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Game Design & Development

Dramatic Elements

Game Structure

- Formal Elements: mechanics (see Ch. 3)
- Dramatic Elements:
 - Character
 - Story
 - World
 - Aesthetics

Dramatic Elements

- Elements aiming at engaging the player emotionally through the gaming experience and creating a deeper connection.
- Dramatic elements give context to gameplay, overlaying and integrating the formal elements of the system into a meaningful experience.

Character

- Characters are the agents through whose actions a drama is told.
- By identifying with a character and the outcome of their goals, the audience internalizes the story's events and empathizes with its movement toward resolution.

Character Meaning

- Psychological: character as mirror of player's fears and desires.
- Symbolic: standing for larger ideas (e.g., Christianity, American dream, democratic ideals et cetera)
- Representative: standing for a segment of people, such as socio-economic or ethnic groups, a gender et cetera.
- Historic: depicting real-world figures.

Role of Characters

- Protagonist: the main character of a story, whose engagement with the problem creates the conflict that drives the story.
- Antagonist: character working against the protagonist.
- Minor: small impact on the story outcome.
- Major: significant impact on the story outcome.

How to Make a Character

- Answer to these 4 questions:
 - What does the character want?
 - What does the character need?
 - What does the player/audience hope?
 - What does the player/audience fear?

Agency VS Empathy

- Character design needs balance between agency and empathy.
- Agency: is the practical function of a character to serve as a representation of the player in the game.
- Empathy: is the potential for players to develop an emotional attachment to the character, to identify with their goals (game objectives).

