

Surriel Vazquez

Narrative Design
& Writing Samples

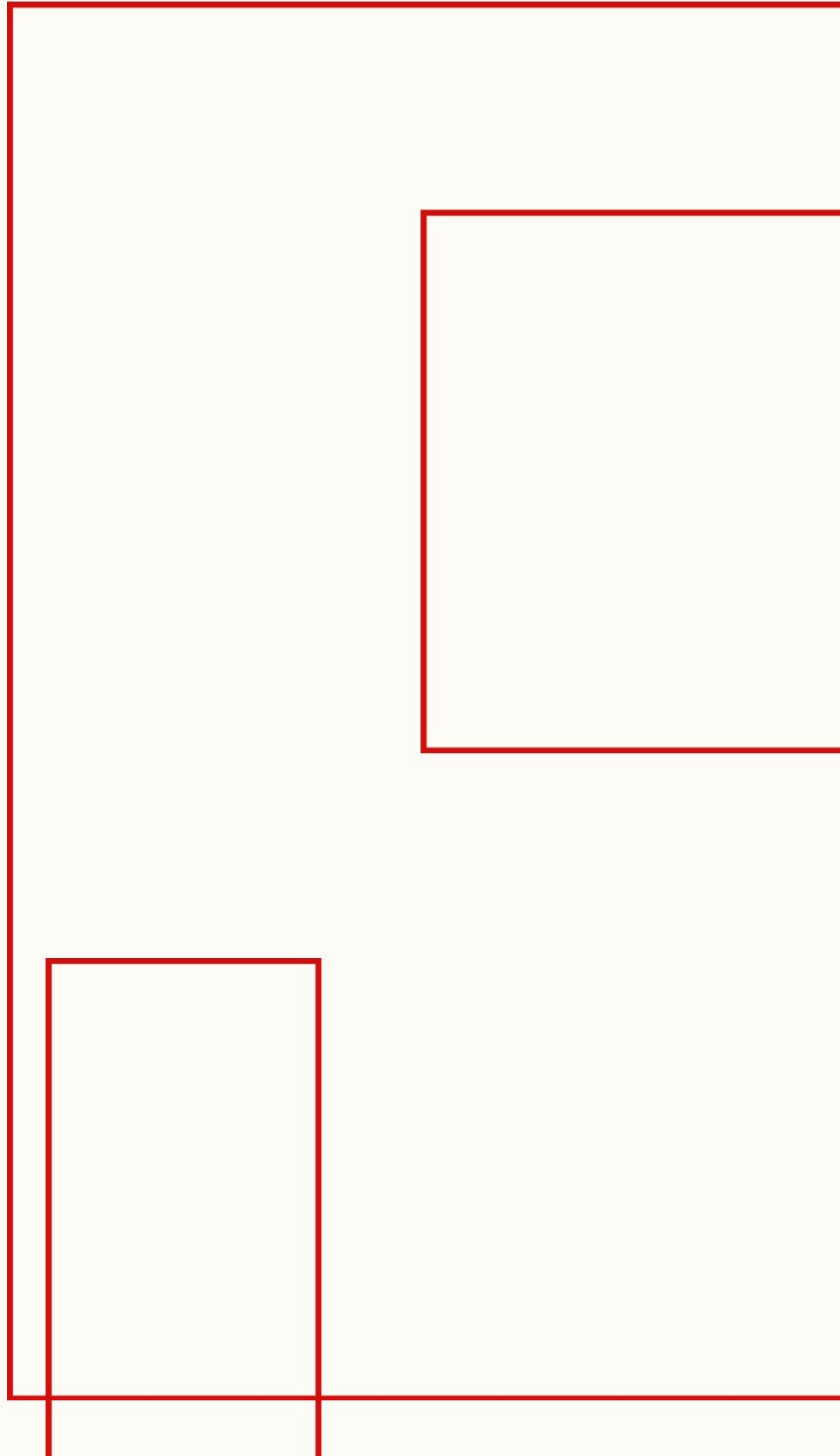


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◦ DETAILS ◦

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◦ SKILLS ◦

Narrative Design

Game Design

Writing

Consulting

Collaboration

Leadership

Editing

◦ LANGUAGES ◦

English

Spanish

👤 PROFILE

I am a professional video game narrative designer, writer, consultant, critic, and journalist with more than 14 years of experience. As narrative designer I wrote the entirety of the main story for *Merchants of Rosewall* and have created short Twine game called *Dead Astrology*. I have also consulted on the design and narrative of dozens of video games, including *Alan Wake 2* and *Silent Hill 2* (2024).

📁 EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Writer and Narrative Lead at Big Blue Sky Games, Remote

March 2023 — April 2025

Helped concept the world, characters, and story of *Merchants of Rosewall* with the narrative team as a writer, then wrote the entirety of the shipped story and oversaw all narrative aspects of the game as Narrative Lead, working with the design and art departments to craft a story that fit the gameplay and themes of the game.

