



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
 - Gamer since th
- Education :

- Bachelor o



e)
is & strategy)

APPLICANT QUALIFICATIONS

- Language skills: English, French, German, Spanish
 - Quick to learn new software (programming skills)
 - Gamer since the Apple IIe (primarily single-player)
- Education :

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



APPLICANT QUALIFICATIONS

- 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



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APPLICANT QUALIFICATIONS

...IT ME

- Language skills: English, French, German, Spanish
- Quick to learn new software (programming skills: none)
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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**



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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



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AGENDA & TAKEAWAY

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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FOR NOTE-TAKERS



REFERENCE SLIDES

If you take pictures to take notes,
useful info slides are marked with
a camera icon.

SO WHAT THE HECK IS **NARRATIVE DESIGN**?



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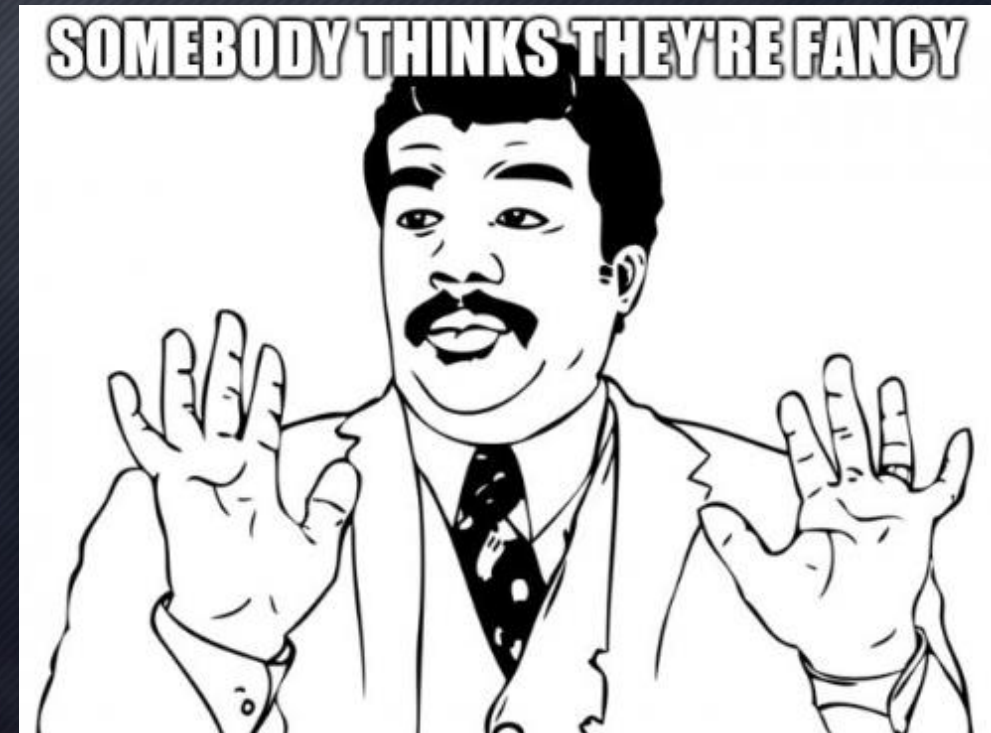
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SO WHAT THE HECK IS **NARRATIVE DESIGN**?

ISN'T "NARRATIVE DESIGN"
JUST A PRETENTIOUS
WAY TO SAY
"GAME WRITER"?



WRITER:
USES WORDS TO TELL STORIES

(groundbreaking info, here...)

NARRATIVE DESIGNER:
USES GAMES TO TELL STORIES



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THE ND'S PRIMARY JOB

UNDERSTANDING & USING GAME COMPONENTS

(do they reinforce or contradict the story?)



**COMBAT, GAME DESIGN,
PROGRESSION**



YOUR MISSION
Should you choose to accept it

UI & UX



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LEVEL DESIGN



CINEMATICS

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**WRITER:
USES WORDS TO TELL STORIES**

