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*The third Impression.*

And unto this Impression is added seven Playes, never  
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viz.

Prince of Tyre.

Prodigall.

Thomas L<sup>a</sup> Cromwell.

John Oldcastle Lord Cobham.

Barbanthorpe Widow.

Two Tragedy.

Tragedy of Locrine.

# Narrative in Games

Day 1:

What is narrative?

What makes games unique?

How do we tell stories in games?

Write your own story!

# Today:

- Discuss what narrative is
- Look at examples from movies and games
- What makes games unique?
- How can we tell stories in games?

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*John Oldcastle Lord Cobham.*  
*Bartholomew the Rector.*  
*The Merchant of Venice.*  
*The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus.*  
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! SPOILERS !  
I am warning you. This is the warning.

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What is a story?

We want to find meaning in random events

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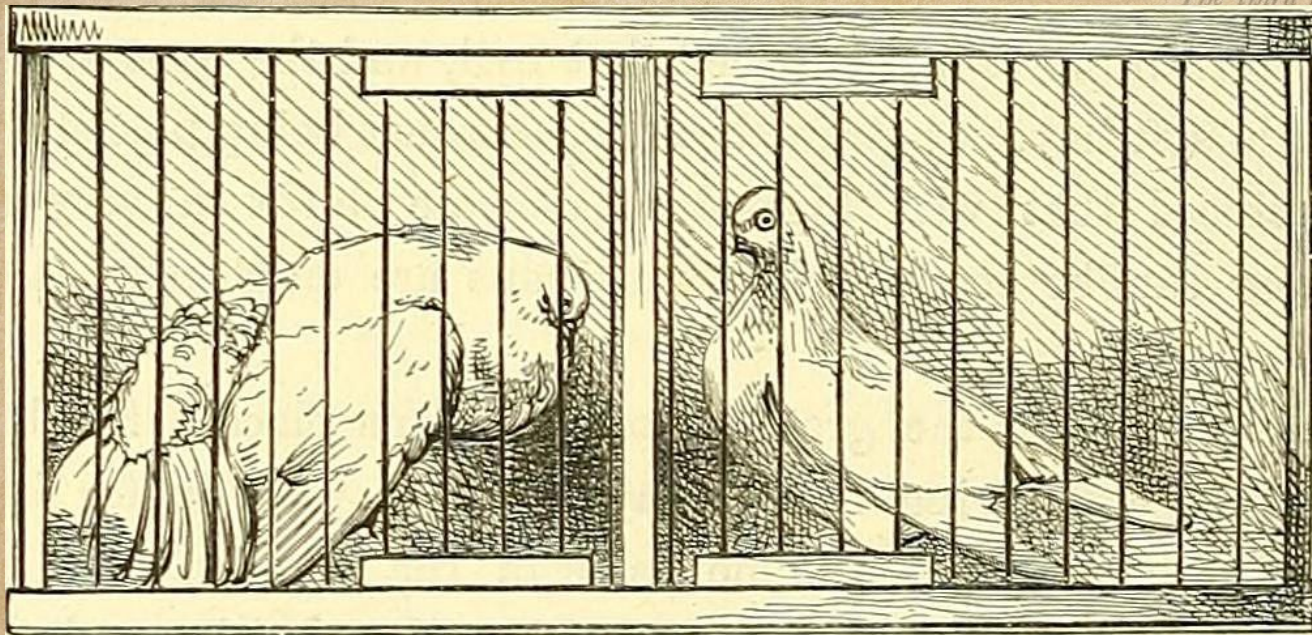
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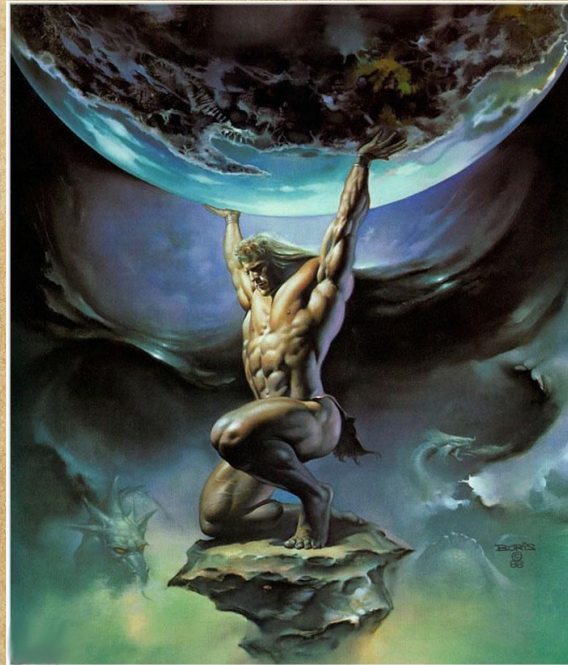
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*gall.*  
*Thomas L<sup>d</sup> Cromwell.*  
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# Legends, myths...

We have always sought to explain the world with stories.



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*L<sup>a</sup> Cromwell.  
Gobham.*

What is thunder?

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The Prodigall.

The Life of Thomas L<sup>d</sup> Cromwell.

The Life of Sir John Oldcastle, called  
the Lord Cobham.

The Widow.

The Tragedy of  
Titus Andronicus.

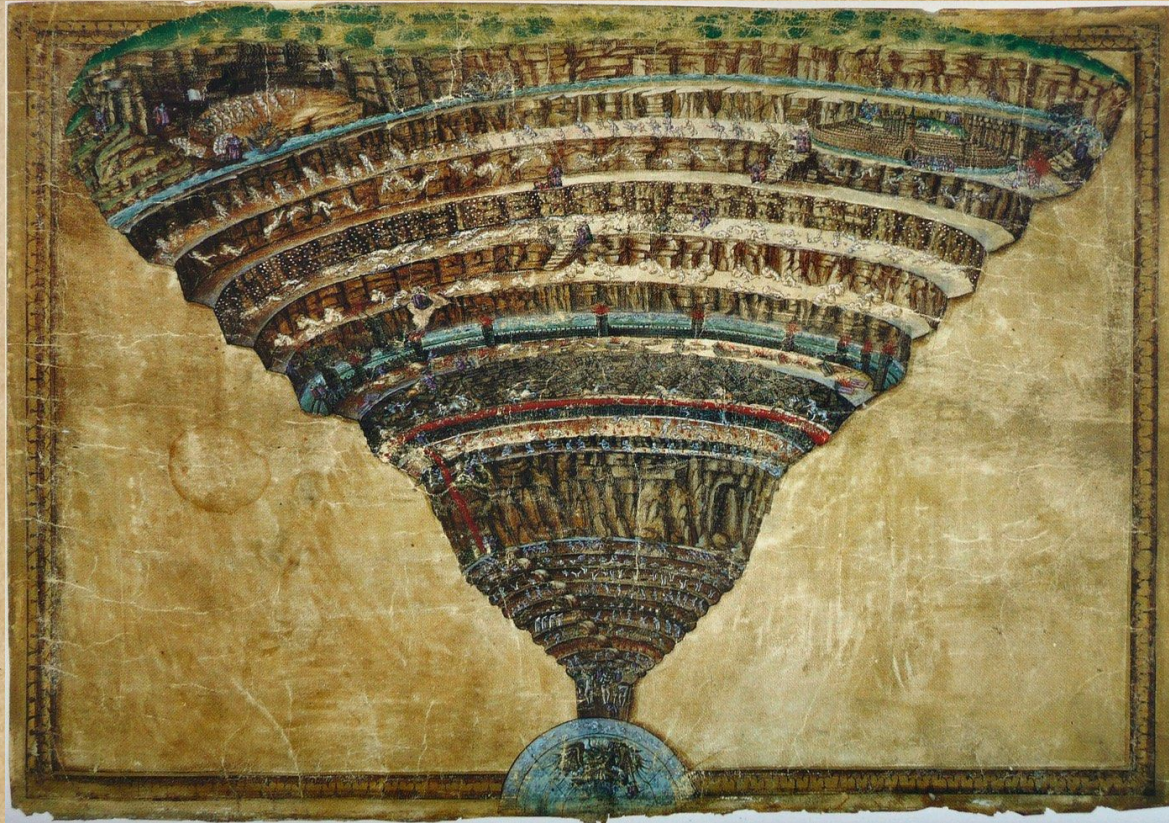
The Tragedy of  
Locrine.



