

NELL RABAN, Design Samples

***Sea of Legends* – Procedural Narrative (1 page)**

Templates for injecting dynamic text strings for the board game *Sea of Legends*, published by Guildhall studios.

***Mother Tongue* – Interactive Fiction (2 pages)**

A survey of my submission to IFComp 2020, a short Twine in the form of a text messaging conversation.

***Dragon Age: Inquisition* – CRPG Quest (2 pages)**

An overview of my original character and companion recruitment mission inspired by the third installment of Bioware's popular fantasy series.

ALEX – Interactive Conversation (2 pages)

An itemized breakdown of custom work requested by a client company licensing ALEX, Jellyvision's interactive benefits enrollment tool.

After I'd written a number of unique adventures for *Sea of Legends*, Guildhall Studios contracted me to help lay out the dynamic string templates for their repeatable adventure stories. I knew I could rely on certain pre-existing strings, but the real challenge was to carve out spaces for new strings that were both evocative and flexible enough that they could potentially be used in a variety of adventures.

Blue bolded text is a string that already exists. Dark green bolded text is a brand new string.

You and **Itzel** infiltrate **Thieves' Landing** in search of **Bones**, who holds the **Eye of Tlaloc**. Together you sneak past the outer defenses of the Spanish occupiers and come face to face with **Bones himself**, the relic in **his** grasp. **"Lookin' for this?" he** taunts. **His** guards close ranks around **him**.

Forget the odds. (Challenge.)

Offer up your own Relic in exchange for the Eye of Tlaloc.

Forget the odds. (Challenge.)

Success: **"We tempt the currents tonight," Itzel** exclaims. As **she dives** toward **Bones**, you engage with **his** guards. **Steel and tentacles clash in tense combat**, but you emerge victorious, with **Itzel's tail** pressing **Bones'** face into the ground. **"We have back our Eye of Tlaloc. For that, take this. Be well, landwalker."**

Result: **Itzel's** status is set to available. Player discards **her** crew card. Gain Ally Relic.

Failure: **"We tempt the currents tonight!" Itzel** exclaims. As **she dives** toward **Bones**, you engage **his** guards. **Steel and tentacles clash in tense combat**, but **Bones** and **his** crew have you outnumbered. You manage to escape and notice that **Itzel's** been injured. **"No matter. We live to fight another day."**

Result: **Itzel's** status is set to available. Player discards **her** crew card.

Offer up your own Relic in exchange for the Eye of Tlaloc.

"A dealer, eh? Know what, you can have your bauble then." Bones casually **tosses the Eye of Tlaloc at Itzel**. You hand over your relic in return. **"This'll do. Now scram before I change my mind!"** Later when you're both safe, **Itzel** expresses **her** thanks. **"Smart as a dolphin you are. You deserve this. May it aid you."**

Result: **Itzel's** status is set to available. Player discards **her** crew card.

Player-facing text

You and **[Text_Faction1Guest]** infiltrate **[Text_Location2]** in search of **[Text_Faction2Guest]**, who holds the **[Text_Faction1Relic]**. Together you sneak past the outer defenses of the Spanish occupiers and come face to face with **[Text_Faction2Guest]** **[Text_NPC2Reflexive]**, the relic in **[Text_NPC2Possessive]** grasp. **"[Text_Relictaunt]" [Text_NPC2Subj]** taunts. **[Text_NPC2PossCap]** guards close ranks around **[Text_NPC2Obj]**.

Forget the odds. (Challenge.)

Offer up your own Relic in exchange for the [Text_Faction1Relic].

Forget the odds. (Challenge.)

Success: **"[Text_AgainstTheOdds]," [Text_Faction1Guest]** exclaims. As **[Text_NPC1Subj]** **[Text_AthleticApproach]** toward **[Text_Faction2Guest]**, you engage with **[Text_NPC1Possessive]** guards. **[Text_RelictCombat]**, but you emerge victorious, with **[Text_Faction1Guest]'s [Text_LowerLimb]** pressing **[Text_Faction2Guest]'s** face into the ground. **"[Text_RelictSuccessResult] [Text_Faction1Relic][Text_RelictSuccessResult]"**

Result: **[Text_Faction1Guest]'s** status is set to available. Player discards **[Text_NPC1Possessive]** crew card. Gain Ally Relic.

