

Game Narrative Samples

Three samples covering dialogue, character and quest design, and lore architecture. The first two were written for MinMax, an exploration adventure set in the drowned city of Echograd Bay. The third is a narrative proposal for Chain City, a game world whose lore and characters were to be partly generated by AI.

1. In-world dialogue: Min and the Holograms

MinMax • the Liu Residence, Echograd Bay

Brief: write a dialogue scene in which Min, confined to the family residence, questions her hologram companions about the city outside. Their tone should shift from foreboding towards encouragement under her questioning, in keeping with their established scholarly, poetic cadence.

INT. MIN'S ROOM

Min sits on her bed, talking with three children her own age. The other children are holograms, projected by small floating devices, each with a distinct colour and voice. They take turns speaking, with a scholarly and poetic cadence, occasionally riffing on one another or on Min's phrasing. Confined as she is to the Liu Residence, Min's curiosity turns naturally to the world outside and the state of the city called Echograd Bay.

MIN But what's it really like outside the gate?

H1 The citizens fashion residences within the sunken rubble.

H2 They feud endlessly, a cacophony of voices without a conductor.

H3 They are trapped in the present moment. Each attempt to crystallise the future soon crumbles to dust.

MIN How do they survive, then?

H1 Living for the moment confers certain advantages on a person, fleeting as these may be.

H2 Which is to say, they go with the flow and get a taste for its underlying currents.

H3 I concur with that notion. The pick of them are equal to fate's riptides and learn to ride them out.

MIN Sounds pretty cool.

H1 It's perfectly dangerous.

H2 Not to mention predictably short-lived.

H3 Even those with the greatest talent for improvisation are destined to crash and burn in due course. It's only a question of when and why.

MIN At least they're out there, taking their chances. Sometimes it feels like I'm wrapped in so many layers of cotton wool, destiny is certain to overlook me.

H1 I wouldn't be so sure. Destiny is nothing if not persistent.

H2 Especially if you happen to have caught its eye.

MIN Are you saying that's true of me?

H3 ... I wouldn't discount the possibility altogether.

MIN So you think I should embrace it if it comes knocking?

H1 My parameters oblige me to pass on the question.

H2 As do mine.

H3 The same is also true of me.

MIN Why do I get the feeling you guys are holding plenty back?

Without warning, Min's father, Bo, appears in the doorway.

BO Băobèi!

The holograms flicker out and the projector drones drop to the floor.

BO The bots again? We discussed this.

MIN But Bàba . . . I need someone to talk to.

(Scene continues.)

2. Character and quest design: Gladwood Breaux

MinMax · the Rind, Echograd Bay

Brief: working from concept art alone, create a non-player character who inhabits the scene, and design a side quest they assign to the player with the "scoober" (scuba scooter) at its centre.

The NPC is a neo-Cajun by the name of Gladwood Breaux, based in the estuarine township of Swole, where the polluted currents of the Canola River meet the overcooked waters of Deep Fried Bay. A man for all seasons with a finger in plenty of pies, and a dizzying array of side hustles (everything from illicit neural retrofits to submersibles for hire), Gladwood is connected with all of the murkier elements that power the lion's share of the local economy.

The side quest involves a mini-sub reputed to be lying on the seabed some fifty nautical miles south of Swole. It belonged to Jepson, the former CEO of one of Echograd Bay's leading tech firms, who went down with it. The wreck holds an artefact of practical use to Min/Max, which also deepens their understanding of Echograd Bay's occulted truths, and their own relation to them.

As for how the scene plays out (depending, of course, on what precedes it), it might be best if Min/Max arrive in Swole having already learned of the mini-sub's location, looking to hire a vessel of their own to reach it. To make it more interesting, I'd have Gladwood express deep scepticism about the mini-sub's existence. The fact that he tries to talk them out of the voyage, even though they're offering to pay, should raise a question or two.

Something along these lines:

GLADWOOD Wouldn't waste my time, if I was you. Those are seriously hostile waters. Must have been a dozen parties gone out there looking to get their hands on whatever Jepson took with him to his watery grave. As I recall it, only one ever made it back.

3. Narrative and lore architecture: Chain City

Chain City · narrative proposal for an AI-driven game world

Brief: propose a narrative architecture for Chain City, a game world whose lore and NPCs will be partly AI-generated, flexible enough to evolve organically while keeping its inner consistency and narrative credibility.

Overview

Given the role AI will play in populating the lore book and powering the mechanics of the game world, I think the main design challenge is to create the right conditions for its continual evolution, so that Chain City keeps its inner consistency and narrative credibility whichever direction the world takes. That calls for a flexible macro structure, with plenty of give in it, that can absorb all kinds of organic unpredictability.

Back story

This brings us to the first important question: the game world's back story, and where exactly it sits in space-time. Although the set-up is very different, what I have in mind is *Lost* as a contextual model. What made that storyline so gripping was that its central question ("Where the hell are we?") worked on several levels at once. The same could be said of *The Matrix*, in a somewhat different way.