Example



Pre-designed character



Player-created avatar

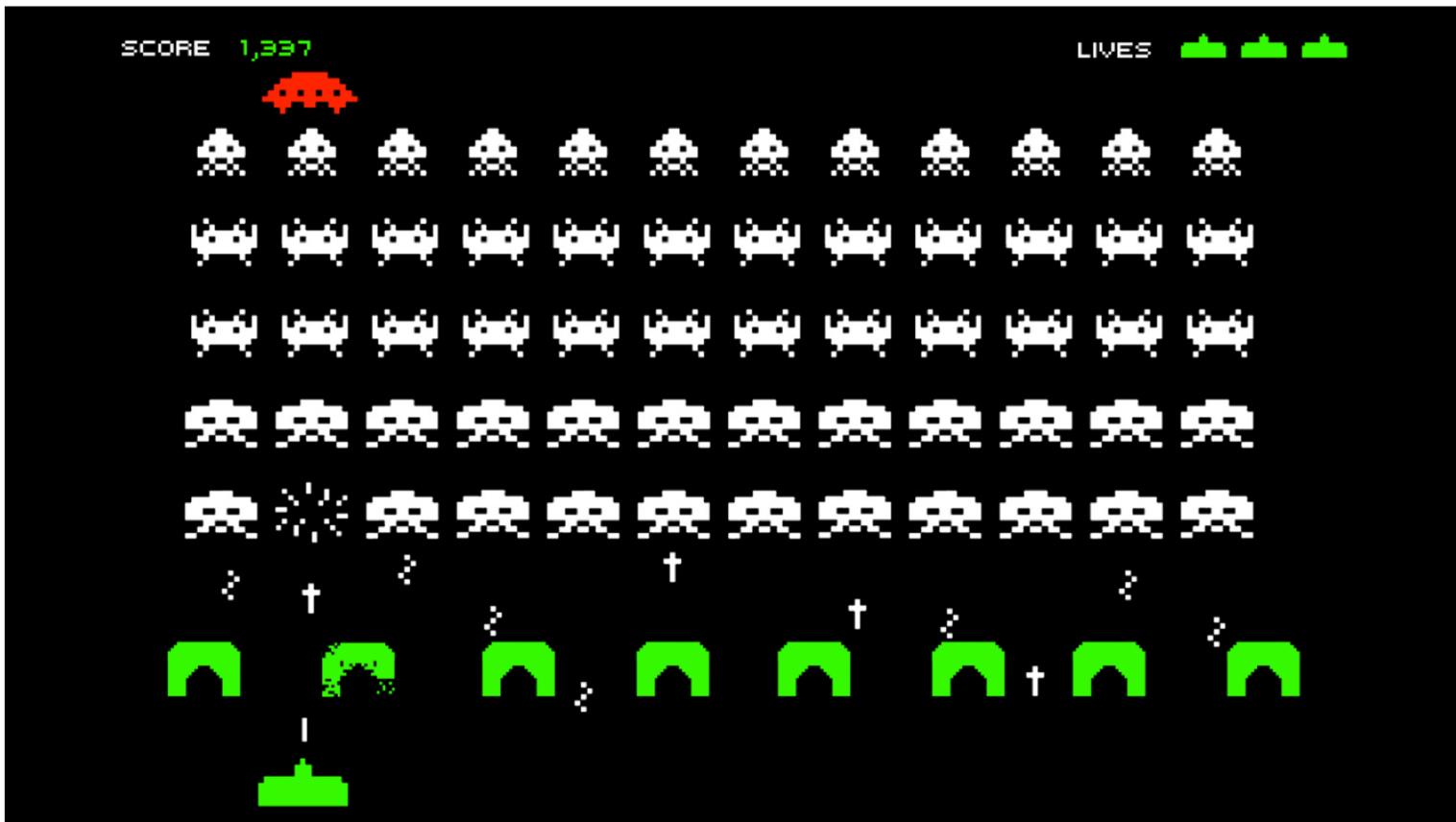
Free Will VS Automaton

- Free Will: the character is controlled by AI, which exhibits a sense of autonomy that creates an interesting potential tension between what the player wants and the character wants.
- Automaton: the character is fully controlled by the player, who assumes agency for the character's actions.

Story

- Storytelling and narratives.
- The story gives the game a context and a meaning.
- In many games, the story is limited to the premise (backstory and context).
- The story can be part of the experience.

Example: Space Invaders



Building Story in Games

- Utopia: the player has full choice when thinking, acting and communicating in the game and every choice matters.
- Reality: the player has a limited set of actions and only some have an actual impact on the story.
- 3 main kinds of storytelling forms in games
 - String of pearls
 - Branching story
 - Emergent Storytelling

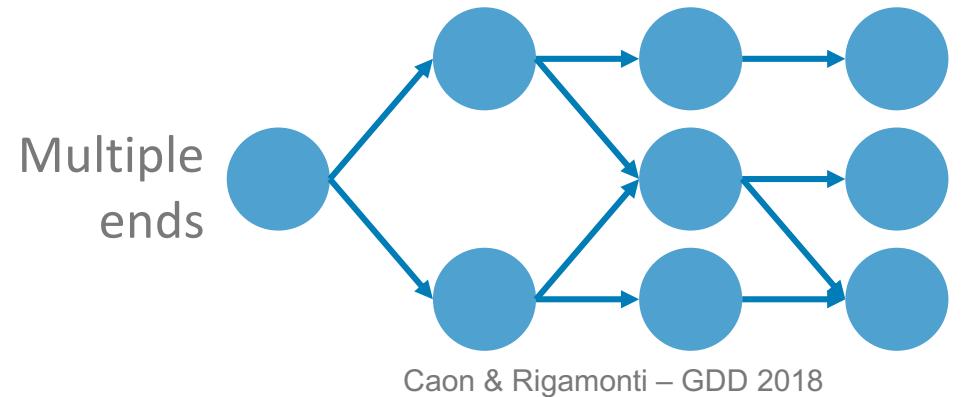
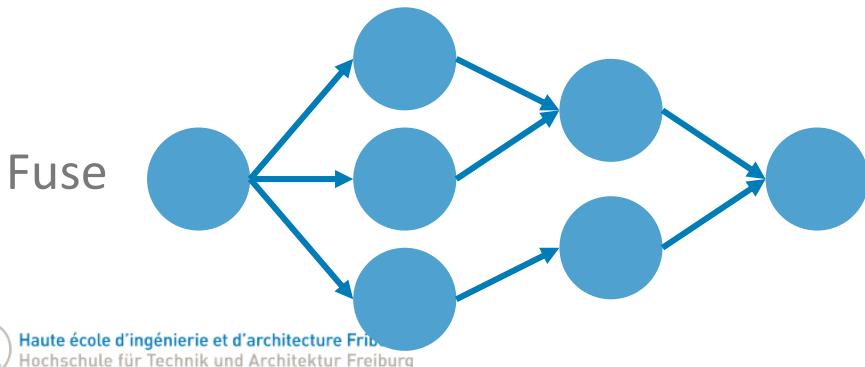
String of Pearls

- Non-interactive story, mainly a backstory.
- Gameplay does not affect the story progression.
- Usually divided into chapters, it is possible to move to the next one only if player succeeds in the gameplay.
- The story is told through cut scenes, text or animations.



Branching Story

- Player choices feed into several possibilities at each juncture of the diagram causing pre-determined changes to the story.
- Fuse structure: all choices end up at the same place (some paths can create uninteresting outcomes).
- Multiple ends structure: different storylines with different ends (player can be disappointed of not knowing which is the best ending).



