



# Narrative Design Portfolio

by Anthony Jauneaud

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# Overview

**I truly believe that the narrative design of a game has to be either the most visible thing or the least visible one.**

Games like *Uncharted* or *L.A. Noire* put before everything else the dialogues, the characters, the world the player is in. But when the focus of the game is on other aspects, the role of the narration has to be a persistent and steady humming, like the one you hear after a grenade goes off.

A few months ago, **I decided to write my portfolio for a game that was yet to be released**, a famous MMO TPS by a major developer. My goal was to work on different aspects of the game and not only dialogues. It was for me a challenge as well as a fun experience.

First, **I had to figure out the themes of the game** and I saw two paths that could be taken on this game. The story takes place in New York City, three weeks after the collapse of the city due to a virus. The army tries to keep peace and deals with mercenaries, terrorists and survivors.

The first was obviously **the ghost of 9/11**, a terrible event that made an impression on all of us. The images we saw twelve years ago are still very vivid in our minds: those huge buildings falling like a house of cards; the smoke rushing through the streets like a torrent; the ash everywhere, on every face; New Yorkers praying and gathering around candles at night...

The second path that could be used is the origin of New York. It is a cosmopolite city, inhabited by people from all over the world. And this is a wonderful opportunity. Different people mean different cultures, different ways to deal with tragedy. Some will form groups to fight or to protect, other will be even more alone. **Gods can last for centuries and then disappear in a blink of an eye.**

The narrative design proposition you are about to read gives you different views on what stories to tell and how. **"The Trumpets of Jericho"** is a series of short stories about several characters all around New York City. **"The Notes"** is a collection of information (safe codes, map to a weapon cache, etc.) that can be useful... or dangerous. **"Wall of Faces"** gives the player small quests and urge them to find missing New Yorkers.

Finally, I wrote four **scenes**—dialogues between the player and his or her teammates.

# “The Trumpets of Jericho”

## General information:

- “The Trumpets of Jericho” are short stories. They do not have any impact of the gameplay.
- Every character has 5 short stories. Usually they write it themselves, sometimes a specific short story can be written by someone else.
- The stories are found by looting places, dead bodies, enemies. Maybe a limit of one per day.
- Players can get the stories in any order: so each short story must have a surprise or a twist. If they get the first story and then the last, they must ask themselves: “how did this happened?”
- Due to the MMO nature of the game, maybe those stories can be shared with other players (trading, selling, etc.).
- Some stories are lighter or have a happy ending. Sometimes a character will talk about another. Some stories can cross.
- These short stories are the equivalent of an entire mythology you’ll find in games like *Dragon Age* or *Mass Effect*. Instead of talking about legends, historical facts or discoveries, we talk about the people of New York City and how they struggle through the events of this game.
- We can imagine that for each story, the player character has a specific dialog and talk about it with his/hers teammates.

## A few characters:

1. **Ross:** a middle-aged conspirationist. He’s sure he is spied on. He believes he discovered something important. He kills the firemen that try to rescue him from the Black Friday events, making him a wanted criminal.
2. **Emily:** a pregnant woman. Clumsy and unlucky, she is regularly in grave danger. Ultimately, she’s saved and each time, she promises to give the baby the name of her savior.
3. **Anastasia:** an old woman living ber herself in the same flat for 50 years. She never left New York City, goes to the same deli everyday, and play crossword puzzles like others go to church.
4. **Jean-Luc:** a French trader. He came here to become rich, to live the American dream. A few months before the Black Friday events, he was fired but lied to everybody—his friends in the States, his family in France. The collapse of the city he dreamed of will give him a chance to hide his lies.
5. **Amira:** a young woman from Morocco. Intern at Lenox Hill Hospital, she has to face hatred. On day 2, Amira fails to save a woman’s life and her husband comes back and threaten her. He starts to follow her everywhere.
6. **Bernard:** an Englishman, visiting New York for the first time. Tries to find his son who

lives in the city. We gradually understand that his son does not like him and that if Bernard is doing everything he could to get to his son, the opposite is not true.