Game Consultant at Various, Remote

June 2020 — Present

Have written several long and short-form mock reviews, consultation reports, and related projects both independently and as part of a team to help guide, facilitate, and greenlight the development of entries in major video game franchises.

Freelance Writer at Various, Remote

April 2011 — October 2021

Wrote dozens of reviews, opinion pieces, and reported features for outlets including GameSpot, IGN, Polygon, Fanbyte, GamesBeat, USGamer, Paste Magazine, Vice, Playboy, Kotaku, Unwinnable, Rock Paper Shotgun, GamePro, and more from April 2011 to August 2016, then from September 2019 to October 2021. Worked with editors to conceptualize article ideas and refine them for publication.

Associate Editor at Game Informer, Minneapolis, MN

August 2016 — August 2019

Wrote articles for Game Informer's magazine and website, including long-form reported features, researched news articles, insightful reviews, and more, working with an editorial team to produce content. Appeared on and hosted episodes of The Game Informer Show podcast.

🎓 EDUCATION

B.A. English, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, NE

August 2010 — May 2014

Majored in English with a concentration on American literature.

📢 REFERENCES

Matthew Bertz from Magid

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BRANCHING NARRATIVE SAMPLE: DEAD ASTROLOGY

Dead Astrology is a Twine game I wrote a full draft for over the course of three months. This demo is the opening chapter of that draft, which I ported to Twine in 2022 (the rest of the script has yet to be implemented). I wanted to explore branching narratives but also push by implementing code that allowed for the “hover cursor over text to advance” mechanic to work (which I did with the help of some friends). This involved some light coding knowledge and knowledge of Twine as an engine to fully implement but allowed me to execute on a unique concept not available in Twine’s base feature set. An excerpt is available here for the sake of convenience, but this is best experienced as a Twine game, which you can download it at: <https://surielvazquez.itch.io/dead-astrology-sample>.

Dead Astrology (Text-Only Sample)

By Suriel Vazquez

Color Key/Reading Guide:

[Click text to advance]

[[Branching choices, lead to next section]]

{Hover cursor over text to advance}

Intro

The floorboards belch a raspy whine as you step onto the porch of the old house. The house seems upset [you've arrived.]

It's the house's fault, really. It was the first thing you'd looked at on purpose since you started walking down that gangly dirt road earlier. The upset house had stood out amidst the otherwise eternal stretch of clay sands, copper stones, and [blood-red sky.]

Even better, the verdant lichen on its roof and dense splotches of color at its base suggested someone had decorated. [Someone else was stuck here, too.]

The path from the road to the impinged-upon house had worn millions of skeletal foot and pawprints. Scattered across it were halves of antlers, misplaced teeth, and abandoned shells. Among all these remnants you found a single, glistening fish scale. Even without a working knowledge of this ethereal, arid plane, it seemed incongruous. It became [your keepsake.]

Now, here on the porch, the splotches have morphed into seashells, bones, teeth, and withered flowers embellishing a raggedy screen door. They all beg for a second look.

[[Shells break up the open spaces on the surface of the door.|1A]]

[[Hard animal remains adorn the door.|1B]]

[[Withered plants overrun most of the porch.|1C]]

1A

Crown conchs, shark eyes, sundials, saw-tooth {pens}

{You wince as you remember things you've left behind back home}

and other skin-colored shells pockmark the spaces between animal fragments and shriveled foliage. The shells' openings face outward. Are they goading onlookers who want to listen to the ocean to [pluck them?]

No dice; they're surprisingly stubborn when pulled and offer no respite from the desert howls. Even if they could be dislodged, [what ocean would they echo?]

[[You wonder if you'll ever see water again.|2]]

1B

Somehow, skulls, fangs, and horns from {the other side}

{a sharp cold pierces your spinal cord}

have wound up littered everywhere around the irked house. No one stays here for long – the road calls everyone back eventually – so they move on without paying attention to these fragments. Making them the centerpiece of this door, loud and impossible to ignore, is a fitting [[tribute to the dead.|2]]

1C

Their ends curl up slightly, struggling to regain their former selves. The mounds of foliage on either side of the door hint at their previous shape: Serbian ramondas, doradillas. Curled bushes like shriveled hands grasping at air. Known as {resurrection plants}

{You shiver at the mere thought of death now}

they sleep in this state between states most of their lives, but loosen their grip when exposed to the life-affirming power of water. Some of them must have slept too deeply and [[drifted over here.|2]]

2

Noises rustle from the bothered house's second story; it's now forced to acknowledge you. Your heart begins to sputter. Does the house know about the

panic attack you had on the way here? About your heart sputtering? How does your "heart" work now, [anyway?]

[The door rattles for a beat then swings inward.]

The frame squeaks as it reveals its decorator. A copper-coated skeleton you assume spends at least some of their time scooping up seashells, hunting for skulls, flattening curled plants, and maintaining the beleaguered house. They look a lot like you, except bronzed and furnished with more trinkets.