I'm not proposing that Chain City operate as a mystery game, but I do think the question should be left open and work as a plot device. Where Chain City actually is, what gave rise to it, and its relation to "reality" would all be up for grabs, and hotly contested by the factions that inhabit it. Weaving the mystery of its origins into the fabric of the world makes it resilient as a story, and lets ambiguity flourish without undermining the game's inner logic.

The particulars

The main actors in Chain City will have conflicting ideas about the nature of reality. Dr Sakamoto, and the corporation he heads, would assert that Chain City is simply part of the human continuum, the latest stage in recorded history, for all its high weirdness, its curious phenomena and the strange gaps that the past can't account for.

In this scenario, the corporation's principal asset, the jewel in the crown of its technocracy, is an immensely powerful AI super-computer (provisional name: *Glory*), which performs a vast array of tasks, from regulating the power grid to surveilling the citizenry. *Glory* runs on particle physics (think of the Large Hadron Collider as a mega-processor), the only way it can reach the bandwidth it needs to function at this level.

The precise mechanism is shrouded in mystery, with the machine secreted away in an impenetrable subterranean lair. Some people claim it doesn't even exist. Others credit it with a rupture in space-time that has already taken place.

Dr Sakamoto and the corporation claim to be on the verge of another major breakthrough, which will usher in a golden age for everybody: a kind of soft singularity in which people fuse with the all-powerful intelligence and yet, thanks to some quantum nicety, keep their individuality. This is why the corporation devotes so much of its resources to mining and refining the rare metals and minerals that will make this final iteration possible (and also, according to its critics, why it won't let anything stand in its way).

None of those critics is as ferocious, or as committed to the corporation's overthrow, as a rebel group known cryptically as ICU. According to ICU, the super-collider has already ruptured space-time, which explains why everything in Chain City feels suspect, unreal, hyper-chaotic. Everybody is, in essence, living in a simulation. And if Dr Sakamoto completes the next iteration of the AI, everything will be swept away in a final, epic cataclysm.

To sharpen the opposition, ICU is led by a highly charismatic figure called Orizen: a rogue AI who somehow freed himself from the corporate mainframe, and from Dr Sakamoto's clutches, to lead the resistance and offer a strikingly different vision of the future. The corporation, for its part, is forever portraying Orizen as a dangerous extremist at the head of a death cult, out to bewitch and enslave the populace even as he promises them liberation and light (echoes here of Lucifer as the fallen angel).

What is known for certain is that ICU and Orizen are just as obsessed with acquiring the rare metals and minerals that Dr Sakamoto and his corporation covet. To this end, they have recently stepped up their audacious raids on corporate bases and closely guarded mining facilities. Rumour has it they are building something big of their own to overturn the existing order, although the true nature of the project is far from clear.

Creative ambiguity

It would make sense for the players themselves to decide who the real good guys and bad guys are, and the mythos above allows for exactly that ambiguity. It also gives players plenty of licence in choosing their own path and character progression. There's no reason they couldn't change sides repeatedly, or serve as double or triple agents.

A further consequence of this ambiguity is a dramatic, suspense-filled atmosphere, rife with rumour and counter-rumour, in which NPCs actively try to recruit players to their side while spreading information and disinformation of every kind.

At the meta level, with AI generating NPC traits and dialogue, the ambiguity earns its keep too: any resulting contradictions can be put down to one faction's psy-ops or the other's.

The same paranoid atmosphere could shape the look of the game world, with propaganda of all stripes woven into Chain City's texture: officially sanctioned holograms placed throughout the city by the corporation, which ICU might deface with quantum graffiti or something along those lines.

Game economics and desirable objects

As I understand it, Chain City's economy will run largely on tradeable objects acquired during challenges and adventures. Given the ambiguities above, those objects will need to be ideologically neutral and essentially practical, so that players of every allegiance can make equal use of them.

To keep them neutral and equally valuable, I suggest they be made from the rare metals and minerals both factions covet, built either by the corporation's tech division or by ICU's quasi-mystical forge-masters. The two sets of items would overlap in value, power and use, but differ in character: the corporation's more practical, ICU's visionary and perception-altering.

Either way, they would serve broadly the same purpose, enabling players to find their way to new parts of the game world and opening up paths that were closed to them before. As for those new locations:

- **Corporation towns and development zones**, where the whole economy is geared to mining and refining the elements needed to upgrade the super-collider, and the AI with it. Players aligned with ICU might go there for industrial sabotage or theft.
- **Autonomous zones** where the rebels hide out temporarily. Orizen creates them by opening wormholes, inter-dimensional recesses where ICU forces can "disappear" for a time, although these zones are limited in scope and duration. The corporation could claim that this ability is demonic, and that anyone who lives in one of these zones, or even visits, will suffer a terrible fate.

On the balance of power, I do think ICU, as the counterweight to the corporation, needs certain inherent strengths. Otherwise it would seem illogical that the corporation's sheer technological might hasn't wiped it

out already. As for the pop-up zones themselves, they could very well work as the kind of dungeons you've already envisaged, which players can explore on self-contained quests.