**NARRATIVE DESIGNER:
USES GAMES TO TELL STORIES**

**AND PREVENTS
LUDO-NARRATIVE DISSONANCE**

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

no matchy



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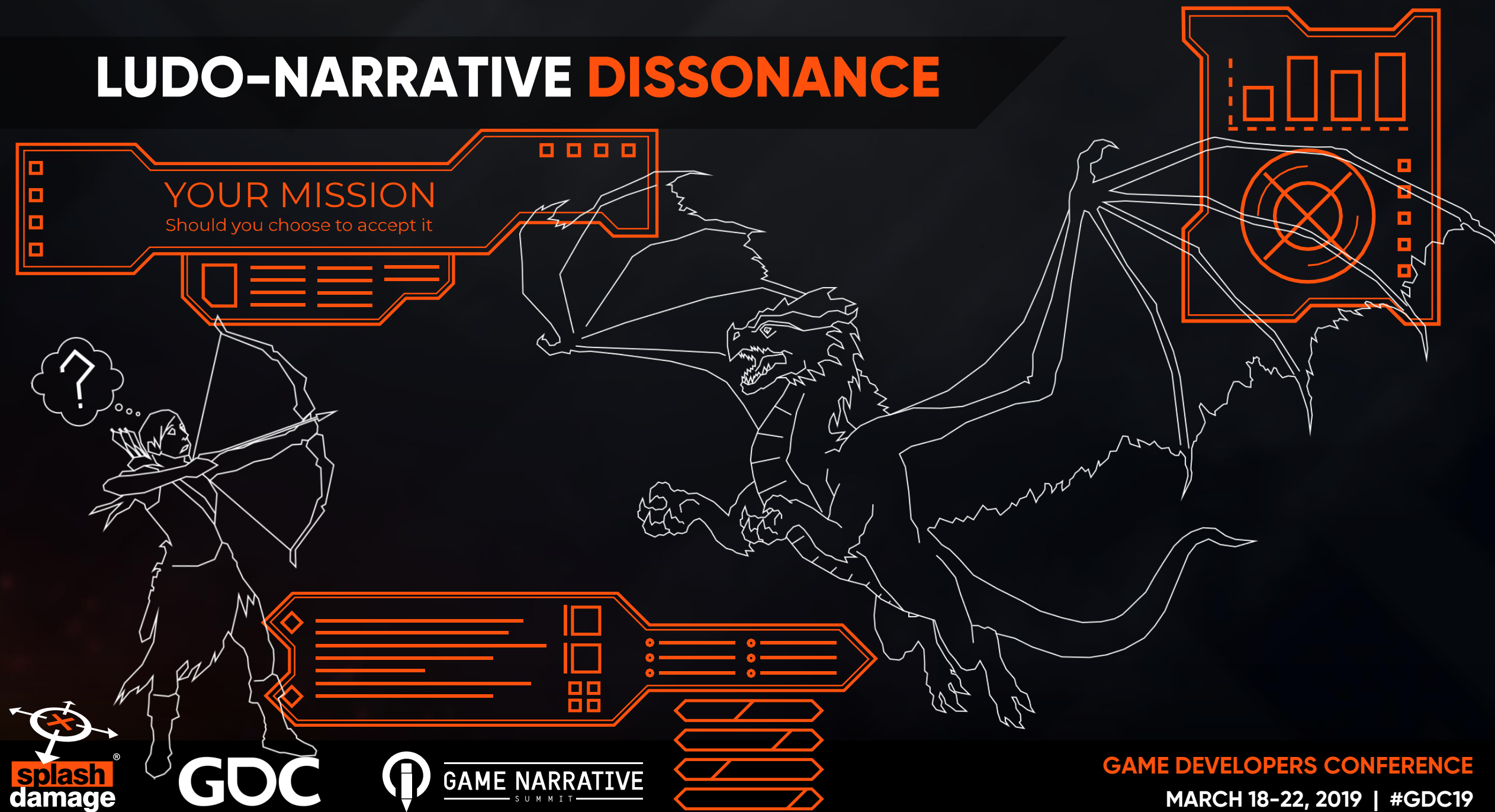
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LUDO-NARRATIVE DISSONANCE

YOUR MISSION

Should you choose to accept it



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LUDO-NARRATIVE **DISSONANCE**



**COOL... BUT WHAT DOES
A NARRATIVE DESIGNER ACTUALLY
DO?**

...AND DO I ALREADY DO 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



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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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no, we don't get our own
IGDA Special Interest Group

there are like 4 of us



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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



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LEARN YOUR **STUFF**

LOOK AT WHAT STORIES
GAMES TELL

AND HOW THEY TELL THEM



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**NO-ONE WILL PAY YOU
TO TELL STORIES IN GAMES
IF YOU CAN'T EXPLAIN
HOW GAMES TELL STORIES**



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the other 9%
is having tech issues



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SUCCESS IN YOUR FIRST ND JOB