[[They're clearly fascinated by animals. They're wearing their remains.|2A]]

[[A coat of thin lichen is slung over their svelte shoulder-bones like a poncho.|2B]]

[[Their bony fingers are lined with more seashells.|2C]]

2A

Fangs and what appear to be nubs of finger bones line the brooches and necklaces the skeleton wears on their hands and neck. Enough to imbue the figure with lifetimes of good luck, some {would say.}

{What is everyone saying about you back home now, you wonder. Are they kind?}

The shiny, animate bones lunge forward in a [bemused greeting.]

[[{"\"Hello.\""}|3]]

2B

Covering the skeleton's clavicles are two bronze flats engraved with a mysterious symbol. Flashes from their toe rings force you to {squint}

{You realize you can't squint anymore, but the reflex lingers}

and invite downwards glances at their bare feet. Hanging on the bridge of their cheekbones, where their cheeks would be if they had flesh, are two brilliant orbs of diamond. They notice you flinching, retreat slightly, [and speak.]

[[{"\"Hello.\""}|3]]

2C

Tiny, sharp turritellas protrude from the skeleton's joints, covering the gaps skin no longer blankets. Stripped of their purpose as shelter and defense against predators, their pointed shape makes their current owner look [lavish rather than dangerous.]

The skeleton feels your stare. They curl their hand and tuck it [out of sight.]

It didn't take long for them to notice someone skulking around the porch. But they hoped whoever it was would have gotten bored and walked back toward the road by now.

[["Hello," they say courteously.|3]]

3

They don't so much speak as expel a sentiment, an intrusive thought that resonates throughout your frame. Their chrome jaw does not swing as their thought diffuses onto the porch. Their eyeless sockets can see {somehow}

{so can yours}

and their abyssal darkness acknowledges you. They twitch their head right, motioning to the frustrated house's living room. Various fangs, shells, and diamonds rattle against their [red-brown frame.]

The living room betrays little about its ossified inhabitant. Its low ceiling and square, cozy frame are offset by how sparse it is. The room houses only a single table made from peeling black wood standing triumphant atop the flattened skin of a big cat you don't recognize. The two accompanying chairs are made of different kinds of wood, both sporting multiple faded colors from years of [patchwork repairs.]

Halfway to their seat on the far side of the table, the sullen copper skeleton suddenly stops and pivots their skull back in [your direction.]

"Right," another thought echoes inside you. You recognize it as external, but uncomfortably intimate. "You have questions, yes? I get a lot of those."

[["Who are you?"|4]]

[["What is this?"|4]]

[["Where am I?"|4]]

4

Expelling thoughts into the world comes naturally, an unconscious twinge that produces a tangible emotion-message while keeping your morass of undeveloped thoughts contained inside your panicked cartilage. The skeleton responds to your thought [with their own.]

"I do readings here. Tarot, astrology. They call me Copperhead, because... well." Copperhead's hands wave down their moss-laden, copper-colored

ligaments. "Most people who come here are curious about what's happened to them. More curious than they are about going down the road, at least. So I answer their questions and tell them what they are and what they [might yet be."]

[[["\"'What's happened to them?' Wait, what's happened to me?\""|4-2]]

4-2

{You already know.}

Asking only makes the knot that's been tugging at your invisible stomach {worse}

The skeleton holds their pose for a moment. Without the twitching of eyes, the palpitation of heart, the gorging of lungs that evince life, their freezing makes everything {stop}

{You're dead.}

[[["You're dead."|5]]

5

You hear the tired house churn. You wonder if houses in the afterlife have piping. Neither the house nor its imagined pipes fall apart in the {short silence that follows,}

{You don't have a heart but feel it pulse}

{You can't hyperventilate and it only makes the impulse to do it worse}

{Why is the brain you no longer have doing this to you?}

{It's okay}

{You're dead but you're okay}

{Right?}

{Calm down}

[Calm down.]

To be continued...

CHARACTER PROFILE SAMPLE: RAWHIDE

This is character profile and screenwriting sample for a speculative Apex Legends character, which I wrote when I applied to be a writer at Respawn Entertainment in 2022. Knowing that playable characters in live-service games live and die by how they express themselves during gameplay and the tantalizing peeks into their backstories shown in trailers, I offered the full breadth of character writing, including a **detailed backstory**, a **unique personality**, barks, and how their role in the larger Apex Legends universe could **overlap with other characters**.

