GAME NARRATIVE
S U M M I T

PLUNGE INTO STORYTELLING
TRANSITIONING INTO NARRATIVE DESIGN FROM OTHER DISCIPLINES

KHAN

AYESHA KHAN - SENIOR NARRATIVE DESIGNER - SPLASH DAMAGE

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APPLICAN

■ Language skill
■ Quick to learn   e)
■ Gamer since t   s & strategy)
Education :
        ■ Bachelor o

DEGREE IN CREATIVE WRITING YOU SAY?

YES I'LL HAVE FRIES WITH THAT

APPLICANT QUALIFICATIONS

- Language skills: English, French, German, Spa
- Quick to learn new software (programming sk
- Gamer since the Apple IIe (primarily single-pla

Education :

- Bachelor of Fine Arts : Creative Writing
- Bachelor of Arts : History

APPLICANT QUALIFICATIONS

...IT ME

- Language skills: English, French, German, Spanish
- Quick to learn new software (programming skills: none)
- Gamer since the Apple IIe (primarily single-player RPGs & strategy)

Education :

- Bachelor of Fine Arts : Creative Writing
- Bachelor of Arts : History (European, pre-gunpowder)
- Further studies : British theatre, Tolkien, art history, mythology, architecture

Hobbies:

Tabletop & board gaming, LARP, art, singing, travel, cooking,

written & verbal **STORYTELLING**

AYESHA KHAN

The TL;DR

- 12+ years in the industry
- Worked on a bunch of games,
  in a bunch of genres

  Gears: Tactics, APB, Lord of the Rings
  Online: Mines of Moria, Lord of the Rings Online:
  Shadows of Angmar, Wizard101, Game of Thrones:
  Seven Kingdoms, DarkOrbit, Drakensang Online,
  Battlestar Galactica Online, Pirate Storm, Seafight, Hocus Puzzle,
  Skyrama 2, Farmerama, Shards of War...

- Convinced Splash Damage to create a position for me

AND YES, OBVIOUSLY I GO BY "KHAN" PROFESSIONALLY

KHAAAAAN!

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What *is* narrative design
-- and could I do it?

Could I succeed even without any specific
narrative design experience?

How do I get a narrative design job?

IF YOU LOVE STORYTELLING, YOU CAN GET PAID TO DO IT
BY MAKING YOUR EXPERTISE INTO YOUR USP

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SO WHAT THE HECK IS NARRATIVE DESIGN?

