

# **Narrative Design Sample**

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# Character One-Pagers

What follows are examples of character one-pagers from different types of game stories.

## Dirk - The Rabid Dog

*This character is for a gritty fantasy, action-adventure.*

### **Fast Facts**

- Had a horrible case of laryngitis as a teen that severely damaged his vocal cords so he can barely speak above a whisper.
- His home has started to double as an animal shelter.
- Tricks the village kids into believing he keeps a bag of his enemies' teeth but it's just bleached corn.

### **Bio**

Eldest of the village chief and under constant scrutiny, Dirk was raised under a lot of pressure and the few times he cracked have forever marked him. Even now, when helping milk cows or handing out clothes to children, people whisper about that time he was younger and almost beat a boy to death for hurting the village stray.

The times since then that he's returned home bathed in the blood of his father's wars only confirm what everyone seems to find true: Dirk is not worthy of being heir – closer to a rabid dog than a man. Much more favored is his younger brother – ever-charismatic, and wildly irresponsible with a thirst for power that often disturbs Dirk.

No matter what others say, Dirk has always stood as a guardian for his people and will do whatever is necessary to protect them. Even at the cost of his humanity.

### **Lines**

*... aye.*

*\*to a kid\* Breathe, don't let fly until you know your direction, little arrow.*

*Fields need water, not blood.*

# Calliope - Hell's Angel

*This character is for an irreverent, rogue-lite adventure.*

## **Fast Facts**

- Fidgets with her demonic friendship bracelet when she's nervous.
- Once broke her leg falling out the window of a senior's room she was 'visiting'.
- Kept the matches her mom gave her.

## **Bio**

Calliope had never met her father. This wouldn't have bothered her, but she felt she'd never met her mother either. She was 11 when she was left at a strict, all-girls, Catholic boarding school – her mother giving little explanation and shoving whatever was in her pockets into Calliope's hands as a parting gift. She was gone shortly after, leaving Calliope with a half-stick of gum, a set of matches, a pack of cigarettes, and the vague sense she'd done something wrong. She handled it like a champ though.

Two months into her forced enrollment, when an IRS representative showed up at the school with questions about her mother they had to speak to the now-dubbed Cal through a slot in a wrought iron door. Cal casually explained her confinement as a business transaction gone wrong but the school matron had much more to say. Fights, smuggling, and an unbearable sassiness – Calliope was already testing their Lord's patience.

If anything has changed as she's gotten older, it's the diversity of ways Cal tests that patience. She's kept up with the fighting, smuggling, and sass but has recently added demonic summonings to the list. Designed with her similarly wayward friends as a prank in the matron's office, Calliope took the joke too far and accidentally summoned Satan himself, binding them together with a friendship bracelet from Claire's and a pact to sow chaos wherever she went.

Discovered by the matron, threatened with expulsion, and starting to realize how badly she's screwed up, Calliope has been on a journey of redemption – trying to repent to the angels that now plague her, however disastrous that always seems to go.

## **Lines**

*If I knew you were this much of an idiot, I'd have started a conversation with the lamp instead.*

*Oh joy, a holy war.*

*I just want to do normal things for once! Like get a gas station slushie and have food poisoning for a week.*

# Gameplay Script

*Following is an example of a cinematic and level dialogue gameplay script.*

## Pack Opening & Closing

*Project Description: **Pack** is a 3D adventure set in the wilderness. We play as Reese, a traumatized former search-and-rescue dog, as she works to get her new human, Esther through the woods after a brutal mountain lion attack. The two struggle to come together.*

*This scene is from the very start of the game.*

### OPENING

EXT. FOREST TRAIL - MORNING

[Cinematic]

Warm rays of fresh morning light stream through a dense canopy of leaves and branches, alighting a forest rich with old-growth trees and brush. Hardly visible, a thin hiking trail weaves itself into the forest's haphazard tapestry.

Sure-footed steps grow near, crunching dirt rhythmically beneath them. ESTHER, 26, walks cheerfully along the path. She stops and looks around, closing her eyes and taking a deep breath.