Nächter: "If strands of hair you would provide,  
in helping you, I would take pride."

Why do people drown? How do I keep my kids from drowning, too?





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*Tragedy of Prodigall.*

*Tragedy of Thomas L<sup>d</sup> Cromwell.*

*Tragedy of the castle Lord Cobham.*

*Tragedy of the Widow.*

*Tragedy.*

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What happens after death? Why should I be nice to people?

# We give things context and humanity

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Making things human helps us interpret them



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We strip people of humanity to be able to hurt them



*Black Mirror (season 3, episode 5)*

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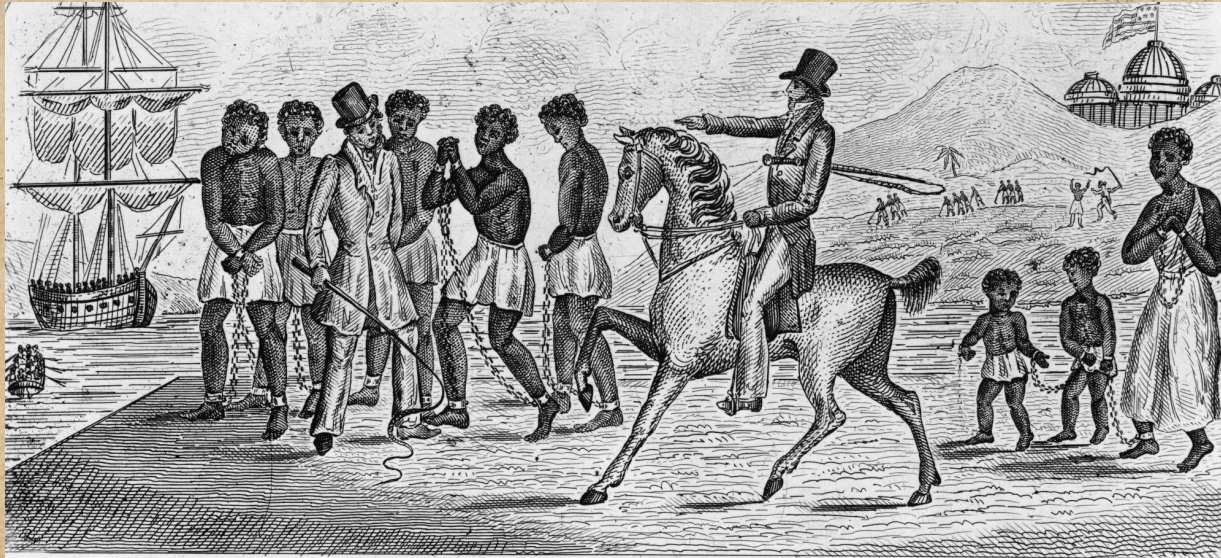
*Thomas L<sup>a</sup> Cromwell.*

*lle Lord Cobham.*

*Vidow.*

*agedy.*

*Lochrine.*



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# Telling stories is a powerful tool

- Helps us understand
- Gives us hope
- Gives us excuses
- Helps us remember
- Keeps us together
- Pushes others out
- Entertains
- Keeps us occupied

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Defining story, plot, and  
narrative



# The difference between “story” and “plot”

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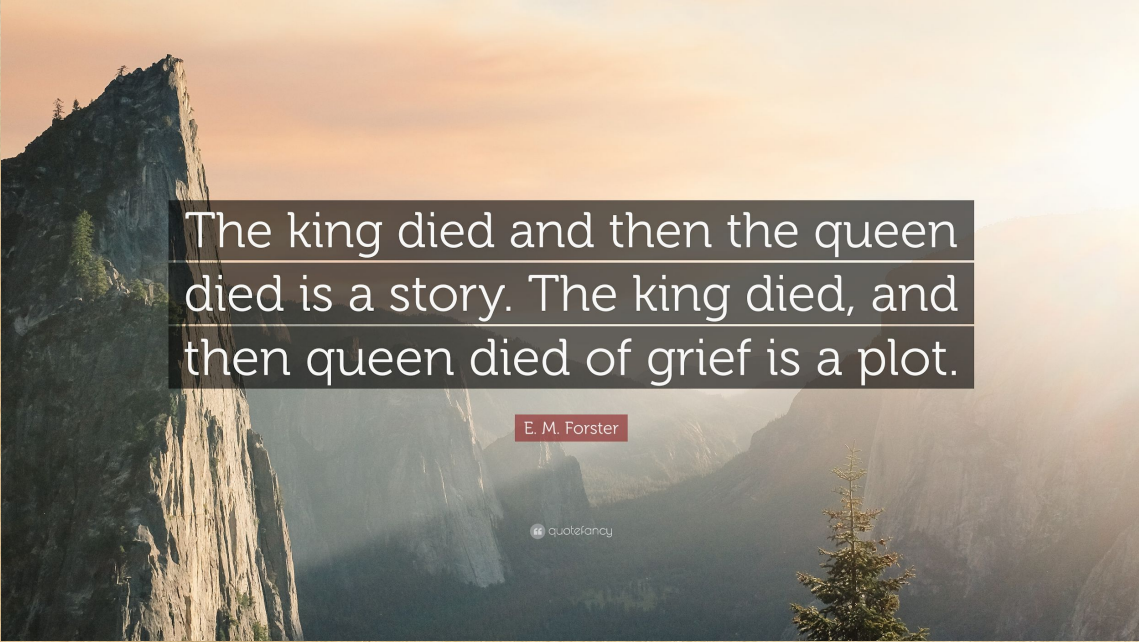
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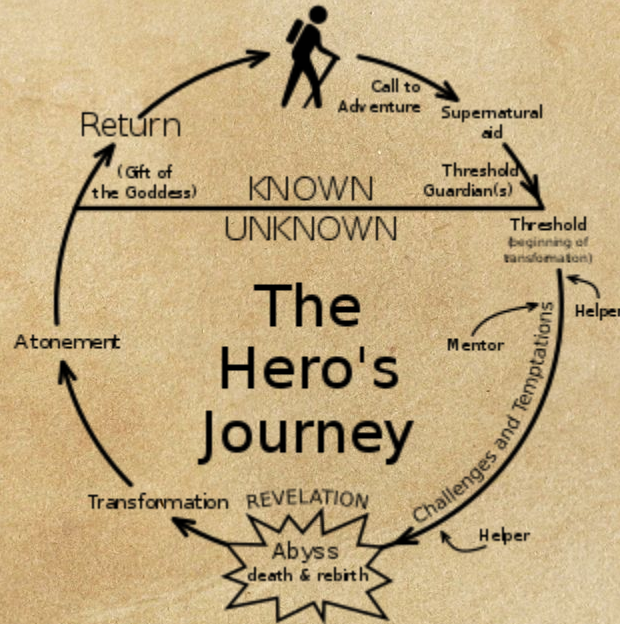


The king died and then the queen  
died is a story. The king died, and  
then queen died of grief is a plot.

E. M. Forster

quote fancy

# Stories tend to follow certain structures



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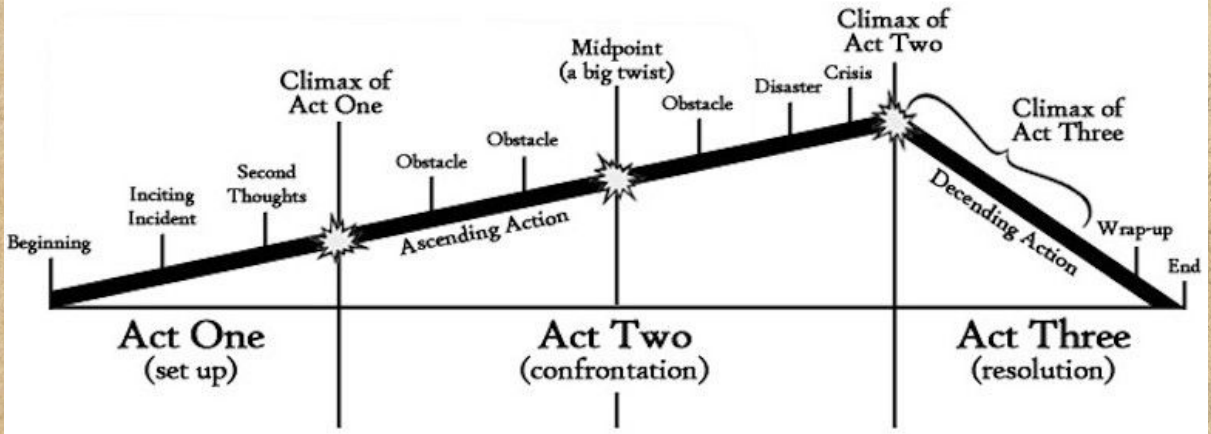
*The Tragedy of Locrine.*

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# Three-Act Structure



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- of the Wittell Lord Cobham.*
- Widow.*
- Tragedy.*
- of Locrine.*

# What does “narrative” mean?

## Narrative [ˈnærətɪv]

### *noun*

1.

a spoken or written account of connected events; a story.

