

THE PLOT IS NOT TOLD. IT IS ASSEMBLED.

Designing the layered narrative architecture of ERUDITA

PPS SEALS

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ERUDITA PLOT

ERUDITA IS NOT THE ONE WHO KNOWS. ERUDITA IS THE PROCESS OF LEARNING HOW TO KNOW.

The ideas that structure how ERUDITA's plot is built, layered and assembled, carried over from the manuscript at first pass.

"No single character possesses the truth. One document proves very little. Two documents establish a relationship. Three characters comparing evidence can reveal a system."

81. MAKING ETHICS PLAYABLE

It took me two months, working on average eight hours a day, to understand how a project about ethical and moral values in the context of artificial intelligence could become a game plot. The difficulty was not inventing a story. The difficulty was making ethics playable. I did not want players to receive a lesson about moral choices; I wanted the structure of the game to place them in situations where they would have to interpret incomplete information, confront uncertainty, meet other people, and decide what they believed should happen next.

That distinction became the starting point for ERUDITA. A plot in an educational game cannot be reduced to a sequence of attractive scenes. It must create a reason to act. It must produce tension between what the player knows and what the player still needs to know. Above all, it must make the learning inseparable from the decisions through which the game progresses.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE

The challenge was not to explain ethics and moral values. It was to make the players play them.

82. A DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE HUMAN AND THE VIRTUAL PLAYER

One of the first ideas came from the duality in *The Matrix*: Thomas Anderson and Neo, two identities occupying different realities. ERUDITA uses a different kind of duality. The Human Player does not become the virtual character. The virtual character already exists, carrying a predefined history, information, memories, motives, and uncertainties. In a sense, that character is trapped inside the phone and needs a human partner in the real world to continue the story.

This changes the familiar relationship between player and avatar. The human is not asked to pretend to be someone else. The human becomes a supporter, a partner, and, eventually, a decision-maker. The Human Player walks through the territory, encounters heritage, reads documents, talks with other Human Players, and helps the Virtual Player understand what is happening. The virtual character experiences the narrative from inside the game; the human acts on its behalf in the physical world.

A second design decision reinforces that uncertainty. Ten characters appear to exist in the player list, but only six are actually active. No player knows how many others are really playing. More importantly, none of the active characters knows the whole story. Through the REBOOT platform feature Levels to Characters, each character receives a different personal story, different documents, and different encounters. Their paths converge gradually: first alone, then in pairs, later in trios, and finally in collective debrief meetings. The distribution of information is not a technical detail. It is the mechanism that makes the plot possible. Sometimes a virtual facilitator adds extra information to the story before meeting all players in person.

83. PLOT BEGINS IN THE TERRITORY

A story like this cannot be created out of the blue. Before building the plot, I needed to understand the relationship between heritage, territory and history in their social, geographical and political dimensions. That meant going to Peniche: walking it, eating there, sleeping there, observing the routes, learning the heritage, teaching, and prototyping in the same places where the game would later unfold.

The territory is not scenery. A monument is not simply a background image or a GPS point. When a place carries historical significance, it becomes part of the evidence and part of the emotional logic of the experience. The Blueprint therefore begins from the premise that heritage significance must be integrated into the story and made to work inside the plot.

84. THE LAYERED ARCHITECTURE OF THE GAME EXPERIENCE

The easiest way to understand this design is to imagine the game as a set of transparent layers placed over a map. The territory forms the physical canvas: routes, locations, monuments and possible encounter points. Heritage gives those places cultural, historical and symbolic meaning. Evidence adds documents, records, photographs, testimonies, videos, clues and archival material that allow the visible world to be questioned rather than merely visited.

The game is then activated by people and characters. Human Players move through the real territory, search, compare, communicate and make decisions. Virtual Players inhabit the narrative dimension with their own identities, personal histories, memories, conflicts, and goals. Interaction connects the layers: human with human, human with virtual character, human with place, human with evidence, and human with the game system itself.

