A Narrative Designer's Toolkit: Resources for Narrative Game Designers

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[Psst... gimme a sign when we’ve got 15 minutes left]
Who is this guy?

- Venerable Roleplaying Game Designer of:
  - Ancient Era of D&D: Paranoia, RuneQuest, AD&D, WFRP, Tales of the Arabian Nights
  - Modern Era of CRPG: design lead; Morrowind and Oblivion for Bethesda Softworks
  - Post-Modern Era: Failed Retiree
  - Post-Virtual Era: design lead on “I’ve Got a Secret and I Won’t Tell” for Big Huge Games
Harlan Ellison - List of Writer's Resources

Bernstein's Reverse Dictionary

Rhyming Dictionary
Mrs. Byrne's Dictionary of Unusual, Obscure, and Preposterous Words

By Josefa Heftez Byrne
What are tools good for?

- Making Stuff...
- Priming the Pump...
- Primping Professional Pride...
- Tangible Currency of Quality...

Note: Most of my tools are for creating vast fantasy roleplaying narratives... so if you hate them, it might be time for you to slip out the door.
What do my tools look like?

Physical Artifacts

Virtual Artifacts
Physical artifacts...

- books
- games
- magazines, pamphlets, and maps
- cinema
... including pogey bait*... for low-blood-sugar emergencies

* Marine slang for ratio sweets used for barter

Trail mix

Donuts
Virtual artifacts...
Virtual artifacts...

- Game saves, FAQs, walkthrus
- Student portfolios
- Game editors & dev tools
- Archived websites
- Software
- Models of storytelling and poetry
- Riddles
- Text lists
- Manifestos
- Bookmarks
- Game proposals and pitches
- Gameplay video & trailers
- Pitch documents
- RSS feeds
- Marketing materials
- Graphics - Fonts - Images - Artifact documents
- LARPs
- FRP game PDFs
- Job descriptions
- Internet
- Game diaries
- Archival websites
Dafont – browse themes like: foreign, ancient, runes, fantastic
http://www.dafont.com/

The Scriptorium
http://www.fontcraft.com/fontcraft/?p=528
Artifact Presentation

Fonts

http://www.shipbrook.com/jeff/typograf.html
Get fonts “JSL Ancient” and “JSL Ancient Italic”, and JSL Font Converter, a utility that processes text to add obsolete 17th C. characters and ligatures.

Facsimiles

“The Ruins: or a Survey of the Revolutions of Empires”, by Constantin-François Chasseboeuf, marquis de Volney [1789]

Restoration Print Culture - sample facsimiles of period literature
http://cogweb.ucla.edu/Restoration/index.html
At these words, my eyes filled with tears: and covering my head with the fold of my mantle, I sank into gloomy meditations on all human affairs....

...And sunk in profound melancholy, I remained motionless.

- Constantin-François Chasseboeuf, marquis de Volney
THE
RUINS:
or
-A SURVEY
OF THE
REVOLUTIONS
OF
EMPIRES.

BY M. VOLNEY,
ONE OF THE DEFENDERS TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF 1789;
AND AUTHOR OF TRAVELS INTO SYRIA AND EGYPT.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

THE THIRD EDITION

I will dwell in solitude amidst the ruins of cities I will enquire of the
monuments of antiquity, what was the wisdom of former ages: I will
ask the effects of legislatures, what causes have erected and overthrown
empires: what are the principles of national prosperity and misfortunes:
what the maxims upon which the price of folly and the happiness of
man ought to be founded? Ch. iv. p. 24.

LONDON;
PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.
M.DCC.LXVI.
I will dwell in solitude amidst the ruins of cities:

and furthermore a useful History of those Places
of Interest by Nature of their Location & Influence

The strongest swimmer is soonest drowned.

The strongest swimmer is soonest drowned.
Well wrought this wall:
Weirds broke it.
The stronghold burst . . .
Snapped rooftrees, towers fallen,
the work of the Giants, the stonemiths, mouldereth.

-The Ruin - 8\textsuperscript{th} C Anglo Saxon poem

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ruin
Juvenile Books

- Gods
- Death
- War
- Magic
- Exotic
- Extinct
- Melancholy

Search for “how would you survive” on Amazon...
Paper RPGs

- Gods
- Death
- War
- Magic
- Exotic
- Extinct
- Heroic
Glorantha

RuneQuest [Mongoose]

HeroQuest [Issaries]

King of Dragon Pass
http://a-sharp.com/buy/ [download one-year demo]

Glorantha ["A Personal View: What My Father Told Me"]
http://www.btinternet.com/~Nick_Brooke/voices/ISS3001.HQVoices-300.pdf

[See also Nick Brooke Gloranthan LARP in the LARP section.]
King Arthur Pendragon

Out of print, but pdf version available...
http://rpg.drivethrufu...
Call of Cthulhu

Masks of Nyarlathotep...
classic campaign presentation

Cthulhu Lives...
Free, brilliant artifact props
http://www.cthulhulives.org/toybox/PROP_DOCS/FreeProps.html

Arkham toe tag
Grey Ranks

Roleplay Resistance teens in Poland.

