Spring 2020

GAME DESIGN

ACT 5

Maurizio Rigamonti

Experiences can be judged by **Interest curves**

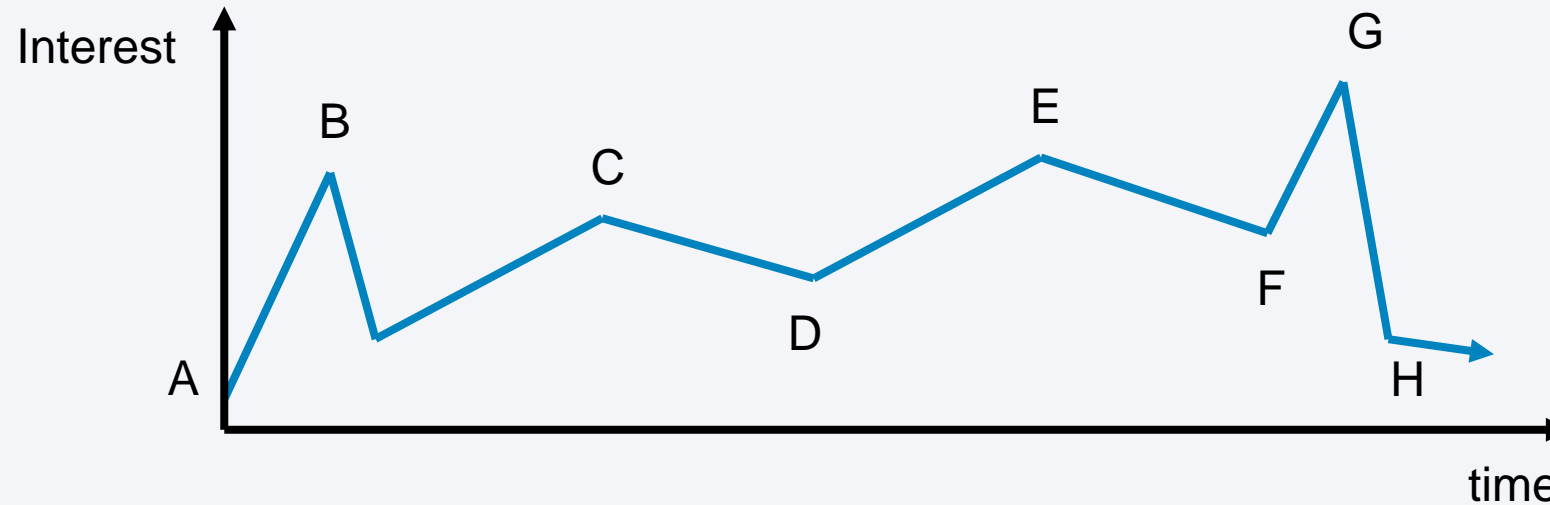**UNIVERSITÉ DE FRIBOURG / UNIVERSITÄT FREIBURG** | FACULTÉ DES SCIENCES ET DE MÉDECINE / MATH.-NATURWISSENSCHAFTLICHE UND MEDIZINISCHE FAKULTÄT