Progression gives direction to those interactions. It determines when new information becomes available, how encounters are triggered, and what allows a player to move to the next level. Rewards reinforce that journey, but reward does not have to mean points or tokens. Access to a new document, the realization that two pieces of evidence connect, or the discovery that another player knows something you do not can be a stronger reward than a numerical score.

Learning develops across the whole architecture. It is not a training module pasted on top of the game. Players learn by moving, noticing, comparing, discussing, interpreting evidence, confronting contradictions and reconsidering what they thought they knew. Plot emerges in much the same way. It is not simply placed above the game as a finished story. It is generated through the connections between territory, heritage, evidence, characters, interactions, discoveries and decisions.

85. GAME EXPERIENCE LAYERS

LAYER	ROLE IN THE EXPERIENCE
Territory	The physical map, locations, routes, monuments and spaces where the game takes place.
Heritage	The cultural, historical and symbolic meaning carried by the territory.
Evidence	Documents, clues, testimonies, videos, records and information that players investigate.
Human Players	Real people who move, decide, communicate, investigate and encounter one another.
Virtual Players	Characters with identities, histories, motivations, memories, conflicts and personal narratives.
Interactions	The connections among people, characters, places, heritage, evidence and the game system.
Progression	The structure that moves players between information, encounters and game levels.
Reward	Points, tokens, access, discoveries, achievements or meaningful revelations.
Learning	The knowledge and reflection that emerge through exploration, interpretation and decision-making.
Plot	The unfolding connection among discoveries, characters, conflicts, revelations and decisions.

Seen together, the logic becomes simple: the territory is the canvas; heritage and evidence give it meaning; Human and Virtual Players activate it; Interactions generate the experience; progression gives it direction; rewards reinforce participation; and from the combination of all these layers, learning and plot emerge.

86. ATTENTION, THE ORACLE AND THE AI LAYER

Another part of the design concerns the economy of attention. A plot may be sophisticated, but if it cannot gain traction in the mind of the player, the player will leave it. In that sense, game design also means resisting the siren song: all the distractions that pull attention away from the experience. Odysseus had to protect himself from the Sirens; a contemporary game designer has to design an experience strong enough to compete for attention without reducing everything to noise, speed, or reward loops.

ERUDITA adds another layer through the Oracle. Like the Oracle in *The Matrix*, this figure knows the game and can be questioned, but does not carry the player's responsibility. Then the AI possibility extends the idea further. What if each Virtual Player is not simply a fixed character delivering scripted content, but an AI Agent with whom the Human Player can exchange information while trying to understand the story and the plot? The result is a character that can be talked to while the game is being played.

That possibility is one of the most innovative features of the REBOOT platform, but it comes with a design cost. An AI Agent cannot be added as decoration. The game designer has to construct the character's dataset: what the Agent knows, what it does not know, what it believes, what it may infer, and how its information changes across the game. The intelligence of the Agent depends on the intelligence of the narrative architecture behind it.

87. STORY, PLOT AND GAMEPLAY ARE NOT THE SAME THING

This distinction matters because the words story, plot, and gameplay are often used as though they were interchangeable. They are not. The game concept tells us what the game is fundamentally about. The world or setting tells us where and when it happens. The story contains the broader history, characters, relationships, and background. The plot is the chain of events experienced during the game. Gameplay is what the player actually does to move through those events.

A useful definition, therefore, is that a game plot is the structured sequence of events, discoveries, conflicts, and turning points that gives the game its dramatic direction. It defines what happens during the player's journey, how the central problem develops, what is gradually revealed, what stands in the way, and how player decisions contribute to the final outcome.

STARTING SITUATION → DISCOVERY → COMPLICATION → CONFLICT → REVELATION → CONSEQUENCE → DECISION

There is one additional condition in games: player action changes how the plot is discovered or develops. This is also why plot and narrative should be separated conceptually. Plot is what happens. Narrative is how the game allows the player to experience and understand what happens.

88. ERUDITA AS A DISTRIBUTED INVESTIGATIVE PLOT

Imagine the simple concept: six people arrive in Peniche to investigate the history of a traditional lace. That is a premise, not yet a plot. The plot begins when apparently ordinary historical records start to contradict the official story, when separate pieces of evidence suggest a relationship with political persecution, when the characters discover that their own histories are implicated, and when they have to meet other people in order to understand what none of them can understand alone.

