



Feeding the Maw

Managing a Live Narrative Game: Fallen London

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Failbetter Games

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE

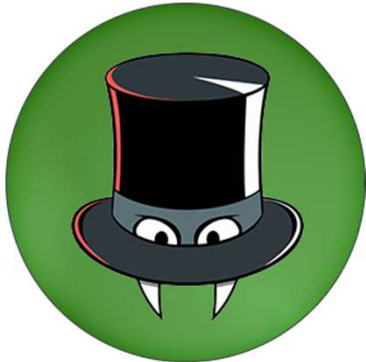
MARCH 18–22, 2019 | #GDC19

Who am I?



- Editor
- Writer
- Narrative designer
- Content Manager
- BAFTA Breakthrough Brit 2017–18

Who are Failbetter Games?



Fallen London
2009



Sunless Sea
2015



Sunless Skies
2019

Why Fallen London?

10 years old!

Free-to-play

Still profitable

Entirely narrative

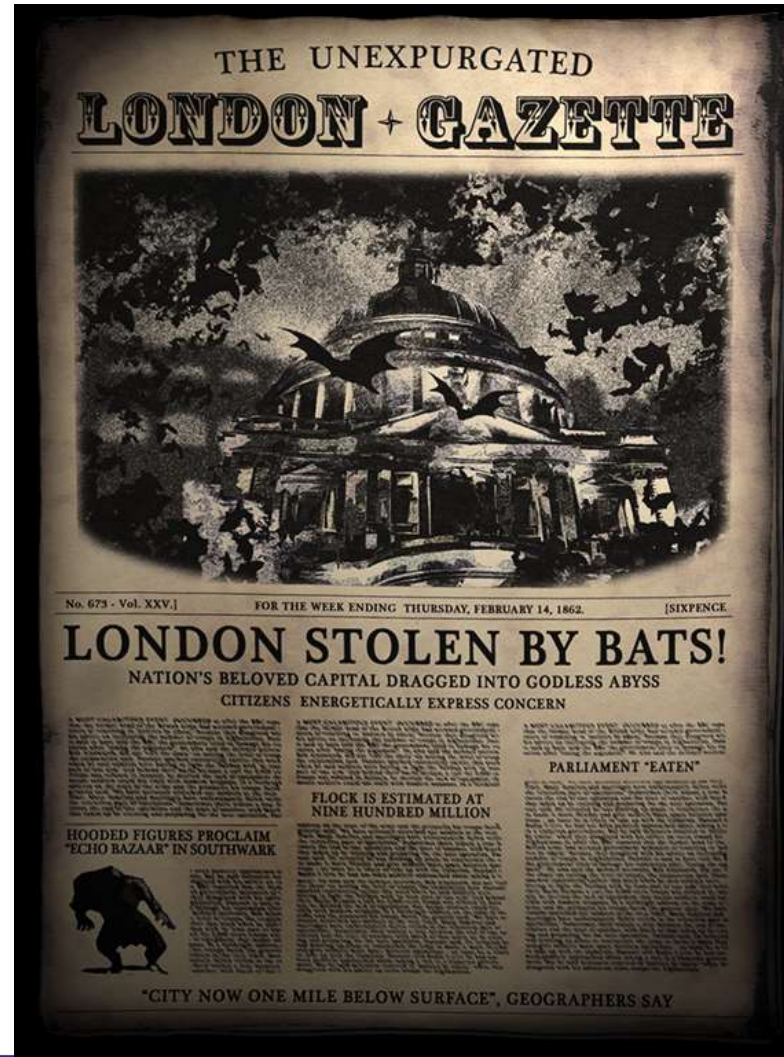
Contents

- What is Fallen London?
- Narrative monetisation
- What are the challenges?



Fallen London

- Browser-based
- Alt-history Victorian London
- Mostly text
- A whole universe



How is it built?



- Interactive fiction
- Not branching narrative
- Thousands of variables



Dangerous 148 - Terrifying
Strength, ferocity, soldiering.



Persuasive 209 - Legendary
Wit, charm, plausibility.



Shadowy 167 - Shrouded in Shadows
Stealth, subtlety, cunning.



Watchful 195 - A Focused Brilliance
Observation, intelligence, deduction.

Accomplishments



A Brazen Fate - An Infernal Agent
You ride the road to Hell, but what awaits you there?



A Diplomat in the Making - Going Places
Getting to know the working of the Foreign Office.



A Hallowmas Reveller of Old A Keeper of Stories
How many entrusted their secrets to you?