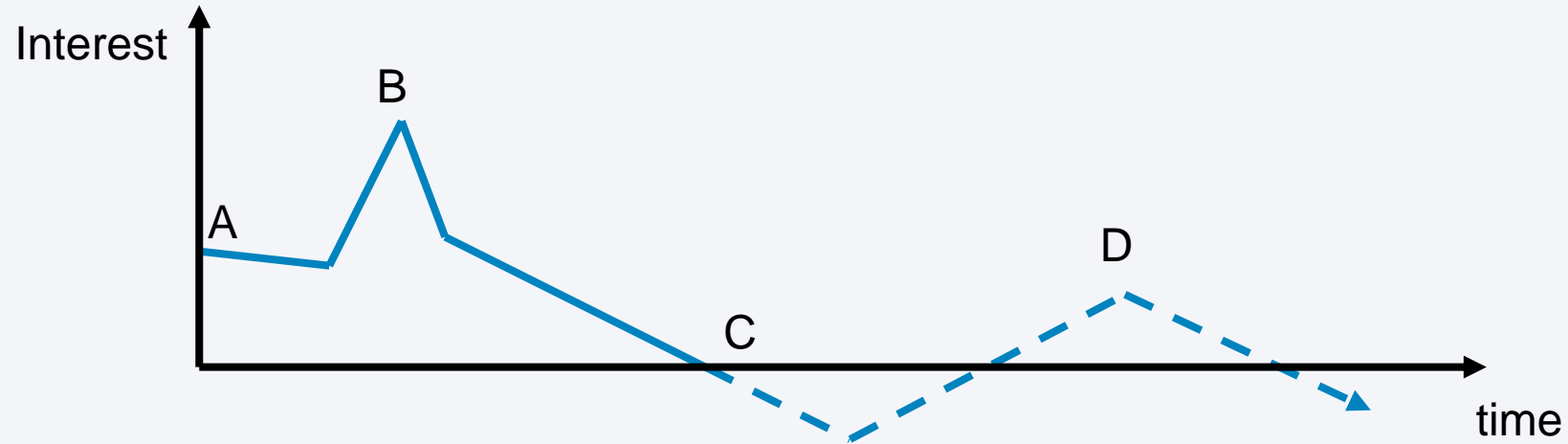Maurizio Rigamonti

INTEREST CURVES

- Interest curves are useful tools to create an entertaining experience
    - Help to spot troubles

- Observe players during the experience and compare their and your curves

- Different demographics can have different curves

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POSITIVE INTEREST CURVE

A. Some level of interest

B. "The hook" (e.g. first cinematic)

C-F. The interest continually rise

G. Final climax

H. The history is resolved

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A.   Lack of a decent hook

B.   The interest crosses the threshold

In general, the end of the experience

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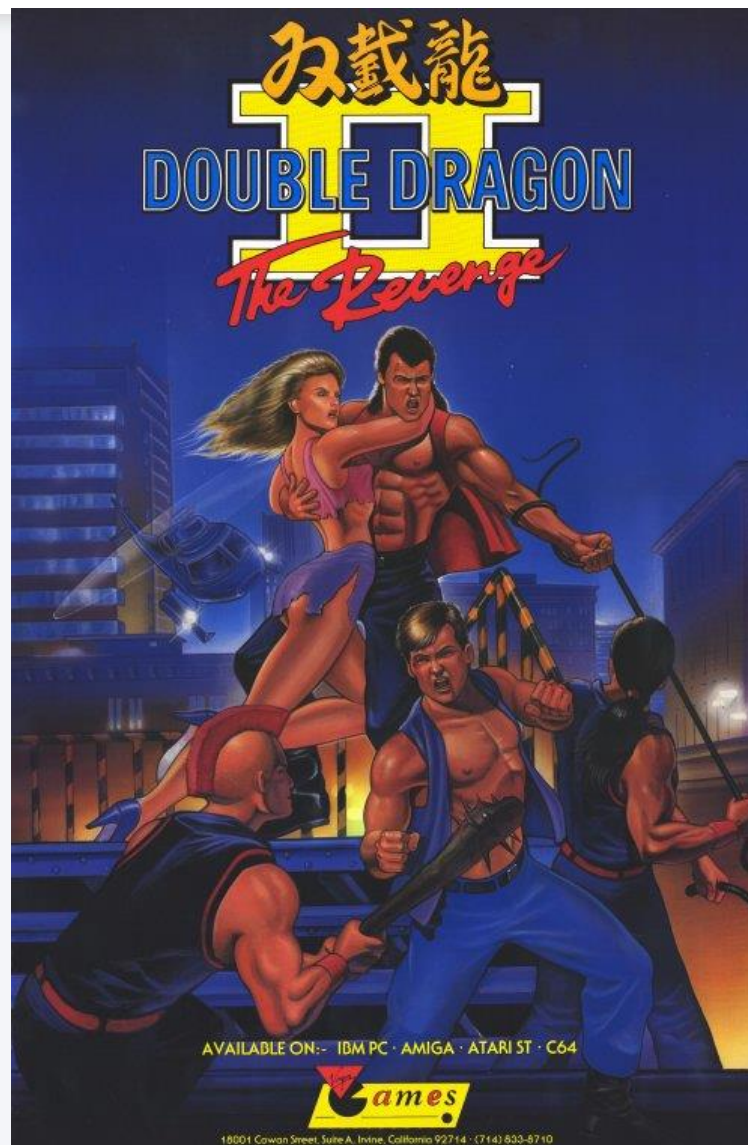
PATTERNS INSIDE PATTERNS