Emergent Storytelling

- Story emerges from gameplay rather than from a pre-determined structure.
- More about scripting, less about story writing.
- Procedurally generated plot: procedural generation is a method of creating data algorithmically as opposed to manually.
 - Example: BRUTUS artificial intelligence

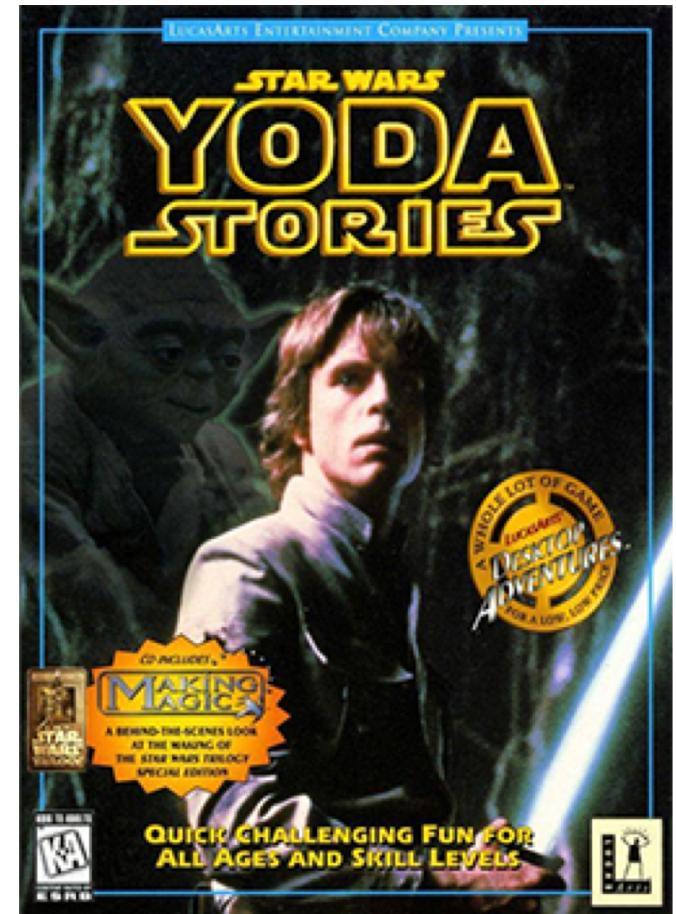
Reference: Bringsjord, S., & Ferrucci, D. (1999). Artificial intelligence and literary creativity: Inside the mind of brutus, a storytelling machine. Psychology Press.

Examples of Emergent Story



Example of Procedurally Generated Story

- Levels in the Yoda Stories are procedurally generated.
- Yoda Stories has no central plot or definitive goal - it's a collection of games where the player, controlling Luke Skywalker has to complete an objective like rescuing someone, obtaining an object, etc.



How to Write a Story

- Provide goals, obstacles and conflicts: the character has a goal and there are obstacles interfering, when the character tries to overcome obstacles, conflicts tend to arise.
- Add:
 - Simplicity: the game world is simpler than real one.
 - Transcendence: the player is more powerful in the game world than in the real one.

Follow the Hero's Journey

Vogler's synopsis of the hero's journey:

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

Example: Neo in Matrix



Tips for Storytelling

- Adapt the story to the game and not vice-versa: the story is the most flexible element of the tetrad.
- Keep the story world consistent.
- Make the story accessible: use understandable references and plausible invention.
- Use clichés judiciously: they have the advantage to be familiar to the player but they can become boring.
- Experiment with alternative forms of storytelling.
- Do not forget emotions.

Worldbuilding

- World building is the deep and intricate design of a fictional world, often beginning with maps and histories, but potentially including complete cultural studies of inhabitants, languages, mythologies, governments, politics, economies et cetera.
- New trend is procedurally generated worlds.
- Refer to “Chapter 4: Indirect Control & transmedia world”