"a gripping narrative"

"a chronological narrative of Stark's life"

### *adjective*

1.

in the form of or concerned with narration.

"a narrative poem"

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# So, like, story?

Often used to describe *more* than “just” the story:

- Plot
- Lore
- World building
- Interactions with NPCs
- etc.

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# Exposition vs. story progression

- Narrative consists of different types of writing, with different purpose.
- Everything in your narrative should have a purpose.

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# Exposition

- Introduces you to:
  - Characters
  - Setting
- Sets Tone

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# Story progression

- Drives the story forward
- Changes the stakes

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 estled atop the cliffs that rise from the Sword Coast, the citadel of Candlekeep houses the finest and most comprehensive collection of writings on the face of Faerûn. It is an imposing fortress, kept in strict isolation from the intrigues that occasionally plague the rest of the Forgotten Realms. It is secluded, highly regimented, and it is home.

Within these hallowed halls of knowledge your story begins. You have spent most of your twenty years of life within this keep's austere walls, under the tutelage of the sage Gorion. Acting as your father, he has raised you on a thousand tales of heroes and monsters, lovers and infidels, battles and tragedies. However, one story was always left untold: that of your true heritage. You have been told that you are an orphan, but your past is largely unknown.

DONE

REPLAY

*Baldur's Gate 1*

What's this?



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World of Warcraft

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Half-Life 2

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 In her 29th summer of life, Fjori the huntress met the warlord Folgeir on the field of battle. None remember what they fought over, for their love to come was so great it overshadowed all rivalries or disputes. They fought to a standstill, as their followers looked on - till her sword broke his axe and his shield dulled her blade and all could see that

they were equals.

As the Eagle finds its mates, so too did Fjori find hers in Folgeir, and a time of peace came to the clans of the forest. But as the summer's warmth gives way to winter's chill, so too would this peace pass.

But the Snake came and bit Folgeir, its venom seeping deep into the wound.

*Skyrim*

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*Final Fantasy 7*

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*What if it's neither?*

Sometimes, characters talk...

...but they don't say anything.



*Suicide Squad*

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The Taming of the Shrew.  
The Merry Wives of Windsor.  
The As You Like It.  
The Twelfth Night.  
The Comedy of Errors.  
The Two Gentlemen of Verona.  
The Winter's Tale.  
The Tempest.  
The Tragedy of Hamlet.  
The Tragedy of Othello.  
The Tragedy of King Lear.  
The Tragedy of Macbeth.  
The Tragedy of Coriolanus.  
The Tragedy of Julius Caesar.  
The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra.  
The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus.  
The Tragedy of Troilus and Cressida.  
The Tragedy of Timon of Athens.  
The Tragedy of Pericles.  
The Tragedy of Cymbeline.  
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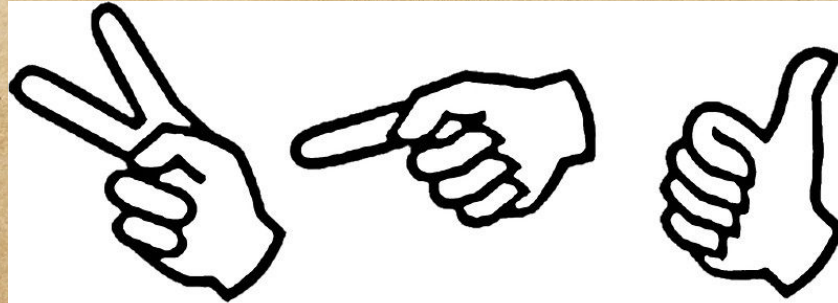
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**Cut - It - Out**



# Pacing

The pace in which the story progresses through the experience.

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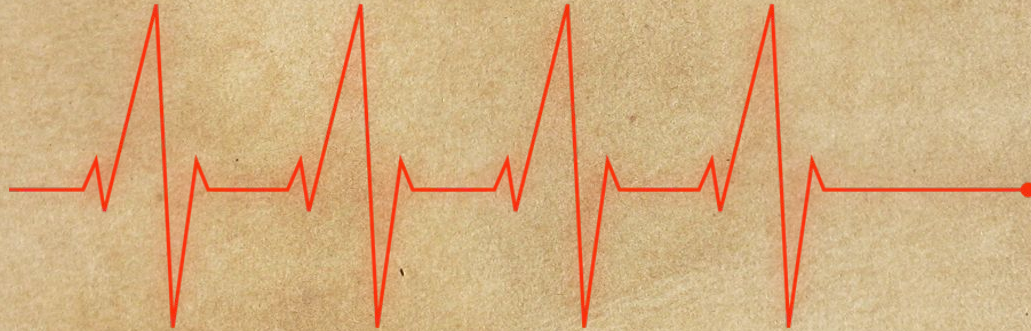
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# Story “beats”

What is a story beat?



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# Story beats

- **SOMETHING HAPPENS!**
- And then you need to breathe...
- **UNTIL THE NEXT THING HAPPENS!**
- And then you need a quick breather...

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**PAUSE**

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Narrative in games

What makes games special, compared to other media?

*The player.*

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## The player...

- Is unpredictable
- Wants to interact with the world
- Wants power
- Wants to explore
- Is affected by skill level

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# The interaction shapes the story

- Games tell stories in vastly different ways.
- Mechanics usually come first.

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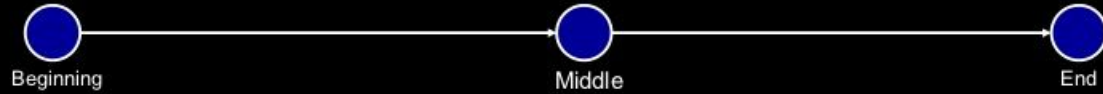
*John Oldcastle Lord Cobham.*

*Bartholomew the Rector.*

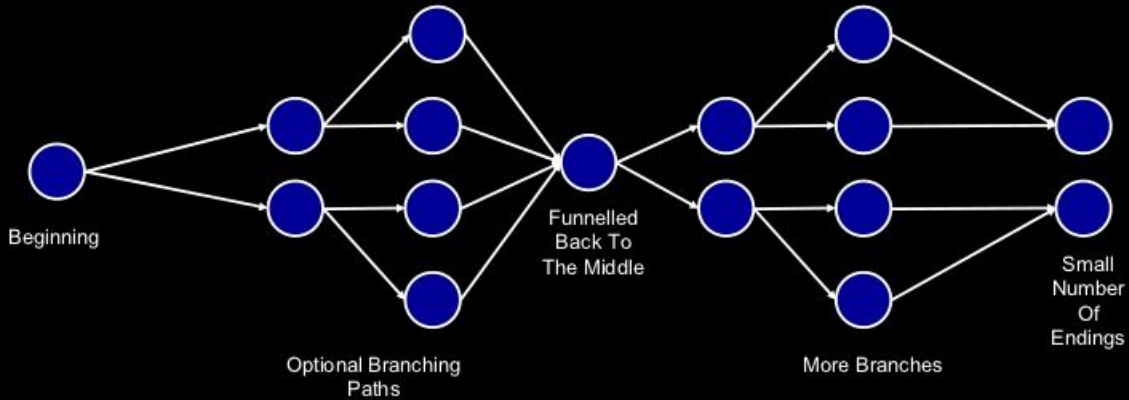
*The Tragedy of Hamlet.*

*The Tragedy of Locrine.*





Standard Game Narrative (Half Life)



Branching Game Narrative (Mass Effect)