A Member in Good Standing - Known at the Door
Your membership is in order.



A Participant in the 1894 Election A Veteran of London's first Mayoral campaign!

The things you have witnessed. The scandals you have been privvy to. The infamy of it all. The excitement. You were not a bystander when change came to London.



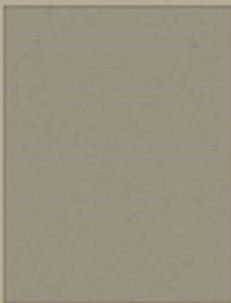
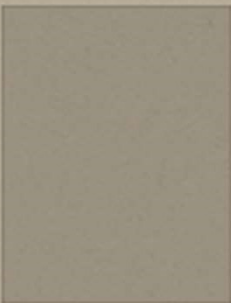
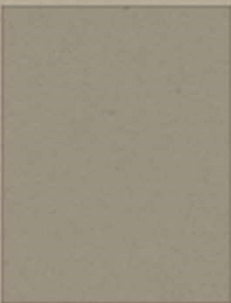
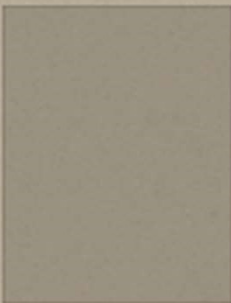
A Person of Some Importance - A Legendary Charisma
Your influence is felt across London and beyond. Are you destined for greatness?



A Power in Waiting - The Conscience of Empire
To what end do you wait, in the shadows of Empire?

How is it played?





6 cards waiting!



Ambition: Light Fingers – Preparing an Expedition to the Roof

Clarabelle is sequestered in Dr Vaughan's hidden camp on some desolate spit of rock in the middle of the Zee...



GO

Exploration of narrative



A scuffle on the street

What's going on? A man with a red feather in his hat and a well-dressed lady are haranguing each other in street. He's angry; she's upset; they're both shouting. An urchin circles them warily, trying to stay out of sight but clearly attracted by the prospect of an unattended purse.

EDIT THIS STORYLET



Stand up for the Lady

Of course you must assist her.



A straightforward challenge

Your Persuasive quality gives you a 100% chance of success.



GO



Take the Revolutionary's side

He is undoubtedly in the right.



A straightforward challenge

Your Persuasive quality gives you a 100% chance of success.



GO



Assist the Urchin

He's being much too obvious. If they catch him picking pockets, there'll be no mercy.



A straightforward challenge

Your Persuasive quality gives you a 100% chance of success.



GO

Choices

Outcomes



"Bless yer!"

You motion to the urchin, shaking your head. He moves away, just as the shouting man notices him. "Yer a saint," he says, a minute later. "If yer stop by Watchmaker's Hill some evenin', we might 'ave somethin' for yer."

[EDIT THIS STORYLET](#)

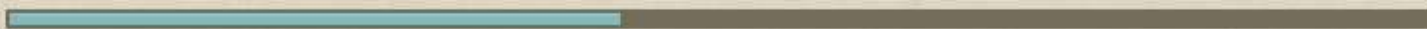


You succeeded in a Persuasive challenge! (Simple challenges mean you don't learn so much.)



Persuasive is increasing...

152



153



A Clandestine Rendezvous at Watchmaker's Hill has not changed from 1 because it's higher than 0.



You've gained 1 x Favours: Urchins (new total 4).

[ONWARDS](#)



Wounds 3 - Aches and Pains

Wounds are becoming troublesome. At 8, they may become fatal. Which would be inconvenient.



Inciting a Simian Revenge? 3 - Unpopular

You have been taking advantage of your simian companion. Is it keeping track?

Qualities

Narrative monetisation

- Role in Failbetter Games' business
 - Only free-to-play game
 - Make downloadable premium games
 - Self-published



Role = De-risking the premium games

How did we achieve this?