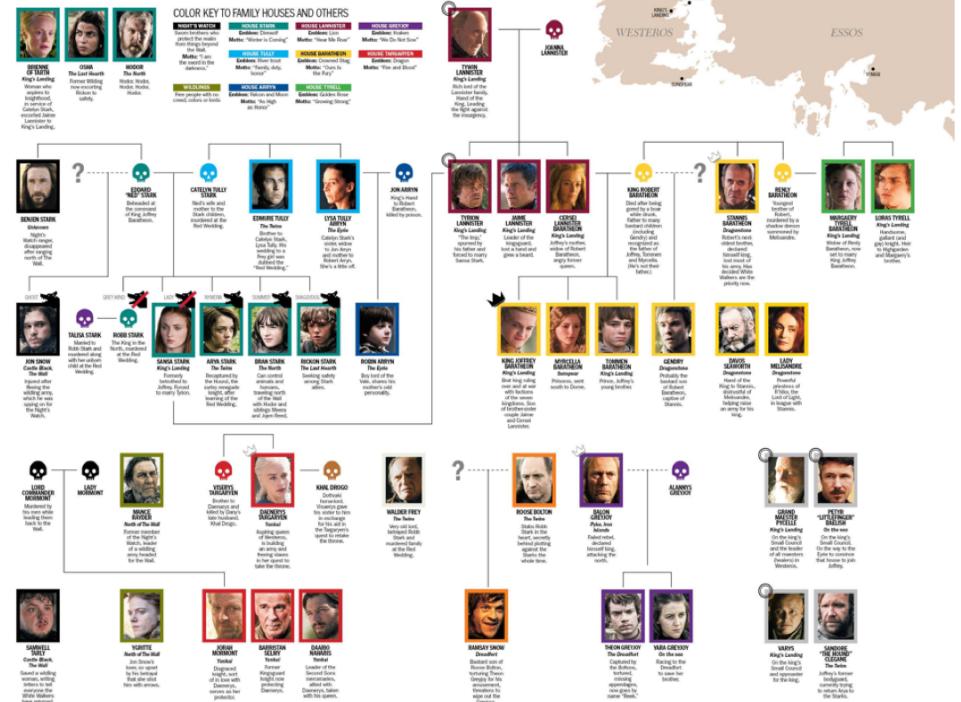
Example: Game of Thrones

The universe of “A Song of Ice and Fire” is very rich with a precise map with relative climate, fictive Houses, politics, history, religions, languages etc.

Players in the ‘Game’

COMPILED BY KEVIN COFFEY • WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER GRAPHIC BY BRADY JONES • THE WORLD HERALD

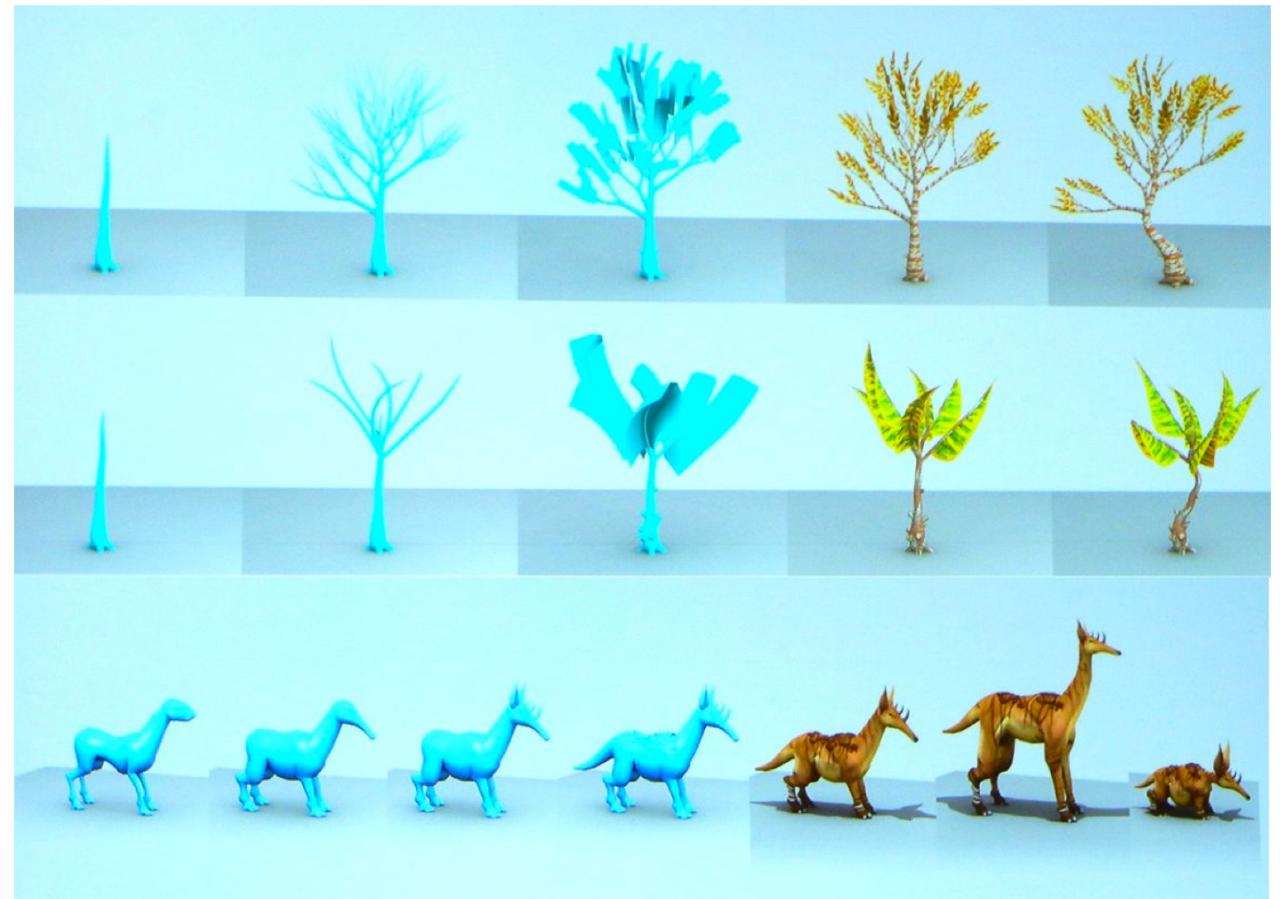
Who's where? Where do what? Who's dead? In the sprawling, epic HBO series "Game of Thrones," several noble houses are locked in a civil war for control of their country, Westeros. What almost none of them knows is that the real message may be in the north in the form of the zombies-like White Walkers. We caught up with what they were up to and how they got there at the end of season three.