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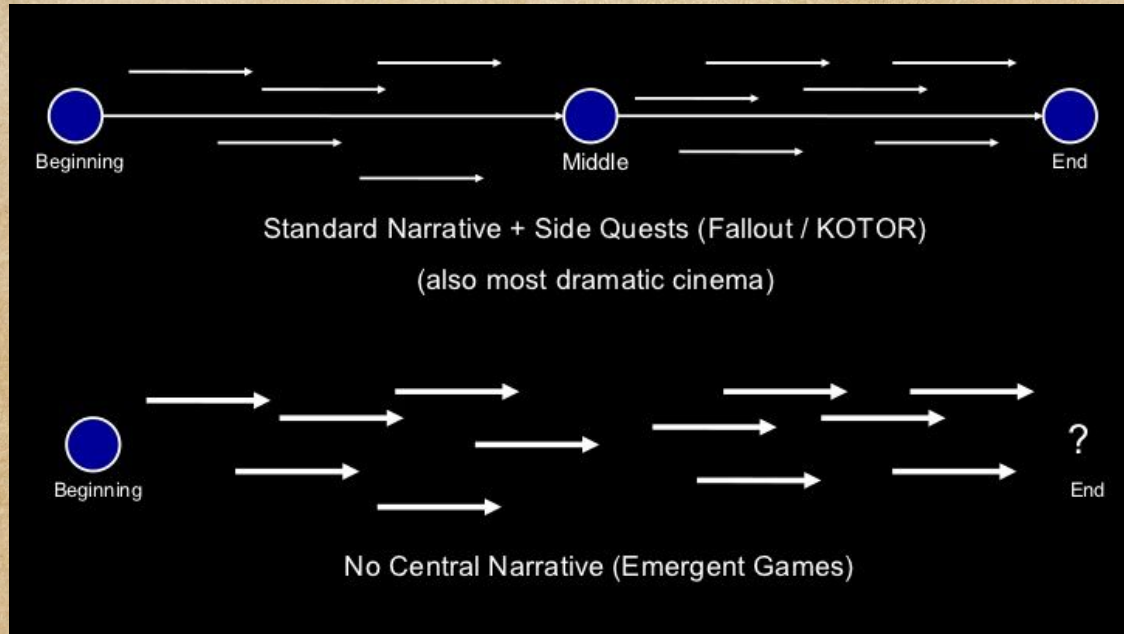
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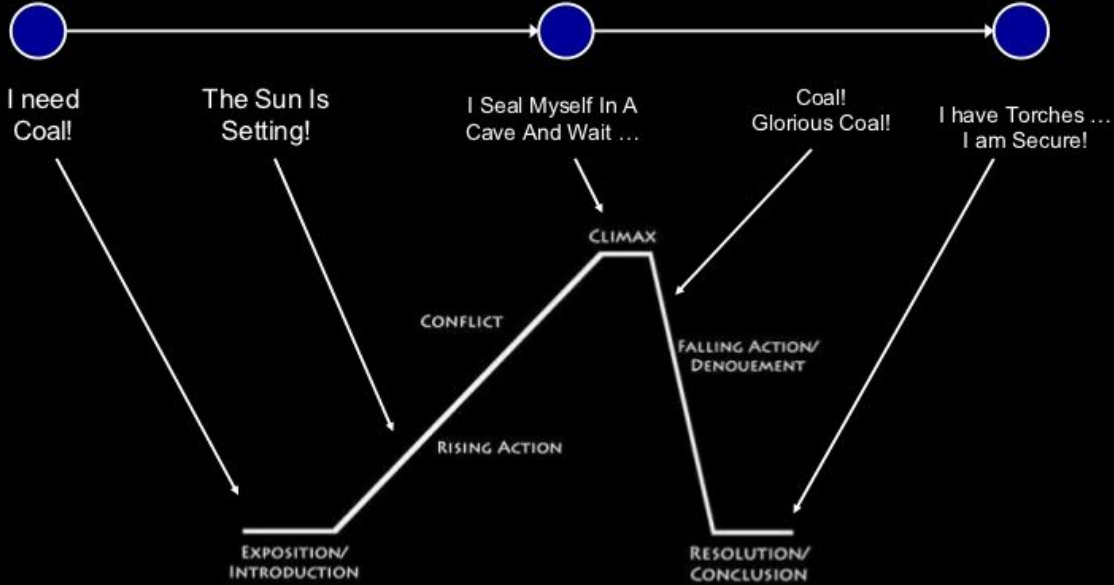
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n Widow.

Tragedy.

of Locrine.

# A Typical Minecraft Story



# A look at a familiar story

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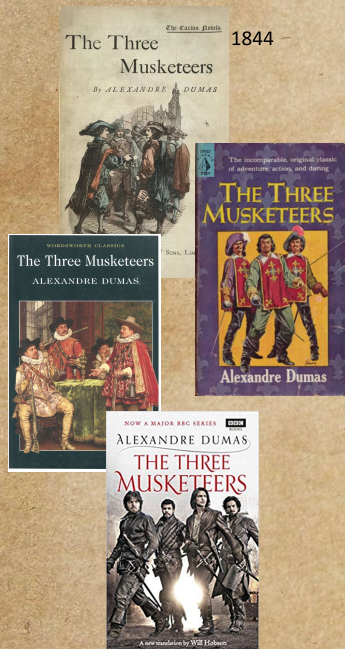
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## Book



## Movies



## Comics



## TV series



...Games?



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# Known, linear stories don't work well within games

- A familiar, linear story would make the game feel deterministic.
- What you do doesn't matter - you still end up in the same place.
- No sense of wonder or exploration when you know the story.

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VS.



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even Playes, never  
lio.

L<sup>a</sup> Cromwell,  
Gobham.

- You are this cool hero you already know *has* to survive.
- You know how it ends.
- You fight to see more of a story you already know.

- You know the world, but not *this* story.
- The stakes are completely different.
- You fight to keep exploring a familiar and appreciated world, and to make an actual impact on it.



# Instead, we create new IPs

Based primarily on mechanics, not story

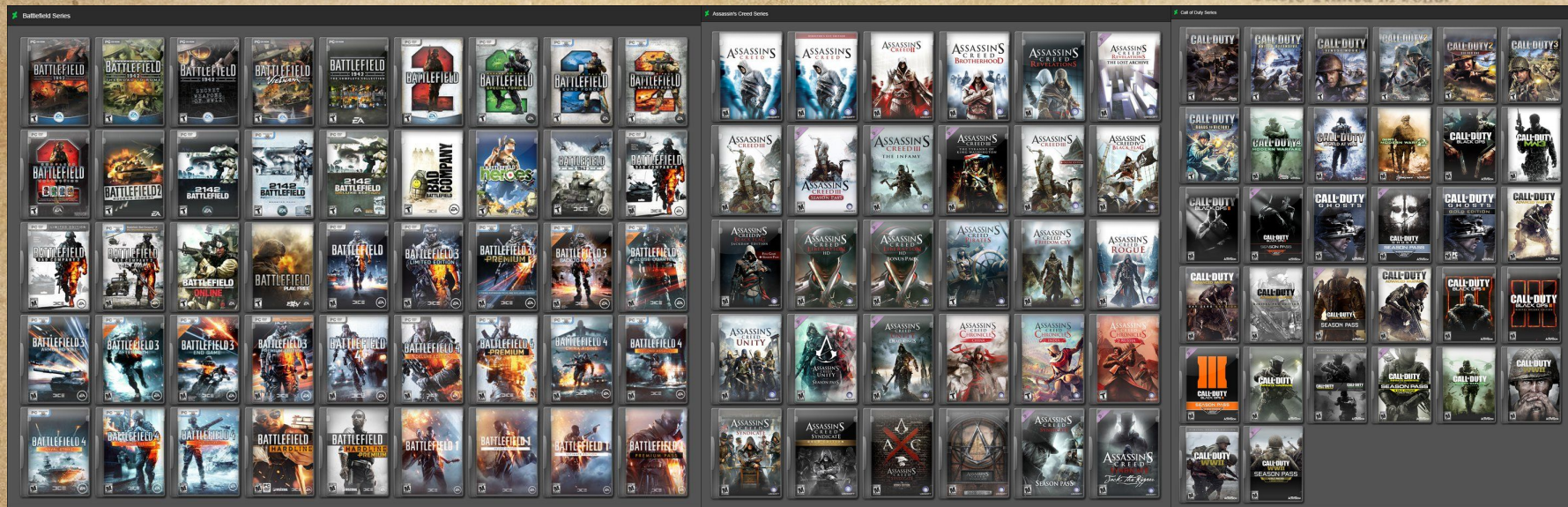
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# Limitations for games

- People who read a book expect to read text.
- People play games to *play* games.
- Most players do not want to read text in games.
  - ...Especially not on mobile!
    - You should avoid more than 8 words at a time on mobile, according to King
  - ...Especially not kids!
    - For kids games, aim for even fewer words.
- There are of course exceptions (lore books in Skyrim, visual novels) but don't count on players wanting to read.
- If you have too much story you want to convey, write a book.

