

Writing Sample – Sagar Doshi

Game overview, casting biography of major character, and sample lines from historical Venetian espionage RPG, *La Serenissima*.

GAME OVERVIEW – *La Serenissima*

Historical espionage RPG set in the Republic of Venice in 1453. Handpicked by the legendary, but forbidding Venetian spy Arcangela, the player character joins an elite espionage squad known as the Sirens. They are sent to do the dirty work of the expanding Venetian Republic, undermining and discrediting erstwhile rebels wherever they go. The player character joins high society in various locales, infiltrates target groups, obtains key evidence by guile, speech, or outright theft, and defuses the plots of Venice's enemies.

As time goes on and the Sirens learn to trust and rely on one another, the jobs become increasingly questionable. Is there a rogue element in Venice's government? What are Arca's ultimate aims? Is Venice's expansion always a good thing? The player must decide whether the Sirens ought to remain blindly pointed outward at Venice's enemies, who loom ever larger, or whether their next target might actually lie within.

Mechanics alternate between

1. Dialogue and conversation choices with general members of the public,
2. Stealth, puzzles, and hidden object discovery during heists, and
3. Multi-person debates within the Sirens about the way forward.

The game begins as the Sirens attend a ball in Venice's vassal state Candia (modern-day Crete) to suss out rumours of a local rebellion.

CHARACTER BIO – Arcangela, Mastermind of the Sirens, 47

Sitting alone in her leafy elevated courtyard, Arca pondered her emotions. What was it that fuelled her starry career of espionage against Venice's enemies?

Ah yes: rage.

Not chaotic rage. No, never that. Even as a child, when her parents were killed by the hated Genoese and she felt the first red strummings of wrath, she knew vengeance would be a long-term game. Discipline was paramount, as long as she never forgot that Venice's enemies and her family's enemies were one and the same. And that she would bring justice to them.

With her network of privilege, it didn't take long for Arca to enter into the Doge's service and from there, into a very useful marriage of convenience with a senior diplomat. With that platform, Arca could temporarily exorcise her rage. Stationed variously across the Republic, she would locate the enemy. She would listen, watch, and understand them. And then she would dismantle them utterly.

So how could it be that now, after decades of such successes, the bureaucrats were implying she was getting on in years? What foolishness. Arca felt the tension in her knuckles as she took a sip of her mulled wine under the cool sun. Still, she knew which battles could be won, and which not. And she certainly knew how to bide her time.

So here she was, looking over a set of nominees to join her new force of spies, the Sirens. She flipped through the pages. Children, all of them. So inexperienced. So earnest. Would any have the focus to do the work? Well... She *was* coming up on a big assignment down south, after all, and a few more tools at her disposal might help. And if one or two didn't make it, well... they just weren't up to the work. Perhaps the Sirens could be of use after all. Anything that could help fuel the ever-present rage.

SAMPLE LINES – Arca tests the Sirens on their training and physical preparation before their first group job, commenting on their choices.

Location: the private basement of Arca's home in Candia, which functions as the local Siren HQ. It is fully outfitted with various stations for wardrobe, arms, and equipment preparation, each staffed by a loyal servant.

Note: these lines can also function as tutorials or reminders for the player if conversing directly with Arca. Or they can be heard if the player approaches Arca's area of the basement HQ.

1. Have you memorised your covers and your connections to me? I want to hear them from all of you, now.
2. Any questions on tonight's goal? Remember, I just want names and relationships. We start simple.
3. Cucumbers. On that table there. Go test your daggers on them. If they're not sharp enough, the armoury is behind you.
4. Certain you can move fast in that outfit if everything goes wrong? If you need to adjust your wardrobe, go down the hall.
5. Do your best to befriend any Candians who look awkward or alone. If they do not already know someone, they are likely to be part of our target's social class.
6. I don't want to see *anyone* approaching me or this house in groups. Ever. In any context. Make your own way carefully.
7. That's your weapon choice? It's far too big. They won't let you in with it. Try a subtler blade.
8. If you have unsheathed your weapon, then you've already failed the night. Just get out safe and come back.
9. And please, I should not have to say this, but do work to fit in. Others are observing as much as you are. Someone who doesn't take any drinks attracts just as much attention as someone deep in their cups after the first hour.
10. I'll be maintaining an overview of the ball from the centre. You all have designated excuses to speak to me, should they be needed. Report to me before the dancing ends, and I will give you subsequent instructions.