7. **Gary:** a rising Broadway star that got his dream shattered by the Black Friday events. The Black Friday happened two days before the opening night of the musical he plays in. He has the main part and it was supposed to be a solid hit. His career, after years of lousy roles and small jobs was about to take off...
8. **Cindy:** a dancer, she's in love with Gary since a long time. Her life revolves around Gary's. After the Black Friday events, she is looking for him. She discovers what Gary had to do to "survive" in New York City as an escort for producers and Broadway stars. She realize that he'll never be in love with her.
9. **Abigail:** a blind woman that usually lives in the metro. She survives the disease and uses her skills to go on living. She lives underneath the city, far from the chaos. When a little girl tries to steal her food and shelter, she understands she has to leave the city.
10. **Bruno:** an aged art dealer who, in the midst of the chaos, tries to steal paintings from a museum in New York. During those five days, he let go his shy and quiet personality and discovers in himself new feelings: greed, hate and violence.

# Amira's Story

Amira's story is told through e-mails sent to her mother, who still lives in Morocco.

## First day

Hello mama,

I'm sorry I missed your call last night. I was out, buying presents for the kids. Everything is so cheap during Black Friday, it's crazy. Some malls reminded me of the souk in Casa. Everybody was shouting and fighting to pick up DVD players and games out of bargain bins. You have to see it to believe it! It's funny how anybody on this planet likes a good deal. I imagined Baba trying to haggle the cashier to get 5 or 10 dollars out of a bookshelf.

I miss you so much :) I hope you're fine.

I'm stuck at the hospital for 30 hours now, I'll call you later this week.

Amira.

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## Second day

Mama, I tried to call but it's like 2 in Morocco, so I'll write you this quick mail...

A woman died today. Very young, my age. She was ran over, a block away from the hospital. His husband was there, furious, shouting on me and on everyone else.

Do you remember when I told you I wanted to do my internship in New York? You told me it was not a place for a girl like me, for a Muslim. Well, you were maybe right. Since I'm here, no one ever said anything wrong to me. Until the husband. They were pretty harsh words.

I miss you. I did not cry in front of him of course. The whole team was great with me, they said it was not my fault. But for the first time, I really want to be back home. With all of you.

Amira.

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## Third day

Hi mama,

Any news about Baba? I hope he's fine and that he will take his medications. This is really important, he must follow the doctor's advice.

We are facing a strange epidemic here, the hospital is filled with sick people. I went home for a couple of hours, took a shower and ran back to the hospital. I'm tired, I'm stressed but this is part of the work mama. I'm glad I came here.

I couldn't even finish this mail in ONE shot. I had to stop my break to help a bunch of kids. They are really sick. Do not worry for me mama, please, you know how it works: patients are always sick, doctors are always healthy.

Twahachtek,  
Amira

(I miss the keyboard back home...)

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#### **Fourth day**

Mama,

Please, don't panic. You know how the medias are: yes, we have a situation here in New York but I'm a doctor, I have access to drugs and supplies. The police told us to stay inside the hospital so we are working like crazy, taking naps whenever we can. The telephone lines are not working but please say to my brother that I'll send him his console as soon as possible.

Do you remember the man who insulted me the other day? He's back, he's really sick. I hope he will get better. I am doing everything I can to save him. This is why I came here.

Amira.

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#### **Fifth day**

Mama,

Don't get mad. I wish I could call you but here, nothing really works anymore. We have enough electricity to use an old communication station and use Internet. I wish I could call you. I wish I could say that I'll be back in Morocco in January as planned. I wish I could see the whole family once again.

The man who insulted attacked me this morning. He stole a knife and... Well, let's not talk about this. I really wanted you to see Central Park in Fall. The colors are so amazing, I KNOW you would have loved it. It reminds me of this old cafe in Rabat. The one with the cardamom tea.

I am dictating this mail to my friend Elsa. She will contact you as soon as the city is under control. It will be in a few days, I'm sure. I love you.

Bye bye 'alikh, wada'an

Amira

## “The Notes”

MMO have usually very specific ways to deal with communication between players. They can have positive communication (chat or trade by example), they can have negative communication (by fighting and killing each other). But in both cases, the game needs both players to be playing at the same time.

What if we could come up with a system that allows asynchronous gameplay?

“The Notes” is this system.