Character Bio: Rawhide

Real Name: Robert McCormick

Age: 35

Home World: Cibus

Tactical Ability: Caltrops (emit noise when triggered, cloud enemy vision for a few seconds)

Passive Ability: Sureshot (first shot after reloading does not have bullet drop)

Ultimate Ability: Hawkeye Drone (portal over target area that lets allies shoot from above)

The many refueling stations on Cibus needed someone to maintain them, and the McCormick family was more than happy to snatch up and fix whatever backwater stations Dionysus left behind if the money was right. Taking potshots at empty fuel tanks during all the downtime refueling IMC ships, a young Robert McCormick knew he wasn't going to stick with the family business long. A Dionysus crony shooting his father and forcing the McCormicks to sell their land at gunpoint made sure he couldn't.

Leaving Cibus as a teenager, Robert earned the name "Rawhide" when he started claiming bounties on outlaws others thought were too tough—like leather—and bag and tag. This kept Robert fed until he was picked up by the Remnant Fleet, who "offered" him a job when he claimed a bounty on one of their gun merchants who doubled as a warlord.

Turns out Robert had broken more than his fair share of laws in his hunting days, and the Fleet was ready to absolve him of some of them (and pay him cash) for taking up new off-the-radar targets. Saving up his earnings from these bounties, Robert hopes to enter the Apex Games to earn enough money to launch his campaign to reclaim Cibus from his employer. He just needs to wait for the right moment to strike.

Character Barks

Character Select Screen

- You won't see me comin'. But I'll see everything.
- This bullet's got your name on it.
- Ready to hunt 'em down and tear it up.
- Nothin' personal, but I'm the better shot here.
- Just watch my back and I'll knock 'em all down.

Intro

- Nothin' and no one gets by me. Promise you that.
- Remember this face, darlin'. You won't see it again.
- Best hope I'm shootin' *for* you, not at you.
- Pistol, rifle, cannon, doesn't matter. Can't outshoot me.
- Only things at the other end of my rifle are cowards and corpses.

Jumpmaster

- I'm the jumpmaster! Gonna have to trust me.
- Jumpmaster here. I'll pick us a good landin' spot.
- I'm Jumpmaster. Now, where to hole up?

Firing on an enemy

- Startin' a fight here!
- I'm firin' on a bad guy!
- Shootin' an enemy! Back me up!

Reloading (Rare)

- Trust me, next one won't miss.
- Next shot's got somethin' special in it.
- Watch this next shot.

Using Tactical Ability

- Y'all better stay away.
- Watch out for these. They're loud.
- Watch my back, 'lil guys.

Caltrops Triggered

- Ooh, they're sticky, ain't they?
- Oop! There ya are.
- Hah. Can't sneak up on *me*!

Using Ultimate Ability

- Oh hey, nice hidin' spot.
- Let's see what we have here.
- Time for a bird's eye view.

Ultimate Charging

- Hold on now, ultimate's still chagrin'.

- Yeah, ultimate's... not ready yet.
- Just a sec now, Ultimate's about ready.

Downing an Enemy

- Ooh, got one.
- Popped 'em good.
- Got one down!

Two Enemies Down

- Hoo! Gotcha both.
- That's two!
- 'Nother down. Two of 'em.

Downing a squad

- Got 'em all. Like I told you.
- Aaand squad's down. You're welcome.
- Whole squad's down. We kicked ass.

Downed

- Where'd that come from?! I'm down.
- They snuck up on me. I'm down.
- Yeah, I'm not feelin' too good. Little help?

Just two squad members left

- Welp, just you an' me bud. Let's make it count.
- Just the two of us, but don' worry. My shots're worth double.
- Okay, just us now. But we'll figure it out.

Squad Spread Out

- Hey, where'd you go? We're too far apart.
- I like my space fine, but... squad's too spread out.
- We should probably stick together. Not too close, though.

Respawned

- I'm a little tougher'n that. I'm back.
- I'm back? That was weird. Won't happen again.
- Not ready to give up on landin' that kill yet. Keep goin'.
- Let's give life another shot, huh?

Skullpiercer Rifling

- Hop-Up here. Skullpiercer? Could have some real fun with this.
- Found a Hop-Up. A Skullpiercer. For the man who don't miss, right?

RAWHIDE CINEMATIC TRAILER

INT. STORAGE ROOM ABOARD IMC SHIP

The lighting inside the makeshift interrogation room is minimal and harsh. Wedged between two shelves of cleaning supplies is a card table that barely fits, allowing one person to squeeze through to the far side of the table.

RAWHIDE sits on a chair on this far side, trapped between the back wall and the table.

RAWHIDE picks up a mug of stale coffee on the table. He takes a whiff and makes a slightly dejected face.

RAWHIDE

So...

RAWHIDE takes a slow, steady sip of lukewarm coffee.

CUT TO: the opposite side of the table, where MARINA sits. She is accompanied by two SOLDIERS holding rifles pointed at RAWHIDE. She is holding a DOSSIER that covers her face.

RAWHIDE (CONT'D)

What can I do ya fer?

MARINA lays the DOSSIER down, revealing her face to RAWHIDE.

MARINA

Good to know you're finally willing to talk, Mr. McCormick.