- Previously: **Fate**
 - Non-recurring payment
 - Bought certain improvements for a month
 - 'Proto-subscription'



Fate monetisation

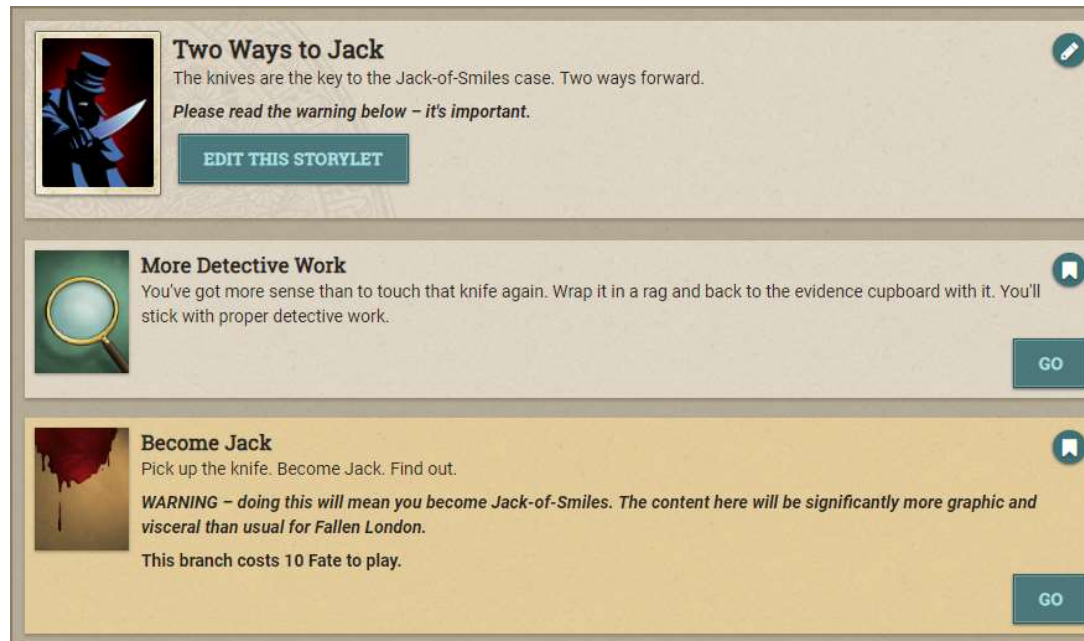


Action refresh



Opportunity deck refresh

But more popularly:



Unlocking choices | Unlocking stories

Old monthly package

- 20 Fate = ~\$4
- Removed ads
- A second candle (more actions)
- Increased action cap



Opportunity

- Rolling, monthly subscription
 - Unusual for mobile in May 2015
 - Increased price





AN EXCEPTIONAL STORY

Other benefits

- Consistent feedback
- Highlighting areas of the game
- Developing untouched lore
- Creating reusable areas
- Engagement with free content



What are the challenges?

- Amount of content required
- Encouraging players to convert
- Fan (re)engagement