Failure: **"[Text_AgainstTheOdds]!" [Text_Faction1Guest]** exclaims. As **[Text_NPC1Subj]** **[Text_AthleticApproach]** toward **[Text_Faction2Guest]**, you engage **[Text_NPC1Possessive]** guards. **[Text_RelictCombat]**, but **[Text_Faction2Guest]** and **[Text_NPC1Possessive]** crew have you outnumbered. You manage to escape and notice that **[Text_Faction1Guest]'s** been injured. **"[Text_RelictFailureResult]"**

Result: **[Text_Faction1Guest]'s** status is set to available. Player discards **[Text_NPC1Possessive]** crew card.

Offer up your own Relic in exchange for the Eye of Tlaloc.

[Text_RelictDeal] [Text_Faction2Guest] [Text_RelictDeal] [Text_Faction1Relic] [Text_RelictDeal] [Text_Faction1Guest] You hand over your relic in return. **"[Text_FG2RelicResult]"** Later when you're both safe, **[Text_Faction1Guest]** expresses **[Text_NPC1Possessive]** thanks. **"[Text_FG1RelicResult]"**

Result: **[Text_Faction1Guest]'s** status is set to available. Player discards **[Text_NPC1Possessive]** crew card.

Authoring tool text

“You're sitting at home, minding your business, when your mom texts you. It's a familiar situation. But when the chat turns nostalgic, how do you reconcile her regrets about how she raised you with your own needs? Do you just indulge her, or do you take this opportunity to forge a deeper relationship with your family and your heritage?”

Mother Tongue is a short interactive fiction game written in Twine 2 and submitted to IFCOMP 2020. It allows the player to explore their fictional relationship to family and heritage through a simple text message-style interface, achieved by customizing Philo van Kemenade's Trialogue story format.

The game subjects the player to a series of the Ma character's Tagalog lessons. How well the player does, and the enthusiasm they show, ultimately affects their relationship to Ma in both trivial and profound ways.

IFDB page with playable link:

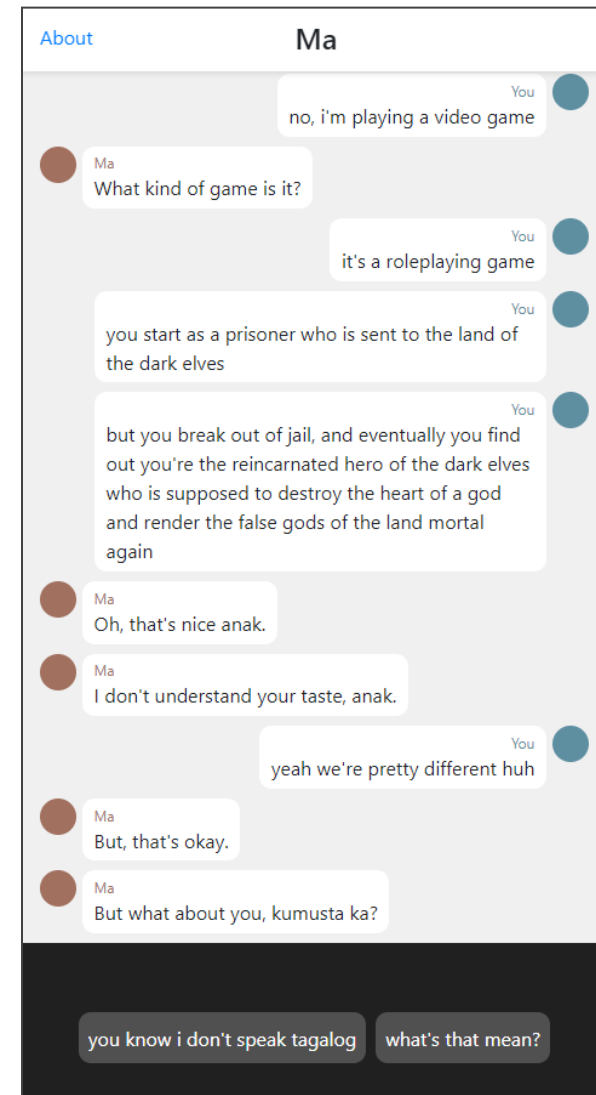
<https://ifdb.org/viewgame?id=er2xdsb698f76hu3>