FRPs do heroic escapism. Rarely do they do tragedy.


review by Greg Costikyan
http://playthisthing.com/grey-ranks
Live Action Roleplaying [LARPs]

http://www.rpg.net/larp/scenario.html#general

http://www.etyries.com/moonson/index.htm
Character sheets and background sheets for a major Gloranthan LARP.
http://www.etyries.com/moonson/yolanela.htm
A sample character for the 'Life of Moonson' LARP with a public and a hidden identity, with 'Objectives', 'Who You Know', 'Other Knowledge', 'Secrets', and 'Special Items'.

Future scheduled LARPS with descriptions.
Names & Languages

Onomastikon - archive this... it comes and goes
http://www.gaminggeeks.org/Resources/KateMonk/

Everchanging Book of Names (a.k.a. EBoN)
http://ebon.pyorre.net/

Omniglot: writing systems and languages of the world
http://www.omniglot.com/index.htm

English - Tlingit Dictionary
http://www.alaskool.org/language/dictionaries/akn/tlingit/information/Index_TND.html
"I could eat a baby's arse through a sewer grate." [Morrowind]

*Whole Grains: A Book of Quotations* - Art Spiegelman & Bob Schneider

*Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*

Henry Beard - *Latin for All Occasions*

"*In the good old days, children like you were left to perish on wind-swept crags.*" "*Antiquis temporibus, nati tibi similes in rupibus ventosissimus exponebantur ad necem.*"
Quotes from *Whole Grains*

A thorough survey may prove it impossible to buy a plain white or decently tasteful shirt in all of Las Vegas.
- Jann Wenner

The world looks as if it has been left in the custody of a pack of trolls.
- Father Robert F. Capon

The magnificence of the mountains, the serenity of nature... nothing is safe from the idiot marks of man’s passing.
- Loudon Wainwright

I don’t think that women are capable of achieving enlightenment. They’re really nice to have around otherwise.
Arthur Kleps, Grand Boo Hoo of the Neo American Church

Don’t never trust no skirt.
- Wallace Beery
Lists

The simplest tool of all.

• Annotated lists of books, games, software tools, & films I’ve consumed or want to consume.
• Maintained in simple text files, stored on Dropbox and always accessible.
• Evernote: text lists and image lists... AND accessible and manageable on iPhone.

The 400 Project – rules of good game design

What Makes A Good Game -- Nineteen Good Game Features
Lists - Design Goals for Morrowind

1. Graphics
2. Freeform
3. Personalized Hero
4. Epic Setting
5. Editor
6. Quests
7. Factions
8. Action Immersion
9. Epic Story
10. Dialog & Info Management
What Makes A Good Game?

A GameSpot News report of a pre-GenCon Game Designers Conference – Discussion including Richard Garfield, Jeff Grubb, Lester Smith, Michael Stackpole, Mike Fitzgerald.

1. Lots of positive reinforcement to keep gamers playing.
3. A level of engagement beyond the norm.
4. Authentic decisions with reasonable data and consequences.
5. Clear sense of role and goal within the game context.
6. Vicarious thrills with suspended disbelief.
7. A replayable potential (the "What if?" factor).
8. A simple interface (non-intrusive on the PC/less clutter in physical games).
9. Enough options that the player always has a move to make.
10. A reasonable learning curve.
11. [cont.]
What Makes A Good Game? [cont.]

- 12. Clean and clear rules.
- 13. An enjoyment quotient that is equal to the time investment.
- 14. Potential use of unlimited power (lots of skill or lots of dice).
- 15. Pacing that gives one a sense of improvement paced with challenge/place to savor accomplishment.
- 16. Tactilicity (stuff to grab and control - pieces in board games/miniatures, for example).
- 17. Heuristics - a sense of how one is doing and how to become better.
- 18. A quality of engendering stories about the game or bragging rights.
- 19. A sense of accomplishment and competence.
Tanya Short – Oblivion – Guild Hall student project - Noble Intentions Level Design Doc... great model of student/design candidate portfolio site... but attachments gone now 😞
http://guildhall.smu.edu/Individual-Student-Portfolio-T.144.0.html?&tx_guildhallstudentportfolios_pi1[user]=561

Jeremy Sera – Oblivion – Town of Bartholm mod with design doc
http://jsera.fortinbras.net/
http://jsera.fortinbras.net/bartholm_design.html

Chris Taylor [game design doc template]
http://www.runawaystudios.com/articles/chris_taylor_gdd.asp

By the way, Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion Game of the Year (eGuide) reflects extensive access to internal game docs.
Game Dev Tools

Access to structures and content of development – see how it’s done.

