INFT3960 – Game Production

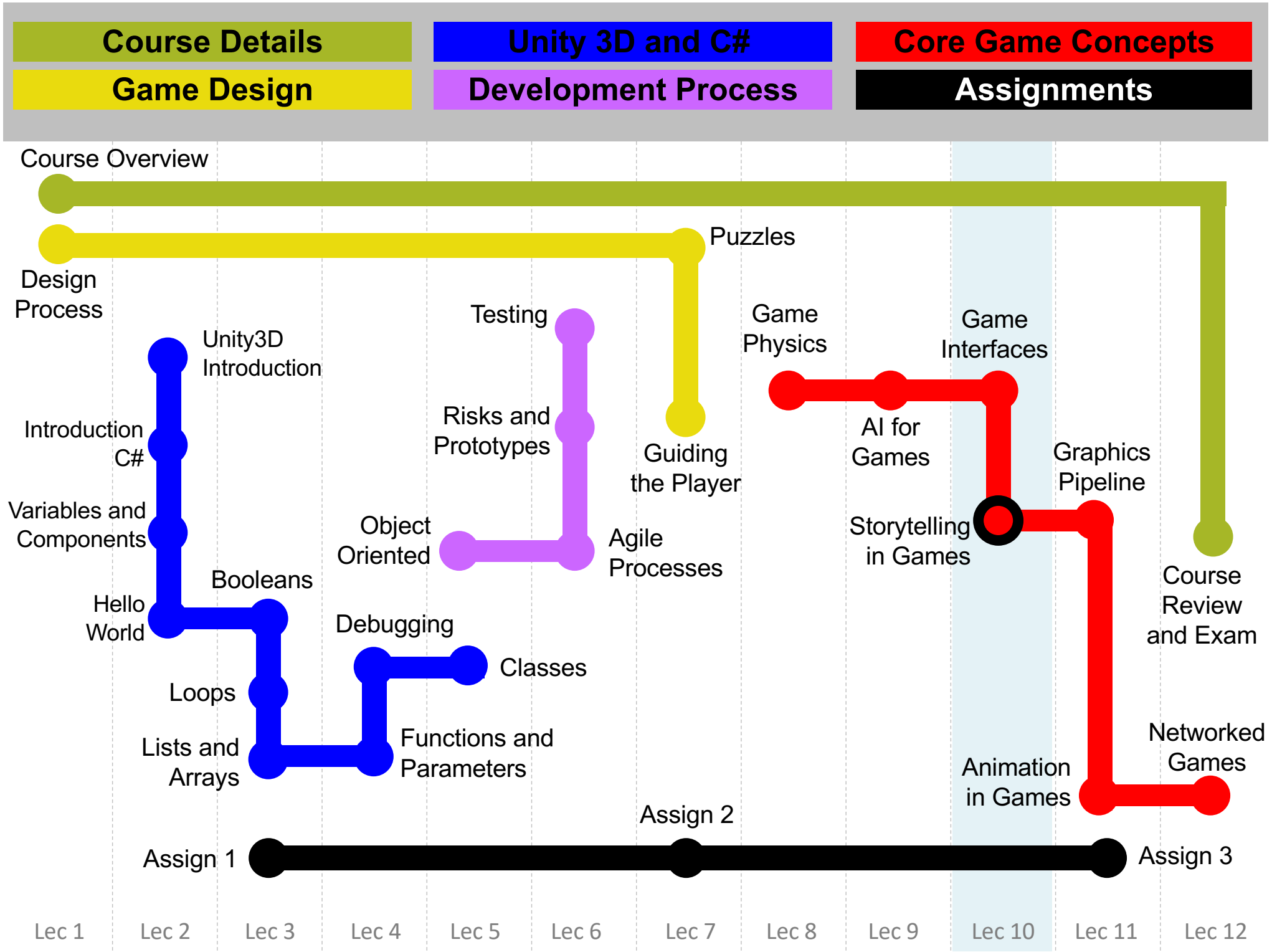
Week 10

Module 10.2

Storytelling in Games

Course Overview

Lec	Start Week	Modules	Topics	Assignments
1	3 Aug	Mod 1.1, 1.2	Course Overview, Design Process	
2	10 Aug	Mod 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4	Unity3D Introduction, Introduction C#, Variables and Components, Hello World	
3	17 Aug	Mod 3.1, 3.2, 3.3	Booleans, Loops, Lists and Arrays	Assign 1 21 Aug, 11:00 pm
4	24 Aug	Mod 4.1, 4.2	Functions and Parameters, Debugging	
5	31 Aug	Mod 5.1, 5.2	Classes, Object Oriented	
6	7 Sep	Mod 6.1, 6.2, 6.3	Agile Processes, Risks and Prototypes, Testing	
7	14 Sep	Mod 7.1, 7.2	Puzzles, Guiding the Player	Assign 2 18 Sep, 11:00 pm
8	21 Sep	Mod 8.1	Game Physics	
9	12 Sep	Mod 9.1	AI for Games	
10	19 Oct	Mod 10.1, 10.2	Game Interface, Storytelling in Games	
11	26 Oct	Mod 11.1, 11.2	Graphics Pipeline, Animation in Games	Assign 3 1 Nov, 11:00pm
12	2 Nov	Mod 12.1, 12.2	Networked Games, Course Review	


Course Details
Unity 3D and C#
Core Game Concepts
Game Design
Development Process
Assignments
Course Overview
Puzzles
Design Process
Testing
Game Physics
Game Interfaces
Unity3D Introduction
Introduction C#
Risks and Prototypes
Guiding the Player
AI for Games
Graphics Pipeline
Variables and Components
Object Oriented
Agile Processes
Storytelling in Games
Course Review and Exam
Booleans
Hello World
Debugging
Classes
Loops
Functions and Parameters
Networked Games
Lists and Arrays
Animation in Games
Assign 2
Assign 1
Assign 3
Lec 1
Lec 2
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Lec 6
Lec 7
Lec 8
Lec 9
Lec 10
Lec 11
Lec 12

