# SHUTDOWN [Mia Michel]

# Narrative Design Sample: Location Breakdown

## THE CLUB - LEVEL 1

**Game Context:** A survival action game set during a zombie apocalypse.

**Location Function:** Exploration, resource collection, environmental storytelling, and a scripted enemy encounter.

### GOAL

The club should feel like a place from X's life before the apocalypse. A familiar, but deteriorating environment she'd rather not revisit but must enter to collect supplies.

There's a sense of safety in the silence before it turns tense and violent. There's a striking contrast between the club's former purpose and its current condition, demonstrating the wide collapse of the world and X's relationship with her past.

This history is communicated more through visual details, atmosphere, and design rather than purely exposition.

### ENVIRONMENT & SPACE

An abandoned club, one of the few structures in the district still retaining partial electrical power.

**Key Features:**

- Velvet furniture and ornate tables.
- A DJ booth.
- Dance poles and a former performance area.
- String lighting, largely intact but aged and flickering.
- Several long-dead bodies seated or slumped among the furniture.
- A kitchen area that functions as a dead end with one exit.
- An open, multi-level layout connecting to the main floor, stage area, and upper floor.

### STORYTELLING DEVICES

1. **Preserved power (light) in the dead city (dark):** The flickering LED lighting contrasts with the dark around it.

**Narrative purpose:** Suggest that the district's collapse was uneven and that there are some places which remain operational.

**Player experience:** The lighting creates an immediately recognizable visual feature while contributing to the atmosphere of a location suspended between its former life and current decay.

**Note:** Coordinate with lighting and audio design to establish the electrical system through flickering lights, intermittent buzzing, and other environmental cues.

2. **Undisturbed Decay:** The bodies are long-rotted rather than freshly killed. They're still seated, undisturbed.

**Narrative purpose:** Create the impression of a neglected, unclaimed space.

**Player experience:** The absence of obvious recent conflict encourages a temporary sense of safety, which can later be disrupted by the Bitten.

**Design consideration:** The appearance and placement of the bodies should support the intended atmosphere without implying that the location has been completely untouched.

3. **Luxury stripped of function:** The velvet couches, ornate tables, and lighting show the club's former purpose, but these objects no longer functions as they once did.

**Narrative purpose:** Contrast the environment's former function with its current abandonment.

**Player experience:** The player recognizes what the space used to be while observing how completely its original purpose has been lost.

**Character connection:** The contrast parallels X's own experience of continuing to function in a world that no longer resembles the one she knew.

4. **X's Past:** The location is connected to her personal history rather than just being a place to collect supplies. X used to work here.

**Narrative purpose:** Establish that the environment has emotional significance for the protagonist which causes hesitation.

**Narrative delivery:**

- X may recognize specific objects or areas through animation or brief interactions.
- Her movement through the location can suggest familiarity.
- Environmental details can imply her former role without requiring a lengthy explanation.
- Any character reactions should be communicated through observable behavior, dialogue, or player interaction.

**Implementation Note:** The exact details of X's former employment and the way her familiarity is expressed would need to be cross-referenced with the narrative, level design, and animation teams.

5. **Spatial Foreshadowing:** The club's layout is introduced and partially explored before the enemy encounter begins.

**Key spatial features include:**

- The kitchen dead end.
- The main floor and performance area.
- The DJ booth.
- Railings and access points to the upper floor.
- The route X uses to escape the Bitten.

**Narrative purpose:** Establish the space before it becomes dangerous.

**Gameplay purpose:** Allow the player to develop a basic mental map of the environment before being required to navigate it under pressure. The ambush should feel like a transformation of a previously explored space rather than a random event.

## PLAYER EXPERIENCE & INTENDED PROGRESSION

| STAGE | PLAYER EXPERIENCE | NARRATIVE FUNCTION |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Familiarity | The player notices recognizable club features and signs of X's connection to the location. | Establish the place as part of X's past. |
| 2. Unease | Decay, bodies, flickering lights, and environmental silence create discomfort. | Establish the location's post-apocalyptic condition. |
| 3. False safety | The player explores and collects supplies in a neglected space. | Temporarily reduce the perceived threat. |
| 4. Ambush | The Bitten emerge and interrupt the exploration sequence. | Convert the environment from an exploration space into a survival challenge. |
| 5. Escape | The player navigates the established layout to reach the upper floor. | Make the previously introduced spatial features mechanically relevant. |
| 6. Character Encounter | X meets Sailo during the escape. | Introduce a potential companion and establish their conflicting survival philosophies. |

## IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY

Proposed sequence:

1. The player enters the club to collect supplies.
2. The environment establishes the club's former purpose and X's connection to it.

3. The player explores the available space and becomes familiar with the layout.
4. The Bitten encounter begins.
5. X escapes through the club and reaches the upper floor.
6. The scripted cinematic introduces Sailo.
7. The cinematic concludes with Sailo agreeing to accompany X.
8. Control returns to the player at the next location, where X and Sailo continue toward the hideout.

**Development status: The above is the intended progression and a conceptual narrative design sample. The environmental details, gameplay flow, and collaboration notes represent proposed design intentions rather than implemented game features. Yet the exact pacing, enemy placement, and player movement would be determined in collaboration with level design and gameplay teams.**

## CROSS-DISCIPLINE CONSIDERATIONS

These are proposed considerations for collaboration during development.

### Level Design

- Establish readable routes through the club.
- Ensure the kitchen (dead end) and upper-floor access are understandable to the player.
- Place environmental obstacles and escape routes in ways that support the intended encounter.
- Introduce the relevant spatial features before the ambush.

### Lighting

- Create a contrast between the club's surviving lighting and the darkened district.
- Use flickering or inconsistent illumination to support the atmosphere.
- Ensure lighting remains readable enough for navigation and combat.

### Audio

- Establish the electrical system through ambient buzzing or intermittent sounds.
- Use environmental silence and distant sounds to build unease.
- Introduce the Bitten's presence through audio before or during the ambush, where appropriate.
- Support the transition from exploration to combat with changes in sound intensity.

## Animation

- Communicate X's familiarity or discomfort through observable behavior.
- Support the environmental storytelling with character reactions where appropriate.

## Narrative Design

- Coordinate the club's personal significance with X's character background.
- Ensure the supply-collection objective leads naturally into the enemy encounter.
- Align the encounter's outcome with the subsequent introduction of Sailo.

# WHAT THE PLAYER LEARNS WITHOUT DIALOGUE

By exploring the location, the player should be able to infer that:

- The district's collapse was uneven, and some places remain operational.
- The club has been neglected for an extended period, yet once served a recognizable purpose.
- X has a personal history with the club.
- The space initially appears relatively safe but contains potential danger.
- The club’s layout is relevant to the upcoming escape sequence.

These inferences should be supported by the environment and gameplay rather than requiring the player to interpret a single detail in isolation.