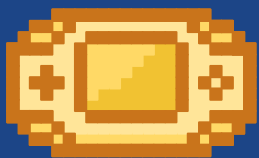




STORYTELLING IN GAMES



LEVELS



Why Stories Matter

For business and pleasure.

Storytelling in Games

The good, the bad, and the explodey.



Story Structure and Theme

What happens next?

Creating Character

What's my motivation?



Writers and Narrative Designers

What do these crazy word wranglers do?

Delivering the Story

From your brain into the player's





01

WHY STORIES MATTER

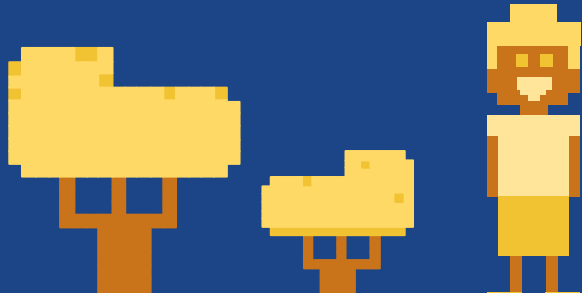




Guess the Game



After his unit is killed during an investigation on the martian moon, Phobos, a marine is forced to fight his way through hordes of the demonic undead to find his way back to Earth.

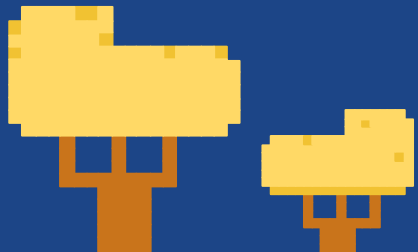




Guess the Game



After an invading force lands on his island, a young warrior must find allies and learn new techniques to rescue his lord and free his people.





Guess the Game



A young farmer inherits a farm in the country and forges a new life, learning ways to improve the farm and build connections within the community.





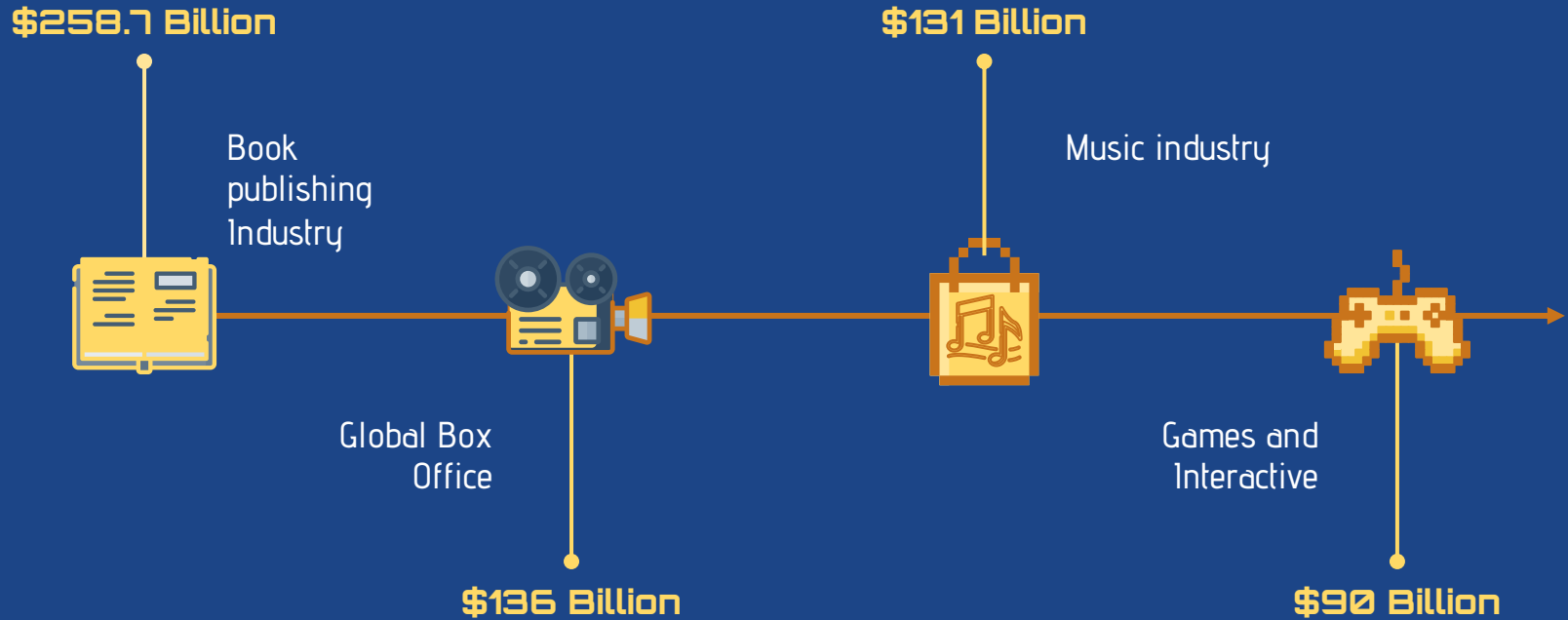
Guess the Game



An eternal battle between a guy who just wants to eat crumbs and fruit and the four ghostly beings who seek to end him.