Storytelling in Games – Topics

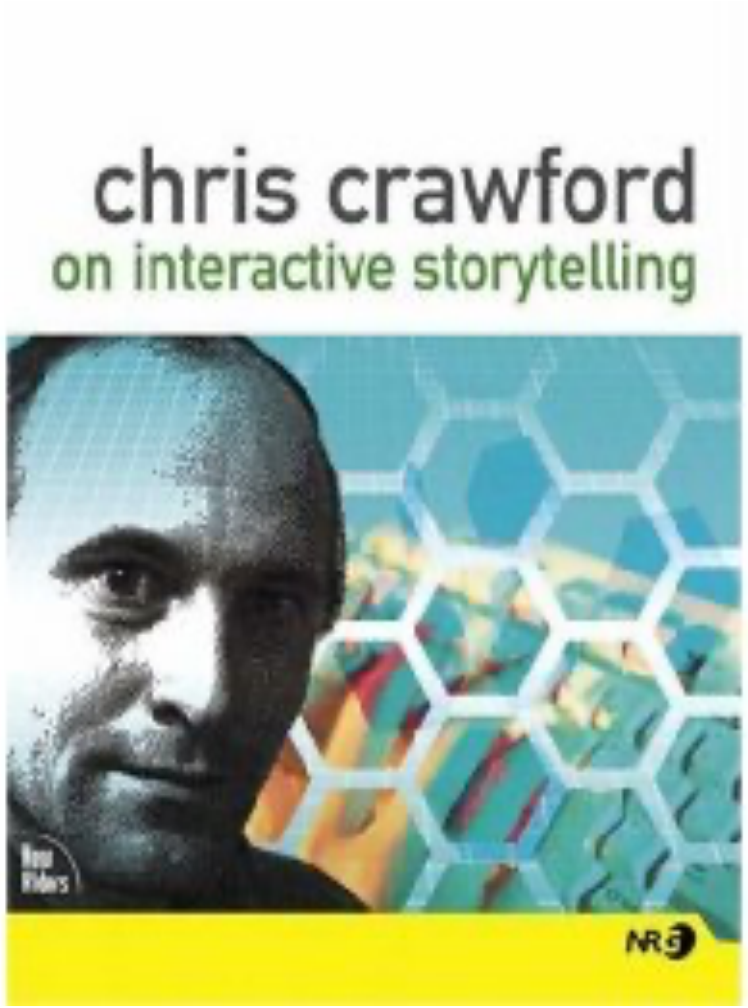
- Interactive Stories
- Narrative Events
- The Storytelling Engine
- Linear and Nonlinear
- Conversations

Useful Reference

Crawford, C.

Chris Crawford on Interactive Storytelling (2004).

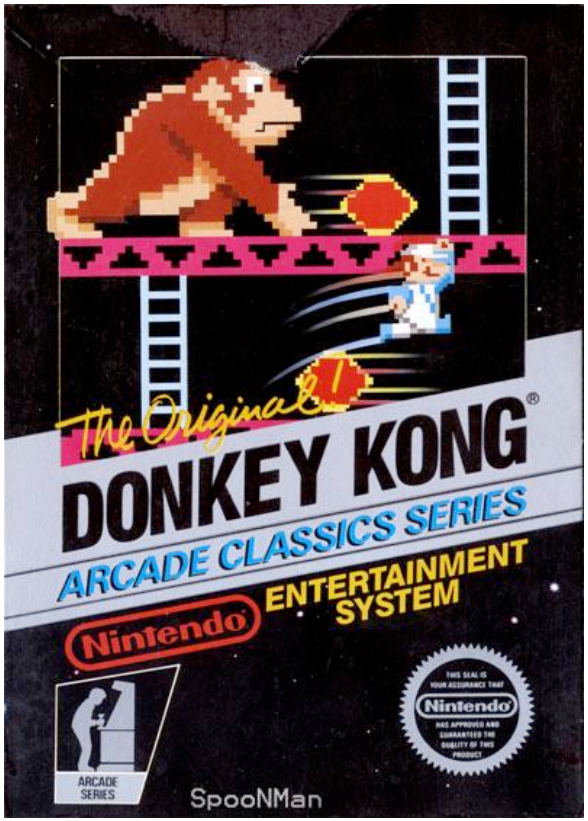
New Rider Games. USA



Stories in Games

The use of storytelling and narrative in computer games has changed over time.

In early action games there was usually little story or at best some attempt was made to set the context of the game - often in the manual or on the box the game came in.



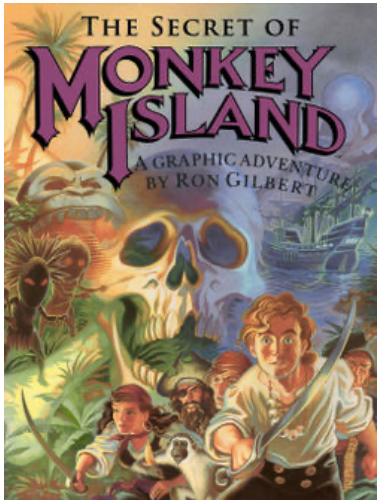
Stories in Games

Leisure Suit Larry 1

Adventure games are an exception and have always included a story component

Stories in Games

In many games the narrative can be quite central to the game world experience.



Story and Gameplay

The narrative can be delivered in the form of ..

- a movie
- cut scenes
- scrolling text
- voiceover

But is critical to balance narrative with action to keep players interested.

Story and Action

It is the art of interactive storytelling that makes computer games different.

But most players want to interact!

Gameplay is interactive (not story)

If you just want a story there are a lot of good books and films.

Setting the Context

Many existing games come with a cinematic lead in (a small introductory movie)

This introduces the player to the game world and helps put their actions in context ..

(What is the goal of the game?)

e.g. you are saving the world

Setting the Context

These lead ins set the context - but are not interactive.

It involves no game play and delays the start of the game.

In the future games will trend towards creating a rich enough game world that requires no context to be spelt out..

Cut Scenes

Many games also attempt to weave a story within the game.

The story develops as the player progresses. For example, it is linked to challenges.

e.g A reward for completing a challenge or level might be an advance in the storyline.

Cut scenes are often used for this purpose to advance the plot, present character development, or provide more background detail.

Rendering

Lead ins & cut scenes may be produced in 2 ways.

1. Prerecorded films or photorealistic animations. These scenes may contrast with the rest of the game and break the player's immersion in the game world.

2. Using the game engine itself to render the scene - either in real time or prerecorded. This is a more flexible approach and ensures the look and feel of the game remains.

Genre Dependence

The need and depth of narrative is still highly dependent on genre.

For example it tends to be more critical in Role Playing and Adventure Games than Action Games.

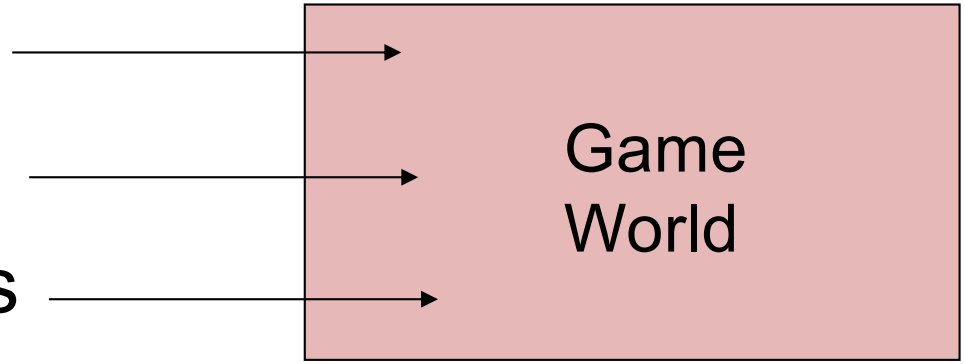
But even simple games tend to have a backstory.

e.g Donkey Kong must recover his stolen hoard of bananas

Narrative Events

An interactive story includes three kinds of events:

1. Player events
2. In-game events
3. Narrative events



These three kinds of events interact with one another to change the state of the game world.

