

# Thomas McGuinness

## Narrative Design Portfolio

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## Project 1: The Dublin Mysteries (2023)



When a poet is found dead under mysterious circumstances, private investigator Sean Carver's search for the truth will take him into the world of secret societies and occult intrigues in Edwardian Dublin.

▶ PLAY IN APP

### Project Summary:

- A multi-chapter interactive audio adventure game developed for EarReality.
- The series follows a series of supernatural murders occurring in turn of the century Dublin.
- Role: Main writer.
- Responsibilities: Owned story development, developed all scripts, implemented narrative into the TWIST Engine, wrote promotional market copy, provided voice direction for character VO.

## Key Pillars:

- Create a sense of mystery and intrigue fitting of classic detective novels.
- Play into the unique history and politics of early 1900s Ireland.
- Make players feel like a detective: searching for clues, interrogating suspects, and making connections to solve the case.

**Full Game Link:** <https://twist-tales.com/games/dublin-mysteries/>

### Sample 1: The First Interrogation (Branching Dialogue)

*In this scene, the player takes the role of Sean Carver, a blind consulting detective. Following the mysterious death of acclaimed poet James Conroy, Carver is called to assist in the interrogation of their first suspect: Charles Conroy, the victim's brother.*

*As this game is an interactive audio adventure, the player must be prompted for their choices before they voice their decision aloud to proceed.*

*Choices have been colour coded for your reading benefit.*

### The Interrogation Begins

Inspector Gregory leaves for a moment before returning with another man in tow.

[Gregory]: "Sean Carver, allow me to introduce you to Mr. Charles Conroy."

You can hear Charles fiddle anxiously with his wristwatch.

[Charles]: "James was my brother. And I was the one who... found him this morning."

Do you want to [ask him about his relationship with his brother](#) or [about how he found him this morning](#)?

### Ask Him About His Relationship With His Brother

[Charles]: "James and I worked together. I helped him get his start, publishing his early writing in my magazine. We were close, or we were until he got those new friends of his."

Would you like to inquire more about [James's writing](#) or [his friends](#)?

## James's Writing

[Charles]: "James was a romantic poet, fully immersed in the ideas of the Celtic revival. He loved writing sprawling scenes of Ireland's beauty and magic. At least, he did, until his work turned more somber and political. Old walls crumbling, the nation falling into ruin, people in the streets coming to arms. Awful things."

[Charles]: "Sure, the more controversial his work became, the more readers flocked to our magazine. But with that came a lot of unwanted attention. Threats coming at us from all sides, and violent ones at that! Not aimed just at James but at me, my workers, as well as our families. I didn't want James's work messing with their lives. And so I asked him to stop."

*Proceed to [Evidence](#)*

## His Friends

[Charles]: "James had grown close to a number of other writers who filled his head with ideas of a liberated Ireland. Republicans they were, through and through. Some of them even had a bit of a reputation for getting physical with their protests."

[Charles]: "James and I had it pretty well with our lot in life. We're respectable folk from a respectable line dating back to the Tudor plantations. I didn't want his mixing with these dangerous characters to blow back on us and our families."

*Proceed to [Evidence](#)*

## How He Hound Him This Morning

[Charles]: "James and I had a meeting scheduled this morning. The door was locked when I arrived. James had a habit of working late and falling asleep at his desk, so I didn't think much of it at first. But when he wouldn't answer me, well, I had to go break the lock to get in. That's when I found him like this."

Would you like to inquire further about [the scheduled meeting](#) or [the locked door](#)?

*Proceed to [Evidence](#)*

## The Scheduled Meeting

[Charles]: “I was meeting with James to discuss one of his upcoming poems. I run the magazine that publishes his work. I helped him get his start, actually. James’s poetry had been taking a dark turn lately what with how political his work was getting. I had asked him to stop it with this republican drivel before any more threats came our way but he just wouldn’t give up. ”

*Proceed to [Evidence](#)*

## The Locked Door

[Charles]: “The door to the study locks from the inside. James didn’t like there being any interruptions to his writing. He said he needed to be ‘alone with his muse’. I was actually the one who installed the lock for him. Locksmithing is a bit of a hobby of mine. It’s a shame I had to ruin my own hard work to get in but I didn’t have my tools on me to pick it.”

*Proceed to [Evidence](#)*

## Evidence

Gregory coughs loudly.