BECOME THE VISION-KEEPER

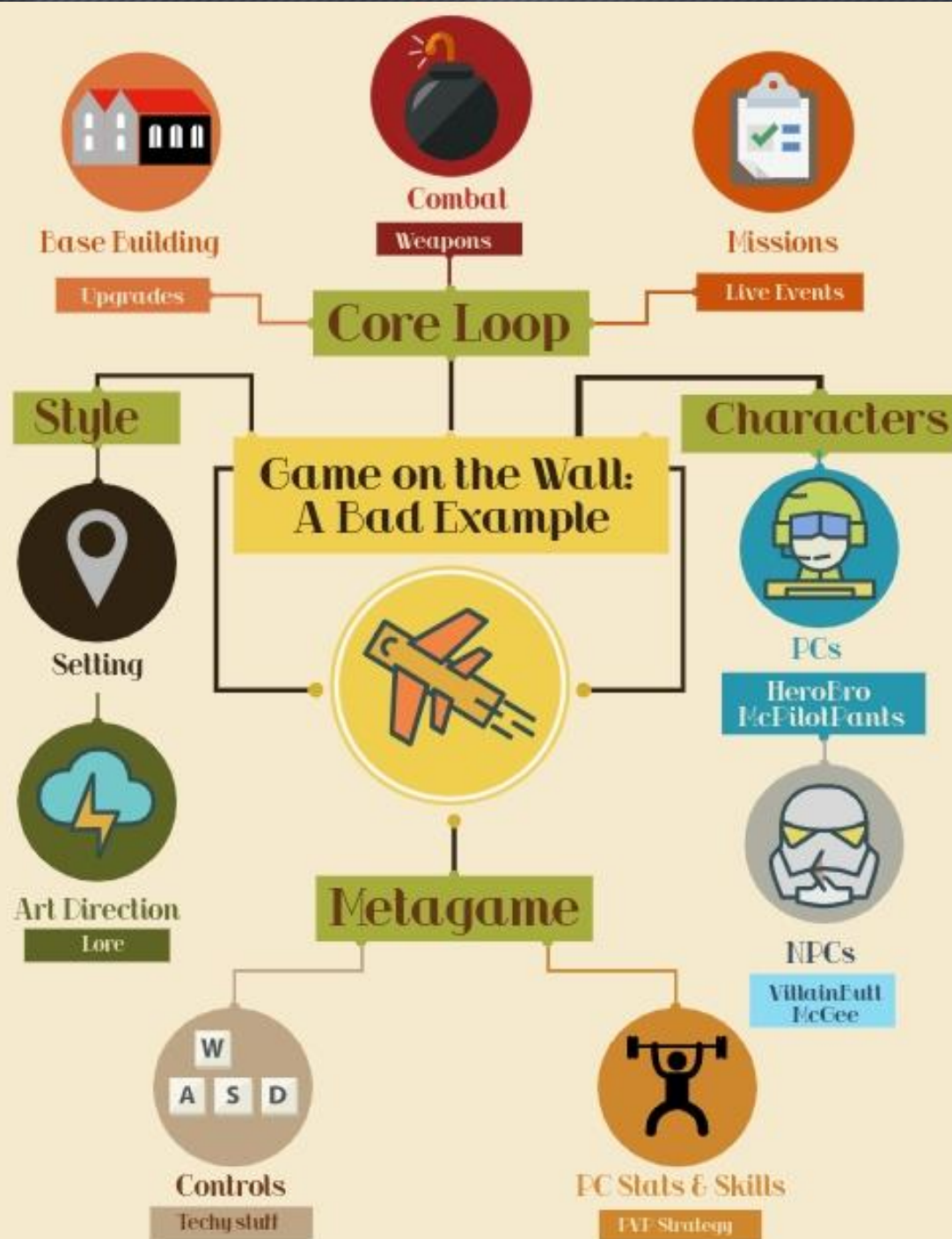
- Figure out what your team is for their feature
- Use their answers to question
- Use *their* answers to identify more questions
- Ask the Creative Director to
- Use your new knowledge to ask questions and create documents
- Make a game on the wall



GAME ON THE WALL



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(break each out into its own more detailed section)

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HOW DO I GET A NARRATIVE DESIGN JOB?

CREATING YOUR PORTFOLIO

From: [REDACTED]
<[REDACTED]@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, January 19, 2019 18:57
To: Ayesha Khan
<ayesha.khan@splashdamage.com>
Subject: Thank you

Dear ~~Ayesha~~,

my name is [REDACTED]. You were very kind to review my portfolio in early October last year, by request of my friend, [REDACTED], 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!