ESTHER

Man, look at this weather! It's great to finally be back out here.

Esther opens her eyes and grins widely. She grips the straps of her backpack in excitement.

ESTHER

What do you think, Reese?

Esther turns to look behind her and pauses a moment. Her brows furrow slightly as her head tilts to the side and her smile softens.

Further down the path, REESE, 5, a large but svelte dog is focused on gingerly picking her way along the trail. She attempts to hop over a fallen log but stumbles clumsily. Esther huffs a gentle laugh before whistling. Reese looks up at her.

ESTHER

Come on, there's a clearing up ahead where we can rest a bit before the summit.

Esther turns away and continues up the trail.

GAMEPLAY Player takes control of Reese, the dog, guiding her along the path after Esther. There are various plants, rocks, and debris for Reese to sniff and paw at hesitantly.

[Level Dialogue]

ESTHER

I'm glad the weather cleared up -- I was worried we'd have to postpone again.

When Reese nears the medium-sized boulders, Esther pauses in thought in front of them.

ESTHER

Huh. I don't remember these being here. All the rain must have washed them out.

Esther climbs over them nimbly. Reese follows.

GAMEPLAY Reese is introduced to vaulting.

ESTHER

You know, last time I was out here this trail was better maintained. I guess not that many people hike it anymore. That just makes it our little secret, so don't tell anyone, Reese!

Reese enters a flat clearing after Esther, looking cautious.

ESTHER

And here we are! Perfect spot for a granola bar.

[Cinematic]

Esther places her backpack on the ground by a rock, looking through it as Reese explores the clearing.

Reese focuses on sniffing at a bug on a plant near Esther who looks at her and smiles. Esther starts to reach down to pet Reese's head, but the bug flies off suddenly, causing

Reese to flinch back and yelp in surprise. Esther frowns and retracts her hand, looking away.

ESTHER

Hey...

Reese looks up to see Esther holding a stick. Esther wiggles it slightly and smiles hesitantly.

ESTHER

I know this is all pretty... new. But this clearing is... was...

Esther tenses and glances away for a moment. She sighs and refocuses on Reese, her smile brittle.

ESTHER

I have it on good authority that this is an excellent clearing to play fetch in.

She wiggles the stick again.

ESTHER

So, what do you say?

Reese sniffs at the stick.

GAMEPLAY Reese is prompted to sit.

[Level Dialogue]

ESTHER

Alright!

Esther throws the stick and the two gradually start to play joyfully together.

GAMEPLAY Reese runs to retrieve and pick up the stick, returning it to Esther. Esther begins to run around and throw the stick. Occasionally, Esther hides and Reese uses her sense of smell to find her.

Esther throws the stick and it lands next to her backpack. Reese runs over and, as she goes to grab the stick, notices a small stuffed dog toy in Esther's pack. She sniffs at it in curiosity.

ESTHER

HEY!

Esther rushes over, visibly upset.

ESTHER

Stop! That doesn't belong to you!

[Cinematic]

Esther wrenches her backpack away from Reese and glares at her. Reese flinches and backs away skittishly, twisting her body and raising her hackles in defense.

Esther looks into her backpack, gripping it tighter for a moment before her brows furrow and she zips it shut quickly. She swallows and gives Reese an apologetic look.

ESTHER

I'm--

Esther sighs heavily. Reese unfurls from her defensive pose.

ESTHER

Let's keep going.



*The following scene takes place near the end of the game. Reese and Esther have been through countless challenges together and formed an unbreakable bond. In the gameplay preceding this they conquered the mountain lion that's been hounding them.*

## CLOSING

EXT. FOREST OUTSIDE CAVE - NIGHT

[Level Dialogue]

Reese and Esther lean heavily against one another. Esther's arm is covered in blood and glistens almost black in the moonlight.

GAMEPLAY Reese urges Esther into slow steps forward. Reese struggles to vault over a log with her bad leg and Esther helps lift her over it. They help each other move forward.

Esther stops against a tree and breathes raggedly.