[Gregory]: “Pardon my intrusion, Carver, but I would like to ask Mr. Conroy—the surviving Mr. Conroy I suppose I should say— about the evidence we found on the body.

You can hear Charles stir at Gregory's words.

[Charles]: “Evidence? What did you find?”

*The path will now split depending on if the player found [the knife](#) or [the book](#) earlier in their investigation.*

## The Knife

Inspector Gregory pulls out the strange knife that once lay inside James Conroy's chest.

[Charles, somber]: "Oh, that... It was a gift from some of James's friends. Each member receives one once they have been initiated into their circle."

You can hear the slight sound of his fingernails as they run over the engraving of the blade.

[Charles]: "You know, there used to be a big scratch here from when James first tried to sharpen it. He must have had it fixed since then."

Would you like to ask Charles about the knife's [engraving](#) or James' [initiation](#)?

## The Engraving

[Charles]: "It's old Irish engraved on the blade. I barely speak it myself, but I know that James kept a book of it on his desk to use as reference in his writing. Perhaps you can take a look there?"

*Proceed to [End of Interrogation](#)*

## The Initiation

[Charles]: "James was part of a group of spiritualists or occultists or whatever word it is they're using these days. They're a group of pompous fools who think they can consult with fairies and call upon old magics. It's all nonsense to me."

[Charles]: "It takes a friend to be brought into their meetings, and even then you have to do something public to show your belief in their ideology. James's got away with writing a poem for them."

*Proceed to [End of Interrogation](#)*

## The Book

You hear the unmistakable sound of tears hitting paper as Charles quietly weeps over the book.

[Charles]: “Oh, forgive me gentlemen. This was an old gift I gave to James. He had a big kick back in the day for Eastern poetry, especially haiku. He loved playing around with their structure: the five, seven, and five syllables.”

[Charles, breaking down]: “I just can’t believe that he’s gone. It’s finally settling in. My baby brother, gone...”

Would you like to [offer sympathy](#) to Charles or try to [push him](#) back onto the investigation?

## Offer Sympathy

You pull out a handkerchief and give Charles a moment to wipe his tears and collect himself.

[Charles]: “Thank you for this. James and I had a wee bit of a fight last time we spoke. Knowing he still had this book—well, it’s given me a bit of peace.”

*Proceed to [End of Interrogation](#)*

## Push Him

[Charles, angry]: “My brother is dead! Can a man not have a moment to mourn his murdered brother!”

*Proceed to [End of Interrogation](#)*

## End of Interrogation

Charles sighs, running a tired hand through his hair.

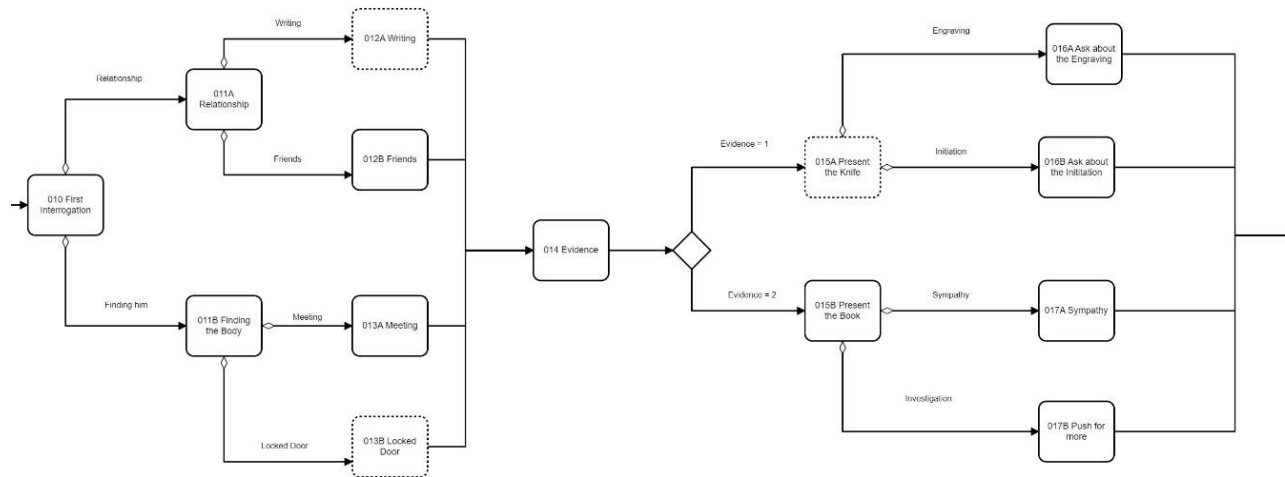
[Charles, tired]: “I’m sorry gentlemen, but it’s been a long morning. This has all been very draining and I still have to get started on making arrangements for the funeral.”