Narrative Events

An interactive story includes three kinds of events:

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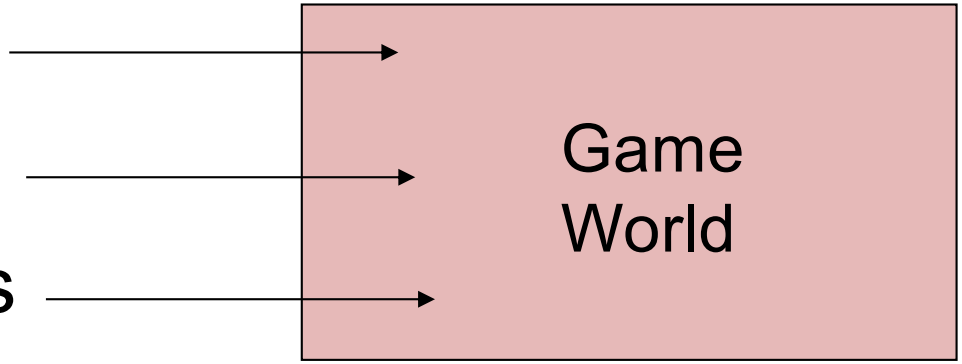
3. Narrative events



Player events result from actions taken by the player during gameplay (e.g. enter the building)

Narrative Events

An interactive story includes three kinds of events:

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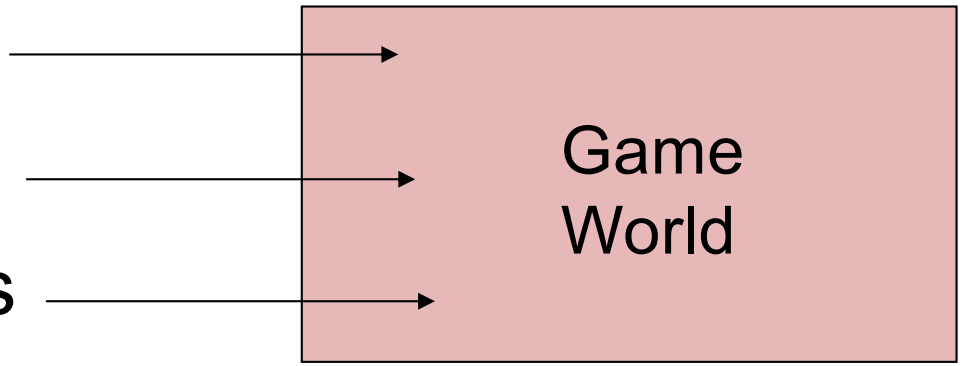
3. Narrative events



In-game events are things that happen under control of the game itself. These are determined by the core mechanics of the game engine (e.g. enemies are spawned every 2 minutes).

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Narrative Events

An interactive story includes three kinds of events:

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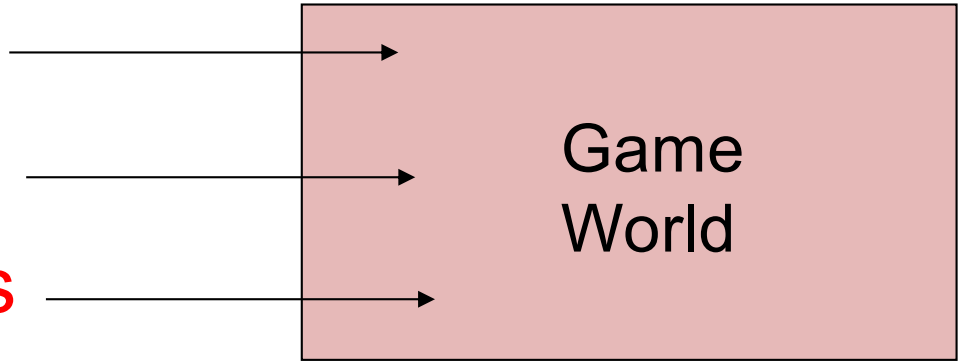
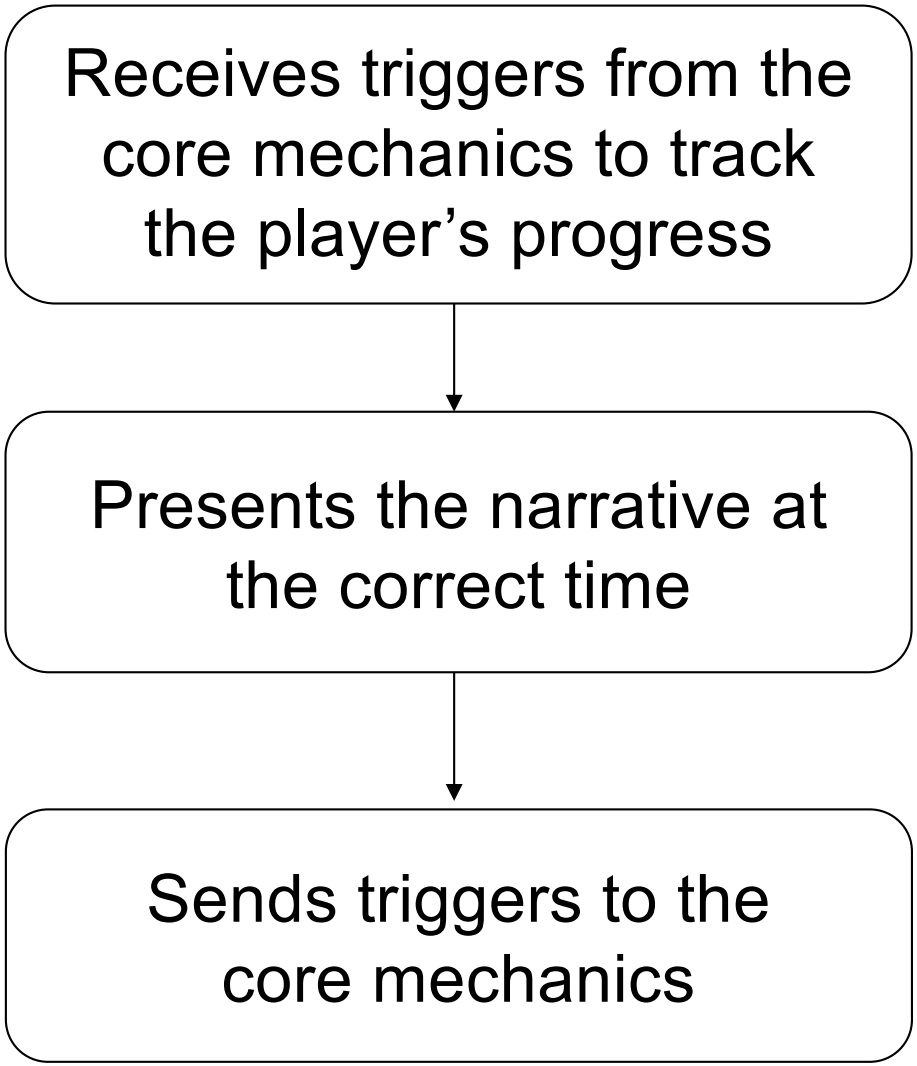


Narrative events are also controlled by the game but are designed to advance the story. These may be generated by what is called the "Storytelling Engine" (e.g. heroine appears).