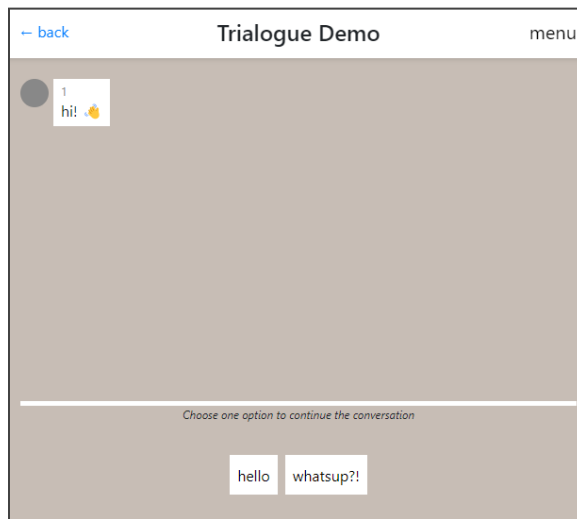
Goals

- Provide space for meaningful personality expression and character interactions
- Wrap pop quiz gameplay within familiar conversational language
- Offer multiple distinct endings without extensive branching

+Polish: Very polished.
 +Descriptive: The characters really came alive.
 +Interactivity: I felt like my choices really mattered.
 +Emotional impact: Felt some tension. Worried I'd say the wrong things.
 +Would I play again? Sure!

From a review by user MathBrush on *Mother Tongue's* IFDB page





What the Trialogue story format looks like before any customization

```

:: ma wraps up [speaker-ma]
I think that is all I can do tonight, anak.

<% s.finalMood = s.mood + (s.scoreTotal / 2); %>
<% story.showDelayed("mood response"); %>

:: mood response [speaker-ma]
<% if (s.finalMood >= 6) {
  %>I had so much fun! Thank you sweetheart!<%
} else if (s.finalMood >= 2 && s.finalMood <= 5) {
  %>Thank you for humoring me!<%
} else {
  %>I hope you learned something.<%
} %>

```

Mother Tongue was the first game I made with Twee, a human-readable text format for Twine source code

Game structure

- Ma texts you and asks what you're doing, **game saves choice**
- Ma offers to teach you Tagalog
- **Lesson:** anak
- **Lesson:** what you were doing
- **Branch 1:**
 - **Lesson:** food and cooking
 - skips **Branch 2**
 - **Detour:** curse words
 - **Ma Will Remember This**
 - leads directly into food and cooking
- **Branch 2:**
 - **Lesson:** food and cooking
 - **Lesson:** activities and stuff
- Ma asks if you want to keep going
- **Lesson:** whichever wasn't chosen at previous branch
- Resolution
 - Quiz **Score** is totaled
 - Ma's **Mood** is determined by various conversation responses
 - **Final Mood** is calculated based on **Score** and **Mood**, then tiered:
 1. Ma is happy and had fun
 2. Ma is glad you humored her
 3. Ma hopes you at least learned something
 - Each **Final Mood** tier offers a unique set of options where you can express your own feelings about the lesson
- Game ends

I've tried to write this letter six times, but I'm just no good at this. There's so much I want to tell you. But I don't think there's anything I can say that you'll accept. Well maybe I don't need you to accept it. Maybe I just need to say it.

When we left that day for the Silent Plains there was a part of me that thought, I'm not coming back. And I was ready for that. But after it was over, when I saw Gray's body, I knew I was wrong. There was no preparing for that.

I'll never forget how you looked right at me and told me you wished it was me instead. The truth is, I wish it too, every day since. I'm sorry.