Copyright © 2014 Applibot, Inc. / Tatiana Kirgetova / kir-tat.deviantart.com

LEGEND OF THE CRYPTIDS

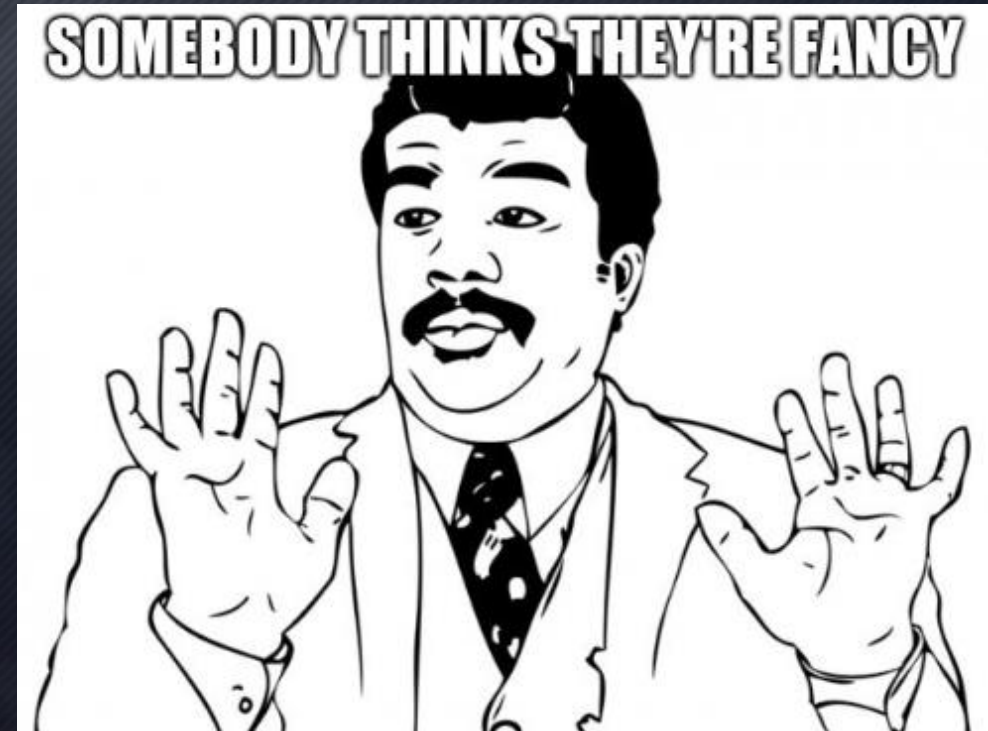# WRITER:
USES WORDS TO TELL STORIES

(groundbreaking info, here...)

NARRATIVE DESIGNER:
USES GAMES TO TELL STORIES

THE ND'S PRIMARY JOB

UNDERSTANDING & USING GAME COMPONENTS

(do they reinforce or contradict the story?)

CON BRIO

DRUMROLL

CYMBAL CRASH

EPIC DRAMATIC

CON YOLO SWAGISSIMO

SPOOKY THERAMIN INTERLUDE

COMBAT, GAME DESIGN, PROGRESSION

LEVEL DESIGN

YOUR MISSION
Should you choose to accept it

UI & UX

MUSIC, VO, AUDIO

CINEMATICS

WRITER:
USES WORDS TO TELL STORIES

from Latin
for "to play":
means
game-related

NARRATIVE DESIGNER:
USES GAMES TO TELL STORIES

no matchy

AND PREVENTS
LUDO-NARRATIVE DISSONANCE

LUDO-NARRATIVE DISSONANCE

YOUR MISSION
Should you choose to accept it

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AUDIO, MUSIC, VOICEOVER

- Prepping recording scripts
- Voice acting
- In-studio recording
  - Sound engineering
  - Directing
- Vendor contract negotiation
  - Composers, actors, recording studios
- Audio design
  - Balancing cue playback
  - Frequency analysis

ART & ANIMATION

- Character design
- World-building
- Art direction
- Infographic & presentation creation
- Outsourcer wrangling
  - Briefs for vendors
  - Constructive feedback
- Technical art skills
  - Working in editor
  - Source control etc.

THEATRE & FILM

- Script writing & / doctoring
- Acting
- Directing
- Scene and action pacing
- Shot framing & composition
- Talent management
- Fight choreography
- Set, costume, prop design
- Vendor contract negotiation

PROGRAMMING & SCRIPTING

- Dialogue database wrangling
- Tool creation & optimisation
- Scripting ALL THE THINGS
- Editor wrangling

(Note: Technical Narrative Design is a fast-growing & in-demand field!)

QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Creating & following procedures
- Getting the right details from the right people
- Creating clear & concise documentation
- Understanding project dev phases
- Being diplomatic to a dev about their pet feature's problems...

BRAND, SALES, MARKETING

- Planning out a marketing campaign
- Creating ad copy
- Designing pitch decks
- Delivering persuasive presentations
- Defining target audiences & personas
- Promoting content virality
- Vendor contract negotiation
  - Outsourced writers, artists, publishers

PRODUCTION & PROJECT MANAGEMENT

- Cat-herding
  - Making people talk to each other
  - Keeping meetings on track
- Creation of roadmaps, budgets, estimates, & scope/cap plans
- Coordinating multiple teams / disciplines working on a feature
- Budgeting for and acquiring outsourced work
- Vendor contract negotiation

GAME DESIGN & SYSTEMS DESIGN

- Feature design
- Feature implementation, iteration, & balancing
- Design documentation
- Team-wide alignment
- Pitch and presentation delivery
- Live event design & implementation
- Metagame design & balancing
- Bug-fixing & troubleshooting

LEVEL DESIGN

- Use of editors and technical software
- Understanding of player paths and level flow
- Scripting
- Coordination with other disciplines
- Artistic skills or understanding
- Bug-fixing & troubleshooting

GAME WRITING

- World-building
- Script writing
- Lore creation and documentation
- Character design
- Dialogue writing & troubleshooting
- UI text creation
- Prepping recording scripts

HOW CAN I SUCCEED WITHOUT ANY NARRATIVE DESIGN EXPERIENCE?