EXT. ABANDONED SETTLEMENT ON VICTOR - NIGHT

RAWHIDE is perched atop a hill near a settlement and taking aim with a sniper rifle as a dropship descends on his location. A fight between RAWHIDE and five SOLDIERS RAPPELLING from the dropship ensues. RAWHIDE picks two of them off as they're rappelling, and shoots one more with a handgun before the rest tackle him to the ground.

MARINA (V.O.)

You certainly gave the *five* men I brought with me the silent treatment.

(snidely)

Good to know having your back against the wall breaks the ice with you.

INT. STORAGE ROOM ABOARD IMC SHIP

RAWHIDE

(shurgs)

Y'all didn't wanna talk either, I recall.

MARINA

Mr. McCormick... You don't like being seen,

do you?

EXT. REFEULING STATION ON CIBUS - MORNING/EVENING

A young RAWHIDE is bullied by DIONYSUS crewmen at refueling station for spaceships, preventing him refueling ships. That evening, he watches those same crewmen from afar as they shout and laugh near their RED SHIP, beneath the lower-power lights of the refueling station. The next morning, RAWHIDE takes shots with his rifle at distant fuel cannisters when no one is around, PUNCTURING them.

MARINA (V.O.)

Grew up on Cibus as part of the McCormick family that bought up a bunch of refueling stations the IMC left behind.

Young RAWHIDE applies tape to the holes in the cannisters. We then see him "refueling" ships by loading the taped-up cannisters into the machines that load them into the ships. RAWHIDE watches as the RED SHIP that took off using a sabotaged fuel tank EXPLODES.

MARINA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Your family wanted their business, but you didn't play nice. Multiple incidents here of ships you refueled "malfunctioning." You've been a real handful all your life, haven't you, Mr. McCormick?

INT. STORAGE ROOM ABOARD IMC SHIP

RAWHIDE

So what do y'all want with a real handful like me, then?

MARINA

(leaning forward)

You know how to do things unnoticed. Things people would pay to have go unnoticed.

INT. DIGITAL MAP OF FRONTIER SYSTEM

A red line jumps from planet to planet to planet, starting with Cibus and jumping to a handful of others. As the line lands on each planet, multiple RED X MARKS appear on them.

MARINA

(coldly)

Took us a while to figure out who was claiming so many bounties across the Frontier. Some of them weren't even on the official bounty board. But whenever you happened to show up, there just happened to be a spate of "accidents" nearby. You're a long way from Cibus, Mr. McCormick.

INT. STORAGE ROOM ABOARD IMC SHIP

RAWHIDE leans back in his chair and crosses his arms.

RAWHIDE

What happens when you don't have a choice.

EXT. REFEULING STATION ON CIBUS - DAY

Dionysus soldiers argue with RAWHIDE's father silently as RAWHIDE watches from afar. RAWHIDE's father refuses to give in to their demands. The Dionysus soldiers later return and raze the entire fueling station, killing both of RAWHIDE's parents in the chaos.

MARINA (V.O.)

Yes, I'd heard about your parents'
accident after a tank ruptured-

INT. STORAGE ROOM ABOARD IMC SHIP

RAWHIDE loses some of his cool, but his face hides it.

RAWHIDE

(flatly)
Wasn't no accident.

EXT. REFUELING STATION ON CIBUS - DUSK

RAWHIDE is peeking out from behind the now-ruined fueling station building and sees a Dionysus ship preparing for takeoff. As the cargo bay door begins to close, he makes a break for it and boards the ship without being seen.

He stows away inside a cramped compartment of the ship, then sneaks off the ship after it's landed on a different planet.

RAWHIDE (V.O.)

Dionysus-your people-aren't the kind to
let sleeping dogs lie. So people have to
get by without endin' up in the spotlight.

INT. STORAGE ROOM ABOARD IMC SHIP

MARINA

You can track and take care of people that
need taking care of, and that makes you a
valuable potential asset to the IMC.

MARINA looks up from the DOSSIER to catch a glimpse of RAWHIDE's face as she says this. How would RAWHIDE feel about working with the parent company of the people who murdered his family? RAWHIDE's face remains blank.

MARINA (CONT'D)

(casually)
We have people who need taking care of.
And we'd prefer no one knew it.

RAWHIDE

You're *asking* me? No explodin' collar? No
holdin' my family hostage? Oh wait...

MARINA

We'd prefer it if you wanted to work with us. We don't want to have to keep after you. We could make it extremely lucrative.

EXT. REFUELING STATION ON CIBUS - DAY

A dropship arrives at the refueling station, now rebuilt and reclaimed by Dionysus. RAWHIDE, holding an assault rifle, RAPPELS into frame, along with several soldiers. The soldiers begin shooting it out with Dionysus soldiers.

Another WARSHIP and a TITAN descend in the background.

MARINA (V.O.)

Lucrative enough to do whatever you wanted.
All you need to do is clean up a few loose ends for us. Easy, right?