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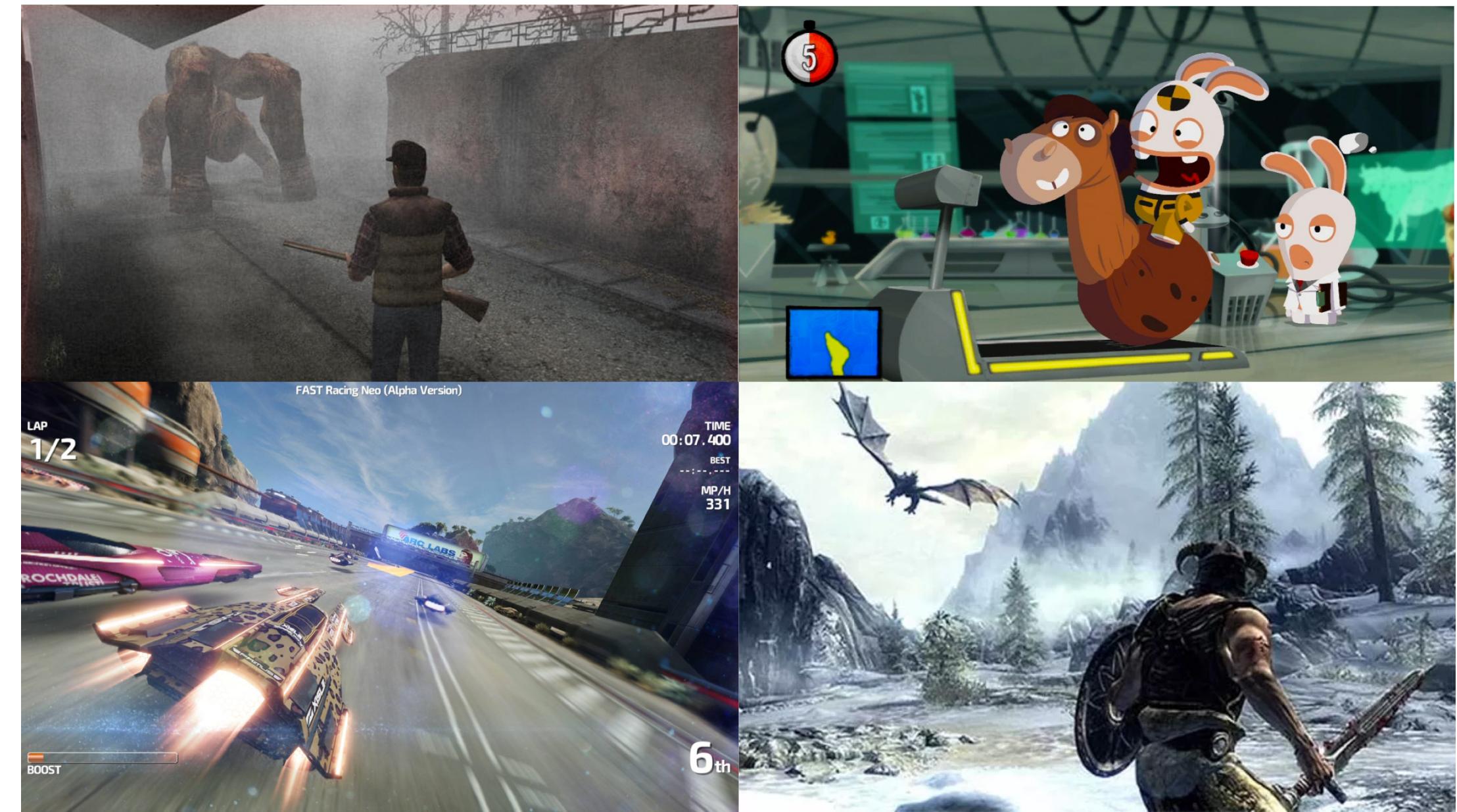
Example: No Man's Sky