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Narrative vs. writing

# Narrative design

How does the player interact with the game?

- How do dialogues work?
- What's the pacing?
- Setting.
- The relation to the game design.
- Etc.

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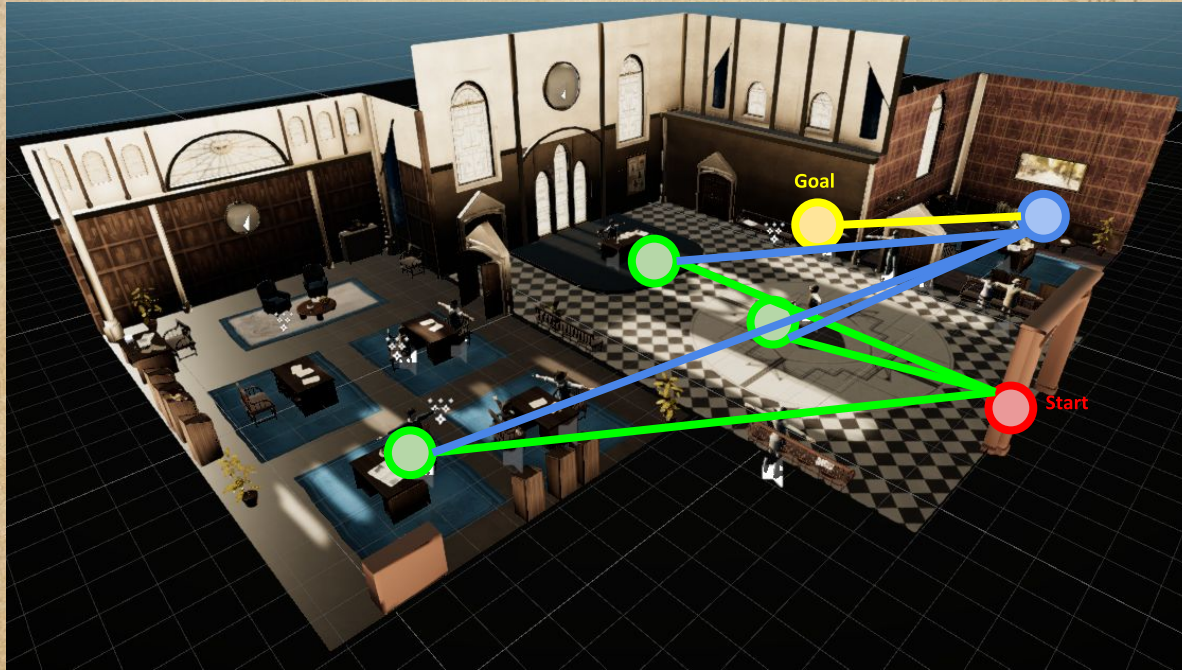
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*The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus.*

*The Tragedy of Locrine.*

# Example (Pendula Swing):



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Tragedy.

of Locrine.

What's the story progression in this area?

Which NPCs need to be present, and what what purpose do they have?

# Writing

What are the actual words said and displayed?

- The actual words in the dialogues.
- Item descriptions.
- Combat barks.
- Etc

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*More Tragedy.*

*Tragedy of Locrine.*



# Example (Pendula Swing):

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Which words do these characters use?  
Are they grumpy, happy, cautious...?

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*Oldcastle Lord Cobham.*

*The Merchant of Venice.*

*The Jew of Malta.*

*The Tragedy of Troilus and Cressida.*



**GDC**  
18

GDC 2018

**Writing and Narrative Design: A Relationship**

by Eric Stirpe (Telltale Games)

Game Narrative Summit





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*John Oldcastle Lord Cobham.*

*Bartholomew the Rector.*

*The Taming of the Shrew Tragedy.*

*The Tragedy of Locrine.*

**PAUSE**

# Workshop part 1: Plan your own interactive story

- **Setting:**
  - Where does it take place?
  - When does it take place? Over how long time?
- **Characters:**
  - Which characters are in the story?
  - Who are they today? What was it like for them to grow up?
  - How do they interact with the story? What do they want?
- **Theme:**
  - What does the story talk about? Life, loss, crime, partying, growing up...?
- **Plot:**
  - What happens in the story? What sets it off, and when does it end?
- **Interactions:**
  - Which choices can the player make?

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*Richard the Third* Lord Cobham.

*Bartholomew*

*Portian Widow.*

*Antony and Cleopatra* Tragedy.

*Pericles* Tragedy of *Lochrine.*

Types of storytelling in games

# Linear story

- The developer tells the story they want to tell.
- Story mostly told through cutscenes and dialogues.

*Pro:* Experience easy to control. Strong narrative impact.

*Con:* Players can feel disengaged. Why not just watch a movie?

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*The Last of Us*

# Storytelling 101: “Show, don’t tell”

The difference between

**“Jake was scared”**

and

**“Jake’s breath was shallow. His palms were sweating and his knees felt like jelly. Though he tried to stop them, his eyes repeatedly darted towards the nearest exit”**

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"We're bad guys. It's what we do."

VS.



"How about a magic trick?  
I'm gonna make this pencil disappear."

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# In games: “Do, don’t show”

**Metal Gear Solid 4 - Longest Cutscene Sequence** Depending on who you are cutscenes in video games are either the reason you fight so hard to win or a nuisance to be skipped at the first opportunity. No matter how much you might believe the former, however, *Metal Gear Solid 4* is a little excessive. Four separate scenes in the game's finale add up to 71 minutes of non-play, and are longer than some theatrical films. The game also holds the record for longest single cutscene at 27 minutes.

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Tragedy.

of Locrine.

Ask yourself:

What are you doing that could not have been told in a movie?

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What can Josef Fares do now that he's making games?

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*Jalla! Jalla!*



*A Way Out*

# Making the gameplay part of the storytelling

Making a part of the story integral with the gameplay,  
can make **the whole game** much stronger.

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The opposite?

What happens if gameplay and story don't speak the same language?

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# Ludonarrative dissonance

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Just a regular guy!



The good guy!

*The "Uncharted" Series*

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the Lord Cobham.

Widow.

Comedy.

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*Final Fantasy 7*

## How to avoid it?

- Writers + game designers need to talk!
- Decide on a **tone** for the game
- Consider world's reactions
- Give **consequences**

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*Puritan Widow.*

*More Tragedy.*

*Tragedy of Locrine.*



# Branching Stories

- The player can choose the direction of the story by making *active choices*.

*Pro:* Players feel involved in the story - they are not just bystanders.

*Con:* Hard to make all choices matter. The size of the story can easily get out of control.

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John Falstaff  
History of Thomas L<sup>d</sup> Cromwell.  
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Puritan Widow.  
Tragedy.  
Tragedy of Locrine.