ESTHER

I-- I just need...

GAMEPLAY Reese wraps the frayed dog lead around Esther. When she goes to use it to pull Esther forward, Reese's injured back leg collapses and she yelps. Reese drags herself up and tries again, whining deeply as she leads Esther.

GAMEPLAY Reese tries to pull Esther up a small hill but the damaged leash snaps and both fall to the ground. Reese struggles to stand and make her way back to Esther.

Esther clutches Reese's side.

ESTHER

Reese... I--

Esther chokes out a sob.

ESTHER

You're such a good girl. Such a good... and I love-- fuck...

Esther's hand falls to the side. Reese whines.

GAMEPLAY Reese grabs Esther's hood and drags her up the hill.

Reese collapses against Esther with a yelp. Esther runs her fingers through the fur on Reese's head, calming.

ESTHER

That's okay. It's okay. You did good, Reese. You did so good.

Reese whines and pants. Tears run down Esther's face. Reese looks up weakly and licks Esther's face. Esther laughs wetly, voice thick.

ESTHER

I-- I love you, Reese. I love you.

Esther buries her face into Reese's fur. Both start to go still, losing energy. Reese's eyes begin to shut as Esther's voice echoes in her ears. Everything fades to black.

ESTHER (ECHO)

I love you. I love you.

Distantly, a car horn sounds. Reese opens her eyes and slowly looks up. Below them, car headlights are meandering through the forest.

Reese pulls herself to her feet and nudges Esther but finds her completely unconscious.

GAMEPLAY Reese grabs Esther's hood once more and drags her down the hill. She struggles to bring her to the side of the road. The car passes them by. Reese stumbles out into the road and barks weakly. The vehicle continues and she collapses. She barks again, louder. She fights the urge to pass out.

With one more bark, the car stops and Reese hears the sound of people getting out. She whines, falling unconscious.

# Voice Lines

## Character Barks

What follows are examples of character barks with various triggers and tones.

### Character: Rapunzel

#### Happy to See Her Prince

- Be still my trembling heart, your balm is here.
- Oh! To hold you once more.
- Stars burst in my chest now that you are near.

#### Irritated That the Prince is Late

- The face of the clock is more familiar to me than yours now.
- Careful you do not spend all the patience I have for you.
- Were there other towers you saw fit to visit first?

#### Disappointed It's *That* Prince

- Were I any other woman or you any other man.
- Please, relieve me of your presence.
- I pray you are lost and not here for me

### Character: Disaster Reality Cooking Show Contestant

#### Gathering Ingredients

- Is this salt or sugar? SALT OR SUGAR!?
- Wait, I was supposed to melt the butter?
- I'm going to have an aneurysm -- how many tablespoons are in a gallon?

#### Mixing Ingredients

- Every kitchen is hell's kitchen.
- Thinking there's more than one reason my place isn't in the kitchen
- Okay, step uh... shit, what step was I on?

#### Time is Running Out

- Can't I just put whipped cream on a carrot and be done?
- Fuck it, we're having water for dinner.
- Expect nothing and you'll still be disappointed.

## Character: Cowpoke

### Getting a Drink

- Ain't nothin' like fresh dirt in your lungs.
- Fortune ain't never smiled on me.
- I ain't got much to say.

### Annoyed by a Braggart

- Hot damn, you talk to your mama with that mouth?
- Couldn't hit the barn side of a broad if ya tried.
- Louder than two skeletons fuckin' on a tin roof.

### Ready for a Shoot-Out

- Just tell me where to shoot.
- Play me some'a them honkie-tonk blues.
- Sunshine all the time will get ya a desert.

# Location Description

## Atlassa - The Wandering Country

*This location write-up is inspired by artwork on the right by Paolo Puggioni.*

Atlassa sits atop a mighty stone tor rising from the sea. Comprised of one city spanning a seven-block radius, this mounted pinnacle is the smallest country in the world, which it connects to via a slim bridge.