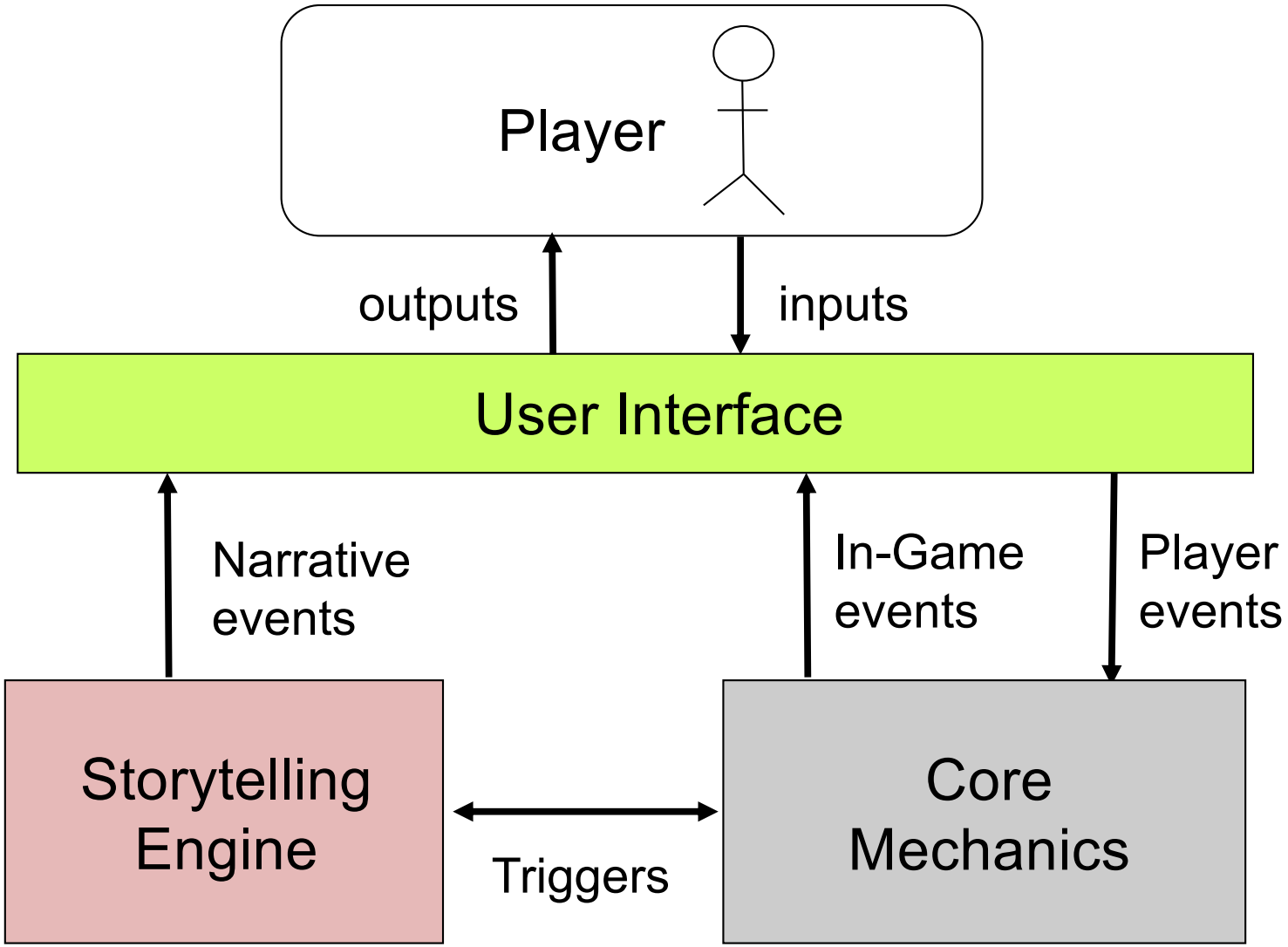
Storytelling Engine

Weaves together the gameplay and the story

How does this work?



Storytelling Engine

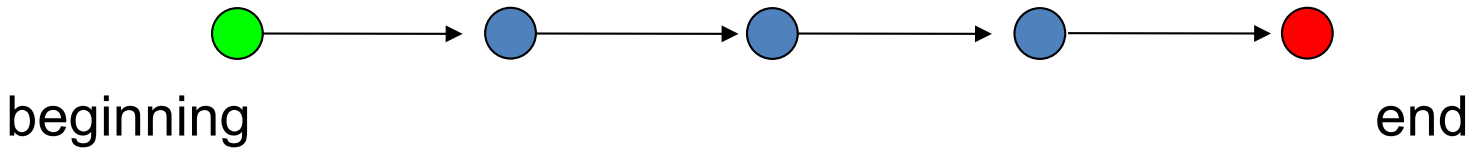


Storytelling Engine

Typical moments for the storytelling engine to advance the plot are:

- when a player completes a specific challenge
- after a player makes a critical choice
- when the player arrives at a set location
- at a set time - depending on player's pace
- after a set time - independent of player's pace

Linear Stories

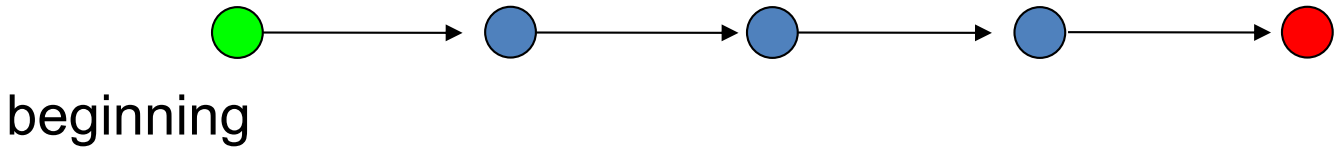


Linear stories confine the participant to a predetermined journey through the story.

From beginning to end with no diversions.

The players actions have no impact on how the story develops.

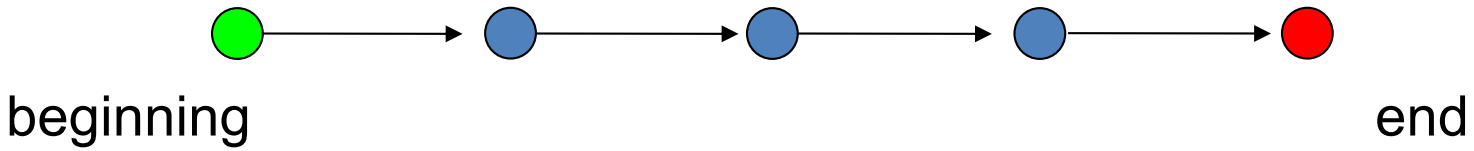
Linear Stories



Simpler to produce as they are defined by a set order of narrative events.

Also cheaper as you only need to produce a limited number of cut scenes for example.