# The burden of many branches

- Making all choices valid and interesting
- Keeping track of it
- Consistency
- **So** much writing...
- Assets
  - Voice Over
  - Animations
  - Scenes
- A lot of your content will never get seen

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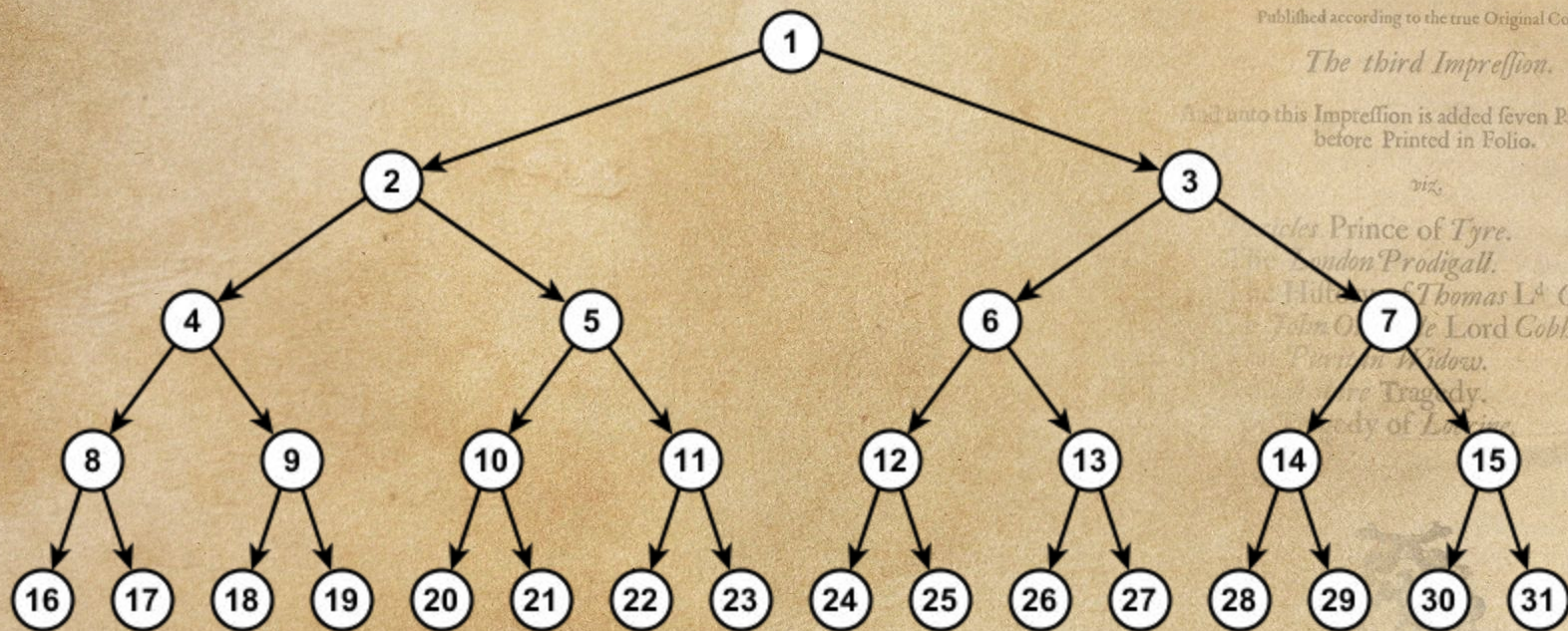
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4. The Tragedy of Iohn O. Lord Cobham.

5. The Tragedy of Puritan Widow.

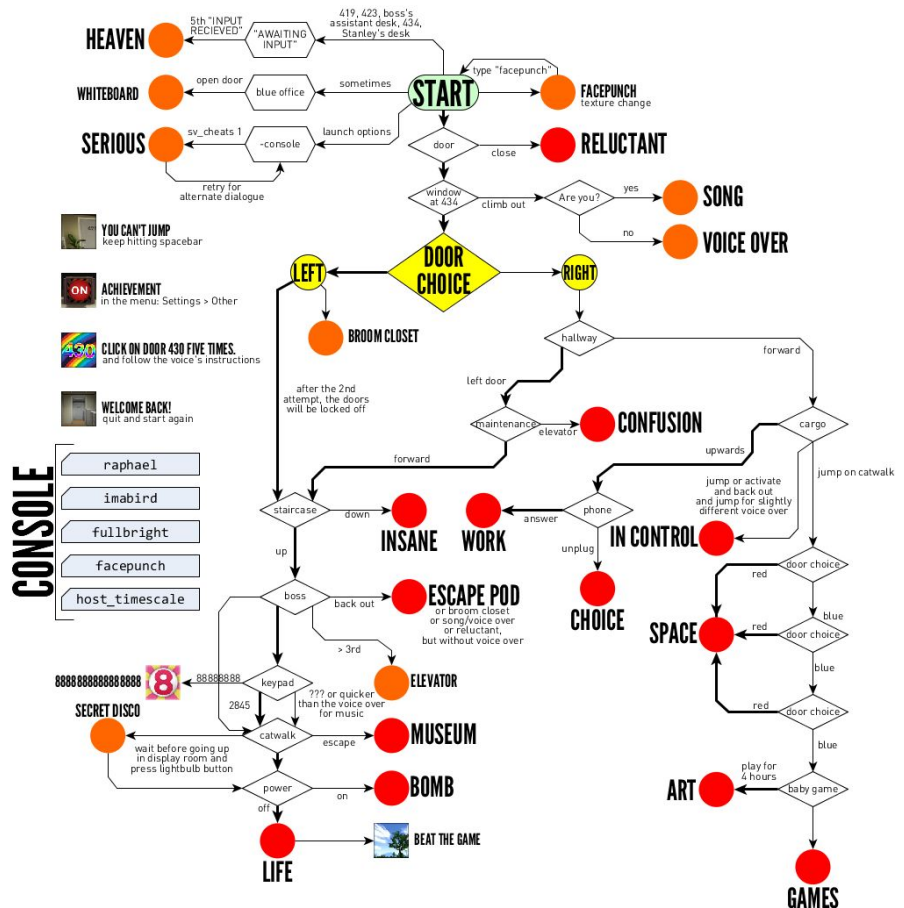
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The Tragedy.  
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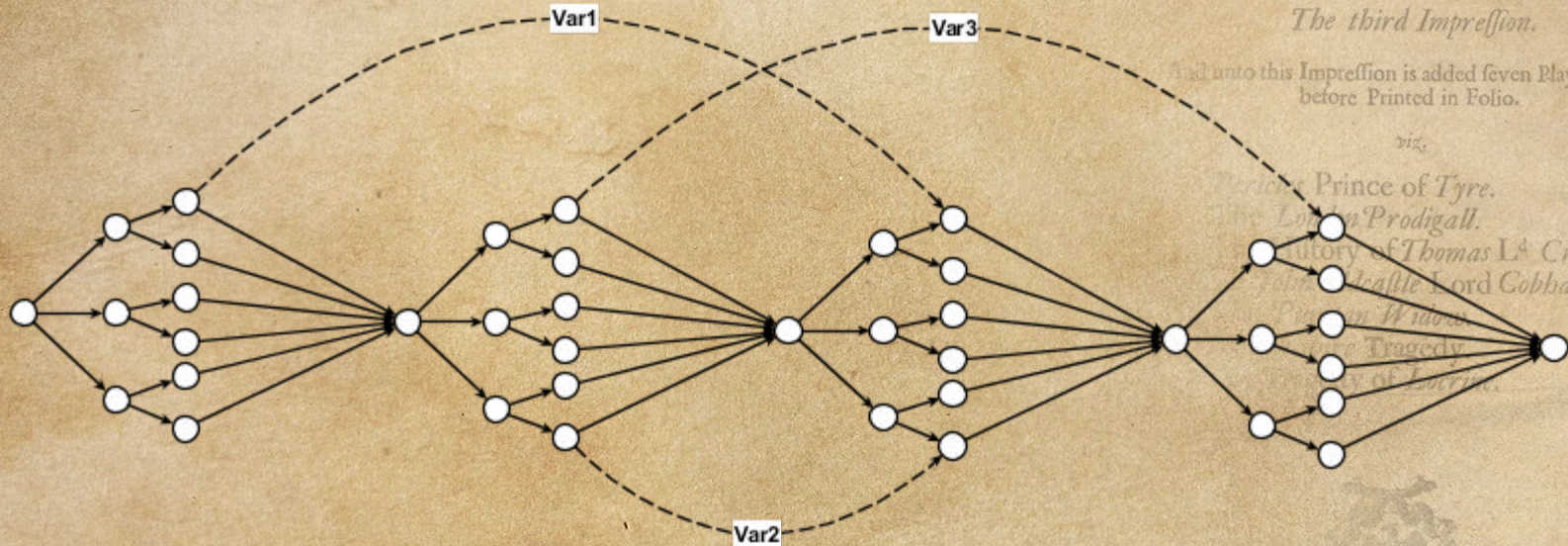
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Widow.