INT. STORAGE ROOM ABOARD IMC SHIP

RAWHIDE

I might be... *amenable* to lettin' some bygones be themselves for a change.

MARINA looks to the soldiers around her in mild disbelief. The soldiers shrug, but do not take their eyes off RAWHIDE.

MARINA

(smiling)
Well then. For your first assignment, we're going to have you play a game.

MARINA slips two items out of the DOSSIER. The first is an invitation to the Apex Games, which she tosses in front of RAWHIDE.

MARINA (CONT'D)

And we're gonna need you to "take care" of one of the players.

Marina tosses the other item in front of RAWHIDE: A photo of HORIZON.

MARINA

We need you to get her to talk about her research then make sure she never talks about it again. Think you can do that?

RAWHIDE

Hun, for the right price...

EXT. REFUELING STATION ON CIBUS - DAY

Soldiers continue pouring out of the WARSHIP as we close in on RAWHIDE, who is taking in the cacophony of gunfire and explosions with a satisfied look on his face.

RAWHIDE (V.O.)

...I can do anything.

WORLD-BUILDING SAMPLE: THE AMBULARI FLEET

This is a world-building sample I wrote when I applied for a writing position at a developer working on a sci-fi strategy game in 2023. I was asked to write a brief profile of a faction that would be added to the game, as well as an enigmatic leader that would represent that faction in-game. I wanted to tell the reader a brief story that conveyed not only the history of the faction, but its philosophy; I love when factions and groups in RTS games have a high-concept idea behind them, so I created a nomad faction that had no home planet, and which would take on a unique role in a strategy game.

The Ambulari Fleet

When the Ambulari chose to trust the kindness of strangers, it destroyed their way of life. Generations ago, a colony ship arrived on Ambulare and promised that, if the locals let them use their ship to tap into a few resource-rich veins on the planet, the natives would reap the rewards. The Ambulari had no need for the minerals, having created an economy based on collective action, sustainable farming, and solar power, but eventually relented to the outsiders' pleas to give them something for nothing. What could they lose?

They lost everything. The "advanced mining processes" relied on blasting corrosive acids into mineral deposits from orbit, vaporizing everything that wasn't valuable. They soon discovered that a number of Ambulare's sedimentary layers contained minerals that were not only poisonous when fulminated, but highly reactive.

The cataclysmic chain reaction turned the hastily built mining outposts into craters and Ambulare into an uninhabitable wasteland. The outsiders abandoned their expedition from the comfort of their spacefaring ships; the handfuls Ambulari that survived did so only by fleeing in the dhows offered to them by the outsiders as bargaining chips.

Through their self-sustaining ingenuity, the Ambulari diaspora cobbled together a small fleet of vagabond ships that now comprise most of their civilization. Swearing they would never let themselves take another bad deal, the Ambulari fleet only trades when they need to, creating "trade names" to both blend in with and keep whatever culture they deal with at arm's length. The Ambulari rarely welcome castoffs from other civilizations and keep their weapons at the ready for the first sign of a deal gone wrong. A common Ambulari saying roughly translates to "Every exchange is a sacrifice; no sacrifice without exchange."

Sydney Xiomara

Sydney Xiomara leads the Ambulari at a perilous time. For generations the spacefaring race had been governed by a congress made up of representatives from every ship in the fleet, making decisions by consensus. But after years of congress members using backroom deals with outsiders to line their pockets came to light, the assembly passed a resolution to elect a single leader to represent them in all communications with outsiders.

Elected for their pragmatic demeanor and spotless track record, Sydney is a pillar in several of the fleet's trade unions, having researched numerous cultures in college and studied them in-person as an inter-ship courier. In their early years as a member of congress, Sydney brokered several deals that helped ships negotiate better terms with outsiders, earning Sydney a reputation as someone who knew how to deal with outsiders but had not succumbed to their lures.

Sydney holds the power to either expand the presence of the fleet on the intergalactic sphere or destroy its identity by selling off the fleet in parts. They may not have been alive when the Ambulari lost their home planet, but as a student of history, they hold the lessons of that disastrous event close to their heart. But as their power grows, so does the risk of taking a short-sighted deal that spells doom for them and their fleet.

TV SCREENPLAY SAMPLE: SPIRIT OF '76

This is a traditional TV show screenwriting sample I wrote as a general catch-all for writing job applications. I wanted to get across my love of genre fiction, flex my chops with dialogue and high-concept premises, and experiment with weaving multiple time periods while keeping the storytelling intimate.

ACT ONE

EXT. ABOVE ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC - DAY

We begin with loud WHOOSHING noises as a series of colorful WORMHOLES give way to a tunnel of CLOUDS.

ANGLE ON: The screen SHAKES as we go to a close-up of a metal CAPSULE the size of a muffler falling through the clouds.

Then, a more distant shot of the clouds from below. It's sunrise. The capsule, a small speck on-screen, spins down and out of frame.