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LEARN YOUR STUFF

Terms to google:
- tecfalabs, narrative theories
- David Kuelz, narrative design tips I wish I'd known
- tomkail.tumblr, irreducible complexity
- YouTube, Extra Credits
- Three act paradigm
- Five act model
- Hero's journey
- Katie Chironis, getting a job in game or narrative design

- ifdb.tads.org
- emshort.blog, game writing, writing IF, narrative
- voiceoverstudiofinder.com
- gamesindustry.biz, game voice casting
- thevoiceovernetwork.com
- Into the Woods, John Yorke
- The Anatomy of Story, John Truby
- The Game Narrative Toolbox, Heusser & Finley

LOOK AT WHAT STORIES GAMES TELL

AND HOW THEY TELL THEM

Like game design, ND is
1 % having an idea
and 90% making people
talk to each other

…the other 9%
is having tech issues

SUCCEEDING IN YOUR FIRST ND JOB

BECOME THE VISION-KEEPER

- Figure out what your teammates think the direction is for their feature
- Use their answers to question the leads
- Use *their* answers to identify mis-alignment and prep more questions
- Ask the Creative Director those questions
- Use your new knowledge to answer the team's questions and create documentation
- Make a game on the wall and keep it updated

GAME ON THE WALL

(break each out into its own more detailed section)

HOW DO I GET A NARRATIVE DESIGN JOB?

CREATING YOUR PORTFOLIO

From: ████████████
<████████@gmail.com>

Sent: Saturday, January 19, 2019 18:57

To: Ayesha Khan
<ayesha.khan@splashdamage.com>

Subject: Thank you

Dear ~~Ayesha~~,

my name is ████████. You were very kind to review my portfolio in early October last year, by request of my friend, ████████, who is a gameplay programmer at Splash Damage.

First, I would like to express my deepest gratitude for your help. Your feedback was extremely detailed and to the point - I have learned a lot from it. In fact, if it weren't for you, my application to Arkane Studios would probably not have gotten off the ground. Thank you!

Reply

HOW DO I GET A NARRATIVE DESIGN JOB?

CREATING YOUR PORTFOLIO

PREPARE 2 PORTFOLIOS:

A MASTER, CONTAINING EVERY POSSIBLE PIECE

A MODULAR TEMPLATE, CONTAINING
MIN. 3 AND MAX. 6 PIECES

PORTFOLIO CONTENTS

EDIT FIRST WITH A MACHETE, THEN WITH A SCALPEL

Writing samples

- Only your best work; doesn't need to be published
- SHORT, concise world-building (setting, lore, character design)
- Character dialogue (cutscene scripts, casting side monologues)
- Combat barks (bonus points if they're formatted as a recording script)
- In-game text (quest journal, Wanted poster, ad brochure)
- Player-facing non-fiction (tutorials, help text, item shop ads, website content)

PORTFOLIO CONTENTS

TRIPLE-CHECK YOUR LINKS AND USER EXPERIENCE

Design samples & relevant skillsets
- Only your best work; doesn't need to be shipped
- Feature / event / quest designs as well as text
- Pen-and-paper prototypes or LARP / D&D modules
- Links to mods, maps, game jam projects (or play-through vids)
  - If collaborative, highlight what YOU did
  - List / explain lessons learned
- Skill ratings with software / tools
- Experience with logistics of getting narrative into games

SAME ITEM

SAME STATS

The ___"LotR"___ section is an example

TITLE OF SECTION

of ___dialogue___ in a ___fantasy___ setting,

TYPE OF GAME TEXT   GENRE

where I had a maximum of __10__ lines

NUMBER

per ___mission___ to establish ___the stakes___,

PLAY SESSION-RELATED NOUN   STORY ELEMENT

___dooooooom___, and ___pickling___ to a

NOUN   VERB

primarily ___rainbow-barfing___ audience.