- Interest curves can be fractal, with more layers

- In videogames, typically three levels

  - **Overall game**
    Introduction >> levels >> end (major climax)

  - **Each level**
    New aesthetics and challenges >> harder challenges >> boss at the end of the level

  - **Each challenge**
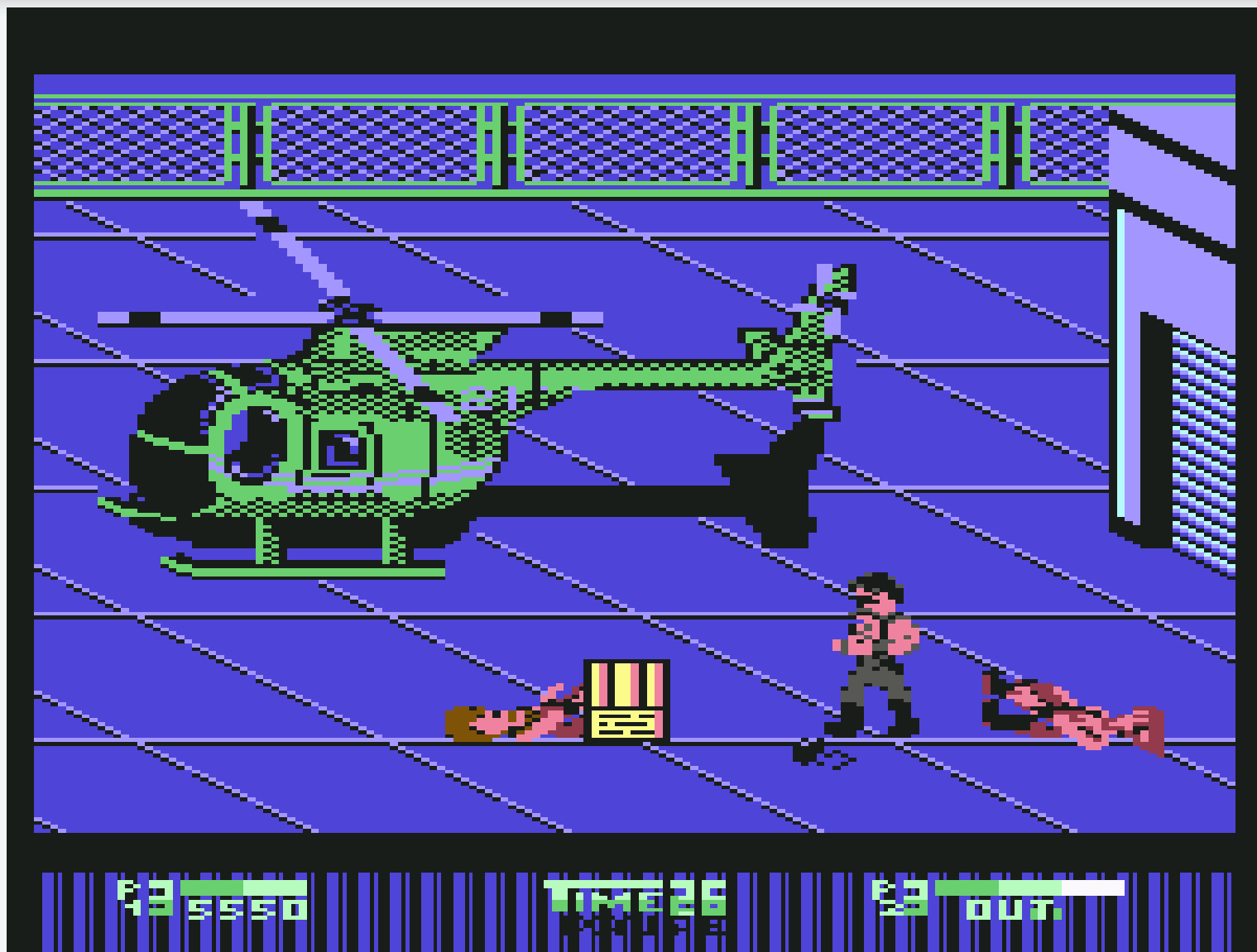   Introduction >> stepped rising challenge