### **How it works:**

First, Player A will find a clue, a NOTE, about a special place. It can be a room that is locked, a old and rusty safe, a hidden safe behind a painting, and so on.

The NOTE will allow player A to pick up any loot inside.

Then, Player A can set a trap: a bomb that blows up, an alarm that goes off...

Player A puts the NOTE somewhere (another corpse, inside a cupboard or a drawer, etc.) and when Player B arrives, he does not know if it is trapped or not.

The only way to know: to check out and be really careful.

These NOTES will contain information such as:

- A safe code;
- A door combination;
- The place where the door key is hidden;
- And so on.

Because the players can know for sure the NOTE was used and/or the place was trapped, they have to weight two options:

- They try to get the loot (and may get it, or may be harmed);
- They do not try to get the loot (and can put back the NOTE, allowing someone else to deal with the dilemma).

Of course, the loot has to be really important or else no player will ever try to get it.

## “Wall of Faces”

Players are offered everyday a different people to track. They are working like bounties only they are about missing people.

We can create random flyers that will be generated everyday a allow players to have their own objectives.

### Information on the flyer:

- Name, Surname
- Age
- Sex
- Ethnicity
- Last seen
- Reward
- Please contact
- Personal sentence

### How to create a flyer ?

Each flyer follows a scenario. Scenarios have a fixed structure that we will fill with random elements. Possible scenarios:

- A wife is looking for her husband;
- A husband is looking for his wife;
- A mother is looking for her children;
- A grandmother is looking for her family;
- A man is looking for her co-worker;
- And so on.

Then, we fill logically these scenarios with random elements. In the first case, the wife will always be a woman between 18 and 80 year-old, looking for a man the roughly the same age. In the case of a grandmother looking for a family, we know she will be at least 55, and that she'll looking for someone aged under 25. And so on.

### Smart links:

- The name and surname are linked to the ethnicity (by example, someone named Patel will be Indian) and sex (obviously, someone named Sonia is a woman).
- The age is linked to whom is looking for the missing person (a 8 year-old boy will be looked after by his parents or his older sister, a 86 year-old man will be looked after by relatives or a neighbor).
- The personal sentence has a link with the age, the ethnicity

### Random elements:



- Name, Surname: are picked up in a database that will allow us to be sure the name is generic enough not to get by accident a “Bruce Willis”. This info is linked to the ethnicity.
- Age: random but linked to the scenario.
- Sex: random but linked to the scenario.
- Ethnicity: random but linked to the name and surname, and may be linked to the scenario.
- Last seen: random but can be used to make the player go to specific places. We can also use this information to guide the player to new areas or areas where he/she never goes to. We can link also some areas of New York City to ethnicities, as many Asian people will go missing in Chinatown (because they lived there in the first place).
- Reward: the quantity of money or loot the player will receive. The further the place is from the base, the bigger the reward.
- Please contact: this info is “NAME, SURNAME (RELATION)”.
  - Linked to the scenario obviously.
  - Relation is a little piece of information on who is looking for the missing person. It can be a sister, a brother, a father, a mother, a neighbor, a co-worker, a cousin, etc.
  - Depending on the relation, the NAME and SURNAME will change. If it is a sister or a brother, the SURNAME will be the same. It has to be a different surname if the two persons are just co-workers.
- Personal sentence: A little narrative bit, that will allow this “fetch quest” to feel a little bit more real.
  - Linked to the scenario.
  - It can be a sentence like “The kids miss you” or “I’m not mad anymore, you can come back”. Each personal sentence is linked to the relation with the missing person.
  - Age and ethnicity have also an impact on the selection: we can imagine a case in which a 6 year-old is looking for his dad and will misspell a word or two; a case in which an Italian wife looking for her husband will add “te amo”. And so on.

### **And then, what?**

Then, the player has to go and find clues about the missing person. Sometimes it is proof that he or she managed to escape New York City and is somewhere else. Sometimes it is proof that he or she is dead. In both cases, the player gets his/her reward.

# Scenes

The team is made up of three soldiers.