Aya

An unsent letter

A number of my writing samples allude to an original companion and questline inspired by *Dragon Age: Inquisition*. As part of this independent exercise, I created:

- Design pitch for character named Aya Flor
- Companion recruitment mission
 - Play the Twine version here: <https://nell-raban.itch.io/the-reluctant-dragon-slayer>
- Cinematic version of combat sequence (see writing portfolio)
- Interactive cinematic for conclusion of loyalty mission (see writing portfolio)
- Non-VO text, including quest log and codex entries

Goals

- Design and pitch a compelling NPC companion that would feel at home in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*
- Write a quest that adheres to the game's narrative systems, such as including tonal choices and investigation hubs

The reluctant folk hero

Ellen Ripley meets Hua Mulan



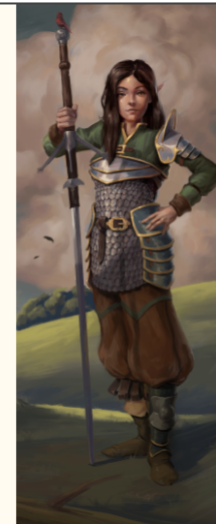
- The only person who has any sense
- The nerve to do what's necessary
- The sole survivor of a trauma
- A reluctance to return



- Her family's only option
- The cunning to see things through
- A sense of duty
- A desire for normalcy

Basics

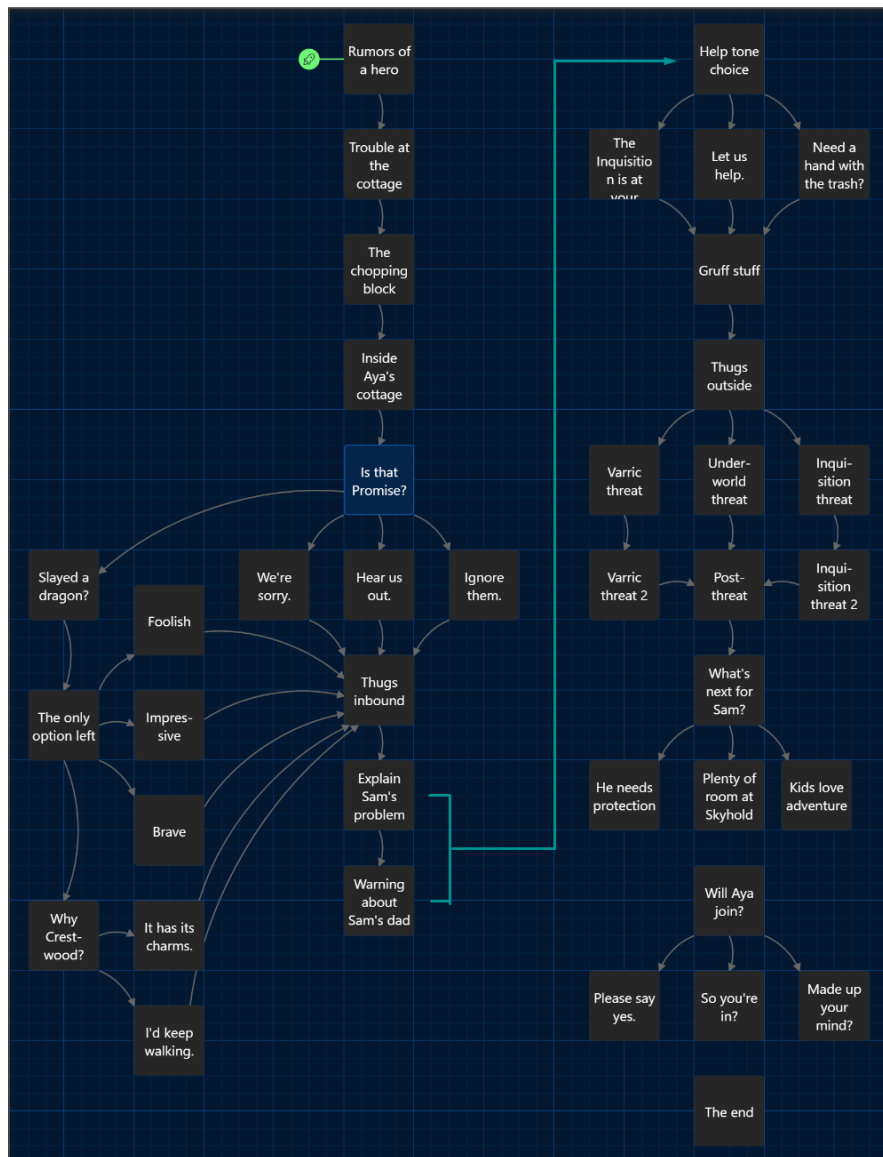
- Elf
- Female
- Warrior
- Light armor
- Two-handed weapon
- Folk hero



Upgrades

- Starting companion
- Quest with tragic ending
- Romance (very gay)

Excerpts from the pitch deck



Twine passage layout for *The Reluctant Dragon Slayer*

The Reluctant Dragon Slayer

Tales are told of the peasant that killed a dragon, and that she currently resides in Crestwood. The Inquisition could use more people like her in its ranks.