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- Touchy-feely

- The **Unity of interest** does not exist

- We care about changes of interest (a relative metric)

- 3 helping factors
  - Can be used together to estimate the interest of a game

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- Some events more interesting than others. For instance:
  - Risk > safety
  - Fancy > plain
  - Unusual > ordinary

- In general, events do no stand alone
  - Story arc
  - Fables are mix of ordinary and fabulous events

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F2: POETRY OF PRESENTATION

- The aesthetic of the entertainment experience

- The more beautiful artistry used in presenting the experience, the more the players find it compelling and interesting

- It can mix writing, music, dance, acting, graphics design, recitation, and so on.

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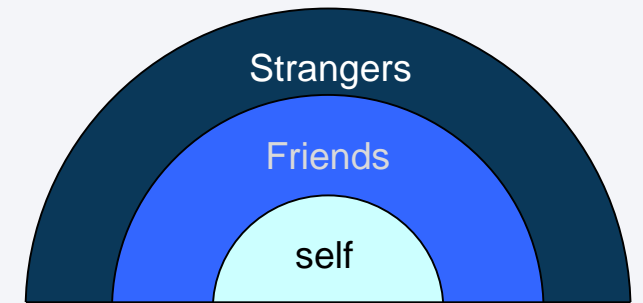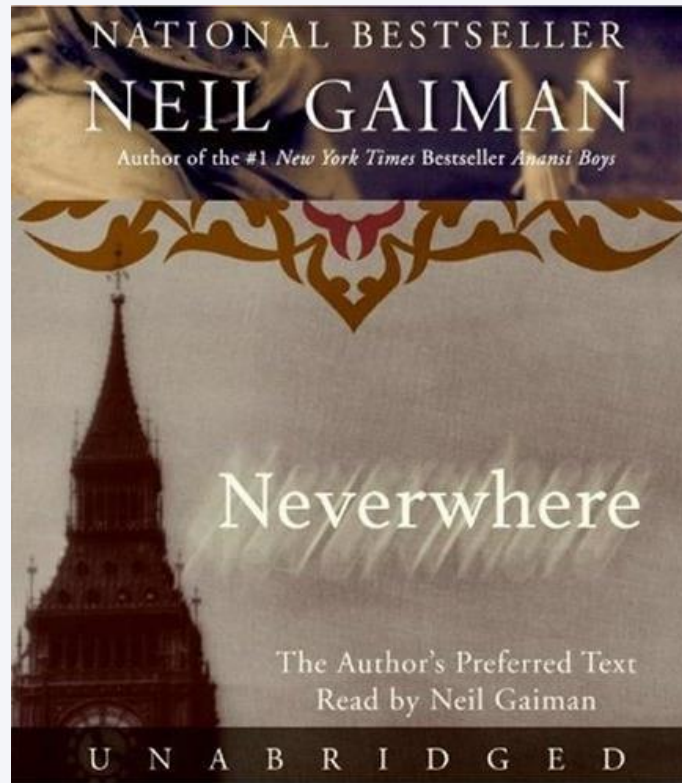
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- Events happening to us are more interesting than events happening to other people
  - E. g. : lottery

- Use the power of empathy…
  - Create character that players can empathize easily
  - More empathy = more interest
  - Interaction allows players to be the heroes

- … and of imagination
  - Consistent and compelling worlds "immerse" the player
  - Contradictions expulse immediately the player!
  - Provide multiple ways to enter the world

Strangers

Friends

self

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One kind of experience:
the story

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STORY AND GAME

- Mid 1970s, videogames with storyboards

- Delicate relationship between story and gameplay

- The story gives the game a context and a meaning
    - Children add stories to abstract game

- The story can be part of the experience!

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THE MYTH OF PASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT

- The myth: "interactive storytelling is completely different from traditional storytelling"

- Traditional storytelling involves the listener
  - Questions
  - Imagination
  - Participation (e.g. "Don't open that door!")

