

Cal Arts Narrative Design

Course 2: Story and Narrative Development for Video Games

Assignment 1

RUMPLESTILTSKIN

Spine/logline: When a young woman's father spreads a lie that she can spin straw into gold, the king orders her to do so on pain of death. Desperate, she accepts help from a small, mysterious man who demands larger and larger rewards until she owes him her firstborn child—unless she can guess his name.

Summary

ACT 1: A man living in poverty boasts to the king that his daughter can spin straw into gold, which is a lie. The king promptly locks her in a room filled with straw and demands that she spin it into gold by morning or he will have her killed. The young woman is certain she will die, but a strange little man enters the room and offers to help—if she will give him something. Desperate, the woman offers him the ring from her finger and the pact is made.

ACT 2: The little man spins the straw into gold. In the morning, the greedy king is overjoyed, but he wants more. He locks the young woman in a larger room filled with straw and makes the same threat. This time, the woman offers her necklace to the little man. In the morning, the king locks the young woman in the largest room of all, filled with an absurd amount of straw. This time, if she succeeds, he will marry her and make her Queen. If not, she will die. The young woman has nothing left to give the strange little man, so he tells her he will help one more time—if she promises to give him her firstborn child. The woman has no choice but to agree. In the morning, as promised, she becomes Queen. One year later, when her first child is born, the strange little man shows up to collect his reward. The Queen is so beside herself with grief that the little man feels pity and offers her one last deal. She can keep her child—if she can guess his name within three days. The Queen accepts, but when two days have passed and even her best messengers and spies have scoured the countryside with no luck, she begins to despair. If she can't find his name within 24 hours, she will lose her child.

ACT 3: A wild, all-night treasure-hunt-like chase ensues and finally, the little man is spotted singing around the fire, boasting to himself that the Queen will never guess his name is Rumplestiltskin. In the morning, when the Queen guesses correctly, the little man is so upset that he rips himself in two, never to be seen again.

What is interesting? I find this story interesting because it deals with lies, power, greed, and desperation. We see the terrible choices one must make when stuck without options, and how those desperate choices can continue to have effects on one's life, even many years later.

SAMPLE

Characters

I had a hard time deciding on the antagonist for this classic fairytale. In the second half of the story, Rumpelstiltskin is trying to take the queen's child, but in the first half of the fairytale, the king keeps threatening to kill her, which seems much, much worse. So I'm going to focus on the king as the overall antagonist and make Rumpelstiltskin a side character who both helps our protagonist and causes problems for her. I took the liberty of making up most of the character details and added additional plot and backstory since the story (as I know it) is written in pretty broad strokes without much elaboration.

Protagonist. Let's call her Emma.

Emma Jones is our plucky protagonist who has been caught up in a web of lies and trickery by the men in her life. Her father betrayed her with a boast in a desperate attempt to save himself from poverty, her husband is wildly unhinged and threatens her life daily, and her only friend (whom she believes is possibly a frenemy) is a strange, small man who is unreliable to say the least. He's never even told her his name. Emma's survival skills revolve around her sharp wit, empathy, dark sense of humor, and her willingness to play the long game. She despises her husband's cruelty and greed and is determined to free not only herself but the entire suffering kingdom from his tyranny. Emma is a brilliant strategist and has her husband's massive wealth at her disposal. What she doesn't have, at least not anymore, is time.

Emma is in her mid-twenties, strong and muscular, with plenty of healthy meat to her bones—a sign of her husband's wealth. Even though she is Queen, it's important to her to stay grounded and prove to herself and the kingdom that she has not been corrupted by wealth and power. She doesn't wear makeup, and only ever wears a single ring and a single necklace. Her outfit of choice is a soft, flowing pantsuit and sturdy boots that allow for easy movement and quick entrances and exits. Her husband, however, insists that her outfits be made with pure golden thread, and her hair is dyed a shimmering golden hue which offsets her glowing brown skin. She has bright, intelligent brown eyes that are often shadowed with dark circles from sleepless nights plotting to overthrow the king.

For years, Emma has been developing a plan to take over the kingdom and share the king's wealth with his destitute subjects who live in poverty like she once did. Now that she's had her first child, her friend, the mysterious little man, has returned to help with the final element of her plan—to “steal” her child for three full days and send all the king's men off on a royal goose chase while she leads an uprising. But she's not entirely certain she can trust him. Like her husband and her father, this “friend” has only helped her when he has something to gain himself. And now that she's handed over her child, there are rumors that her “friend” has a history with the king. She's never sure who to trust. In fact, as smart, strong, and kind as she is, Emma's history makes her unwilling to fully trust anyone. This could be the downfall of her entire plan and her entire kingdom.

THE KING

The king (let's call him King Goldenpaw the Second) is the overall antagonist of this fairytale, and is a threatening, driving force throughout the story. Greedy as all get out, this guy wants to be the richest man on the planet and he'll do anything to achieve his goal. When he hears of a young woman who can spin straw into gold, he sets out to make sure she and her powers belong to him—first, by imprisoning her and forcing her to spin gold for her life, then by imprisoning her as his wife. He truly believes that Emma is a country idiot who will do anything for him, both out of gratitude for pulling her out of poverty and because he has the power to end her life. His ownership of Emma's loyalty is one of his prize possessions.

King Goldenpaw is nearly middle-aged and less good-looking than he thinks he is. His father died when he was young, but everyone knows that Goldenpaw 1.0 was stronger, wiser, funnier, and more humane than the new version could ever be. Goldenpaw 2.0 is too arrogant to believe any of this talk, but deep down, it cuts him to his core, and sometimes he still cries himself to sleep with his stuffed rabbit, Rumpelstiltskin (named after his only childhood friend, who disappeared forever after 6-year-old Goldenpaw tied him up, made him eat straw, then deserted him during an epic temper tantrum). Because of all the crying, Goldenpaw's eyes are almost always bloodshot and red-ringed. He's tall and wiry, but has a small potbelly from all the rich desserts he eats. He's never been able to fully grow out his beard, and he knows people talk about his premature balding, which *he* thinks of as distinguished. He tries very hard to wow people with wild, goth makeup and lots of bling—ornate necklaces, rings, medallions, belts, and cufflinks. His clothes are always brand new, from the most expensive designers, and there is a rumor that his boots are made of baby dragon skin, hand-sewn by dozens of children who were then fed to the dragon's mother.

King Goldenpaw the Second is certain that he can win the awe and admiration of his subjects by amassing incredible amounts of massive wealth and he is determined, resourceful, creative, and ruthless in achieving his goals. Getting Queen Emma under his power (and forcing her to produce whole rooms full of gold) was his first coup. The arrival of his firstborn child gives him a new chance to show off even more opulence (like having a designer dog, but even fancier and more expensive)—and he knows that soon, the entire kingdom will have no choice but to admit that he is the greatest king. Far greater than his weak, much less wealthy father. But when he finds out that Queen Emma has had secret dealings with his old friend Rumpelstiltskin (whom he'd thought was dead) he vows to kill them both once and for all in a gruesome public execution. Unfortunately, his arrogance and greed have left him deaf to the real word on the street: that King Goldenpaw the Second is the cruelest king and must be taken down. An uprising is brewing, and Queen Emma might not be as docile and under his thumb as he believes.