TARGET AUDIENCE ADJECTIVE PHRASE

By contrast, in the ___"Kittens"___ section,

TITLE OF SECTION

PORTFOLIO FORMATTING

CURATED, USER-FRIENDLY NAVIGATION

Make each section's purpose clear
- PDF of samples chosen for *this* application
  - Only submit a Word doc if it's to a Microsoft studio
- Perfect spelling & grammar required
  - Don't use languages you don't speak in your samples
  - Google Translate is not enough
- TINY intro spelling out what skillset each section demonstrates
- Organise by genre / setting, then by skillset
- Format sections cleanly and condense images

JOB SEARCH KEYWORDS

narrative designer
- duh

game designer
- you'll get a **lot** of irrelevant results

creative designer

game writer

game experience designer

content designer
- primarily in the USA

live event designer

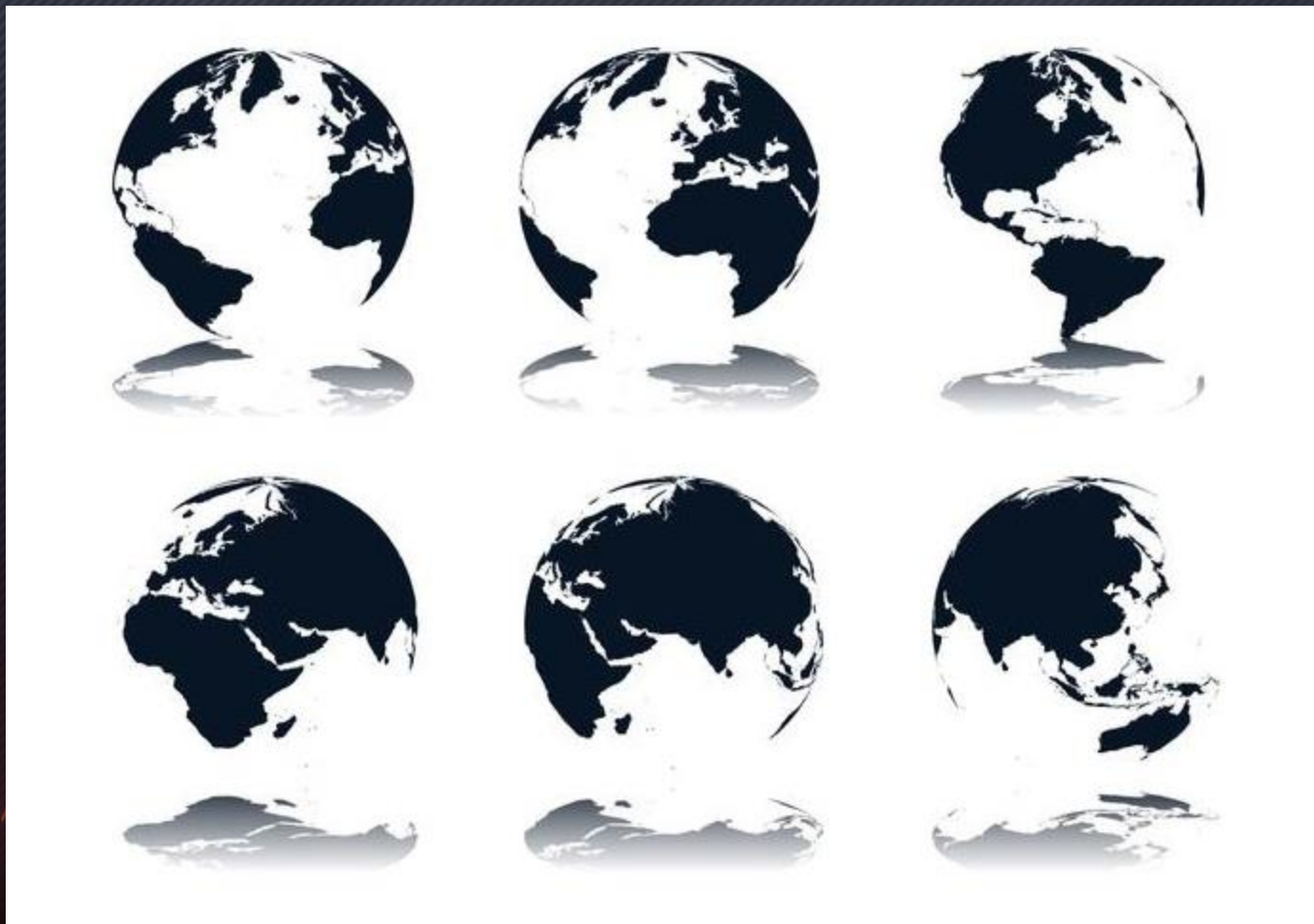## LOOK FOR INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN THOSE AND:

Cinematics, Audio, Voiceover, World-building, Character design, Cross-discipline, & all their synonyms

SALARY & RELOCATION

BREXIT

INDIE & FREELANCE

For those who are willing to sacrifice stability for creative control

- Values cross-discipline skillsets
- Less financial stability, more creative control
- Get comfortable with advertising jargon: you are now the marketing department
- Requires extreme dedication and drive
- Requires actively promoting your game, sometimes for years
- No protective layers of bureacracy between you and The Public

I was working with a single pre-supplied HTML template:

Client: That's great. Each one of the four pages is different so make the layout for each one different using the same template.

Me: So different, but the same?

Client: Yeah, obviously.

Feb 08, 2019

Tweet   Like 3   4 Comments

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AAA STUDIO

Makes expensive games with large teams

- Values specialists
- More likely to have a narrative design department
- More likely to demand experience from candidates
- Less likely to provide work-life balance
- Less creative control

GAME MILL

Medium-to-large companies developing casual and/or free-to-play games for mobile, browser, Facebook etc

- **Great** portfolio-builders
- Value cross-discipline skillsets
- Multiple projects on the go at once
- Often have high churn
- Corporate attitudes & company cultures (not always a bad thing!)
- Will likely have to explain narrative design even more than usual

CO-DEV / WORK-FOR-HIRE STUDIO

Outsourcing vendors who develop games on spec

ASSOCIATE
GAME DESIGNER

→

LEAD DESIGNER

OMG

Hax

NARRATIVE-ADJACENT GIGS

Relevant experience:

- Proofreading / script doctoring
- Copywriting (ads, web content...)
- Project management for film, print publishing, etc
- Teaching your language
- Working for outsourcers
  - Translation/localisation services
  - Art, animation, cinematics vendors
  - Recording studios (VO, perf cap, mo-cap)

EAT
SLEEP
GRIND XP
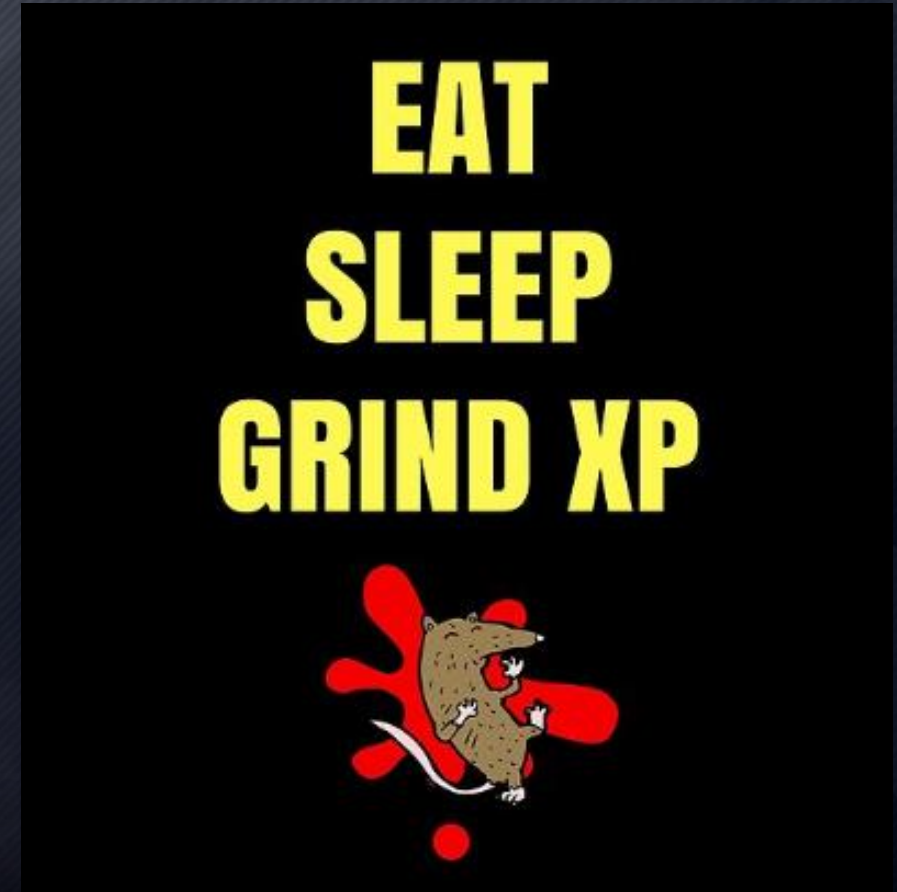
SPECULATIVE APPLICATIONS