- Only difference: the ability to *take* action

- The *desire* to act and the emotions exist in both experiences

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- The player has the full choice when acting, thinking and communicating

- The idea is wonderful, but very hard, probably impossible, to realize

- The truth: 2 common manners of storytelling
  - The string of pearls
  - The story machine

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- The string: non-interactive story
  - text, animations, cut scenes, etc.

- The pearls: periods of free movements and control

- Advantages:
  - Finely crafted story
  - Reward: more story and new challenges
  - Balance between storytelling and gameplay

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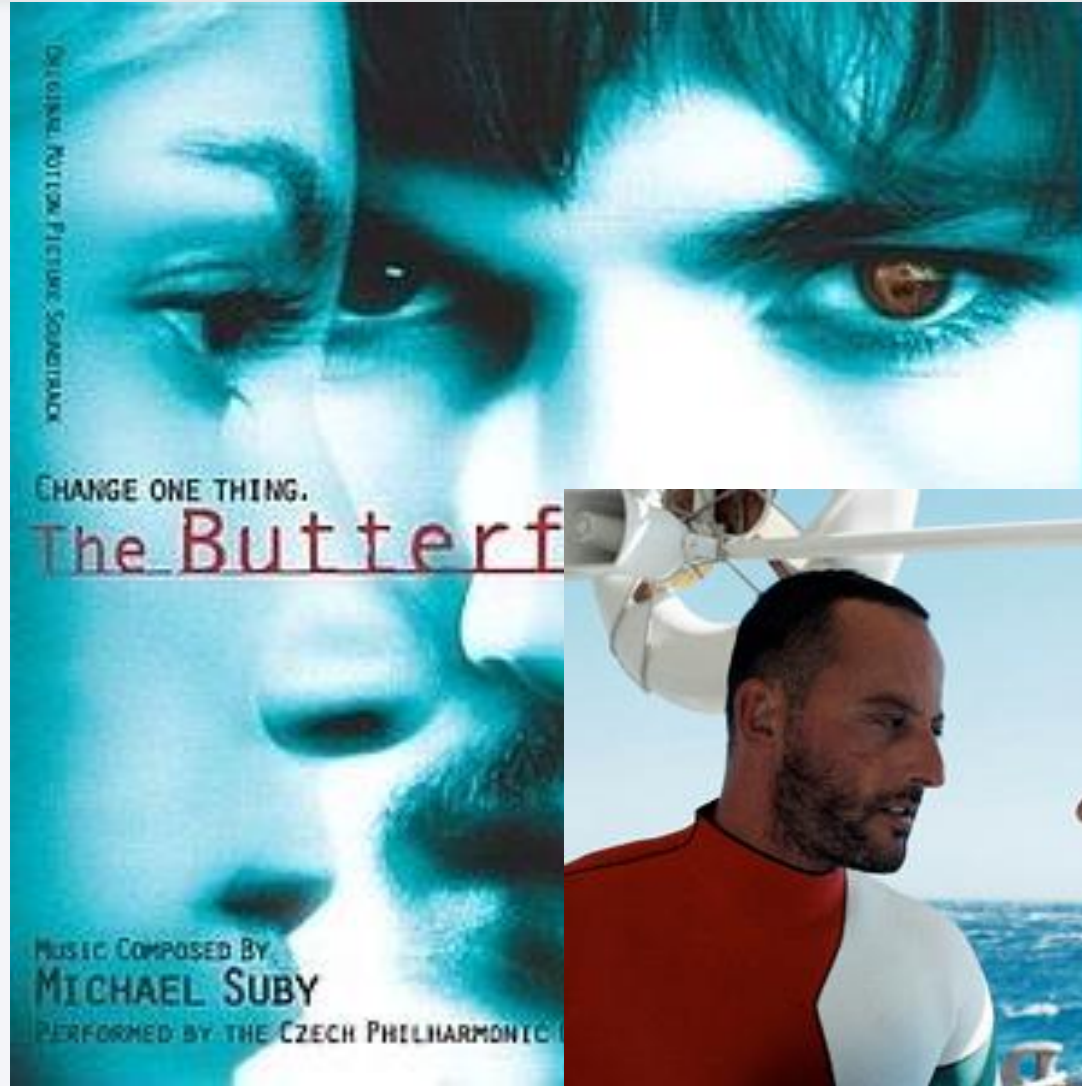
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THE STORY MACHINE

- In general, a story is a sequence of related events

- A good game is a machine generating interesting events

- The events **stimulate** the players to tell someone else **what happened**

- More scripting, less stories produced

- Examples
  - Sport games
  - The Sims

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- They cover almost the 99% of existing games

- Opposite methods

- What about
  - Branching story trees?
  - Full AI characters?
  - Multiple endings?