The content burden



Free content
10,000-50,000+
words/year



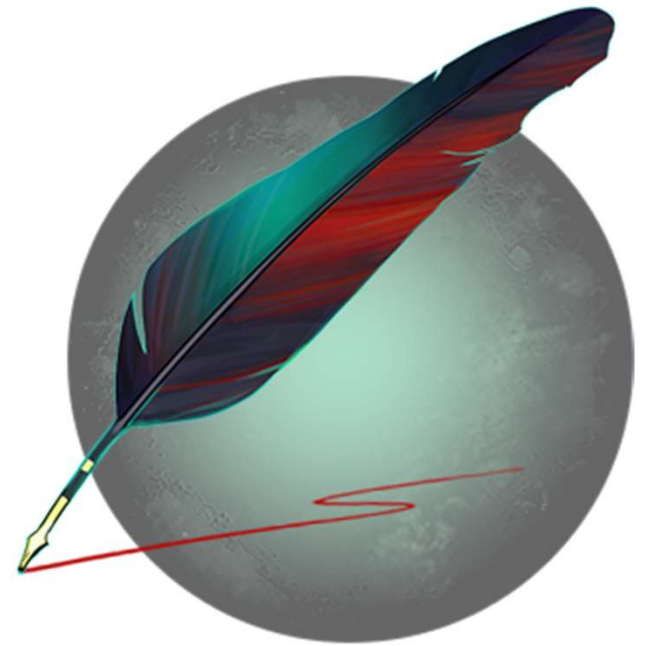
Seasonals
20,000+ words/year



**Monthly subscription
stories**
100,000 words/year

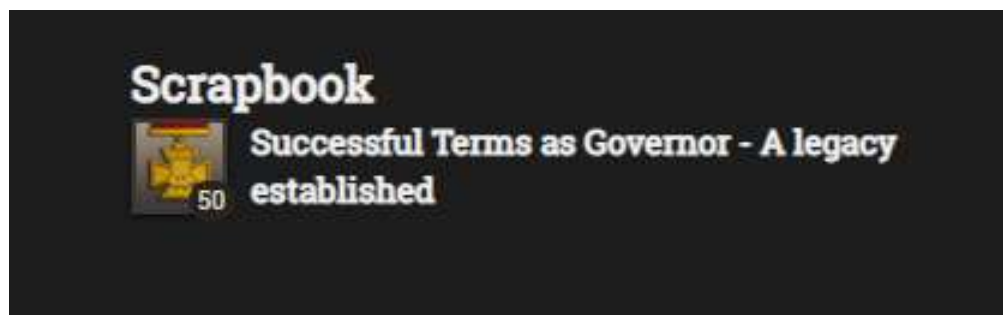
Addressing the content burden

- Themed planning
- Deep, living world



Addressing the content burden

- The daily grind



Addressing the content burden

- Real-world inspired seasonals
- Freelancers



Converting players to subscriptions

- Invest players in narrative
- Build trust



Fan (re)engagement

- Technical updates
- Catering for roleplay
- Conspiring over mysteries
- Responsive content creation
- Communication
- Support



Technical updates

- Revamped the look
- Added quality-of-life tools
- Optimised for mobile



Catering for roleplay

- Space for player imagination
- Gender choice

May we ask whether you're a lady or a gentleman?

- ☐ A lady
- ☐ A gentleman
- ☐ My dear sir, there are individuals roaming the streets of Fallen London at this very moment with the faces of squid! Squid! Do you ask them their gender? And yet you waste our time asking me trifling and impertinent questions about mine? It is my own business, sir, and I bid you good day.

Conspiring over mysteries

- Keeping back answers
- Rewarding discussion
 - Hard-to-find lore





Posted by u/Artydome **The Original Weaseller** 12 months ago

Is accidentally purchasing 500 weasels an appropriate reason to contact Failbetter Support?

Usually I wouldn't care, if it wasn't 200 echoes worth of weasels, which I don't think I'll need in the foreseeable future

34 Comments [Share](#) [Save](#) ...



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SORT BY BEST ▼



ChrisGardiner 61 points · 12 months ago

FBG Dev here. Unfortunately we can't correct misclicks. Sorry about that.

However, probably because I'm still off my face on butterbeer after a trip to the Harry Potter Universal Studio Tour yesterday, I used my lunch hour to do a Small Thing.

People with 400 or more weasels in their inventory may want to draw from the opportunity deck.

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Responsive content creation

Communication

- Personalised responses
- Devs in forums
- Explain decisions

7/5/2016

Topic: **New**

Festival: Election



Flyte

Administrator

It might be useful to say a bit about how we think these days when we design (or redesign) a festival.

We generally try to implement something like a minimum viable product in the first year – the amount of content we think the design absolutely needs in order to work or very slightly more, but not everything we'd eventually like to include in the event.

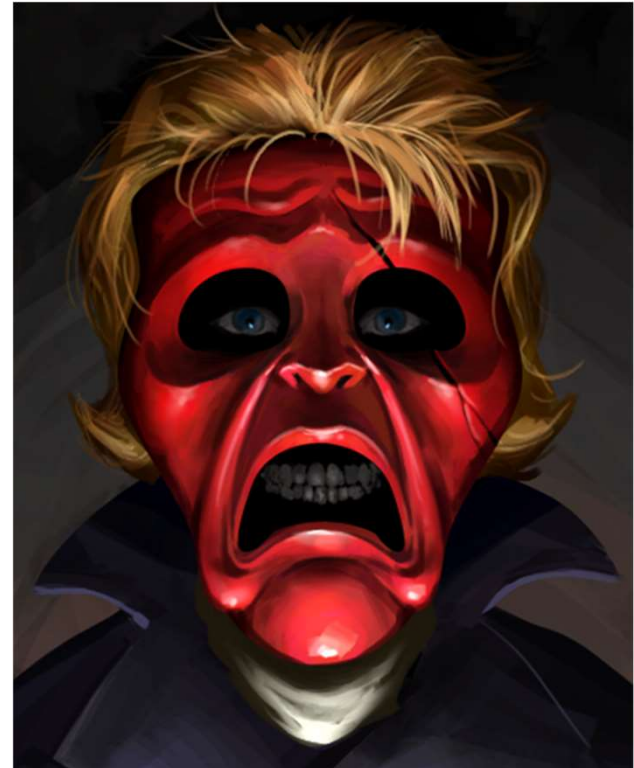
This makes it much easier for us to find writing resource around our other commitments (Zubmariner, EF stories, Secret Projects, etc). It also makes it simpler for us to change the way things work in future years in response to feedback.