ERUDITA is therefore not a conventional linear plot. It is a distributed investigative plot. Six Seekers begin with different fragments of the story, and the real plot appears only when their evidence and personal histories start to intersect.

HERITAGE → EVIDENCE → INVESTIGATION → PERSONAL CONNECTION → CONVERGENCE → BETRAYAL → REVELATION

COLLECTIVE DESIGN

The setting is Peniche in 1975, one year after the Portuguese Revolution. The Seekers become involved in an investigation around ERUDITA bobbin lace, apparently an important piece of local cultural heritage. At first, the story concerns preservation, memory, craftsmanship and the historical work of the Esteves Foundation. Then documents, testimonies and inconsistencies begin to suggest something else. Cultural reports associated with the Foundation appear to connect with records used by the Estado Novo regime. Names, numbers, transfers and recurring references start to form a pattern. What looked like heritage documentation begins to resemble a mechanism of surveillance and denunciation.

Then the investigation becomes personal. Sofia discovers that material she produced was used in ways she never understood. Daniel's search for his absent father intersects with a damaged prison transfer register. Marta confronts evidence of benefits received by her family. Rui is forced to face what was suspected but never said. Isabel carries the consequences of what families lost. Tomas has his own relationship with what the investigation threatens to expose.

ERUDITA

No single character possesses the truth. The game structure itself becomes the plot structure.

89. SEVEN MOVEMENTS OF DISCOVERY

I structured the ERUDITA plot in seven movements. This is not a claim that seven is the correct number or that this is the only possible structure. It is simply the architecture that allowed this particular game to move from cultural curiosity to moral responsibility without explaining the answer too early.

REVERENT 81

The official story

"ERUDITA is cultural heritage."

Players enter through a relatively safe interpretation of the past. They encounter bobbin lace, monuments and places in Peniche, the Foundation, Peniche's reputation, the possibility of UNESCO recognition, or the historical record itself? The plot has shifted from mystery to moral conflict. Evidence can tell the players what may have happened; it cannot tell them automatically what should be done about it.

REVERENT 82

The first crack

"Something does not fit."

The plot does not reveal a conspiracy. It creates doubt. A date appears where it should not. A source repeats. A code is damaged. A name appears in an unexpected place. A document repeatedly points back to Relatorias Culturais, Fundacao Esteves. Each detail is small. Together they create friction between the official explanation and the evidence in front of the player. ERUDITA works better when the player discovers the problem than when the game announces it.

REVERENT 83

The investigation becomes personal

"This is not only history. This concerns me."

Each character's private plot now begins to intersect with the historical plot. Daniel starts from a family sentence: his mother told him that his father went to France. A damaged transfer register destabilizes that explanation. Sofia starts from another certainty: she documented cultural heritage. Then she has to ask whether her work entered a system she never understood. The players are no longer solving only what happened in the past. They are discovering what that past means for the character they are helping.

REVERENT 84

The evidence converges

This is where the progression from solo play to pairs, trios, and finally the collective becomes narratively essential. Sofia may know one thing Daniel may know another. Neither fragment proves very much. When they meet, the combination can create a new interpretation. A cultural report can connect to identification, identification to detention, and detention to a coded transfer. Apparently unrelated evidence begins to describe a process.

This is the midpoint transformation of ERUDITA. The central question changes. The players are no longer asking, "What are these documents?" They are asking, "Was there a system?"

REVERENT 85

The official story collapses

As evidence accumulates, the original narrative becomes increasingly difficult to defend. The Seekers begin to understand that ERUDITA lace was connected to something darker: a system in which cultural documentation, family information and the Foundation's activities became entangled with political persecution.

The most disturbing dimension is precisely the one that prevents the plot from becoming simplistic. The women producing the lace may not themselves have understood how their work was being used. The game therefore avoids the easy conclusion that the lacemakers were conspirators. The morally difficult possibility is that culture itself was manipulated, and that people supposedly protected by the Foundation could at the same time have been used by it. The contradiction of the Foundation becomes central to the story.