- There a lot of problems not yet solved

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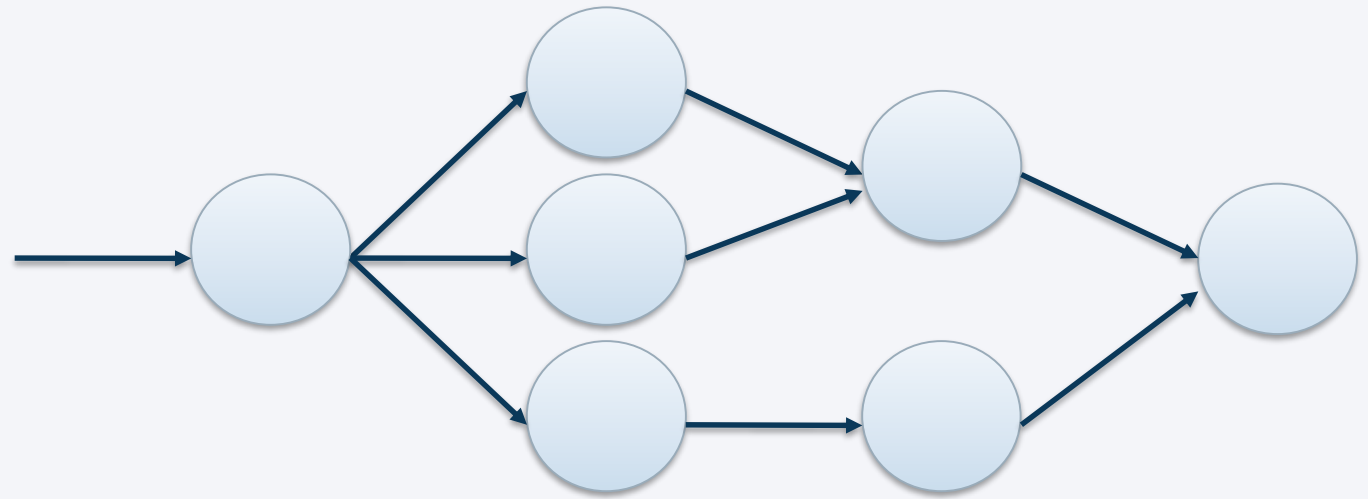
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- Simple to create an interactive story tree
  - How many are enjoyable?

- First 5 minutes: driving force until the end
  - Intense unity

- 1 beginning cannot be perfect for several endings

- Most interactive stories with many branching paths feel watery, weak and disconnected

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- The amount of outcomes increases fast
  - 3 choices per level, 10 levels -> ~90 000 outcomes

- Some storytellers fuse outcomes
  - All choices end up at the same place
  - Really meaningful?

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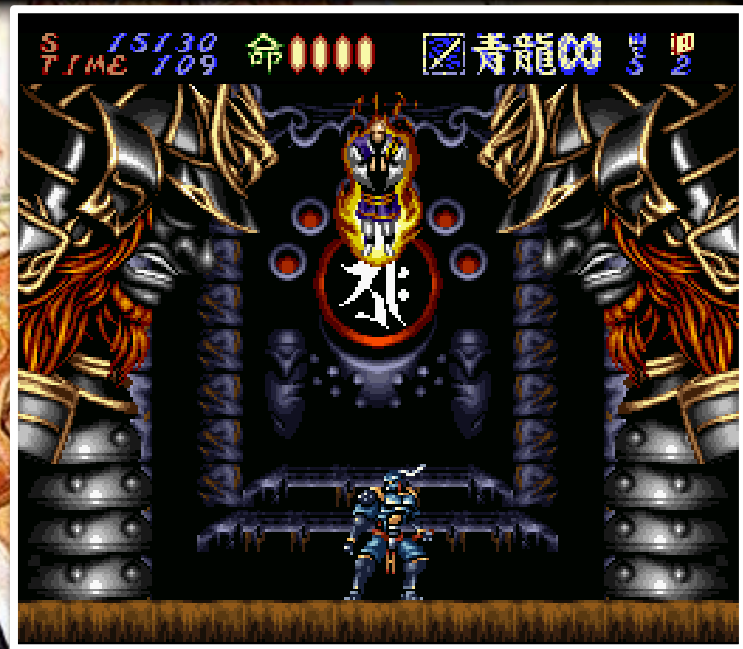
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- Designer's point of view
  - Players can play more times the game