WHEN CHUTZPAH PAYS OFF

Convince a studio it needs a narrative designer
- Hunt for a studio
- Find and research dev team leads
  - If you have 5+ years in the industry, Director level & up
- Ask for an informational interview
- Write a pain letter
- Come prepared to help them say "yes"

SPECULATIVE APPLICATIONS

HUNTING FOR POTENTIAL STUDIOS

Figure out who will need a narrative designer before they do!

- Studios or funded startups with narrative-heavy projects
- Recent purchases of IPs
- Studios aggressively staffing up Cinematics or writing teams
- Ambitious studios trying to grow (III→AAA, AA→AAA, casual F2P→subscription models…)
- Games with great mechanics but bad VO/storytelling
- Dev studios or publishers of successful games with lower review scores due to thin stories or bad translation
- Studios without narrative departments that you *really* want to work for (as the Germans say: "don't ask, don't get!")

SPECULATIVE APPLICATIONS

PAIN LETTERS

This is basically also how you write a cover letter

- Start with WHY they need narrative
- Better story = USP = better reviews = more sales
- Narrative themed events make more money than plain sales
- Explain your plan
  - How ND would fit into their existing project(s)
  - Offer a probation period or a 1-year contract
  - Prepare a list of what they would need to decide:
    - which department you'd be in
    - who your line manager would be
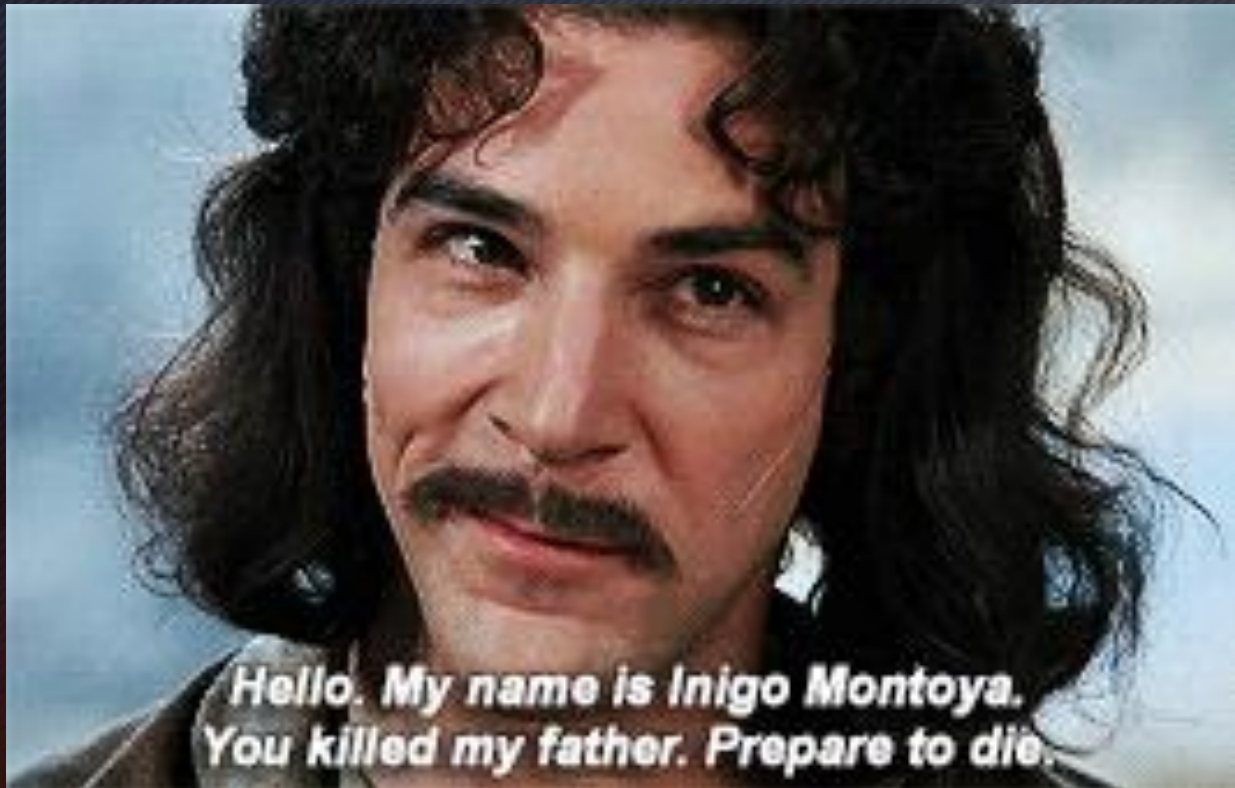   - who would be giving you creative feedback