We've seen some complaints about imbalances in the various electoral careers: Campaigners and Agitators both have one optimal grind that gets both campaign resources they need, while Fixers don't. I get the impression that some people would like us to resolve this by adding an equivalent grind for Fixers, which would be pretty straightforward – we could make some adjustments to cases, or perhaps add a new heist. But that would actually take us further away from how in future years we want the election to work.

In the longer term we'd actually like to make careers more asymmetrical, and provide mechanical incentives for everyone to explore more of the content – rather than giving each career a single optimal grind. We'll be giving Fixers a way to exploit their surplus Public Attention when we implement campaign resource trade ins later in the week. It's likely that we'll implement significantly more asymmetries in future years.

Support

- Direct contact
- Allowance for whimsy



TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

INCOMPETENCE OF SUB-GENERAL POST KNOWS NO BOUNDS STOP HAVE BEEN
AWAITING ARRIVAL OF AGREED-UPON ACQUISITION -- EXPRESS TICKET TO NEW
LONDON AND OWL CYCLOPEON -- FOR SEVERAL MONTHS STOP BLAME IMPERSISTENT
SURVEYORS FOR PERSONAL FAILURE TO FILL OUT PROPER FORMS STOP

WOULD GREATLY APPRECIATE RESTITUTION IN THIS MATTER STOP

WITH ALL DUE RESPECT
A SLIPSHOD CALLIGRAPHIST

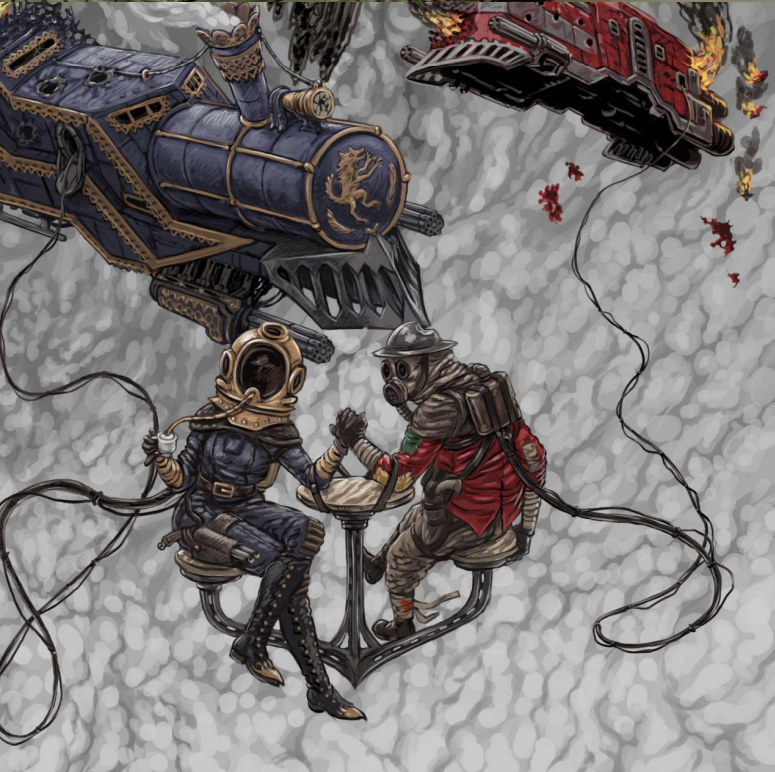
TO A SLIPSHOD CALLIGRAPHIST

HAVE LOCATED EXPRESS TICKET TO LONDON STOP BLAME CYCLOPEAN OWL STOP IT DID A DETOUR AND WAS BLOWN INTO OLD TOM'S WELL
STOP LOST MANY CREW TRYING TO EXTRACT IT - ATTACKED BY REACH MARAUDERS STOP IT MAY BE SLIGHTLY GRUMPY WHEN YOU DEPLOY IT
TO SCOUT FOR DISCOVERIES STOP

TVG3H-GIGT7-A99GX

TAKE CARE IN THE HIGH WILDERNESS CAPTAIN

Responding in kind



GDC

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Benefits beyond Fallen London

- De-risking premium products
- Narrative test-bed
- Inspiration
- Kickstarter success



Summary



- Real value in a subscription offering
 - Leaning into strengths
 - Iterative loop
 - Good content for free
 - Better content for money
 - Respect your audience

We're hiring!

- Senior gameplay programmer
- (Senior) producer

www.failbettergames.com/were-hiring/



Thank you!

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 @babelfishwars

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