Gregory grunts in agreement.

[Gregory]: “That will be all for now. If we need anything more from you, I’m sure we’ll be able to find you.”

You hear the door click open and shut as Charles makes his exit.

## Flow Chart:



### Sample 2: Investigating the Desk (Puzzle Design)

Following the interrogation of Charles, the player's investigation leads them to James's desk where an opportunity presents itself to search it for clues. Players must decide between beginning their investigation with the desk's numerous drawers or the mess of books covering its surface.

Should they choose to begin with the books, players with the knife in evidence will be able to use one of these books to decode the strange message engraved on its blade. This course of action was previously hinted at during Charles' interrogation if players asked him about the engraving. Following this, further investigation will reveal a hidden letter James's received from Charles, threatening him should he continue to incite revolution in his writing. This provides a possible motive for Charles to murder his brother.

Should players choose instead to search the drawers, they will find that one is locked by a mechanism requiring a 3 digit code. The only hint for the code is a small metal plate that reads "Basho". To attempt to access the drawer's contents, players must either input a code, pick the lock, or force the drawer open.

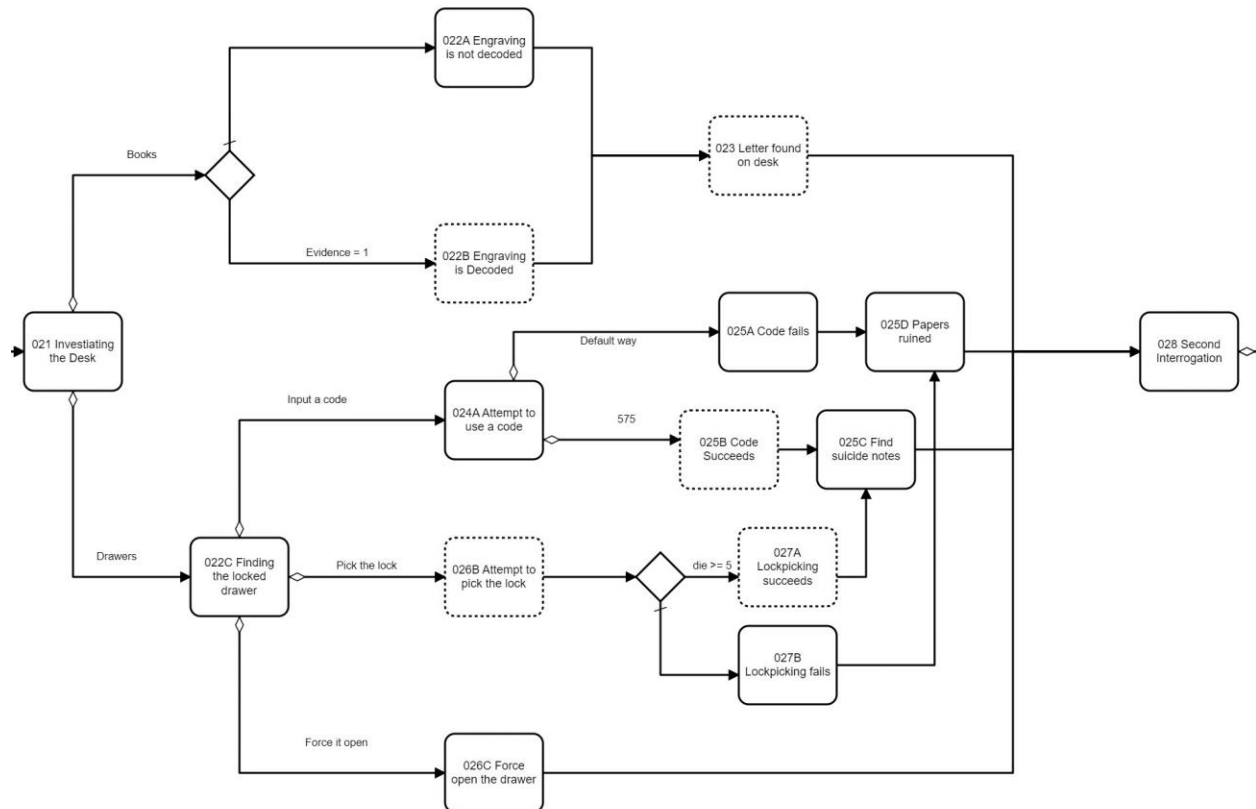


Players with the book in their inventory may recall an earlier conversation during Charles’s interrogation about James’s fascination with Basho’s haiku and their 5/7/5 syllabic structure. Using the code 575 on the lock will open it without issue, revealing drafts of suicide notes in James’ handwriting. A successful lockpicking roll will yield similarly successful results.

Attempting an incorrect code, failing their lockpicking roll, or attempting to force the drawer open will trigger the lock’s safety mechanism: spilling vinegar over the drawer’s contents and rendering the notes illegible.

At this point, all branching paths will gather into the arrival of Maeve, the next suspect to be called for interrogation.

**Flow Chart:**



## Project 2: The Antivan Rook (2022)

### Project Summary:

- A quest design sample in the style of a companion recruitment quest for Dragon Age: Inquisition.
- Role: Quest & Narrative Designer.
- Responsibilities: Developed quest and characters, wrote all scripts, coded all interactivity, play tested for bugs.

### Key Pillars:

- Mimic the tone of *Dragon Age: Inquisition's* fantasy setting.
- Expand upon the pre-established lore of the setting.
- Create an engaging character that would fit well among the existing cast of companions.