INTERVIEW PREP

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GAME TEXT EXAMPLES

- Menu items
- Buttons & labels
- Tutorial pop-ups
- Lore, flavor, & Easter Eggs
  - in-game (quest journals, historical context in the Civilopedia…)
  - website (character backgrounds)
- Puzzles & riddles
- Player-facing info
- Live event splash screens

- Scripts for cinematic cutscenes or voiceover / combat barks
- Store item descriptions that include sales pitches
- Setting-appropriate quest names, chapter titles, character names, region names, weapon names, skill names… so many names…

(player-facing descriptions of each item, too)

DESIGN TEST QUESTIONS & TASKS

- Design a new weapon / enemy / character for Popular Game Mode or Franchise X

- Create a whitebox level for Popular Franchise Y, calling out enemy spawns, loot drops, and player's path through it

- Explain what the best and worst aspects of your favourite character or class in PvP Game Z are, then say how you'd improve them if you could only change or add one thing

- Here are two characters' bios; write X lines of dialogue between them to convey Y information

- Proofread the following passage which appears to have been translated from Russian to English by someone who apparently spoke neither

- Proofread the following passage which appears to be grammatically perfect (hints: take your time, look for homonyms, use copy-editing how-to resources, and don't neglect to check the spacing, fonts, and punctuation!)

- Pitch a new game mode / character / region for This Studio's Most Lucrative Game, focusing on how they / it would fit into the existing lore and tone of the game

IN **CONCLUSION...**

- Your current skillset from another discipline is your unique selling point for applying to a narrative design job
- You will succeed if you love language, come prepared, ask good questions, and learn on the job
- You will succeed harder by using soft skills, vision-keeping, and adding narrative with the game's existing mechanics
- Your portfolio will determine if you're hired or not
- You CAN find or make a role for yourself even if it's not titled "narrative designer"

YOU LOVE STORYTELLING
KEEP THE ABOVE IN MIND AND YOU CAN GET PAID FOR IT

QUESTIONS?

KHAN
@ethnicmutt

HEIDER-SIMMEL ANIMATION

Bonus slide
just for those who stuck
around for the Q & A!

Vladimir Lorenzo 1 year ago

Its the kitchen scene from jurassic park

👍 10 👎   REPLY

luke lee 1 year ago

It looks like some type of an abusive relationship.

👍 4 👎   REPLY

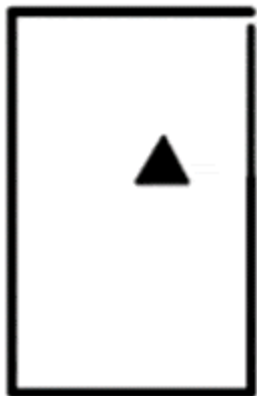**Cam Babcock** 1 month ago

Characters:
Big Triangle: Dorothy (male)
Small Triangle: Hubert (female)
Ball: Gafar (male)

Script: (Beginning of Film)
Dorothy enters his house: "Oh boy, I can't wait to play s

Gafar and Hubert enter the server: Hubert says, "Yo Do
Pizzeria with your eyes closed"

Or:
an illustration of
how gameplay
will tell a story
with or without
you

SHAPE MOVEMENT IS ENTIRELY RANDOM AND GENERATED BY A.I.

Think About It 2 years ago

Angry drunk dad doesn't approve of his daughter's boyfriend.

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