- Talk to Cullen.
- Find Aya Flor in Crestwood.
- (if the player chooses combat) Drive off the thugs.

Quest log entry for Aya Flor's recruitment mission

Quest summary

It has been many years since Aya Flor left Nevarra, where she became a local hero for slaying the Dragon of the Silent Plains, to seek a quiet life in Crestwood. Circumstances being what they are, however, the Inquisition wishes to recruit Aya for the fight against Corypheus and his legions. Haunted by her past and uncomfortable wearing a hero's mantle, Aya will take some convincing.

Visiting her in Crestwood cabin, the Inquisitor's party learns more about the tragic cost of Aya's heroic deed. Soon, however, it becomes clear that that trouble follows her no matter where she goes. This time, she's protecting a young boy from his abusive father, the influential landowner Jarvis Pike. Pike has sent thugs to Aya's cabin to collect his son, but if the Inquisition helps her drive them off, she'll consider joining up.

The party may be able to talk the thugs into leaving them alone if the circumstances are right, such as having a certain perk or a certain companion being in the party. If all else fails, however, the party can fight the thugs off[†]. Afterward, Aya agrees to join the Inquisition, provided there's room at Skyhold for her young ward.

The quest grants Aya Flor as a party companion and enables her loyalty mission^{††}, which allows the Inquisition to help Aya deal with Farmer Pike once and for all.

[†] The cinematic version of this combat is available to read in my writing portfolio.

^{††} The cinematic script for this mission is available to read in my writing portfolio.

As an employee at [Client] with many options for mental health programs, I would like to quickly know what my options are in a fun and easy way.

User story

[Client] purchased a custom module with logic to help users learn about the mental health programs that are available to them. However, they aren't thrilled about their employees having to go through the intro still and answer the many questions we have to ask for the rest of the modules. Especially since they anticipate users who are actively seeking this module to be in a fragile state and would have a much higher bail rate if faced with a bunch of questions.

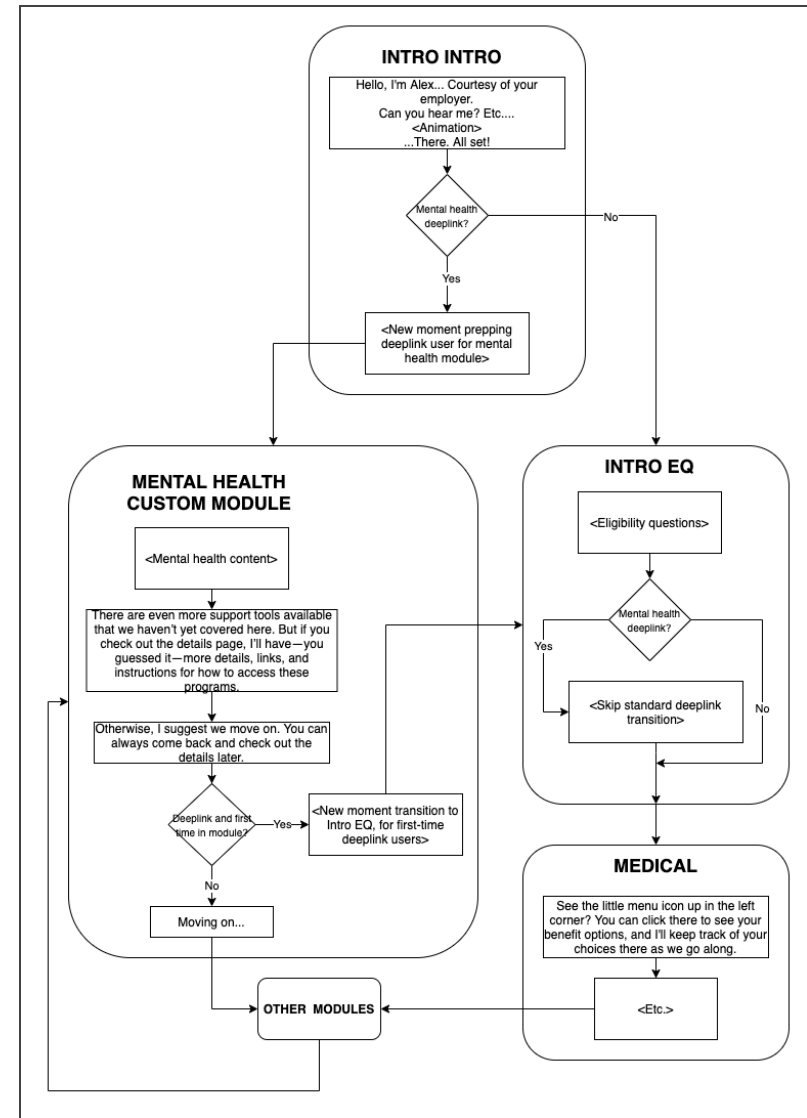
Therefore, they'd like us to evaluate any and all options we can think of to skip over eligibility questions in the intro so users can navigate directly to the mental health content quickly and easily.