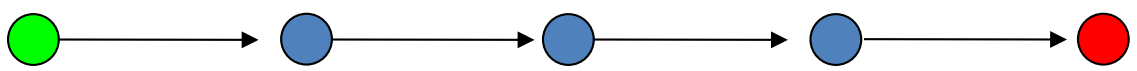
Linear Stories

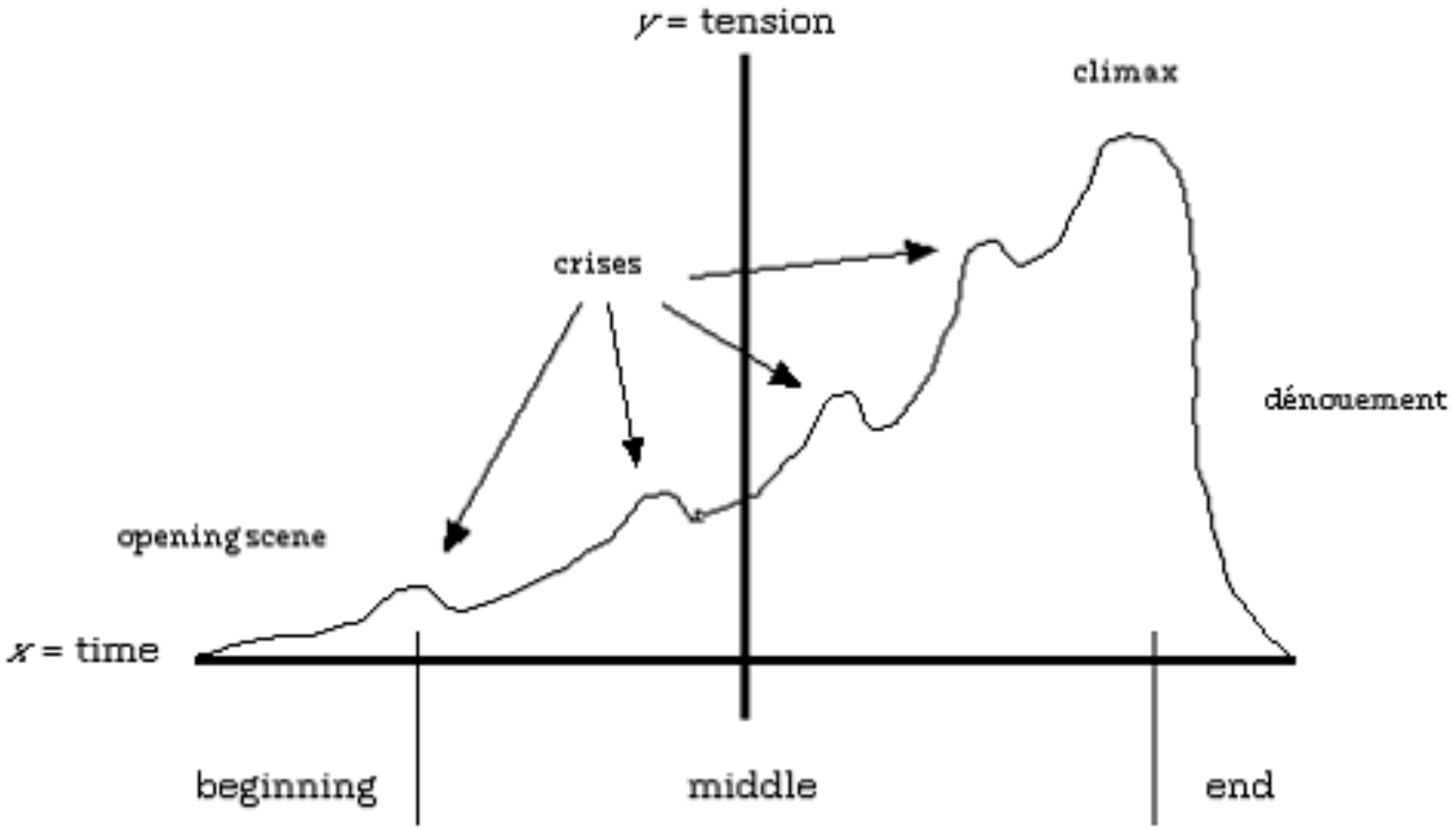


Because the journey is well-defined the author can also assert greater emotional control over the player.

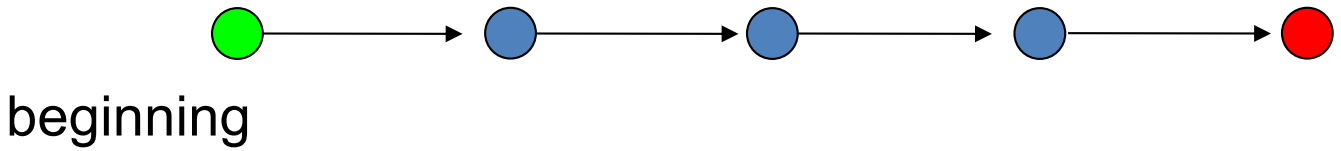
They can follow a traditional, well-described plot curve e.g. with a well placed climax.

Linear Stories





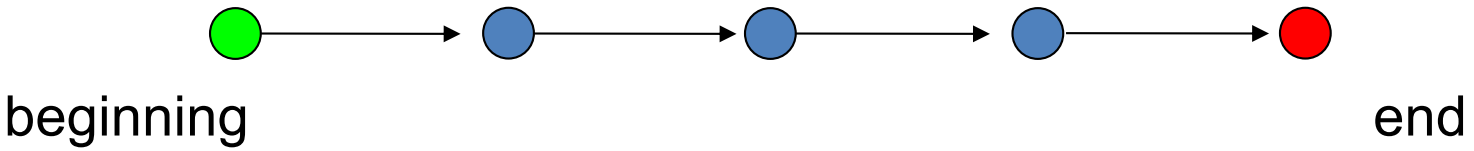
Linear Stories



Linear stories are also easier to integrate into the gameplay and test as there is only one path through the story (less states)

Because only one path is available to the player less content is required in terms of artwork and coding.

Linear Stories



They do reduce the interactive freedom of the player.

The player's actions don't really change the direction of the story.

Linear stories have little replay value as they always play out the same way.

Nonlinear Stories

Nonlinear stories are more aligned to the ideal of interactive stories.

Some good examples with different degrees of player influence over the story are:

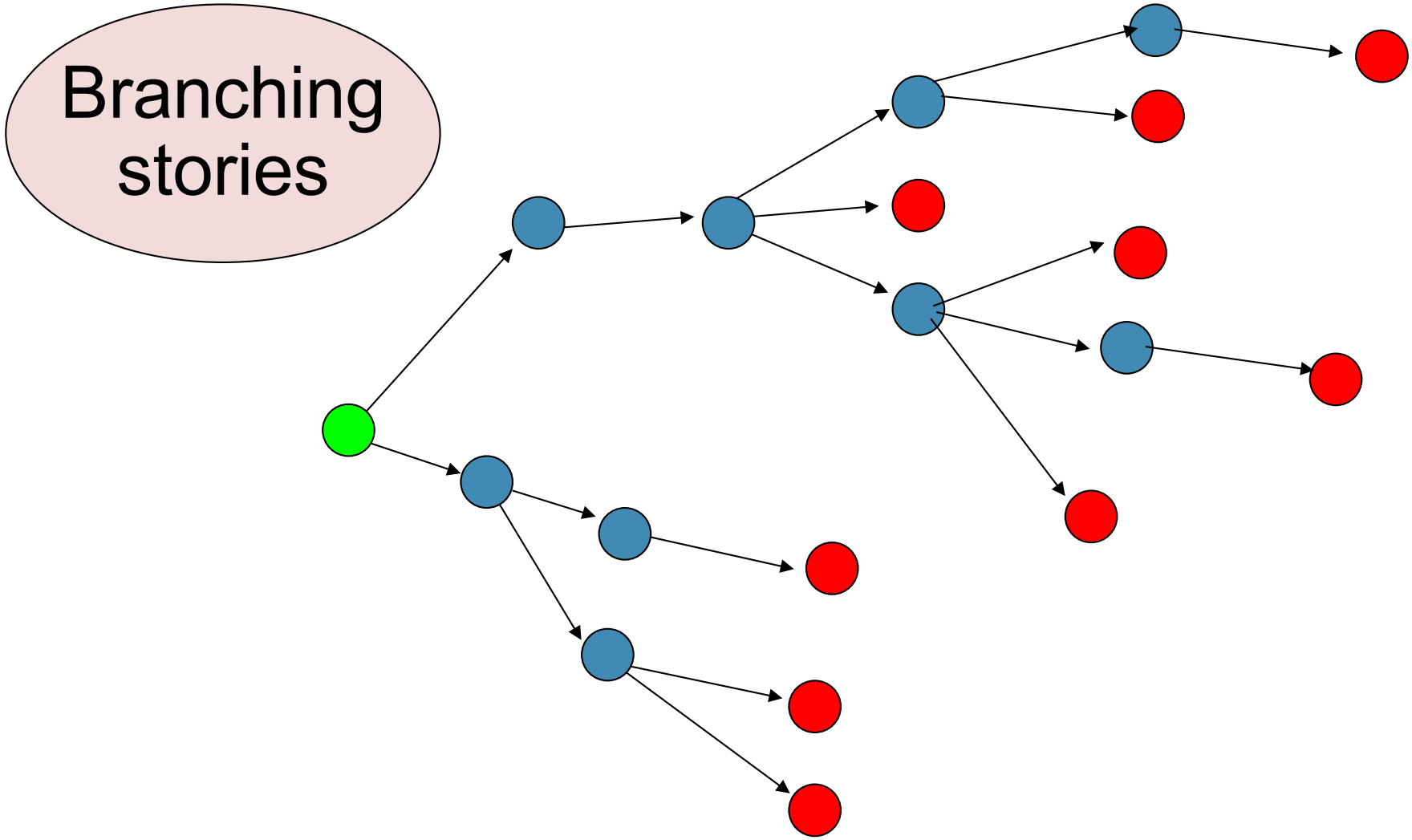
- The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind
- Grand Theft Auto
- Mercenaries
- King's Field: The Ancient City
- True Crime
- Horizon: Zero Dawn

Nonlinear Stories

We will discuss three different types of nonlinear stories:

1. Branching Stories
2. Foldback Stories
3. Emergent Stories

Branching Stories



Branching Stories

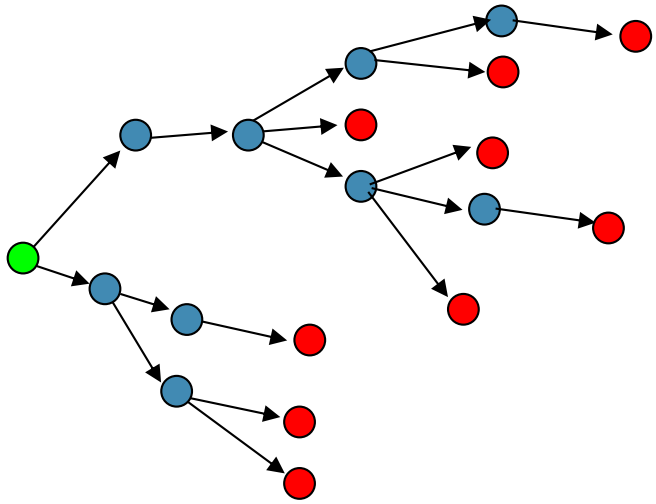
Branching stories

The player must play repeatedly to see all the content

More expensive and complicated to build than linear stories

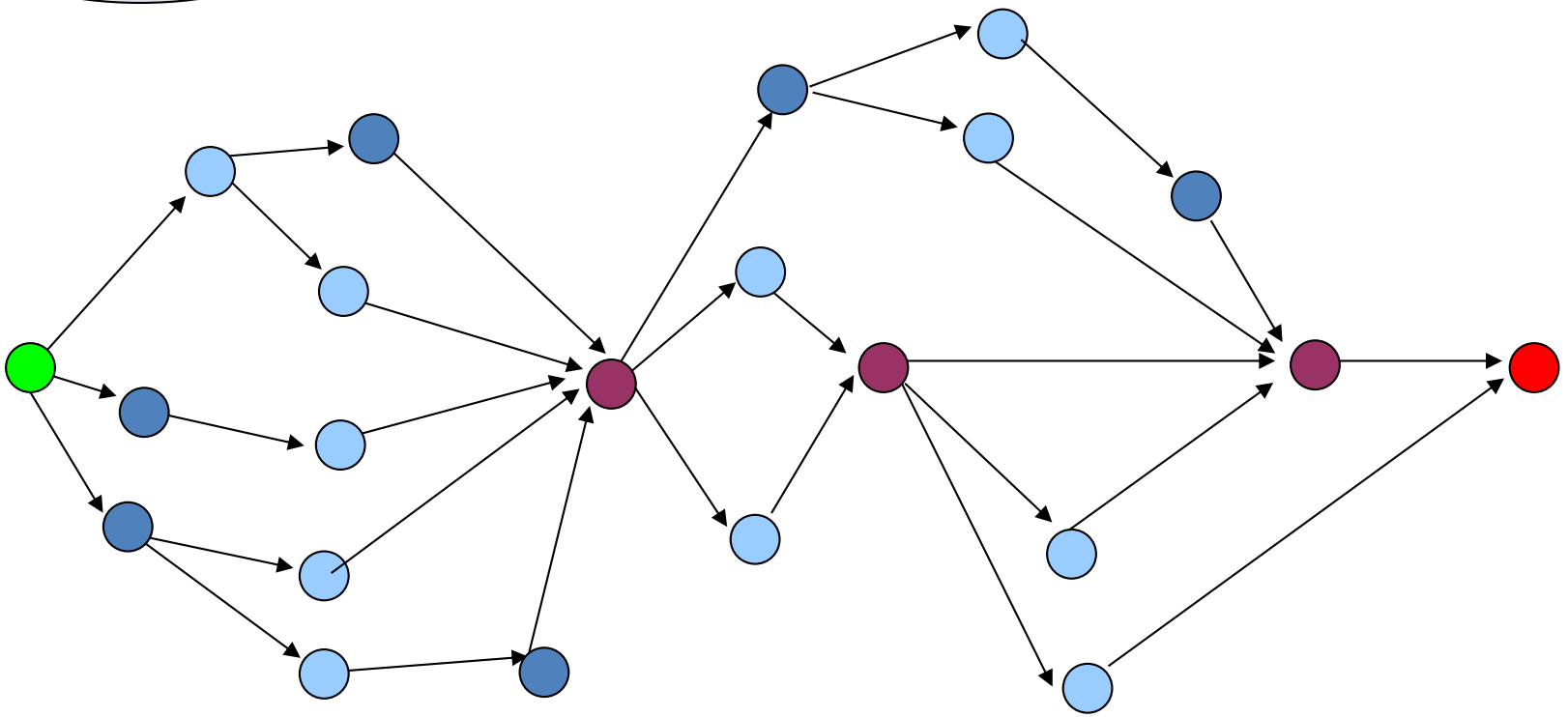
Provide a different experience when different choices are made