MONTAGE - EXT. AROUND NEW MEXICO - DAY

Several morning shots of a small New Mexico town. A "Carter-Mondale in '76" billboard overlooks a highway. A gas station with lines of cars around the block. The large glass window of a deli gleams in the sun as customers walk in and out. A university with a LARGE RETROFITTED WING where a computer lab has recently been installed.

EXT. OUTSIDE ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC - DAY - 1976

We see the clinic, next to a wheat field, from afar. A white portal blinks into existence a few feet above the clinic. A naked MIKE NGYUEN (29, Vietnamese-American) falls out of the portal and lands on the roof of the clinic with a loud PLOP.

INT. MIKE'S ROOM - DAY - PRESENT

We cut to a webcam feed of Mike sitting at his computer, chatting with someone over video.

MIKE

So, in the 1970s, they built a time machine.

(beat)

Yeah, a real one. It's supposed to work.

EXT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC ROOF - DAY - 1976

We see Mike, NAKED, from overhead. He is lying on the roof.

MIKE (V.O)

They have to do so much math just to figure out where to put you when you travel. Everything has to go just right.

Mike slowly opens his eyes and starts looking around for anything that might tell him where he is.

MIKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

They have to make sure you don't end up at the bottom of the ocean or something because of the rotation of the Earth and the expansion of the universe.

ANGLE ON: Mike standing up, his groin just barely out of frame. He looks to his right and looks over to the wheat field.

MIKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

If the math is off even a little, you die.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC - DAY -1976

Mike imagines the portal opening up high above the wheat field instead. We see him falling to his death and hear a loud SPLAT.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC ROOF - DAY - 1976

We cut back to Mike looking around the roof for a beat before...

EXT. CLOUDS - DAY - 1976

Another SHAKING close-up of the capsule falling through the clouds as Mike realizes it's also missing.

EXT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC ROOF - DAY - 1976

MIKE

...Shit!

INT. MIKE'S ROOM - DAY - PRESENT

Mike at his computer again.

MIKE

...So it's like a video recording, but for a whole timeline. Every moment gets recorded the moment you start the machine.

MIKE (CONT'D)

I guess they started recording in '76, so that's as far as you can go.

(an obvious jump cut in the webcam feed)
We couldn't travel back before now because the machine also has, like, an alternator. It builds up this energy, and that's what you use to travel back. And then it stores

the energy in a capsule you take with you
so you can travel back.

EXT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC ROOF - DAY - 1976

Mike looks around nervously for the capsule.

MIKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

So you really need that capsule.

Still rattled and a little self-conscious, Mike heads for the door on the roof and tries to open it. It's locked. He shoulder-checks it a couple of times before it flies open.

INT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC STAIRWELL - DAY - 1976

Mike peeks over the edge of the stairs. No one's there. He makes a run for the bottom of the stairs.

INT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC HALLWAY - DAY - 1976

It's early and most of the lights in the building aren't on yet. Mike creeps into the hallway looking for clothes, opening doors and peeking into any room that isn't locked. He's trying to be sneaky, but not taking it seriously. He does, however, hide in a room when he hears someone walking by. He eventually finds the laundry room.

MIKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It's weird because the past you travel back to isn't actually the past, it's a whole new version of events that starts from whenever the machine started recording.

MIKE (CONT'D)

So you're not changing the present at all if you change the past. And the recording gets erased when you come back, so nothing you do there matters.

INT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY - 1976

Mike starts RIFLING through the laundry hampers and pulls out a scrub shirt and pants, but they're different colors. He hesitates for a beat before hearing FOOTSTEPS coming down the hallway.

Mike starts to put on the scrubs when ARACELI RODRIGUEZ (32, Latinx) walks in with a bundle of CLOTHES. She recoils with a loud YELP after seeing Mike pulling up scrub pants, dropping the bundle.

ARACELI

Híjoles de su-- who are you!?

INT. MIKE'S ROOM - DAY - PRESENT

MIKE

I'm a pretty decent guy, I think. I guess I don't stand out much. But when they were taking applications to test the machine, I got the job immediately.

INT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY - 1976

Mike and Araceli STARE at each other for a while.

MIKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Maybe I'm just bad at making connections.
Talking to people.
(a beat, then annoyed)
Yes, that's why I don't have a girlfriend.

Araceli gives Mike a look like "well?" then picks up the clothes.
Mike darts his eyes around for a moment before speaking.

MIKE

I'm... uh, a visitor.

Araceli, standing up with the full bundle in her arms, dumps it into the hamper. She gives him a suspicious look.

MIKE (CONT'D)

A patient, I mean.

Araceli still isn't buying it and continues to stare.

MIKE

I'm...

MIKE (V.O.)

Yeah, they do have a protocol about what to say to people.