Procedurally generated deterministic open universe including over 18 quintillion planets, many with their own set of flora and fauna.

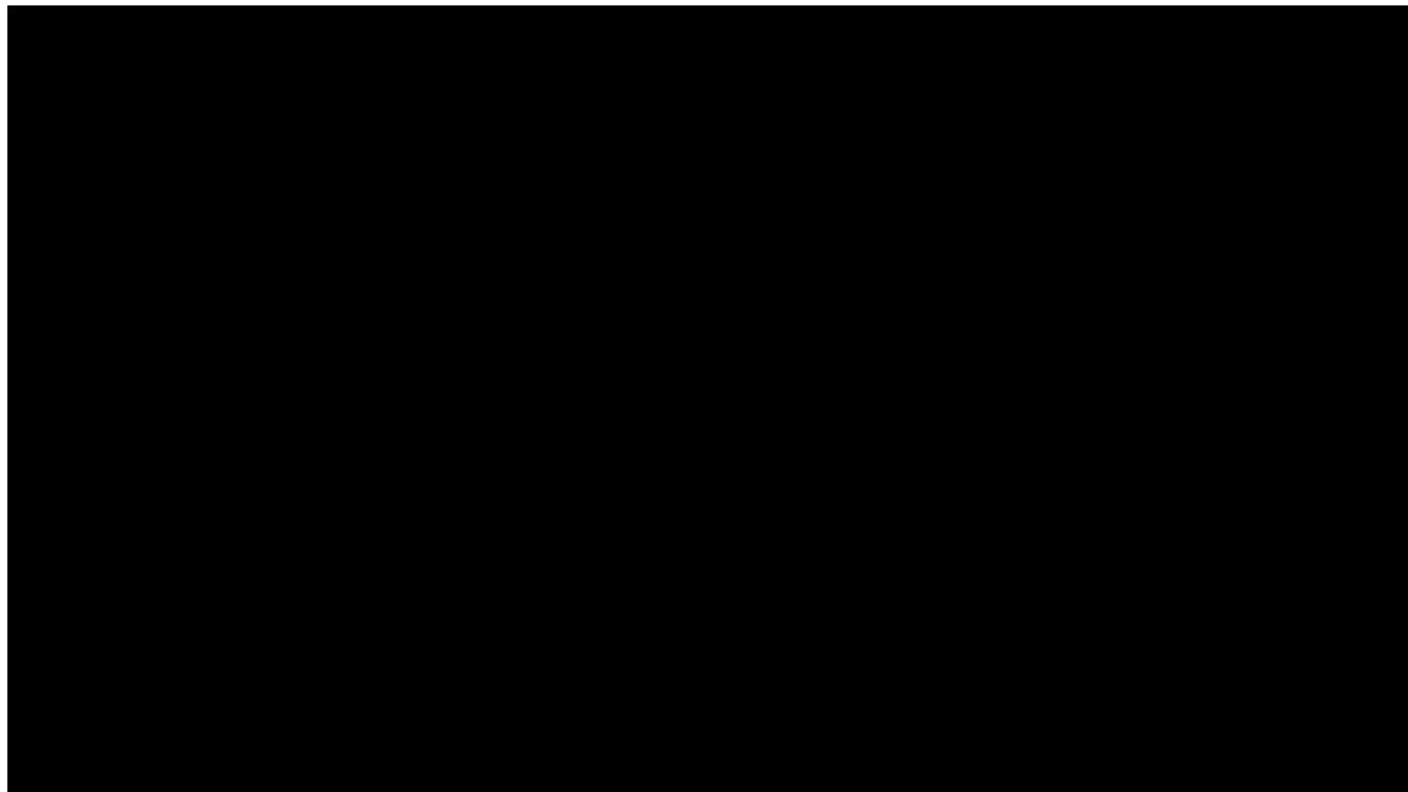


Aesthetics

- Game aesthetics refers to the sensory phenomena that the player encounters in the game (visual, aural, haptic, embodied).
- Game aesthetics refers to those aspects of digital games that are shared with other art forms (and thus provides a means of generalizing about art).
- Game aesthetics is an expression of the game experienced as pleasure, emotion, sociability, form giving, etc. (with reference to "the aesthetic experience").