SAMPLE LINES – PC goes near Arca during the ball

PC overhears Arca chatting with partygoers

1. The weather really is so warm down here, aren't they?
2. [Laughter] Is that what they're saying about the Doge lately?
3. I heard that the Orthodox churches are quite beautiful, quite mysterious. Have you been to any?
4. Oh please, sir, you must tell me who hosts the best soirées here. Let me cheat a little and benefit from your hard won knowledge!
5. The news from Constantinople is frankly astonishing.
6. Could any legacy of Rome remain if the Ottomans have overtaken its last capital?
7. I hear that one can cultivate anything on the Candian soils. Is that true?
8. The local priests have quite a way with words, I hear. Do you happen to know one? I'd love to attend a service.
9. I was hoping to get an understanding of the island, and Rethymno was first on my list. Anywhere comfortable you think my husband and I could stay?
10. These drinks are really quite delicious, aren't they?

PC provides status report on intelligence gathered and Arca responds

1. Have you tried speaking to his wife as well?
2. Good. Continue making the rounds.
3. One of the others has had some luck. Let us meet on the pier just south of the fortress at about eleven.
4. Have one of you spoken to the Orthodox priests hovering near the windows? Do it.
5. That's not enough. Try dancing with someone. They can't escape you then.

SAMPLE LINES – Arca comments as PC picks a lock during an early heist.

If PC takes more than the average of the designer's expected time

1. Why is it taking you so long?
2. I thought you had practised this before?
3. Hurry up! Focus! Why can't you get it right?
4. This is supposed to be the easiest part of the night.
5. The next patrol is going to walk by here soon. Speed up.
6. What is this? What is wrong with you?
7. Be better.

If PC takes more than 90% of the designer's expected time

1. There's no time for this.
2. Get out of the way. I will handle it.
3. Just stop. Go watch for the guard, if that's not too hard of a task for you.
4. That's enough playing around. I'll do it.
5. I didn't think we'd be starting from the absolute basics. Move.
6. I guess this is a bigger challenge for you than I thought. I've got it.
7. Just pick up those broken lockpicks and move aside.

If PC finishes faster than the designer's average expected time

1. Huh. Nicely done.
2. You've finished? Hmm. Alright then.
3. Well done. Ease the door carefully, in case it creaks.
4. Good job. Check if you've left any marks, and let's move in.
5. Not bad. Have you done a lock like this before?

SAMPLE LINES – PC notices something interesting after infiltrating a target’s home. Arca comments.

 If PC indicates a critical piece of evidence to move the story forward that can be investigated or reviewed more deeply.

1. Ah! That looks interesting!
2. Now that seems useful.
3. Let’s take a closer look.
4. We’re getting there. Let’s see what we can learn from this.
5. You’ve found something!
6. We can use this!
7. Yes... this is right!
8. Excellent! Give it here.
9. That’s it!
10. Very well done.

 If PC indicates a less relevant object.

1. Irrelevant. Let’s move on.
2. Doesn’t seem like that’ll help us.
3. We’re looking for something that tells us who they’re connected to. This isn’t that.
4. Stop wasting time.
5. No, not what we need.
6. Something *useful*, I said. Something *useful*.
7. This place is full of junk.
8. Nothing we can use here.
9. Stop looking at just whatever catches your eye.
10. *[After five less relevant object indications]* We don’t have time for mindless exploration!