Morrowind & Oblivion: The Elder Scrolls Construction Set Wiki
http://cs.bethsoft.com/constwiki/index.php/Main_Page

Fallout 3: GECK: Garden of Eden Creation Kit™
http://geck.bethsoft.com/index.php/Main_Page
Game Guides/FAQs/Walkthroughs

Ebook, pdf, and hardcopy game guides can be excellent overviews for game developers, well-organized to reveal structure, and lavishly illustrated.

Betrayal at Krondor Help Web  
http://www3.hi.is/~eybjorn/krondor/krondor.html

Unofficial Elder Scrolls Pages  
http://www.uesp.net/wiki/Main_Page

Game Guide for Might and Magic IV: Mandate of Heaven at The Spoiler  
- inspiration for Morrowind region guides  
- a landscape region grid; click a region... go to a region detail map with numbered sites and a detailed map key with site descriptions  
Narrative Designer Tools to Master

- CorelDraw [or other text-handy vector graphics editor]
- Powerpoint
- Excel
- Photoshop [grr...]
- Word [when it has to be shared and pretty]
- Screenplay format [software or Word template]
- Text Editor [for really fast writing]
- Wiki/OneNote
- Evernote [for note-taking with images]
Cinematic Archives

Film and TV Screenplays – models of form, structure, and dialog
http://www.simplyscripts.com/

Subtitles – when you can’t find a screenplay or want the exact film dialog
http://lx.divxstation.com/subtitles.asp

Screen Captures
Games Archives

• save games
• personal gameplay clips
  FRAPS - http://www.fraps.com/
  AutoGK - http://www.autogk.me.uk/
• trailers
• hint books, FAQs, and websites
• reviews
• sell sheets, box backs, feature lists, websites
• walkthroughs from youtube [tools to save and archive them]
  http://www.youtubedownloaderhd.com/
• personal game diaries - Withershyn in Morrowind – delicious travel diary, charming voice, ironic tone, and well-illustrated [site defunct; from Wayback]
• Gametap [runs old games like Betrayal at Krondor]
Product Promotion Models

• Marketing is designer duty
  • how do models identify their features and target audiences?
  • how do you graphically and textually communicate at the slogan/poster/propaganda level?

• Archive models of:
  • sell-sheets
  • web marketing
  • advertisements
  • trailers
  • posters

World of the Witcher video – introduction to setting [ignore voiceover]
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5K0L73ERMw
RSS Readers & RSS feeds

Gamasutra articles
http://feeds.feedburner.com/GamasutraFeatureArticles/
Example: Designing Dialog Systems: handy survey of game dialog systems

Tom Chick – smart and funny
http://fidgit.com/rss.xml

Shacknews – fewer posts, better scanning
http://feed.shacknews.com/shackfeed.xml

Kotaku – when you’ve got days to kill
http://feeds.gawker.com/kotaku/full
GDC Powerpoints

Gordon Walton - 10 Things Great Designers Exhibit
http://www.gdcvault.com/free/category - search for 'gordon walton'

Do, Don't Show - Patrick Redding

Richard Rouse/ Marty Stoltz – Cinematic Game Design
http://www.paranoidproductions.com/writings.html
I Have No Words & I Must Design - Greg Costikyan
http://www.costik.com/nowords.html

SMU Guildhall - student portfolios
http://guildhall.smu.edu/Student-Portfolios.37.0.html

Game Design Course – models and syllabi
http://www.alanemrich.com/
Project Pitch Models

- Private and proprietary... but I archive them whenever I find them.