**Full Game Link:** <https://thomas-mcguinness.itch.io/the-antivan-rook>

### Sample 1: Rocco (Character Sheet)

**Name:** Rocco "The Rook" Altieri

**Age:** Mid twenties.

**Sex & Gender:** Male, he/him

**Ancestry:** Human (Antivan)

**Alignment:** Chaotic Good

**Key Traits:** Showmanly, Sensitive, Earnest

**Summary:** The celebrity duelist.

**Quote:** "Give me a blade and I'll give you a good show."

**Wants/Needs/Motivation:** A swordsman without peer, Rocco uses his travelling performances and growing celebrity to follow the trails of the assassins' guild known as the Antivan Crows in search of his missing mother. He seeks the Inquisition's power and resources to help him investigate his mother's apparent abduction by the Crows and learn what ties she could possibly have with the guild.

Rocco's quest is ultimately a search for identity. In searching for his mother and uncovering her history as an Antivan Crow, Rocco must decide who he really is: the celebrity duelist, the assassin's son, or someone else entirely.

Other character relationships: As someone of common blood raised into a position of renown, Rocco is sympathetic to the Inquisitor and the struggles their newfound celebrity must bring.

## Sample 2: Recruiting the Rook (Scriptwriting)

*In this quest, Josephine tells you about an Antivan duelist called "The Rook" who has become something of a celebrity in Orlais recently. Seeking his endorsement to curry favour for the Inquisition, The Inquisitor tracks him down to Val Royeaux. Facing him in a brief duel, they are rewarded with a private audience with "The Rook".*

*Though the original quest contains branching dialogue options, this text instead reflects only one such path a player could have taken through this conversation. To play through the original quest yourself, please see the above link.*

INT. TENT - DAY

ROCCO, an olive skinned Antivan man, leads THE INQUISITOR into his tent.

Rocco's tent is a mess of colourful fabrics. As they enter, Rocco picks up a bottle and two glasses. He bites off the cork of the bottle and pours two glasses for the Inquisitor and himself.

ROCCO

My apologies, Inquisitor. I hadn't expected to meet you this way. But you must admit that it was more fun than talking over some boring old papers now, wasn't it?

INQUISITOR

At this point I'd be more surprised if someone I just met didn't immediately attack me.

ROCCO

Cheers to that, my friend! Oh, but I'm getting ahead of myself aren't I? Maker, where are my manners? Allow me to formally introduce myself, Rocco the Rook, duelist extraordinaire, at your service.

INQUISITOR

The Rook?

ROCCO

My stage name from my time back in Antiva. I've grown very fond of it over the years. It makes me sound mysterious and charming; don't you agree?

INQUISITOR

I don't know. I would have gone with Rocco the mysterious and charming, just to be sure.