Player has an immediate, deferred, or cumulative effect on the game



Foldback Stories

Foldback stories

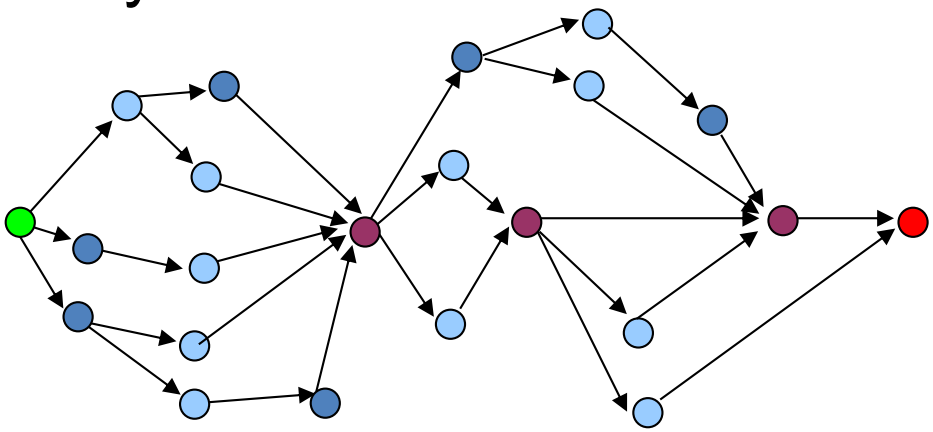


Foldback Stories

Foldback stories

Easiest nonlinear story type to devise and most commercially successful

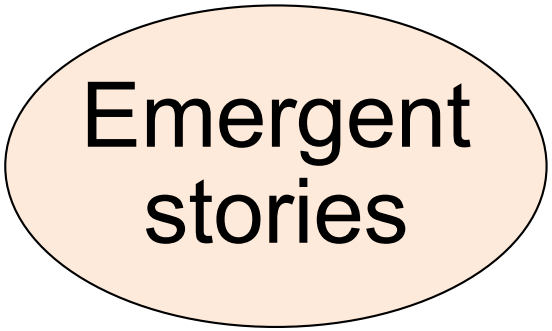
Offer players some dramatic freedom without the cost and complexity of a branching story

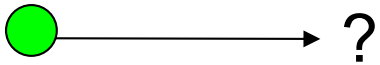


Compromise between branching and linear stories

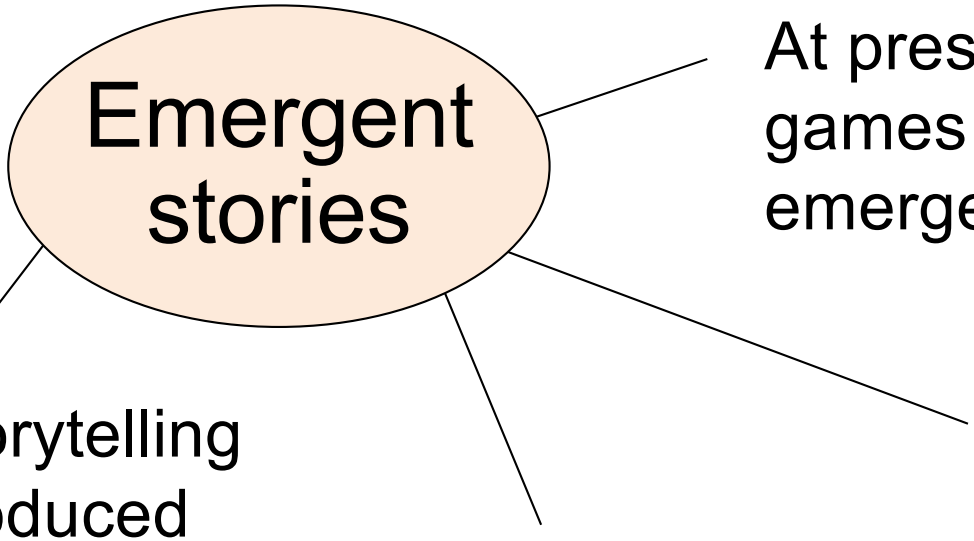
Plot branches, but the branches fold back into a single inevitable event

Emergent Stories





Emergent Stories

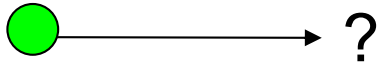


At present, no commercial games use purely emergent narrative

Storytelling produced entirely by player actions and in-game events—story emerges from act of playing

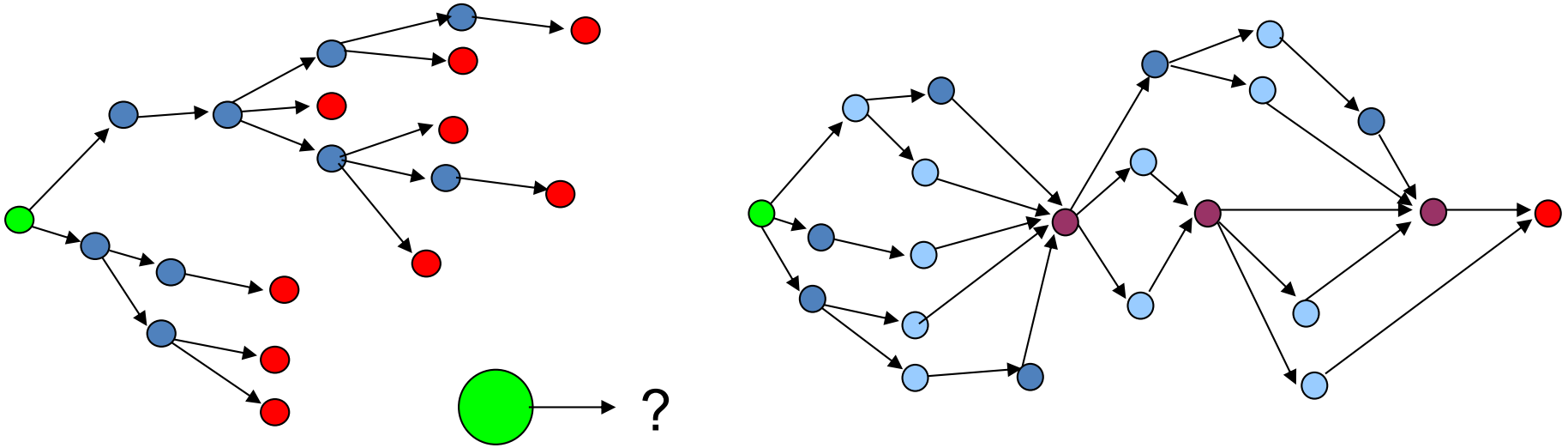
More dramatic freedom because the sequence of events is not fixed by a story structure

Puts a perhaps impossible burden on the core mechanics to produce credible stories



Happy Ever After ?