Meataxe

*By the seventh day, Eric Holden can scarcely imagine a single problem that can’t be settled by the judicious application of a meataxe.*

BeerOverIP – delivery of beer via internet protocol
http://www.costik.com/weblog/

Investor Contact: greg@manifestgames.com
A trackless wilderness of beauty and menace.
Winter is coming... and in the darkness, terror breeds.
A handful of settlers on the edge of the world... 
... can you save them?
Rowdy Vikings Faction

- Tough
- Unproductive
- Internally Divided
- Gloomy
- Drunken
- Violent
- Self-Destructive

Viking Romance

- Dark, Moody, Sultry,
- Fearless, Deadly
- Archer and
- Chieftain’s Daughter

Viking Leader

- Handsome, Bi-Polar, Axe-Wielding, Mature, Charismatic
- Outlaw Chieftain
- Leif Erikson, played by Liam Neeson or Kurt Russell

Homicidal Xena, played by Keira Knightly or Kate Beckinsale
Archiving Tools

Xmarks - bookmark sync among your browsers everywhere
http://www.xmarks.com/

Add Bookmark Here ² - manage and organize bookmarks

Web site archiving – save that web page before it dies.
http://www.httrack.com/

http://www.archive.org/web/web.php

Search Everything – searches your hard drive for file names instantly
http://www,voidtools.com/

Google Desktop – search inside all files on all your web-connected computers for a string
http://desktop.google.com/
Models of Storytelling and Poetry

George Ade: Fables in Slang -
http://www.archive.org/details/fablesinslang00adeg

Mrs. Mortimer [venomous, racist, foreigner-slurring Victorian writer of travel books; model for Oblivion’s town guides]

Project Gutenberg- http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page
- Anglo-Saxon Chronicles
- Confessions of an Opium Eater

Latin Mottoes - 16th-century:
http://www.shipbrook.com/jeff/mottoes.html
Bene agendo nunquam defessus.
Never weary of doing good.
Twists, Slugs and Roscoes: A Glossary of Hardboiled Slang
http://www.miskatonic.org/slang.html

Thieves Cant
http://webspace.webring.com/people/bm/mbertoll/charts/lexicon.txt

riddles
http://www2.kenyon.edu/AngloSaxonRiddles/texts.htm
http://strolen.com/netbooks/riddles2.txt
Online Image Archives

archives.org – eg, Ephemeral Films, gaming speed runs, vintage commercials, vintage instructional films

http://www.archive.org/details/ephemera
http://www.archive.org/details/Experime1940 - Experiments in the Revival of Organisms (1940) - records the successful experiments in the resuscitation of life to dead animals (dogs) in the USSR

NYPL [New York Public Library] Digital Gallery
http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/explore/dgexplore.cfm?topic=all

Fantasy portraits
http://www.sorcerers.net/Games/BG2/index_portraits.php

Medieval Woodcuts
http://www.godecookery.com/clipart/clart.htm
Personal Reference Image Archives

Collected variously, often via Google web or image search. MANY of my bookmarks represent themed sites with rich, organized image collections.

Ken’s Rule: Take a real world image, multiply by 1.5, and the result is believable... grand, but not grandiose.
Personal Reference Image Archives

Personal Reference Image Archives

http://www.lastrefuge.co.uk/photolibrary/sp_tepuis_all.htm

spectacular Venezuelan landscapes
‘Tiankeng’ – spectacular limestone karst cavern collapse formations
Tiankengs, China
Personal Favorites – Xu Bing

Book from the Sky
Personal Favorites – Xu Bing

New English Calligraphy – “Square Word”

http://www.ceas.ku.edu/uploads/Acacia%20Moore-%20Xu%20Bing.ppt

“Gold Green Hue”
Personal Favorites – Folger Library

http://www.folger.edu/Content/Whats-On/Folger-Exhibitions/Past-Exhibitions/Mapping-Early-Modern-Worlds/

http://www.folger.edu/Content/Whats-On/Folger-Exhibitions/Past-Exhibitions/Yesterdays-News.cfm
Personal Favorites – Rongororongo

The Easter Island Tablets
http://www.netaxs.com/~trance/ongo2.html

The Twelve Pages of the Jaussen List
http://www.netaxs.com/~trance/frame.html
Dog’s Breakfast

Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives - vast narratives in video games, television, literature, comic books, tabletop games, and digital art; Buffy and Dr. Who; authoring essays and academic essays
http://mitpress.mit.edu/catalog/item/default.asp?ttype=2&tid=11757

Job descriptions grabbed from game company sites

Fantasy Cartography
http://www.profantasy.com/

Dave Perry video game forum

Foreign Affairs magazine – reading lists – syllabus
http://www.foreignaffairs.com/features/reading-lists
At the end of the day...

You need...

- Energy...
- Time...
- Passion...
- Humility...

... to use the tools.
At the end of the day...

... listen to voices...

... and raid the wisdoms
The Ultimate Tool - Brute Force

- If brute force isn’t working for you, you’re not using enough brute force.
Any questions?

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