Background

This is a scope for Jellyvision's ALEX Benefits Counselor, an interactive multimedia conversation that guides employees through decisions about their benefit elections.

Client companies can purchase customizations to address unique aspects of their employee benefits that the standard ALEX conversation doesn't handle. Customizations start with a scoping process to determine the feasibility and cost of a request.

The user story and background above were written by Jellyvision's equivalent of a project manager or producer. The scope and diagram that follow are mine.



Scope Overview

We can ensure that users who have deeplink access to the mental health custom module see that content in its entirety as soon as possible, by building in a set of transition moments and routing changes. Note that the deeplink tag would be "#custom_module_1" (or _2, or _3, depending on which custom module project we end up building the mental health content in).

The basic flow would be:

- The beginning of Intro, through the fish feeding moment
- A new transition moment
- Mental health custom module
- The remainder of Intro to answer eligibility questions
- Medical, menu button reveal
- Normal conversation behavior from here on

Intro Intro

The conversation will start off normally -- I don't think we can afford to skip the sound check. However, we need to make sure ALEX sends the user to the mental health module before taking the eligibility quiz. Luckily, Intro is built in such a way that making this happen is pretty easy.

At the end of the fish feeding animation, ALEX normally says "Now tell me..." as a segue into the eligibility questions. We'll need to cut this with an **audio change**. Depending on the writing of the new moment, we could also replace this line with a custom segue rather than just cutting it.

We'll also need a **custom moment** (up to 30 seconds/90 words) that prepares the user for the mental health module. In this moment we could also explain to the user that they'll be able to access the rest of the conversation afterward.

We'll need to introduce **logic** in these changes as well. Both the audio change and the custom moment should only be experienced by users who are on the mental health deeplink. Additionally, we need to do a routing change at the end of the new moment to send the user to the custom module.

Custom Module

We can keep the custom module itself largely intact. The only work we need to do here is to create a **custom moment** to segue the user back to Intro to complete eligibility.

This work also includes some **logic**. Only users who are here from the deeplink, and are seeing the module for the first time, should get this moment. And at the end of the moment, we'll add some code to send the user to intro/eq. We'll also make sure that the user doesn't see this moment again, should they return to the module later.

Intro EQ

Once the user is done with the mental health module, they'll return to Intro to complete eligibility. We'll need to do some invisible **logic** work in a few spots here to ensure that, at the end of the EQ, we send the user on to Medical -- otherwise they'd be sent back to the mental health module, like a normal deeplink user would.

Medical

Finally, after completing eligibility, the user will start Medical, where we reveal the menu button. By default, a normal deeplink user would skip this content; the menu button is instead revealed to them in intro/eq. So we need to do a bit more invisible **logic** work to ensure that we reveal the menu button to mental health deeplinkers here in Medical.