- **Captain Henry Banks** is the player character. He is searching a building with his team. A solid man, professional but not a tight-ass soldier.
- **1st Lieutenant Max “Clinton” Hendricks**, 30 something, big mouth and big muscles.
- **1st Lieutenant Anna Gibbons**, 27, from a family of soldiers, tough and fierce. She’s not the kind of girl you mess with.

My objective here is to create light dialogues that will compensate for the dark setting of the game. Here, we have three stereotypical soldiers and they have to be immediately recognizable.

It is with time and more dialogues and scenes that they can get more depth, and grow with the player.

## Scene 1

The player just read a piece of story related to Amira, the Moroccan intern.

**“CLINTON”**

*(really sorry)*

Poor girl. It must have been tough for her...

**BANKS**

Oh please Clinton. You’re saying only because she’s a girl.

**“CLINTON”**

No! Come on Banks. You know me, I can feel, I’m a human being.

**BANKS**

I know you. I’ve seen you in Iraq. I know how you deal with civilians.

**GIBBONS**

*(curious)*

Oh, you two ‘ve been in Iraq together?

**BANKS**

This guy... this guy could not care less about civilians. They could be thirsty, they could have stepped on a mine, Clinton would just ignore them.

**"CLINTON"**

It's not true!

**BANKS**

*(not listening to Clinton's rant)*

Unless! Unless the civilian was a girl. Then, he would do everything to save her. Everything.

**"CLINTON"**

It's a fucking lie Gibbons!

**BANKS**

Admit it Clinton. Be a grown-up.

**"CLINTON"**

Dammit! I'm helping HALF the population of this planet, isn't that enough for you?

**GIBBONS**

Quite the knight in shining armor. I like that.

**"CLINTON"**

*(serious)*

Really?

*Gibbons laughs.*

**BANKS**

Come on, let's go guys.

End.

## Scene 2

Same characters. This dialog occurs when they are trying to enter the Statue of Liberty.

**"CLINTON"**

I think I shouldn't say that but... It's the first time I am here.

**BANKS**

What do you mean Clinton?

**"CLINTON"**

I've never been inside the Statue.

**BANKS**

I have so many jokes in my head right now, it's hard to pick one.

**"CLINTON"**

Please Banks. I'm serious. It's something here! I didn't pictured the inside to be like this...

**BANKS**

What... I'm afraid to ask but... What did you pictured?

**"CLINTON"**

I dunno. Maybe... organs?

**BANKS**

You mean, like a giant uterus and veins everywhere?

**"CLINTON"**

Yeah.

*A pause.*

**BANKS**

You are sick Clinton. Really sick.

**GIBBONS**

I'm sorry to ruin the mood, but we have four tangos in sight, guys.

End.

### Scene 3

Gibbons and Banks are patrolling without Hendricks.

**GIBBONS**

Can I ask you something, Banks?

**BANKS**

Yeah, sure.

**GIBBONS**

Where does Hendricks' nickname come from?

**BANKS**

Huh. It's not a nice story.

**GIBBONS**

Should I ask him directly?

**BANKS**

Well, you see... When we were serving in Iraq, he was skyping with his girlfriend one night and she...

**GIBBONS**

Yes?

**BANKS**

How should I put it... She was having fun with a cigar.

**GIBBONS**

And you caught them?

**BANKS**

The whole squad did. Yes. And they called him "Clinton".

**GIBBONS**

*(not impressed)*

OK. I thought it was something more humiliating like... He likes to play the saxophone.

**BANKS**

Yeah... but no, it's less weird than that.

End.

#### **Scene 4**

The three characters arrive in a room filled with bodies. They were robbed and killed by a group of thugs that roam in New York City.

**BANKS**

It was a bloodbath. Pockets and bag are empty.  
Everything's gone.

**"CLINTON"**

It looks like they were executed. A bullet in the back  
of the neck.

**GIBBONS**

Some of them are not even 15. Who are these people?

**"CLINTON"**

*(in a whisper)*

Animals. No less. No more.

**GIBBONS**

Wow. You can be really serious when you want,  
Hendricks.

**"CLINTON"**

From time to time. Also, I'm trying to figure out a  
good comeback for later. When I'll be killing the  
sons of bitches who did this.

**BANKS**

If you do, please kill us too. Your comebacks are  
usually awful.

End.