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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**



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PORTFOLIO CONTENTS



Karen Chee

@karencheee

[Follow](#)

people say writing is rewriting but i beg to differ and say that writing is, in fact, mostly crying

4:01 PM - 25 Oct 2018



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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)



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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



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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

dooooooooom, 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

**DON'T MAKE ME
WORK HARD TO
FIGURE OUT WHAT
YOU'RE GOOD AT**



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



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Search

▼ Enter Keywords

▼ Multiple Categories

- ☐ Audio
- ☐ Business Development
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Community Manager
- ☐ Consultant

Narrative Jobs

Your email address

[Get jobs like these by email](#)

No job matches your search criteria

[Subscribe to RSS](#)

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

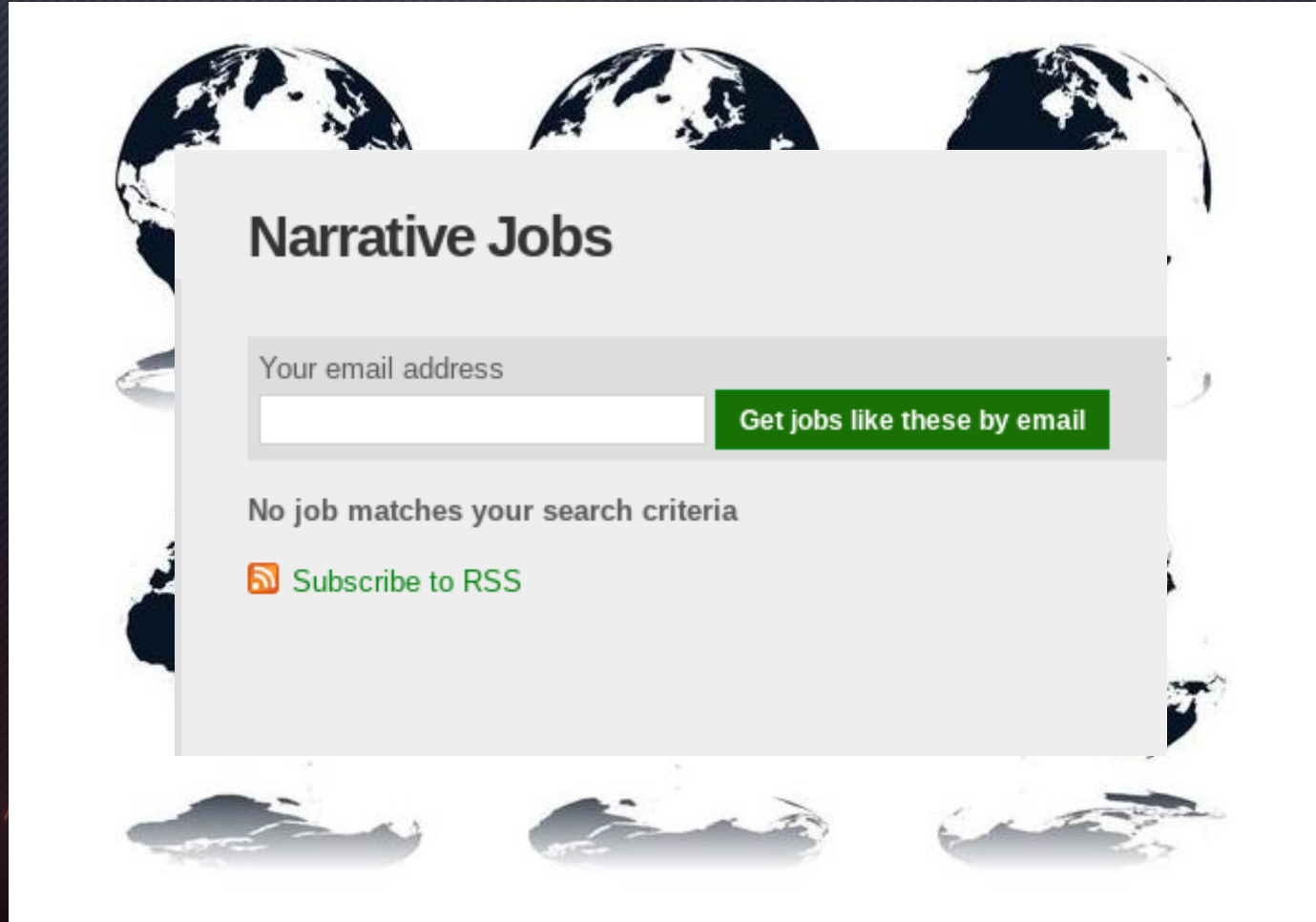


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SALARY & RELOCATION



SALARY & RELOCATION



BREXIT



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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

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



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CO-DEV / **WORK-FOR-HIRE STUDIO**

Outsourcing vendors who develop games on spec

**ASSOCIATE
GAME DESIGNER**



LEAD DESIGNER



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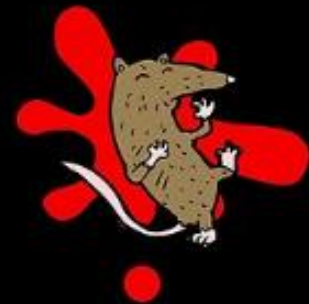
NARRATIVE-ADJACENT GIGS



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**



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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”



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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!”)



