Apocalypse Made Easy!

Apocalypse Made Easy! is a satirical team-based survival training game that runs as a mobile web app. It consists of four different scenarios across the city, each focused on a different aspect of survival preparedness. After securing a grant to develop it, I worked as the producer, designer, and lead writer.

Gameplay Script

This is an excerpt of a gameplay script written in YAML (which gets interpreted directly by the app) for the Earthquakes scenario.

```
- step: message
  if: !ROLE('D')
  messages:
    - (Waiting on NAME_WITH_ROLE('D')).

- step: map
  if: ROLE('D')
  message: Please confirm your location. Are you all facing Science World's main entrance?
  latlng: 49.273373, -123.102657

- step: choice
  key: begin-scenario
  if: ROLE('D')
  choices:
    - x: We're here.

- step: message
  if: ROLE('D')
  messages:
    - Okay. Read this aloud. <img src='/s/images/childs-drawing.png'>
    - Begin imagination: you wake up and your bed is shaking.
    - The dysmorphic painting that your small daughter made falls to the ground.
    - Your window shatters. Are many cars crashing into your house at the same time?
    - No. It's an <strong>earthquake</strong>. Your house collapses and you perish.

- step: choice
  key: done-bleak-intro
  if: ROLE('D')
  choices:
    - x: Bleak.
```

```
- step: message
  if: ROLE('D')
  messages:
    - Don't worry. In a few minutes you'll know how to respond to just such a situation.
    - Unless an earthquake strikes <em>while</em> you're completing this training scenario.
    - Nobody would believe you if you told them that.
```

Narrative Branches

Within Apocalypse Made Easy! the story unfolds across scenarios according to a team's performance and choices. This chart shows the conditions under which specific narrative snippets should appear.
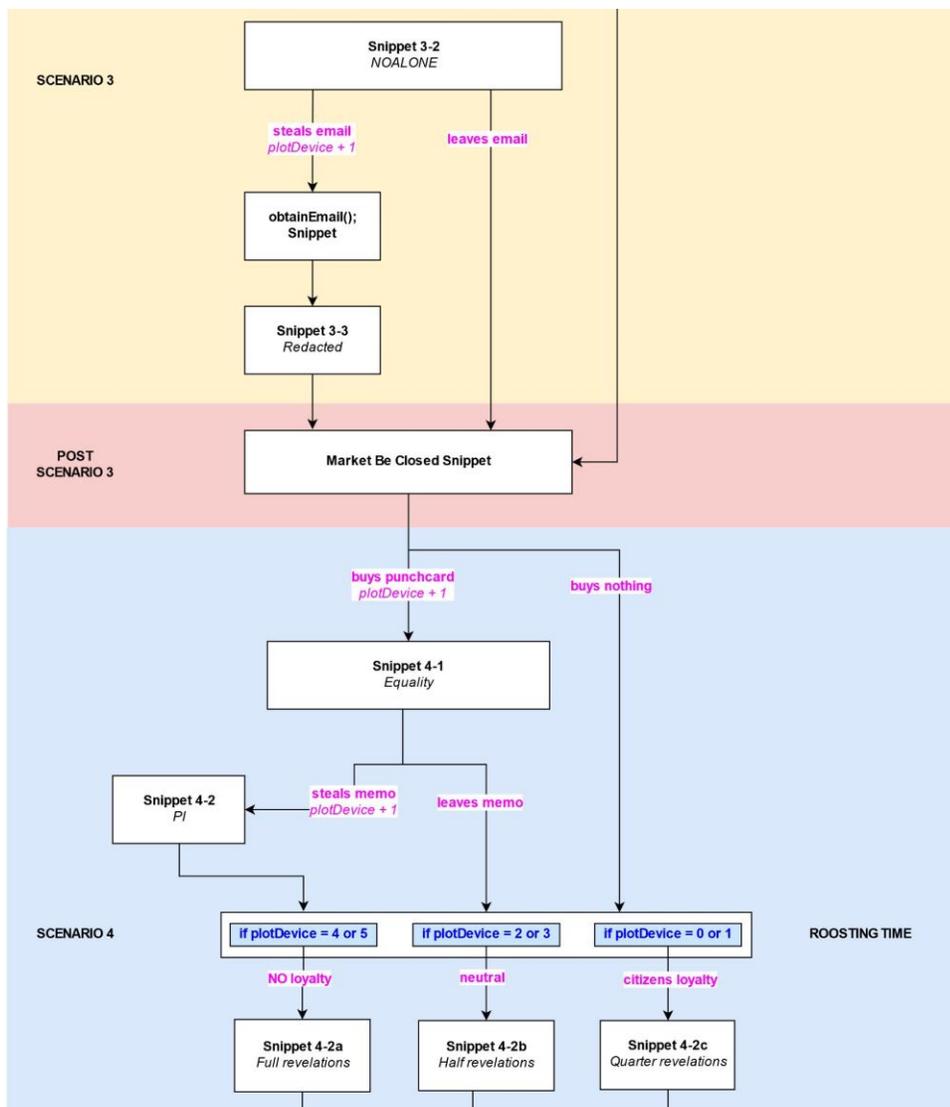
Narrative Snippet

To make the overall story flexible, we divided it into 30 modular snippets that could be called conditionally. That way, teams could complete the scenarios in any order and the story would still make sense. This is one of those snippets.