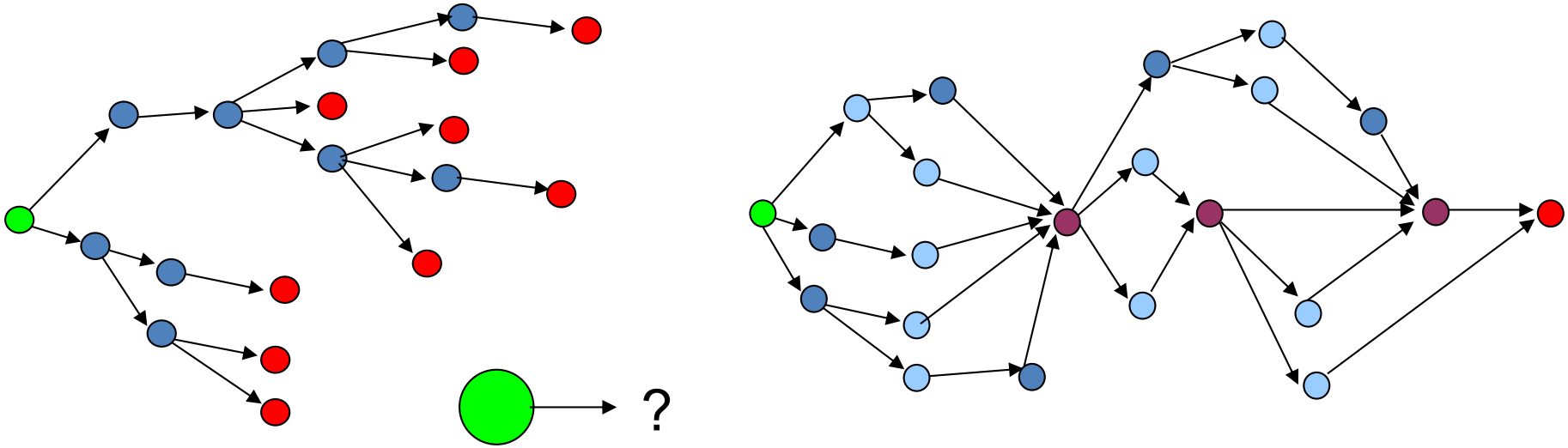
Nonlinear stories introduce the problem of how to end the game, especially if you wish to provide an emotionally satisfying journey and conclusion.



Happy Ever After ?

You may need to provide multiple endings where each one will wrap up the story in a way consistent with player's choices and play.

Once again this will require more work and also clever structure. But it does make the game replayable.



Scripting

One way to advance the story is to use scripted conversations. They are commonly used in Role Playing Games and Adventure Games.

e.g Mass Effect, Zelda

Scripting

For example when interacting with a Non-Player Character (NPC) the player may select from a list of possible responses (usually 2-5)

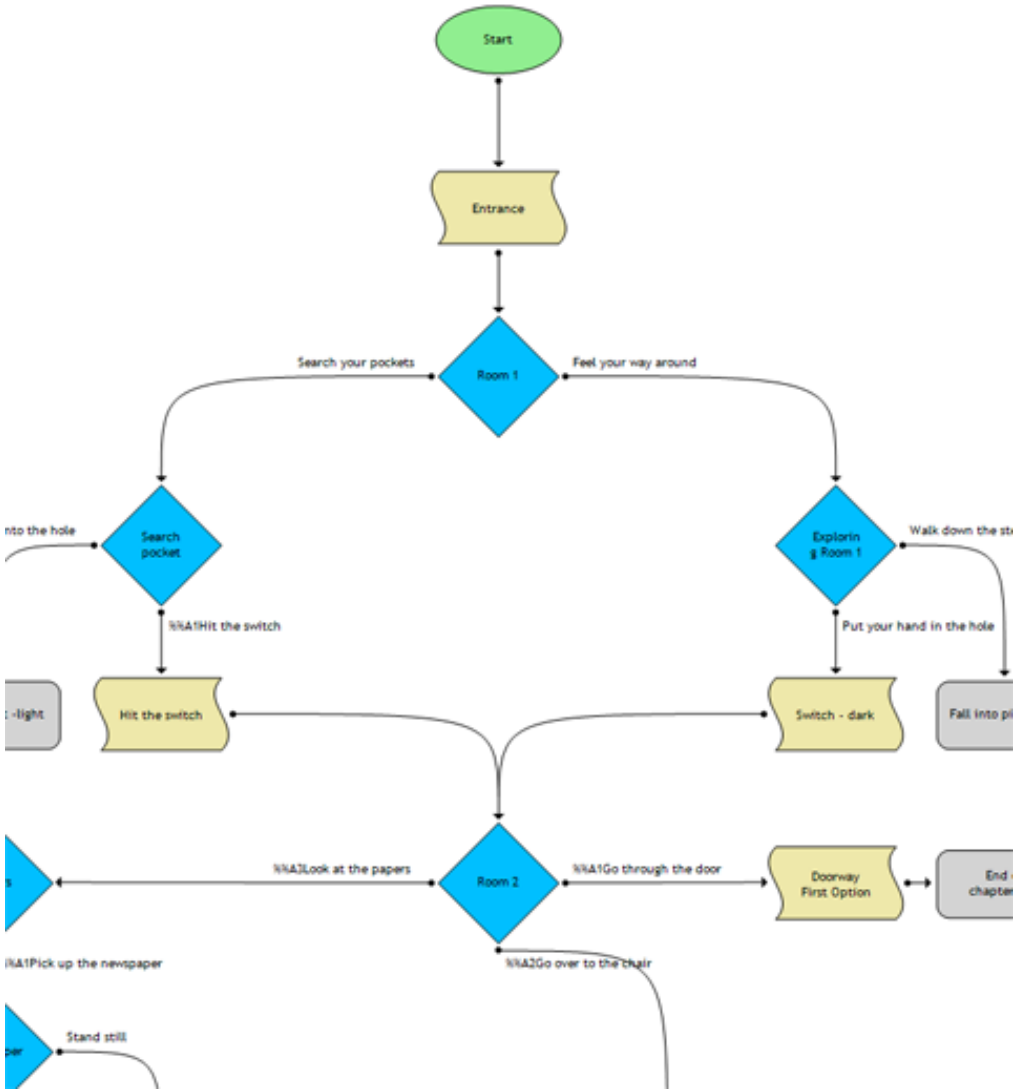
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind

Scripting

Depending on the sequence of responses (and perhaps other factors) the NPC will respond with a piece of scripted dialog or conversation.

In mass effect the dialog can also be influenced by player "attitudes" e.g. *charm* and *intimidate*

Scripting



Scripts are usually designed and stored in what is called a dialog tree

The conversation takes different braches depending on the player's choices.

Conversation

More realistic conversation, along with truly emerging stories will rely on advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Can characters be funny? (no really funny)