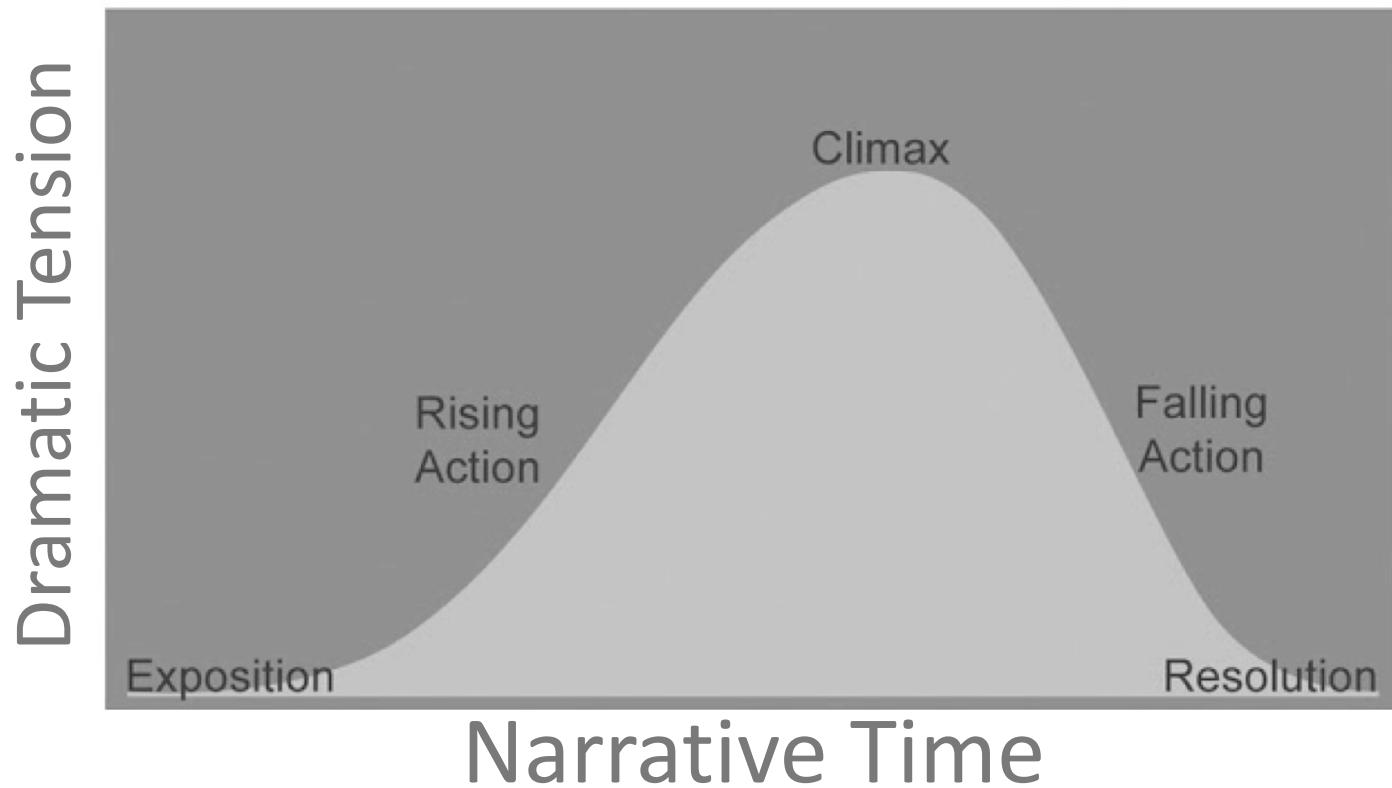
Example: Monument Valley



Dramatic Arc

- Drama originates from conflict.
- Meaningful conflict is not only designed to keep players from accomplishing their goals too easily but it also draws players into the game emotionally by creating a sense of tension as to the outcome.
- Conflicts can be of different types: character vs character, character vs nature, character vs machine, character vs self, character vs society, character vs fate.