If asked about the country's origin, older folks on the tor will proudly weave the tale of the Stalwart King. Millennia ago, Atlassa was part of an entirely different continent across the Goshlyn Ocean some 35 million miles away. This continent was plagued by constant warfare from a tyrant emperor who sought conquest over all, including Atlassa. Over time, this emperor had chipped away at Atlassa's border until all that remained was a single city – which she was primed to conquer.

Despairing what subjugation under the emperor's rule would mean for the last of his people, King Rowen made a deal with the only god who would heed his cries: Selist, the goddess of last chances. She granted Rowen the chance to save his country by turning him into a towering titan at the cost of a massively shortened lifespan – dwindling his time left to a mere week. With enemy forces starting their siege and little time to waste, Rowen grasped the ground below him and, using all his strength, tore his country from its grasp.

Seeking safety, King Rowen braved the perilous ocean waters. For six days he weathered colossal waves, feral storms, and cutthroat currents as he trekked miles upon miles. On the evening of the seventh day, with failing hope and body, he caught sight of land. With the sun dipping below the horizon, King Rowen mustered the last of his energy to reach the new continent but found himself stopping – unable to take the final step as his life drained from him. He refused to let his country fall, however, and instead of crumbling his body turned to stone where it stood, forever bearing the weight of Atlassa.

### Key Features:

- Carved into the stone base is the likeness of the legendary King Rowan with the country held in his unwavering grasp.
- Temple of Selist in the city's center.
- Many exotic plants and fruits not native to the region.

# Treatment

## Exhume: Death And All Her Friends

*This is a treatment example of a fantasy, adventure game that fuses 80s nostalgia with Celtic folklore.*

### Logline

Exhume is a single-player, 3D fantasy adventure with doses of community management, creative puzzle-solving, and spellcaster-like combat surrounding the ability to imbue objects in the environment with powerful emotions, granting them similar sentience to the broomsticks Mickey Mouse enchants in Fantasia (the sorcerer's apprentice?).

Recent college drop-out Caitlin finds herself stumbling into hell which she is tasked with fixing up in return for her freedom, if only the petty devils around her would stop getting in the way.

### Synopsis

In a John Hughes coming-of-age-in-the-80s classic, CAITLIN seeks to escape the pressures of her traditional family and their suburban lifestyle. Making her escape leaves her caught out in a storm where sudden flooding knocks her out. When she awakes Caitlin finds herself in an uncanny reflection of her suburban town – the Otherworld, aka hell with Celtic influence. She is met with the burnt-out MORRIGAN, Celtic ruler of the Otherworld, who promises Caitlin a way back to the mortal realm if she can throw a sick party. The Otherworld is far from the ideal place for a party though, appearing rundown and rife with stuck-in-the-past denizens who could care less about the state of their world. Using her wits and new ability to harness her emotions, Caitlin cobbles together help to put the party in swing (and it is indeed sick).

In short order however, Caitlin finds herself not only learning the truth of her death but unceremoniously thrust into the role of ruler when Morrigan suddenly retires, naming Caitlin her successor – much to the ire of the devilish and ambitious H.O.A, led by the uptight ARAWN. With sudden responsibility in her inexperienced hands and Samhain, the Celtic day of the dead, around the corner, Caitlin struggles to juggle her new reality, the community of lost souls relying on her, and whatever the devils are plotting behind closed doors which threatens to disrupt the dead and mortal realms forever. She's got her work cut out.

## Theme

What would it be like if hell was a place you could manage and make better for the souls who lived there?

### Pillars

- Community Building - foster a place to belong and people to call home.
- Processing Emotions - learning to work through powerful feelings.
- Moving on From the Past - letting go of what was before to allow for something new.

## Tone and Style

A blend of Stardew Valley slice-of-life, Gravity Falls adventure and levity, and Everything Everywhere All At Once sentimentality.

## Characters

CAITLIN is desperate to get away from home and its trappings. She has a difficult relationship with her family who see her as an irresponsible failure. The weight of this has made her headstrong and explosive yet, at the same time, grants her unparalleled determination and resourcefulness.