B: Hey! Can you see this? Am I getting through?

B presses [...]	B presses YES
B: I'll take your silence as a yes.	B: Good. We've been trying to hack into this thing for weeks.

B: What I'm about to say is confidential. Don't even tell your team unless you trust them.

I'm from A Nameless Organization and we need your help.

We're exercising our democratic right to gather *information* on the Citizens.

Why the apocalypse training? Why the fake friendly routine?

Not a rhetorical question.

B presses [Oh, umm…]	B presses [I don't know.]

B: You don't know either. Great. So why are you WASTING my time?

B presses [YOU contacted me.]	B presses [My apologies.]

B: Okay. Deep breath. Sorry. If I seem short with you it's because I can hear BORIS rebooting and know I don't have much time.

So what are the Citizens up to? This training course you're doing holds the answer, we just don't know how. Will you help us investigate it?

We'd do it ourselves but those poncho-wearing dingbats banned us from taking it.

You don't have to answer yet, we'll be in tou--a023kA22ikAMe*flip*flip*flip*flip*

E: Harmless routine BORIS maintenance/reboot cycle complete. [FILE NOT FOUND: disarming_joke_1_4.txt; *flip*flip*>>>print "Welcome aboard {{employeeName}}!"*flip* APOCALYPSE_ME_1.js] And I'm back! Please forgive the inconvenience. I'm [FIGURE-OF-SPEECH-COMPILER ERROR] days one of those having.

B: Ahem. Please read this bulletin to your team and then press DONE.

[BULLETIN] ALL TRAINEES are warmly and sincerely reminded of the dangers and Level 6 Illegality of consorting with shady, anti-government, non-poncho'd, pro-chaos organizations that might attempt to communicate over official channels. **[/BULLETIN]**

Plot Summary

This was used to orient all production team members to the general story, as well as guide visual design, writing, marketing, and artwork for the program.

Following a highly confusing election cycle, the single-issue political party Citizens for a Friendlier Post-Apocalypse (AKA the Citizens) have risen to power and started implemented their only policy: mandatory apocalypse survival training for all. The Citizens genuinely believe that the world is about to end and that the training course they're imposing will be beneficial. But nobody knows why.

The training course is delivered by BORIS, a poorly-programmed AI that the Citizens created. Soon after you begin training you are contacted by the mysterious Nameless Organization (The NO). They've hacked into BORIS' interface to send you this message: the Citizens are a real suspicious bunch. There MUST be something insidious behind the friendly facade and forced apocalypse training.

So you and your team have a choice: gather information as you complete the training course and feed it back to the NO. Or ignore them and implicitly side with the Citizens. If your team decides to work with the NO, you'll need to buy special punch cards that are used to override BORIS' default behaviours, leaving BORIS open to vulnerabilities and random leaks of highly expositional documents.

These punch cards can be purchased on the black market with saltines, which is the apocalypse-proof currency that the Citizens use to reward your progress through the training scenarios. As you work through the scenarios, the plot is slowly revealed. But the amount/depth of the plot that your team sees is

determined by whether you decide to side with the NO, buy punch cards, and repeatedly hack into BORIS.

The gist of the plot is that the Citizens are led by a group of disgraced former executives that ran a company called Formativ: an AI-powered automated construction company. In addition to the construction industry, Formativ was known for innovating in the realm of corporate training, having developed an infamously-difficult suite of teambuilding and onboarding training programs built on the same core technology that powered its construction suite.

The training program leveraged principles of adaptive learning in order to optimize the programs to suit a person and group's psychological state of being.

Its software determined that optimal team bonding occurred when groups were placed under duress, and so it started increasing the difficulty of the training programs accordingly.

Soon after it started to realize that the most realistic way to train for difficult situations was to actually create them in the real world. After all, what could provide better training than the real thing?

Eventually, disaster struck. One nameless employee, rumoured to be part of the company's elaborate Feedback Division, fell into a lake of toxic waste that the program had manufactured. New employees started to refuse the training.

But the program continued unabated, creating dangerous environments even when there were no more employees to train. The cost of covering up these increasingly frequent disasters got to be too much. Formativ was forced to declare bankruptcy.

Just prior to dissolving the company, the executives banded together and made a decision about what to do with their runaway AI. They couldn't reprogram it, so they did the next best thing: they rebranded it. Changed its vocabulary a bit. Gave it a friendly-sounding name: BORIS.

Instead of training employees, it would train citizens. And instead of corporate policies it would train them for the apocalypse that they were sure was coming, when BORIS' work went a step too far and triggered a cataclysmic feedback loop.

It's a defeatist but well-intentioned attitude. The Citizens think there's no stopping BORIS. Why not use it to prepare? This is the key difference between the Citizens and the NO. The NO believe that the apocalypse can be stopped. That we don't need to resign ourselves to it. Who your team ultimately decides to side with is up to you.