JOLIE MENZEL

Design Director • Narrative/Systems Lead • Mission & Level Design

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SUMMARY

Design Director and Narrative & Visual Storytelling leader with 15+ years across AAA and indie, from pitch through live operations. Aligns creative vision with product goals, leading cross-discipline teams to deliver cohesive player experiences, backed by deep craft in writing, storyboarding, and cinematics.

SELECTED PROJECTS

- **Gears 5: Hivebusters** — Shipped well-received (82 Metacritic) standalone story DLC for Gears 5, owning the narrative and mission cohesion of the entire experience
- **Gears 5 (Live Ops)** — Led narrative content creation for 25+ additional multiplayer characters content across multiple releases, including collaboration with WWE and The New Day.
- **South Park: The Fractured but Whole (+ DLC)** — Led narrative and mission development and open world progression across main game and DLCs; IP partner management; designed and shepherded development on a custom dynamic and context-aware dialogue system.

SELECTED EXPERIENCE

Zunzún Studios — Studio Design Director (Mar 2024–Present)

- Scaled execution from Prototype through First Playable across a 30+ person co-dev team by creating delegation-friendly authoring workflows, documentation, and scalable pipelines.
- Owned design vision and player experience for a single-player narrative-driven title; authored/maintained GDD and milestone quality bars with Production-aligned goals, success measures, and review cadence.
- Directed feature strategy using competitive analysis and player research synthesis to set where to innovate vs. where to standardize.
- Identified and specified high-impact tooling and pipeline improvements informed by hands-on implementation to reduce iteration churn and regressions.

Night School (Netflix Games) — Senior Game Designer (Feb 2023–Mar 2024)

- Set core gameplay direction for a cloud/streaming title: designed cross-platform movement (controller + touch) tuned for high latency and player comfort
- Established world metrics + layout standards; authored metrics and implementation guides used by Design and Art to build content consistently.

- Ran decision-focused content reviews (go/no-go calls + decision logs), reducing churn and clarifying trade-offs for leadership and the team.
- Operationalized planning via clear estimates and acceptance criteria, enabling Production to make timely scope calls and keep effort on highest-impact work.
- Mentored designers on resilient implementation and cross-discipline collaboration.

The Molasses Flood, A CD PROJEKT Studio— Lead Narrative Designer (Feb 2022–Dec 2022)

- Narrative and mission design owner; partnered with tools and procedural generation team to reconcile authored storytelling with replayable systemic content.
- Partnered with IP loremasters to define systemic narrative constraints, hooks, and an authoring bible; produced Witcher tone/brand guidelines to de-risk approvals.
- Authored missions across multiple structures in UE4 and proprietary scripting; built reusable templates and best practices for team scaling.

The Coalition (Xbox Game Studios) — Lead Narrative Designer (Feb 2020–Jan 2022)

Shipped: *Gears 5: Hivebusters* (DLC campaign) & Live Ops (*Operations* 3–8)

- Led narrative team (3 - 4 designers + producer); primary liaison to Level/Combat/MP Design, Audio, and Localization to align story beats with features and content.
- Owned multilingual narrative pipeline across 14 voiced languages; supported fully remote recording sessions; coordinated lore/canon reviews with franchise leadership and loremasters.
- Shipped Gears 5 Live Ops (Operations 3–8) on aggressive cadence; delivered 25+ playable characters with complete dialogue sets.
- Lead narrative and mission flow for *Hivebusters* (6-mission campaign); coached designers on resilient Blueprint setups; balanced scripted vs. systemic dialogue implementation; edited/adapted scripts to match encounter/level realities.

Ubisoft Osaka — Lead Designer (Jun 2018–Dec 2019)

Shipped: *Rocksmith+* (Dynamic Difficulty & Curriculum initiatives)

- Led Rocksmith+ Dynamic Difficulty improvements: added note-detection diagnostics and designed a visible skills/curriculum map (RPG-style progression) to make mastery trackable and practice goals clear.
- Hired and partnered with a music educator to build curriculum scaffolding, learning outcomes, and assessment loops, positioning the title for education/edtech use alongside consumer play.
- Primary liaison between Ubisoft Osaka (core dev) and Ubisoft San Francisco stakeholders (Design, Art, UX, Publishing); drove alignment through structured reviews and onsite collaboration.

Ubisoft San Francisco — Lead Narrative Designer (Feb 2015–Jun 2018)

Shipped: *South Park: The Fractured But Whole* and DLC

- Owned missions & narrative: Defined mission flows and macro campaign progression; integrated writing from South Park Studios and the internal team; oversaw VO recording, ingest, and localization pipelines.
- Led a narrative org: managed 4 direct reports and ran a cross-discipline pod of 6; served as narrative/mission point of contact for 24 designers across San Francisco and Osaka.
- Designed and guided development of a context-driven dialogue system to enable dynamic character banter while remaining resilient to heavy iteration and clean scaling for DLC.
- Designed and guided development of an Excel-driven bulk-edit pipeline for 60K+ voiced lines.
- Directed cross-studio level collaboration with Ubisoft Osaka (levels/puzzles): set mission quality bars and acceptance criteria, and established greybox metrics and layout/scale conventions via early level designs.

Telltale Games — Cinematic Artist (Jun 2011–Jan 2015)

Shipped: The Walking Dead S1 • The Wolf Among Us • Tales from the Borderlands

- Built cinematics in close partnership with designers and writers to execute story beats within interactive contexts.
- Authored camera language and navigation setups to keep exploration readable and player interactions legible.
- Used rapid prototyping and greyboxing to validate concepts fast, drive stakeholder alignment, and accelerate production through clearer decision points.

EXPERTISE & TOOLS

Leadership: Vision setting; milestone quality bars; acceptance criteria; Roadmapping & dependency planning; drop cadence (live ops); Build reviews & feedback synthesis; risk/mitigation & scope control; Cross-discipline alignment; co-dev/outsourcing direction; Mentorship & coaching; team health

Design: Mission Design & Level Design; Systems Design; Narrative Systems; Playtesting & telemetry-informed iteration; Accessibility; Cross-platform interaction design; UX Design.

Tooling/Pipelines: Content pipelines for co-dev/outsourcing; VO/Loc pipelines; build/review rituals; Design documentation,

Versioning/Collab: Perforce/Git; Jira/Confluence; Notion; Miro/Figma

Additional: Public speaking; mentorship; IP-holder collaboration; IP development; screenwriting; editing

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EDUCATION

Savannah College of Art and Design — B.F.A., Sequential Art; Minors in Conceptual Art for Games and Storyboarding