other choice but to join and, using their beliefs as justification, they took part in events that led to the death of billions in a genocidal campaign.

After the inevitable defeat of their small faction, and due to decisions that have been lost to time, the convict was spared from execution and instead sentenced to indefinite stasis on a perpetual ship, instructed to find an isolated place to remain there until manual interruption. The convict was forced to sleep, hooked up to genetic memory banks that would allow their conscience to experience memories from other beings as dreams and nightmares until their eventual awakening or the closure of the universe, whichever happens first.

Personality

- They have been heavily indoctrinated since childhood and then were forced to live the experiences of others through dreams, unable to fully process or meditate this dichotomy.
- They can be very cold and pragmatic but persuaded into empathy when watching the player's naiveness.
- They hold deep hatred for a forgotten civilization.

Abilities

The convict is a skilled combatant. Due to modifications in their biology, they need no food for sustenance and have enhanced abilities such as being able to see on pitch black environments, being able to perceive different forms of energy and enhanced strength and agility.

Visual Description

The convict initially wears futuristic but grounded combat armor, they have pale skin but it is usually hidden by a helmet with a full face visor.

Visual References: Killi from Blame! and the Security Officer from Marathon



Plot Description

1 page plot description in paragraph format describing the plot of the game. Three paragraphs ideal, with each paragraph covering an act.

Act I: Wake up

In act one, the player wakes up and is slowly introduced to the ship they inhabit, Melchizedek but the actual reason why they have been woken up is not told to them. Melchizedek encourages the player to explore the ship, to study certain topics (since they are practically a newborn), to relive memories using the genetic banks stored on the ship and to scout for nearby ships which might be orbiting the black hole. The player is immediately entertained by both their experiences through study

and carrying out daily activities, they also become inspired by many of the experiences relived on the genetic memories, although they do not understand many of the overarching conflicts they encounter. The act concludes with the player visiting the convict's ship and releasing them.

Act II: Despair

In the second act, the player has the option of visiting several other ships orbiting the black hole, as well as reliving many other memories from wildly different ages. The player starts to worry that no matter how many ships they visit, it's all decaying or abandoned at best, all the genetic memories he studies seem to show that at any point in history no one ever managed to find an answer to the big questions. As this arc unfolds, the player has the chance to interact with other characters on the ships visited and they can complete their arcs throughout the visit.

Act III: At the end of history, dark frontiers

After visiting all of the required ships and the arcs are completed, a new ship shows up for the characters. In this ship, the player is presented with a final decision. The first option, to wake up all of the lifeforms in stasis from their original ship and sail into space looking for stars that may be able to sustain a small civilization on a planet. The second, to disable the propulsion systems of the original ships so it plummets into the depths of the black hole, without any knowledge of what may happen. Both Melchizedek and the convict will have an opinion depending on the actions taken throughout the game but it will be ultimately left to the player to decide.

Epilogue

The epilogue would simply be a series of dialogue of the player having a conversation with a higher entity outside of reality. Here, the player would attempt to justify the decisions made throughout the story, with the entity enquiring about the ships visited and the memories relived. The entity would not give final answers, those are left for the player to reach by themselves.