ROCCO

Ha! I'll keep that in mind for next time.

INQUISITOR

Orlais is quite far from Antiva. Why are you all the way out here?

ROCCO

I've been on tour. A month ago I was in Nevarra. Before that, Starkhaven! And now it's time for me to give some love to my fans here in Orlais.

INQUISITOR

You've seemed to have amassed quite the following here. I'm sure you're aware that the Inquisition is always looking for outstanding members of the public to declare their support for our cause. We would greatly appreciate it if you would be willing to publicly endorse our efforts.

ROCCO

Is that all? My friend, I would be more than happy to do this for you. Though, I would appreciate one teensy favour in return...

INQUISITOR

Is this where you ask me for a rematch?

ROCCO

Nothing as enjoyable as that I'm afraid. I was hoping you would be able to help me find my mother.

INQUISITOR

Your mother?

ROCCO

A few months ago she disappeared. All she left me was a note telling me not to follow her and that she was sorry. I tore her place apart looking for any clue of where she could have gone or why she would've left and all I found was this.

Rocco pulls out a long knife. Though the metal is dull, the image of a feathery mask is unmistakably etched into the blade.

INQUISITOR

That symbol. This belongs to the Crows!

ROCCO

You're correct, my friend. The very best thieves, spies, and assassins Antiva has to offer and the very worst people to be involved with my missing mother.

He runs his fingers through his hair, his mask of carefree confidence slipping from his face.

ROCCO

(pleading)

My mother is all the real family I have in this world. I've been searching for any sign of her across this tour and have found nothing but dead ends. Your people have spies and scouts and so many more who could help me in my search. Help me find her, and my praise for the Inquisition will ring far and wide.

INQUISITOR

I can't guarantee that we'll find her, but we would be more than willing to try.

ROCCO

Very good, my friend! Now, give me a few minutes to pack up my things and I'll be ready to journey with you shortly.

INQUISITOR

I'm sorry, what?

ROCCO

Well, what better way is there for me to make my endorsement known than by standing side by side with the Inquisitor on their travels? This way, if your people learn anything about my mother, I'll find out right away!

Besides, you've seen how good I am in a fight. You could use someone like me watching your back. So, what do you say?

INQUISITOR

I say welcome to the Inquisition!

FADE OUT.

### Sample 3: The Rook's Voice (Barks)

| Scenario                | Tone          | Line  |
|-------------------------|---------------|---|
| About to fight a dragon | Anticipation  | What happens when a Rook meets a Dragon? Let's find out...      |
| About to fight a dragon | Grandstanding | Get ready for the show of a lifetime!                           |
| About to fight a dragon | Excitement    | If we survive I am never shutting up about this!                |
|                         |               |   |
| Approaching camp        | Complaining   | We could set up camp here. I could do with some beauty sleep.   |
| Approaching camp        | Helpful       | Not a bad place to set up camp.                                 |
| Approaching camp        | Teasing       | Care to set up camp here? I'll happily watch!                   |
|                         |               |   |
| Spotting a merchant     | Hopeful       | Do you think they'll give me a discount?                        |
| Spotting a merchant     | Curious       | I wouldn't mind a peek at their goods.                          |
| Spotting a merchant     | Excitement    | You can never have enough blades! Let's get some more!          |
|                         |               |   |
| Enemies Spotted         | Pride         | Enemies ahead. Let's give them a good show, yes?                |
| Enemies Spotted         | Confident     | Looks like someone wants a private performance.                 |
| Enemies Spotted         | Anticipation  | Ready yourselves my friends. Looks like a tough audience ahead. |
|                         |               |   |
| Kills an enemy          | Pride         | Another falls to the Rook!                                      |
| Kills an enemy          | Bold          | None can defeat us!   |
| Kills an enemy          | Heroic        | Next challenger!  |
|                         |               |   |
| Low Health              | Distressed    | Things are looking dire for the Rook!                           |
| Low Health              | Winded        | I'm good, but not this good! Help!                              |
| Low Health              | Hurt          | Some healing would be appreciated!                              |
|                         |               |   |
| Combat ends             | Somber        | Just like you taught me, Mother...                              |
| Combat ends             | Joy           | Great performances all around!                                  |
| Combat ends             | Triumph       | As if it would end any other way!                               |
| Combat ends             | Pride         | Once again the Rook stands victorious!                          |