THE WANDERER'S WAY [Mia Michel]

Narrative Design Sample: Location Breakdown

THE TAIL END TAVERN

Game Context: A high-fantasy action-RPG where the player can resolve encounters through combat or through the game's social and trust-based systems.

Location Function: Low-stakes, social trust-building encounter with recurring NPC.

GOAL

This should feel like a place in the game where there's very little pressure. It's a calm, social space for the player to relax and connect.

The bar ignores the player unless engaged. And while an open space, the only open table is the one next to the soldiers from the earlier incident. This is shown through staging over any dialogue.

ENVIRONMENT & SPACE

A packed tavern beneath a traveler's inn. It's loud and cheery with lots of activity.

Key Features:

- The bar counter where the barkeep visibly serves regulars first. The player has to actively get the barkeep's attention to be served.
- Auro's table: The loudest, most lavish and filled with plenty of chairs and endless food and drink.
- A shared fruit basket on the table. This is used mid-scene as a prop for Auro's coin philosophy. The environments doubles as a teaching tool.
- A single high window above the tavern floor. Which becomes the exit cue when Salīa's bird, Hawking, swoops through. It links back to the wider plot.
- Crowded seating that leaves the player's table within earshot of other conversations.

STORYTELLING DEVICES

1. **Unavailable Bar:** The space is friendly and cheery, but still selective.

Narrative purpose: Shows that warmth isn't always automatic in this world and each place has its nuances.

Player experience: Being ignored until offering something (a smile, cordial wave, etc.) should feel like a small, low-stakes rehearsal for the trust-building quest.

2. **Forced Proximity Seating:** The seating is closely packed.

Narrative purpose: Removes the option to stay uninvolved. The only free table is next to the soldiers that the player might avoid if possible, but can't.

Player experience: Overhearing Auro's conversation before he ever addresses the player directly lets his voice land which helps lead into the next part.

3. **Window As An Exit:** An open window where messenger flies through.

Narrative purpose: Keeps this low-stakes scene linked to the main plot. The outside world is always connected.

Player experience: The sudden swoop in through the window lands as a reminder that there are other events outside of the brief, leisurely moments in-between.

PLAYER EXPERIENCE & INTENDED PROGRESSION

STAGE	PLAYER EXPERIENCE	NARRATIVE FUNCTION
1. Arrival	The player is ignored at the bar until offering.	Establish that warmth must be earned.
2. Notice	Auro notices the player mid-conversation.	Signal start of the tavern encounter.
3. Banter	The player engages with Auro's charm, shaping their connection.	Demonstrate the game's dialogue-driven trust system.
4. Resolve	Calvo, the soldier from the road incident, offers to make amends.	Resolve the road incident tension through player choice.
5. Farewell	Auro's farewell greeting reflects the player's accumulated choices.	Reward or withhold a gold token based on engagement.

IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY

Proposed sequence:

1. The player enters the tavern and is initially ignored at the bar.
2. The player earns basic service through a small gesture.
3. Auro notices the player's table and initiates conversation.
4. The player engages to some degree determining their connection.
5. Calvo offers amends and the player chooses how to receive it.
6. The scene resolves in a specific farewell, with a possible coin reward.
7. Hawking, the player's bird, swoops through, returning control to the main plot.

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,

character 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

- Keep the only open table beside Auro's group, removing the option to avoid the encounter.
- Have the bar be a centrepiece with enough space between tables for servers to walk by constantly with food and drink.
- Have the window give some hint to the world outside.

Lighting

- Warm, low lantern light throughout. No cold light sources, reinforcing the tavern as a cheery, safe space.

Audio

- Layer general tavern noise (chatter, mugs, distant music) throughout, slightly under key dialogue beats.
- The soldiers' toast-song should be a lightly heard unless it's the specific moment of the scene where it's openly sung after the dialogue between the player and characters.

Animation

- Bazil's handshake with Auro should only trigger on the warm path. On the cool path, block this out as a nod instead, keeping the difference readable.
- Auro's hat-tip to Salīa should be preserved on both paths as his baseline politeness, and in respect to Bazil's protectiveness.

Narrative Design

- Track Auro_Farewell as a persistent flag for any future reappearance, ensuring his tone and offers stay consistent with this scene's outcome.

WHAT THE PLAYER LEARNS WITHOUT DIALOGUE

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

- Warmth in this world must be earned even in low-stakes locations.
- Auro values witty engagement with his dialogue over passive responses.
- The road incident from a prior scene isn't forgotten, it travels over with active memory to all characters.