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## Blue Pill

(Control)



Shepard Died  
Reaper Gone  
Citadel Blown Up  
Mass Relays Destroyed  
Normandy Swallowed

## Green Pill

(Synthesis)



Shepard Died  
Reaper Gone  
Citadel Blown Up  
Mass Relays Destroyed  
Normandy Swallowed

## Red Pill

(Destroy)



Shepard Died  
Reaper Gone  
Citadel Blown Up  
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Normandy Swallowed

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*Sea Tragedy.*

*Tragedy of Locrine.*



**telltale**games

# The Wolf Among Us

- At the end of the game, you get called out on the things you have done.
- The game questions if you are really the good guy.
- **Only works if you feel like you had a choice.**



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# The “Telltale Fatigue”

“The thing is, Telltale's games are all similar. They're based on licensed properties from comics, television and other media. In them, you explore static environments by interacting with various objects. You move the story forward by talking to other characters, and by making choices in both dialogue prompts and "action" sequences. Oh, and the games can still be kinda janky.”

<https://www.polygon.com/2015/12/30/10690764/tales-from-the-borderlands-game-of-the-year-2015-opinion-telltale>

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John Oldcastle Lord Cobham.

The Puritan Widow.

The Tragedy.

The Tragedy of Locrine.

The more you play, the more you see the strings



So that's the puppet master.

Those are the strings.

This isn't a real boy after all.

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*The Partisan Widow.*

*The Tragedy.*

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# Sequels

- Can you make a sequel to a game with several endings?
- Without making just one ending “canon” and disqualifying the others?

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*The History of Thomas L<sup>d</sup> Cromwell.*

*John Oldcastle Lord Cobham.*

*Bartholomew the Rhymer.*

*The Merchant of Venice.*

*The Tragedy of Locrine.*





*Telltale's Game of Thrones*

# Prequels?

- The point of Life is Strange is that you can change reality by reversing time.
- The endings are distinctly different and irreversible.
- A sequel would be impossible.
- The prequel is per definition weaker, because you know how it will end.



*Life is Strange*



*Life is Strange: Before the Storm*

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# Visual novels

Multiple, meaningful choices work best in experiences with few graphical assets.



*Dream Daddy: A Dad Dating Simulator*

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*Puritan Widow.*

*Measure Tragedy.*

*Tragedy of Locrine.*





Menu

Undo



Seysha awaited Patrysha's orders.

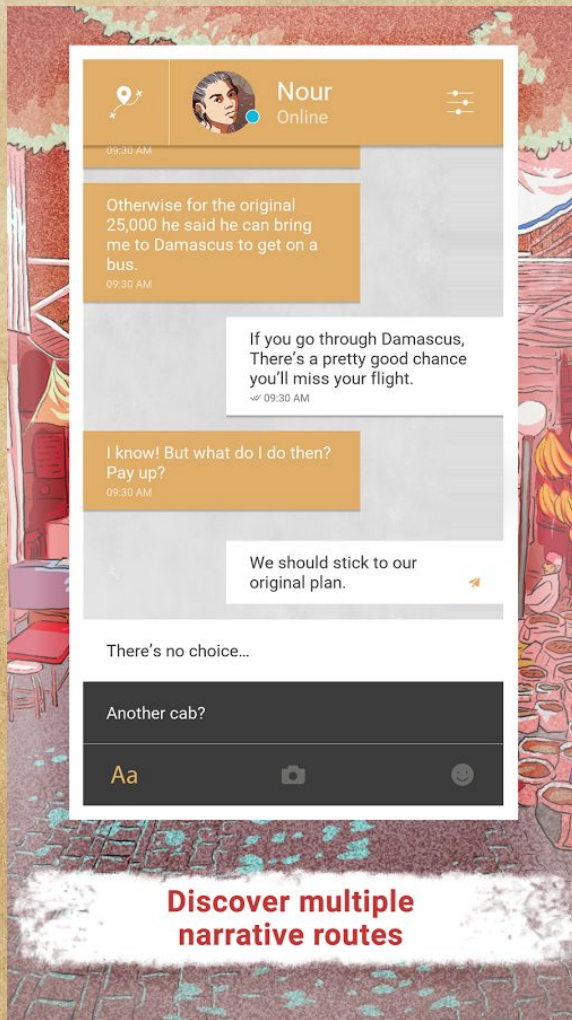
A few more moments passed, and then came the sound of a distant whistle.




"That is the signal", Patrysha announced, "time to go!"

1: Seysha walked close to Patrysha at the front...

2: Seysha stayed close to the back of the crowd...






  **Nour**  
Online 

09:30 AM

Otherwise for the original 25,000 he said he can bring me to Damascus to get on a bus.  
09:30 AM



If you go through Damascus, There's a pretty good chance you'll miss your flight.  
09:30 AM

I know! But what do I do then? Pay up?  
09:30 AM

We should stick to our original plan. 

There's no choice...

Another cab?

Aa  

**Discover multiple narrative routes**

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- John Oldcastle Lord Cobham.*
- The Puritan Widow.*
- The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus.*
- The Tragedy of Locrine.*

*Bury Me, My Love*

Are visual novels games?

Does it matter?

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*John Oldcastle Lord Cobham.*

*Bartholomew the Rector.*

*The Merchant of Venice Tragedy.*

*The Tragedy of Locrine.*

**PAUSE**

# Emergent Storytelling

- The developer provides the building blocks.
- Stories *emerge* based on how the player interacts with the game.
- Focus is on the unique experience of the player.

*Pro:* Generates unique player stories that are easy to share.

*Con:* Complex to design & implement. Harder to convey a message.

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John Oldcastle Lord Cobham.

Portian Widow.

More Tragedy.

Tragedy of Locrine.



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Two of Tyre.

Prodigall.

of Thomas L<sup>d</sup> Cromwell.

of the little Lord Cobham.

The Widow.

A Tragedy.

of Locrine.

The Sims



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*Antonie of Tyre.*  
*The Prodigall.*  
*The History of Thomas Lord Cromwell.*  
*The Duke of Burgoyne.*  
*The Merchant of Venice.*  
*The Tragedy of  
King Lear.*



Minecraft

**W**ord of an Epidemic

We have received news of an epidemic in Mongolia. The information is vague, but word is people are dying like flies and the fear of the disease is spreading as fast as the affliction itself. Furthermore, the condition is reported irreversible as well as incurable, and the scattered records of the events are worrisome. With no source of evil revealed people are turning to their gods and on each other, to protect themselves from contagion. Many call it a new plague.

If I get a chance to help, I will.

Crusader Kings II

# A CK2 story, part 1:

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So downloaded Sons of Abraham and I was having the standard game as Ireland in a TOG start, exploring the hilarity of jewish courtiers and loans thereof, pilgrimages that turned me into closet atheists without fail and the occasional Irish Band usurpation of Turkastan turning the aral sea into an Irish Catholic lake (Which is a story all its own, believe you me, you have not seen crusader kings lunacy until you see Irishmen fend off a Cuman invasion singlehanded and troll the Islamic world like it ain't no thing.

But then interesting things happened. I was called into a petty war over a single province by the king of Navarra, my father in law which dragged on for fucking ever because I only recently unified Ireland and I had zero boats and Galicia was taking its sweet time in attacking Navarra, which is when I got the Joan of Arc event chain (won't go into detail here but needless to say, this was fucking amazing) Lasairfionna the Maid of Ormond arrived at my court, the stories that generated where worth a book of their own, turning my king from Cynical to Zealous and aiding my efforts in coming to the aid of the King of Strathclyde in evicting the Norse and having him swear to me, greatly improving my martial tech growth and generally being badass, so of course I married her to my heir (this is before I noticed the celibate trait and was like 'Damnit') who promptly got her pregnant because apparently he's a fucking beast. My king became a paragon of virtue, gaining the nickname the Holy, the college of Cardinals has three Irish cardinals at any one time and at least one Irish Pope. Not bad for my first 30 years of ruling.

That's about the time I had my daughter, Sebdan, the child of SATAN.

I am not kidding, when she was born I got the event chain showing off her odd traits, being very quiet, not crying or giving fuss, creating buzzing noises when around other children and laughing when other people got hurt. So I went to the court chaplain to see if he could calm my obviously insane idea that she is the bastard child of Satan. He of course, did not such thing and confirmed my fear and told me to disinherit the child and imprison my wife as a witch. My options where to kill him to silence the rumours, do as he said or ignore it and pretend nothing is wrong, roleplaying a good and kindly king who could not fathom his wife and daughter being such evil creatures (and being so damned sure Paradox would never do something like actually follow through with the threat of a satanic overthrow of a kingdom) he of course ignored it all.