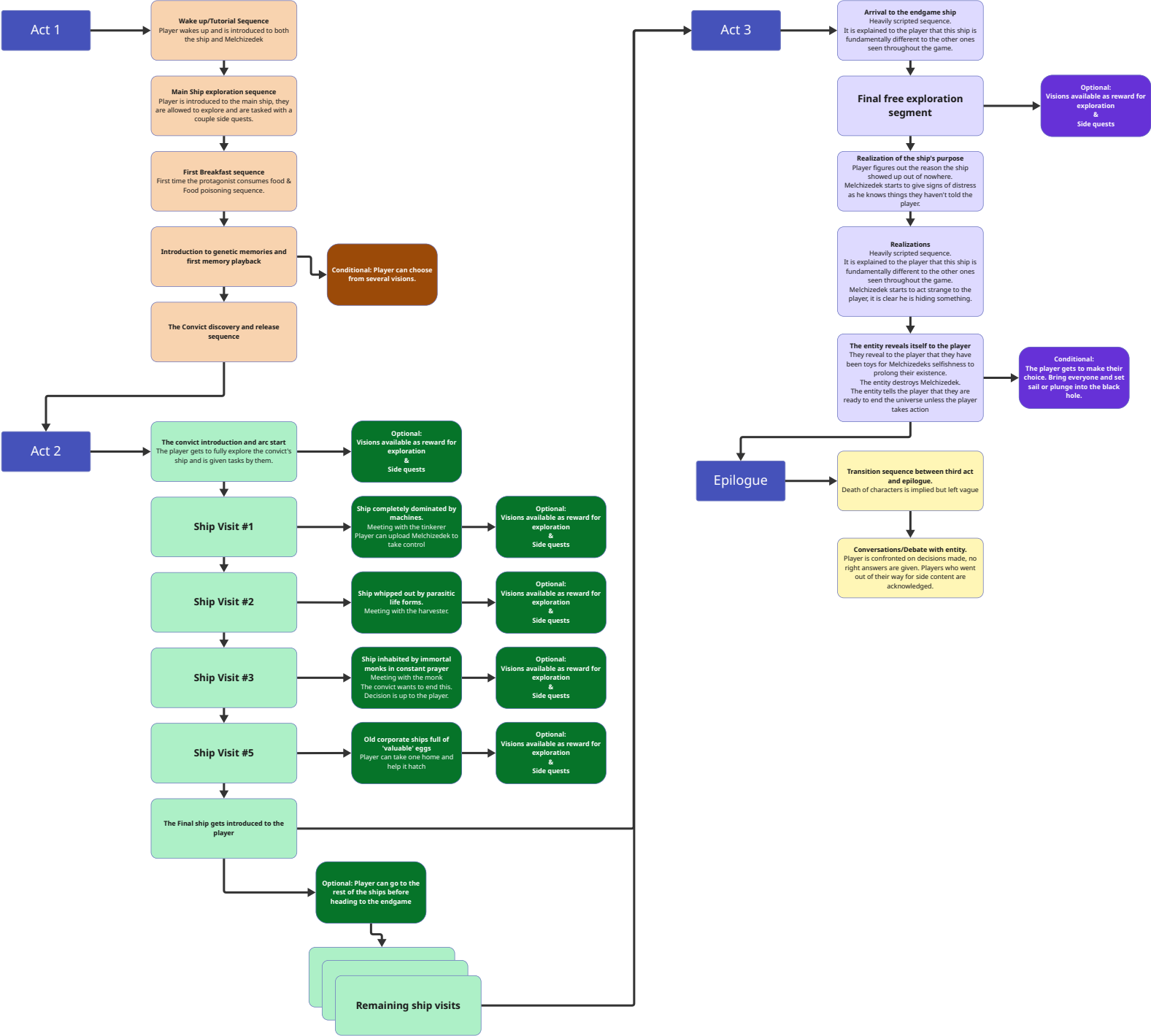
Design Statement

Singularity is a very narrative heavy game with elements of exploration and movement as the in between gameplay in character and plot moments. Exploration is rewarded and some outcomes would be dependent on the character following on leads and encountering the right objectives. Also, choices through dialogue will be in the story but will not have a massive impact beyond impacting an individual character's arc.

Mechanic	Description	Narrative Purpose	Example
Exploration	Big environments hiding secrets, character moments and arcs that need to be discovered through exploration.	Exploring the ships orbiting the black hole is the main method for the player and the main character to know the world.	There's a hidden terminal on a hard to reach area with additional context, shedding new light on existing lore
Parkour	Moving through the big environments from the game is facilitated with enhanced movement. This could be jet-packs, grappling hooks, low gravity and other mobility tools.	Through parkour, the player character can find hidden objects, find logs, meet new characters and expand the game's plot with missable extra content.	In order to reach a certain hidden area, the player needs to go through a course where gravity shifts from low to high every couple seconds.
Dialogue Moments	Characters can be interacted with both in gameplay (by approaching said character) this could involve providing a character with an item to continue a quest.	The game's plot and character arcs move through dialogue. The player can make choices in order to progress the story in a given direction.	First dialogue conversation with Melchizedek/the convict.
Visions	At some points of the story, the player can choose to make the main character experience memories from different points in history. This can be both real history moments or fictional history from the space age.	Through these visions, the main character can learn from history, letting both character and player reach their conclusions on how to deal with the issues brought up by the game.	Witnessing the reign of terror during the french revolution.

Screenshots from examples: NaissanceE, BABBDI, Lorn's Lure





GOALS: Present the character of 'The Convict' to the player and Melchizedek.

INT. SHIP - CONTROL ROOM

The player enters the control room chamber, followed by the illumination of the ship kicking in, blanketing the space in bright fluorescent white light.

PLAYER

What will happen once I give you
access to the whole ship?

MELCHIZEDEK

Nothing will happen right away. But
I'll know exactly what was kept
outside of my reach.

PLAYER

(confused)

So you don't know what's being kept
from you?

MELCHIZEDEK

Whoever designed the ships systems
put special care in
compartmentalizing.

As the player character moves around the chamber, terminals light up, showing foreign symbols and information unfamiliar to the player.

PLAYER

(unsure)

I am going to need your help to
manipulate this... I cannot read any
of this.

MELCHIZEDEK

Actually...

PLAYER

What?

MELCHIZEDEK

The way this place works. I'll gain
nothing from you poking those
terminals.

A new light turns on, illuminating a previously hidden section of the room, showing a figure suspended in frozen liquid, obscured by the condensed and frozen material on the surface.

PLAYER

Zedek, are you seeing this?

MELCHIZEDEK

All the systems, all the subroutines,
the protocols hidden from me, are
constantly checking on this...

PLAYER

Checking on it?

MELCHIZEDEK

Making sure its stable, making sure
its frozen. This are analogue sensors
that I cannot trick. Voltages and
reading that I cannot alter. It is
completely air gapped.

The player character approaches the frozen pod, dodging
cables coming from the pod with every step.

PLAYER

(confused, impatient)

Zedek, I don't understand you.

MELCHIZEDEK

This ship was made for the purpose of
making sure whoever is there stays
there...

PLAYER

Like myself.

MELCHIZEDEK

No. This is nothing like yourself or
the rest of the life forms on our
ship.

PLAYER

How can you know that?

MELCHIZEDEK

They wouldn't have gone out of their
way to design the ships systems this
way. They wanted to make sure they
stayed frozen. For as long as
possible.

PLAYER

I'm letting them out.