REVERENT 86

Betrayal and moral conflict

At this point, investigation is no longer only about discovering information. There are consequences to revealing it. This is where Tomas, the Saboteur, becomes important. His dramatic function is stronger than that of a conventional villain who merely blocks the players. He represents an argument: some truths may destroy what remains.

The Seekers now face competing interests. Should everything be revealed? Should families be protected? What happens to the lace, the Foundation, Peniche's reputation, the possibility of UNESCO recognition, or the historical record itself? The plot has shifted from mystery to moral conflict. Evidence can tell the players what may have happened; it cannot tell them automatically what should be done about it.

REVERENT 87

The final revelation is not the end

This is, for me, the most distinctive part of the ERUDITA plot. Most mystery stories build toward the answer to "Who did it?" ERUDITA should not end there. The factual reconstruction is only the penultimate climax. The final question is more difficult: now that we know, what should we do with the truth?

The Seekers must decide collectively what ERUDITA should become. Should the heritage nomination be supported, rejected, suspended, or transformed? How should the women who produced the lace be represented? What responsibilities exist toward victims and their descendants? Should the Foundation archives be opened? Should names be restored? How should the Esteves Foundation appear in the museum narrative? Can something created within a system of oppression still be considered heritage?

That collective decision is the real climax because it forces the players to move from interpretation to responsibility. The game does not reward them simply for discovering the past. It asks what they are prepared to do with it.

90. FOUR PLOTS OPERATING AT THE SAME TIME

ERUDITA can also be understood as four plots unfolding simultaneously. The historical plot asks what actually happened between the Foundation, the regime, the families and the lace. The investigation plot asks how the Seekers can reconstruct that history from incomplete evidence. The personal plot asks what each discovery means for Sofia, Daniel, Marta, Rui, Isabel and Tomas. The ethical plot asks what society should do with the heritage once its full history becomes known.

These plots do not sit beside one another. They converge. Past truth produces evidence; evidence produces personal consequences; personal consequences demand collective interpretation; and collective interpretation creates collective responsibility.

PAST TRUTH → EVIDENCE → PERSONAL CONSEQUENCES → COLLECTIVE INTERPRETATION → COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

91. THE PLOT IS ASSEMBLED, NOT DELIVERED

In its most concise form, ERUDITA follows six Seekers investigating the hidden history of a traditional bobbin lace in Peniche in 1975. What begins as an exploration of cultural heritage gradually becomes an investigation into evidence suggesting that cultural documentation was connected to surveillance, denunciation and political persecution under the Estado Novo regime. Each Seeker holds only part of the evidence and discovers a different personal connection to the events. As individual investigations converge through encounters between players, fragments become patterns and the official history of the Esteves Foundation begins to collapse. The final challenge is not simply to uncover what happened, but to decide collectively what should be done with a cultural heritage whose beauty, memory and historical violence can no longer be separated.

The essential innovation is that the plot is not merely revealed to the players; it is assembled by them. The movement from solo to pair to trio to collective is therefore more than a gameplay architecture. It is the narrative architecture of the plot itself.

CORE IDEA

The player does not receive the truth. The player participates in constructing enough of it to become responsible for a decision.

92. DESIGNING BEYOND THE FIRST IDEA

There is no shortcut to building this kind of plot. Iterate, prototype, test, and iterate. Then do it again. The story may be imagined in a few pages, but producing the character paths, evidence, videos, documents, encounters and progression logic, and AI datasets required by the platform is another job altogether, and sometimes the harder one.

That is why the Blueprint matters. It turns inspiration into architecture. The purpose is not to copy ERUDITA, but to understand the principle behind it: start from the significance of the heritage and the reality of the territory; distribute knowledge rather than explaining everything; create reasons for Human and Virtual Players to need one another; let interaction reveal the story; and design the final decision so that learning is not a message delivered at the end, but the consequence of having lived through the plot.