INT. MIKE'S ROOM - DAY - PRESENT

MIKE (CONT'D)

You're not supposed to tell anyone you're a time-traveler. No one would believe you, you'd endanger the project, etc. That's where not being white actually helps. You can tell people you're an immigrant.

INT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY - 1976

Mike finally recollects himself and starts to remember protocol.

MIKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Maybe that's why they hired me. 'Cause we're Vietnamese.

MIKE

I'm not from around here.

Mike swallows nervously and tries to look at Araceli knowingly.
Araceli gives Mike an incredulous "uh-huh" look.

MIKE (V.O.)

I mean, you're still gonna lie your ass off, but it's a good to start, I guess.

INT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC BREAK ROOM - DAY - 1976

Mike, holding a Styrofoam cup, is seated at a table in the corner of the starkly-lit break room, opposite the doorway. Araceli is getting herself coffee at the counter.

ANGLE ON: A CALENDAR of 1976 flipped to its July page. The top page shows the logo of the clinic, including the name of the city.

MIKE

I didn't come here *during* the war. I lived in Canada. But after the war ended, I figured that was a good time to come over.

ARACELI

(puzzled)
...why?

MIKE

Well, there wasn't much for me in Canada, so I just thought I would blend in here with all the other Vietnamese.

ARACELI

Do you watch the news? Because people around here aren't too happy with the Vietnamese right now.

(sitting down)
So tell me, "Mike," why are you here, really? You're not a patient, and Nurses don't get dressed in the laundry room.

MIKE

I, uh...

ARACELI

(chiding)
You're bad at lying.

EXT. CLOUDS - DAY - 1976

Another shot of the capsule falling through the clouds.

INT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC BREAK ROOM - DAY - 1976

MIKE

I'm looking for something.

We hold on Mike as he hesitates to say more.

MIKE (V.O.)

You're definitely not supposed to tell people about the capsule.

MIKE

A... jar.

ARACELI

A jar?

MIKE

My mother's ashes. I lost them on the way here.

ARACELI

(confused)

You lost your mother's ashes on the way to a community clinic? We don't treat ashes.

MIKE

It's... a long story. Rather not talk about it. You know how you said people aren't happy with the Vietnamese right now?

ARACELI

(nodding knowingly)

...Oh.

(a beat)

So what, they took your mother *and* your clothes? You don't look all that hurt. You okay? We can--

MIKE

No, no I'm okay. They just, they thought they'd have a laugh or something. But they took the jar and I don't know where it is.

Mike and Araceli awkwardly look at each other for a beat.

MIKE

I really loved my mom, you know.

ANGLE ON: Araceli glancing around awkwardly. She knows what's coming but prays Mike won't ask her.

MIKE

Could you help me out? Just a quick ride--

ARACELI

Ah, I wish I could, but I, you know, these scrubs aren't just for fun.

MIKE

What about after? What if--

Mike suddenly realizes he has a way to persuade Araceli.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Okay, this is going to sound weird, but...

INT. MIKE'S ROOM - DAY - PRESENT

MIKE

I was looking at lottery records today, actually. You can't take anything back with you but being rich can't hurt, right?

INT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC BREAK ROOM - DAY - 1976

MIKE

I can get you a lot of money.

ARACELI

(eyes narrowing)

What?

MIKE

I work for the lottery. And I know the numbers they're going to call out. I can't win the lottery, but you can.

Araceli is more intrigued than tempted.

MIKE (CONT'D)

You'd get half the money.

(off her look)

Most! You can have most of it. 70-30. But you gotta help me out.

Araceli doesn't buy any of this, but a combination of curiosity and compassion compel her to see where this is going.

ARACELI

Maybe.

(off Mike's look)

Maybe. I get off in a couple of hours.

There's a gas station down the street.

(reaching into her pockets)

I have a dollar. Go grab something to eat.

Mike gets up excitedly and takes the dollar.

ARACELI

(standing up)

Don't talk to people. It's not for you.

MIKE

Right, totally. Thank you.

Mike swings his arms wide to HUG Araceli but hesitates and puts his arms down. Araceli looks surprised then backs away.

INT. MIKE'S ROOM - DAY - PRESENT

MIKE

Oh yeah, no, I'm freaking out. It's time travel! Like, it's *the* thing, you know? I don't know what's going to happen, but...

EXT. ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY CLINIC EXTERIOR - DAY - 1976

Mike walks out of the clinic's front entrance, putting the dollar in his pocket. He looks to his left toward the wheat field, then his right, where he spots a garbage truck in the distance.

ANGLE ON: A close-up of the garbage truck. It's about to lift the dumpster of the gas station Araceli mentioned. The capsule is on top of the dumpster. Mike can barely make it out, but the bright-blue glow of the time energy peeking through the capsule's clear-glass panel is impossible to miss.

Mike STARES at the capsule as it's about to be picked up.

MIKE (V.O.)

...we'll see how it goes. I'm pretty
excited, yeah. Love you mom, bye!

END OF ACT ONE