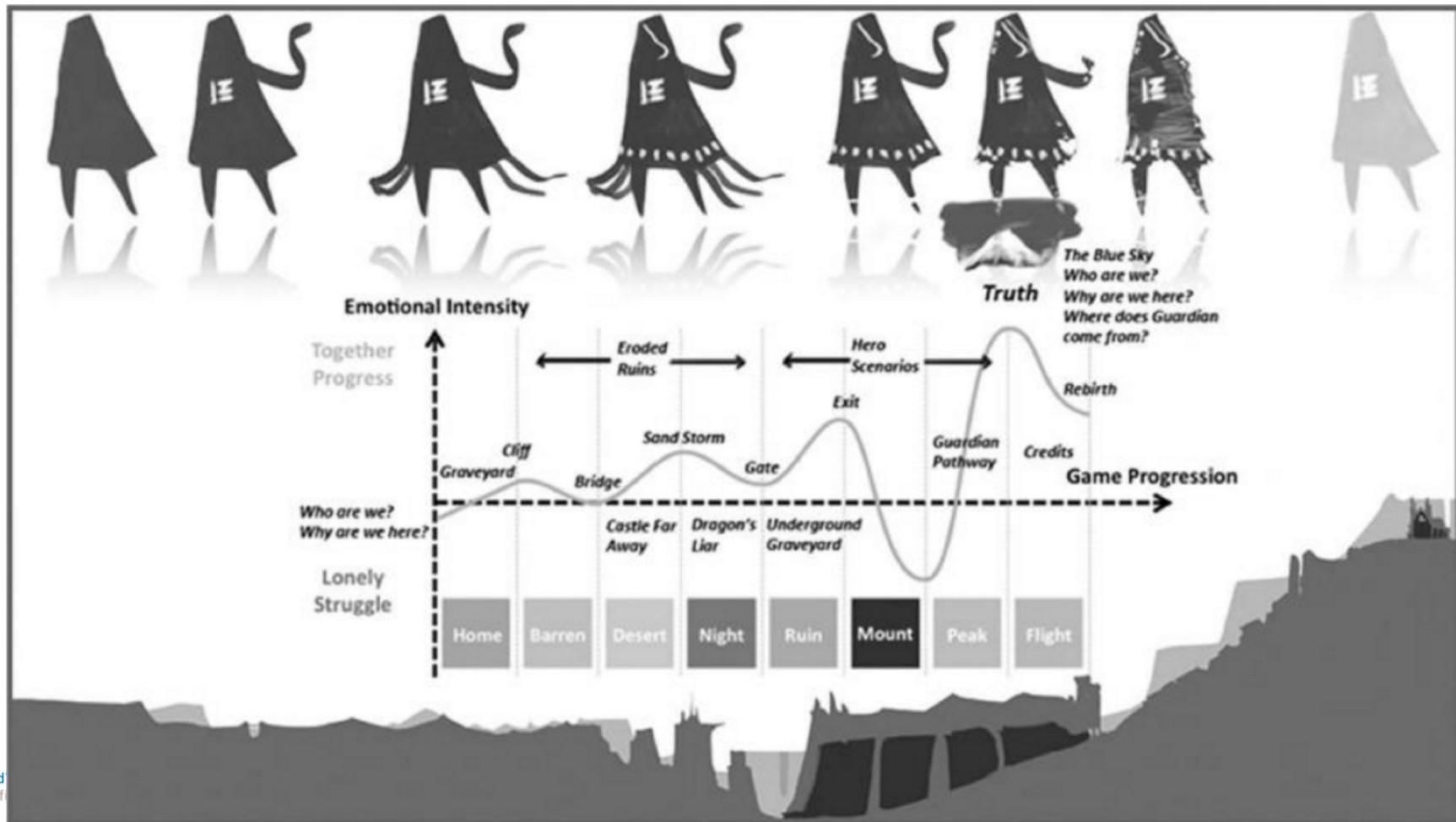
Dramatic Arc



Dramatic Arc Phases

- Exposure: introduction of settings, characters and concepts of the story.
- Rising action: a conflict is introduced and the protagonist attempts to resolve it.
- Climax: deciding factor or event is introduced, which determines the outcome of the drama.
- Falling Action: conflict begins to resolve.
- Resolution (dénouement): the conflict is finally resolved.

Example: Journey



Wrap-up

- What dramatic elements are.
- Characters and their types.
- Story in games and their types.
- Worldbuilding.
- Aestetics.
- Dramatic arc and its phases.

Questions?