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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



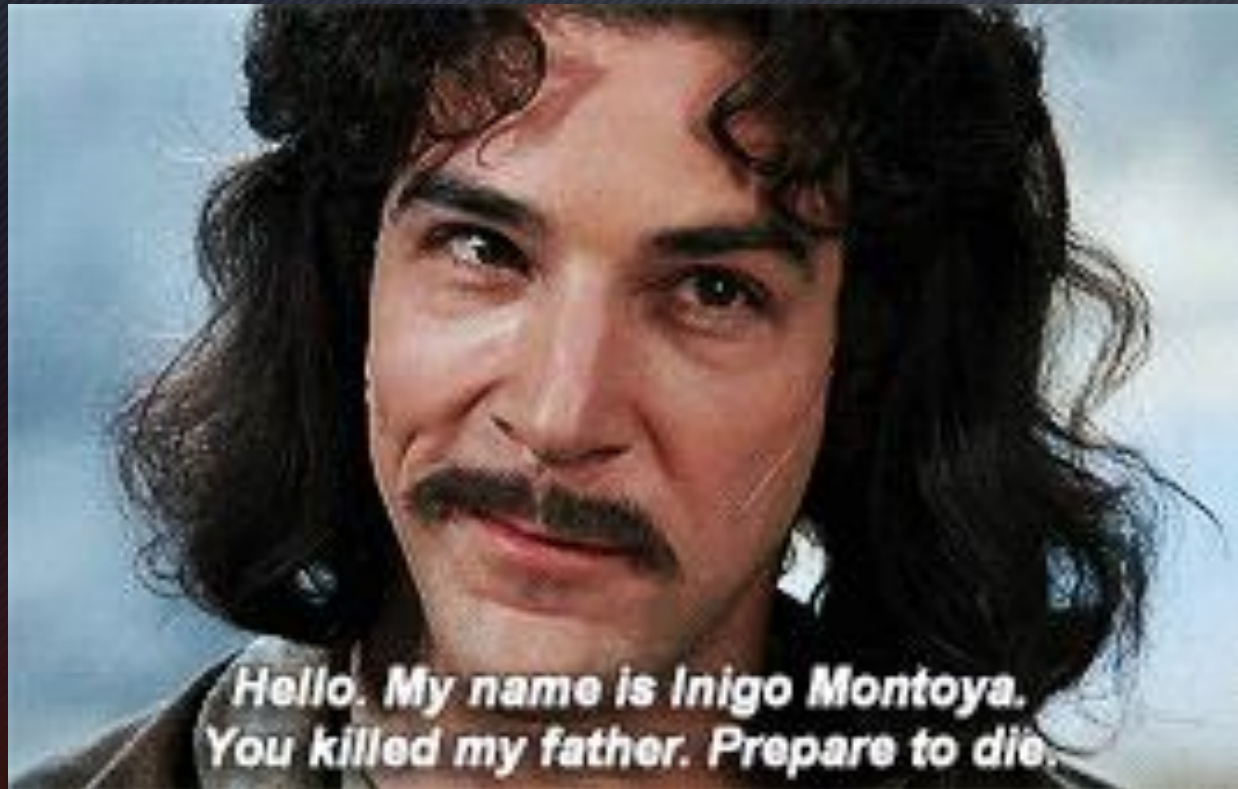
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NETWORKING WITH PROF. MONTOYA



HOW TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF



1. Context-appropriate social greeting.
2. Your name.
3. Your connection to the other person.
4. Your expectations for the relationship going forward and/or a call to action.

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



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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



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QUESTIONS?

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@ethnicmutt



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QUESTIONS?

KHAN

@ethnicmutt



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@ethnicmutt



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HEIDER-SIMMEL ANIMATION



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 D
Pizzeria with your eyes closed"

SHAPE MO



Think About It 2 years ago

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

👍 64 💬 REPLY

ERATED BY A.I.



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