MORRIGAN is based on the Celtic goddess of war and death. She's been in charge of the Otherworld for a long time and she's sick of it. She sees Caitlin as a good enough substitute but largely doesn't seem to care for her realm anymore – coming across as jaded and exhausted.

DULLAHAN “D” is based on the Celtic folk myth of the headless horseman. He's a skeletal 80s greaser who died in a car accident and now resides in the Otherworld with his loyal muscle car. D is stuck relieving the emotions surrounding his death and seems stuck in the 'live fast, die hard' mentality.

ARAWN is a controlling and dangerously cunning devil jarl with grand ambitions to become the next Morrigan. He'll do whatever it takes to maintain the traditional status quo which brings him into conflict with Caitlin as she forges a new path for them all.

## Story Structure

ACT ONE will depict Caitlin running away from home after an explosive argument with her family and getting caught in the storm which leads to her waking up in the Otherworld with strange abilities. She'll meet Morrigan and make a deal to put together a party in return for admittance back to the mortal realm.

ACT TWO will have Caitlin exploring the Otherworld and meeting its inhabitants. She'll complete some quests for them to gain their help refurbishing the community center and gathering supplies and entertainment for the party. At the party, Caitlin learns that she is, in fact, dead and is resigned to not returning to the mortal realm. Morrigan also takes the opportunity to resign, promoting Caitlin as the new Morrigan. The archdevil jarls don't take kindly to being snubbed for the role and one of them lets their emotions get the best of them – erupting into a demon of Envy. Caitlin struggles to fend them off, ultimately needing intervention from Arawn.

ACT TWO continues with Caitlin learning the ropes of her new job in preparation for Samhain – a night when the dead may return to the mortal realm. She'll complete more quests for the town's residents and help them move past the emotions surrounding their deaths which haunt them in their dead lives. Gaining more allies makes her a threat to the devil jarls and they enact a plan that sends Caitlin's recently-passed grandmother to the inhospitable Pit.

In ACT THREE Caitlin ventures into the Pit, battling feral souls to get to her grandmother. Upon reaching her, Grandma is consumed with rage and guilt over Caitlin's death and transforms into a demon of Wrath. Caitlin defeats her and soothes her wrath. One of the devil jarls appears in a rage, revealing their plan to get rid of Caitlin so they can enact their Grand Plan to permanently separate the two realms. Caitlin fights the jarl and leaves the Pit with her grandmother.

Returning to the town she's made home, Caitlin finds it bathed in flames and flooded with feral souls. With the help of the allies she's made, Caitlin calms the chaos before the group departs for the mortal realm in chase of the Arawn. In a grand battle, Caitlin faces off against Arawn and their jarls, winning and ushering in a new era for the Otherworld.

EPILOGUE Caitlin, victorious, joins her family and the characters of the Otherworld to celebrate the ending of Samhain with a supper that bridges life and death. And even though she's dead, Caitlin feels at home.



## Setting & World

Despite being hell, the Otherworld is not a scary place. On the contrary, it's a near-exact reflection of the fictional small town of Tirnog Falls. The main difference is that the Otherworld version is cast in an eternal dusk that is somewhat eerie but also highlights an uncanny beauty in the same way neon signs in a light fog do.

Similarly, the residents of Tirnog Falls aren't terribly ghoulish. Each has been shaped by the emotions of their death to resemble monsters of Celtic myth yet they are set in 80s-style aesthetics and behaviours that make them more human than not.

With the residents, comes a unique social structure that feels very much like Parks and Recreation if it were made up of a cast of petty devils and demons. At the top lies Morrigan as the largely undisputed ruler and below her sit the devil jarls who provide support & advice, though they squabble for power amongst themselves. Next are the residents – souls of the dead who have yet to succumb completely to their emotions and retain their humanity. Lastly, there are the feral souls of the Pit. The weaker versions of these *are* ghoulish, eternally hungry creatures who attack mindlessly. Worse, though, are the demonic versions, created by souls who were consumed by especially powerful emotions and now embody them completely.