That's when a Frankish nun arrived at my court who seemed to get along very well with the child and was a mastermind theologian with 26 learning. Suspicious, sure, but I made her my court chaplain anyway. Then sent her to Hungary to try to convert the Arpad dynasty and she was predictably imprisoned. Ransoming her I got her back and put her in my court chaplain position again.

That's when she tried to convert me to Cathar.

Thinking nothing of it, I imprisoned her, got her to convert, had her retake the vows and made her a chaplain again (where the hell was I going to get another chaplain with those stats again?)

And shortly thereafter I got an event straight out of the fucking OMEN.

Out for a picnic, my king looked up, saw the nun on top of an old watchtower in her habit (or some other black robes) she shouted down to my daughter Sebdan, proclaiming her love for her. And then jumped. My daughter clapping all the way to her bloody smushy death.

*cont.*

# A CK2 story, part 2:

Now thoroughly horrified, I had my daughter educated by Lasairfionna because suddenly shit got real and Paradox was seriously threatening me with the spawn of satan. I figured my not!Joan of Arc with her voice of Jesus and insanely goody good good traits would straighten her out. And for the most part? It did. She became honest, gregarious and Just and I left well enough alone, finally put at ease.

So then my king died and Sebdan came of age. AND BECAME THE INCARNATION OF EVIL. She instantly lost all of her good traits (barring gregarious) and became a cruel, deceitful, lustful, envious impaler who was not only a brilliant strategist because of her education but a GENIUS who was possessed and had the voice of satan modifier to go with her demon spawn modifier.

Thats when family members started mysteriously dying. Some of disease, others by maiming, natural causes, poor health and waaaaay too many suspicious accidents. Before I realized what was going on I died and Sebdan inherited. In a last ditch hope of making her a better person (and prevent a massive vassal revolt by my dukes) I sent her on a pilgrimage to Rome, her husband, a baron, became regent in her stead (poor bastard, I had her betrothed to the king of Lothringia but broke it because I didn't want to inflict anything on the poor bastard) So she arrives in Rome, ignoring all chances of being charitable... And proceeds to reveal herself as God in the Basilica of St.Peter and St.Paul.

After being thrown out, naturally, she swears vengeance on the worshippers of false idols and my vassals promptly revolted, trying to put my kinsmen on the throne. ANY OTHER KINSMEN. So I was forced to use my not inconsiderable resources to pull up a few mercenaries.

I needn't have bothered.

Because almost as soon as the wars started I had reinforcements.

From the devil himself.

Three legendary pagan witches, Circe of Greece, Morganna of Wales and Jezebel of the Levant arrived in dublin, each leading five hundred knights, heavy infantrymen and longbowmen to help me put down the revolts, all of them attractive mystics, one an especially talented diplomat, another and exceptional spymaster and still another a great marshal. All of them have exceptional traits and stats and all of them love me as I am the chosen one, giving +500 relations.

So now I have put down the revolts, and my army of the damned terrorize the Irish High Kingdom and there's not a damned thing anyone can do about it but stare in utter horror of the fulfillment of a satanic plot to overthrow a kingdom blessed by the arrival of a warrior saint who now weeps over the corpses of her dead family.

Help me.

# Accidental narrative

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*n Widow.*

*Tragedy.*

*y of Locrine.*

*Crusader Kings II*

# Gameplay driven story

- There is not really an explicit story in the game.
- You create your own understanding of the events through play.

*Pro:* The story can hit really hard if it hits.

*Con:* Hard to know if the players will really get the message.

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Lord Cobham.

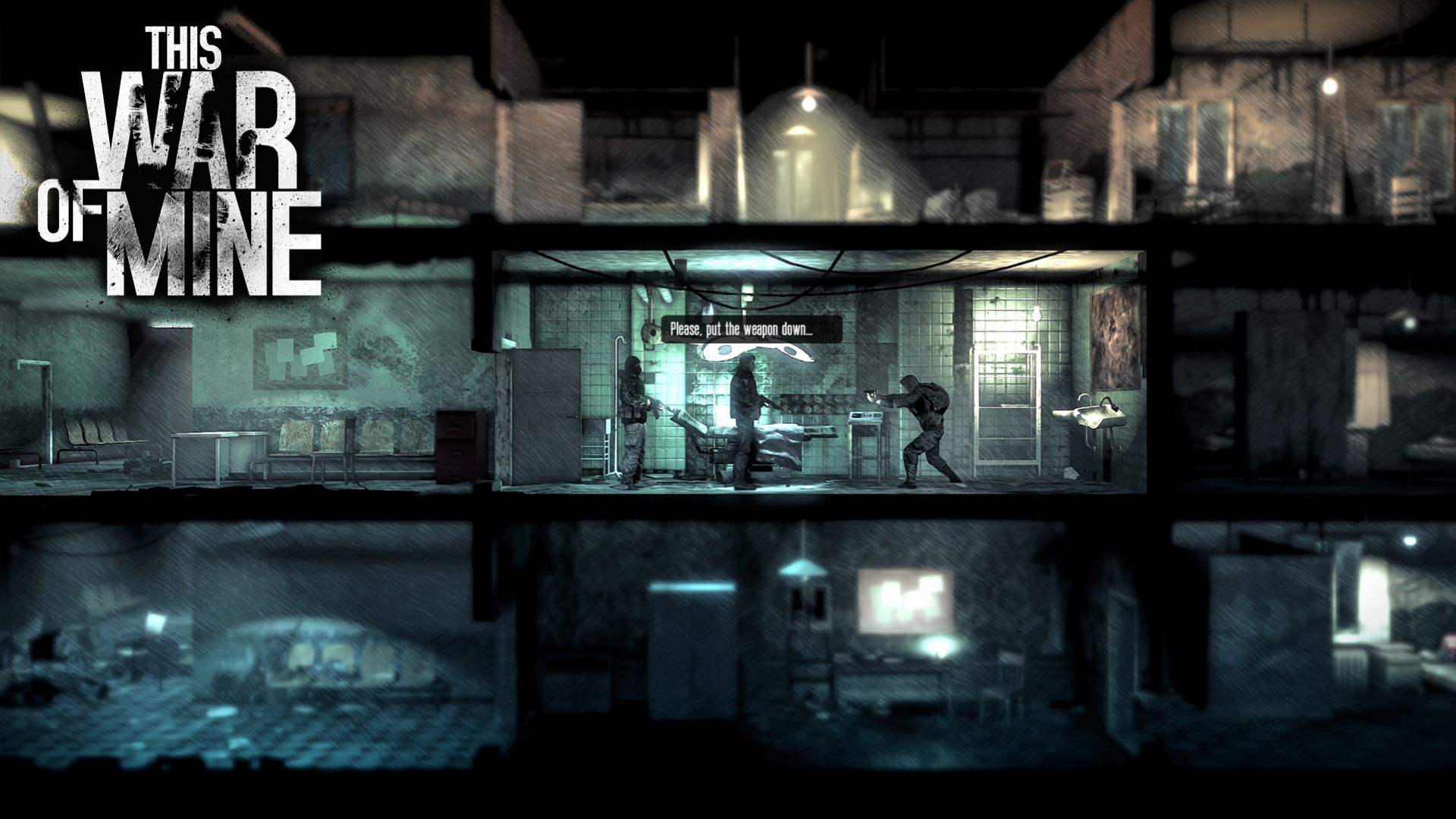
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*Her Story*

# THIS WAR OF MINE





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*Papers, Please!*

# Environmental storytelling

- Very “buzzword”-y.
- Part of other types of storytelling.
- The world is expanded through the items you encounter.
- “Why is that thing there? Ooooh...”

*Pro:* A relatively cheap way to expand the world.

*Con:* **Much** more difficult than you might think.

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*Tom Clancy's The Division*



*Tom Clancy's The Division*



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New Lots via local

END Station

Exit →

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11/25

6659

34th STREET  
STATION

4K  
\$699.98

Caution  
Wet paint

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*What Remains of Edith Finch*



I'M ARMED  
NO TRESPASSING  
WILL SHOOT ON SIGHT

*The Last of Us*

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*Vampire: the Masquerade - Bloodlines*

VS.



*Dragon Age: Inquisition*



# Bonus: Headcanon

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Mass Effect 1, 2 & 3

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*Bartholomew the Rector.*

*The Taming of the Shrew Tragedy.*

*The Tragedy of Locrine.*

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Workshop part 2: Start sketching up your story!

**Twine:**

<http://twinery.org/2>

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**END OF DAY 1**