- Player's point of view
  - Is this the real ending? C.f. Silent Hill endings!
  - Do I have to play the whole game again to see another ending?

- Exceptions: different quests, goals, and endings
  - Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic (good or evil side)

- **2 completely different stories!**
  - The Witcher 2: different points of view

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- Characters in videogames are able to jump, run, shoot, crouch, climb, fly, etc.

- Most of what happens in stories is communication
  - Talk, ask, negotiate, argue, etc.
  - Videogames does not support that yet!

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- Most insoluble problem: "Why don't videogames make us cry?"

- Tragic stories are considered the most serious, most important, most moving types

- Generally, off limits to story tellers
  - Storytellers must give up inevitability
  - Tragic stories already anticipate their unstoppable end

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- The dream of interactive storytelling is **obsessed** with story, not experience
  - The experience is story, as well as technology, aesthetics and gameplay

- The next slides present 8 tricks to make the story elements involving and interesting

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- Old maxim of Hollywood
  1. A character with a **goal**
  2. **Obstacles** that keep him from reaching that goal (in particular, when another character has conflicting goals)

- When the character tries to overcome obstacles, conflicts tend to arise

- Interests of this structure
  - 1 clear goal
  - Obstacles >> problem-solving
  - Conflicts >> unpredictable results (surprise)

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- Simplicity
  - The game world is **simpler** than real one

- Transcendence
  - The player is **more powerful** in the game world than in the real one

- Recurrent worlds because of this combination:
  - Medieval and fantasy
  - Futuristic (technology is often similar to magic)
  - War
  - Modern-like (Grand Theft Auto, The Sims)

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- Propp's functions – Structure of fables

- Campbell 1949 - Monomyth (or hero's journey)

- Underlying structure that mythological stories seem to share
    - Moses, Buddha, Odysseus, Prometheus, etc.

- Vogler 1992 - Guide based on Campell's archetypes
    - Write the story first and use it as a lens

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NEO

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1. The ordinary world
2. The call to adventure
3. Refusal of the call
4. Meeting with the mentor
5. Crossing the threshold
6. Test, allies, enemies
7. Approaching the cave
8. The ordeal (hero faces a peak life or death crisis)
9. The reward
10. The road back (to ordinary world)
11. Resurrection (greater crisis)
12. Returning with the elixir

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- Many game designers begin with the story
  - It can be a mistake: following the story too slavishly
  - Point and click adventures
  - Most pliable element of the tetrad

- Adapt to the story
  - To **overcome** technical **limits**
  - To make the gameplay **coherent**

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- A small inconsistence breaks the reality of the world

- Define the **set of rules** for your world and respect them in any case
  - E.g. if the player can put a big object in his pocket, it should also be able to put a smaller one!
  - Broking your rules will frustrate the player and your world will appear ridiculous

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- Jules Verne's, *From the Earth to the Moon*
  - Cannon to reach the moon
  - Rockets already existed
  - Faster technical progression for cannons
  - Probably, for the audience cannons were more plausible than rockets

- The truth **is not always** your friend when you are a storyteller

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- Common criticism: in game overuse of clichés

- Clichés have the advantage to be familiar to the player

- Combine something familiar with something novel

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T8: SOMETIMES A MAP BRINGS A STORY TO LIFE

- ## Stevenson, *Treasure Island*
  - He drew a map to entertain a boy and he suddenly discovered a full story

- ## Games contain physical spaces
  - Sketch theirs maps and places
  - The story could naturally take shape

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Next act: Indirect control

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QUESTIONS?

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