STORIES ARE BIG MONEY





WHY WE LIKE STORIES



Sharing knowledge

Exploring concepts

Escapism

Fun



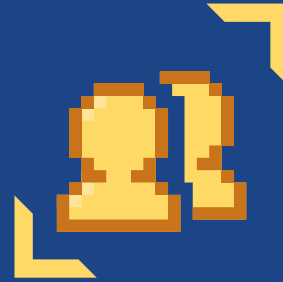


STANDING OUT



GET PEOPLE INTERESTED

Pairing an interesting gameplay mechanic with an equally interesting story hook creates buzz

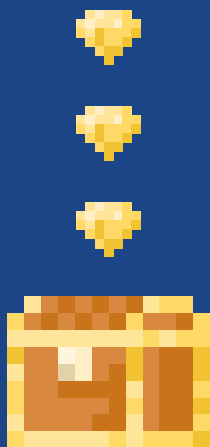
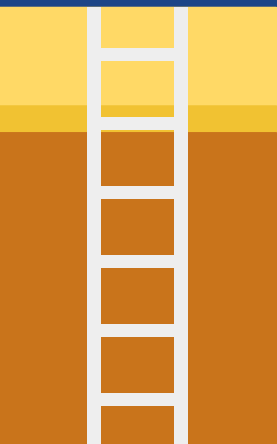


CONVINCE THEM TO SHARE

People like to share the things they enjoy. They want their friends to have fun too. Emotionally engage your players through storytelling.



BUILDING A FRANCHISE



SEQUELS

Benefit from a pre-existing fanbase.



SPINOFFS

Branching out into other media can give your studio multiple revenue streams.



02

Storytelling in Games

Does my game need any storytelling?





IT'S NOT THAT DEEP

What if your game is a simple
solitaire card game?

Or just a linear roguelike where all
you do is shoot zombies while riding
an undead dinosaur?



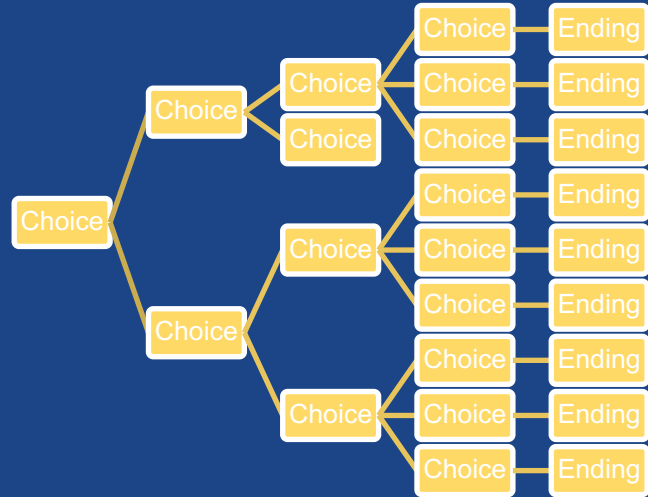
Wait... but Minecraft never had any story.

KINDS OF GAME STORIES

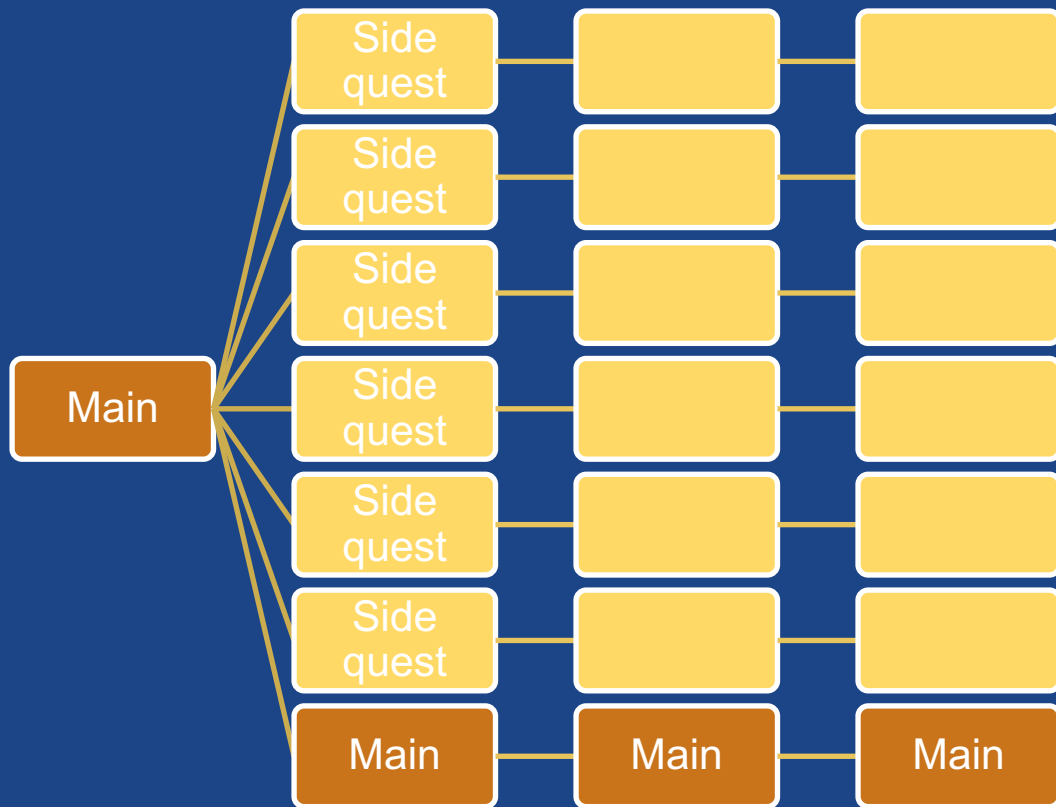
LINEAR



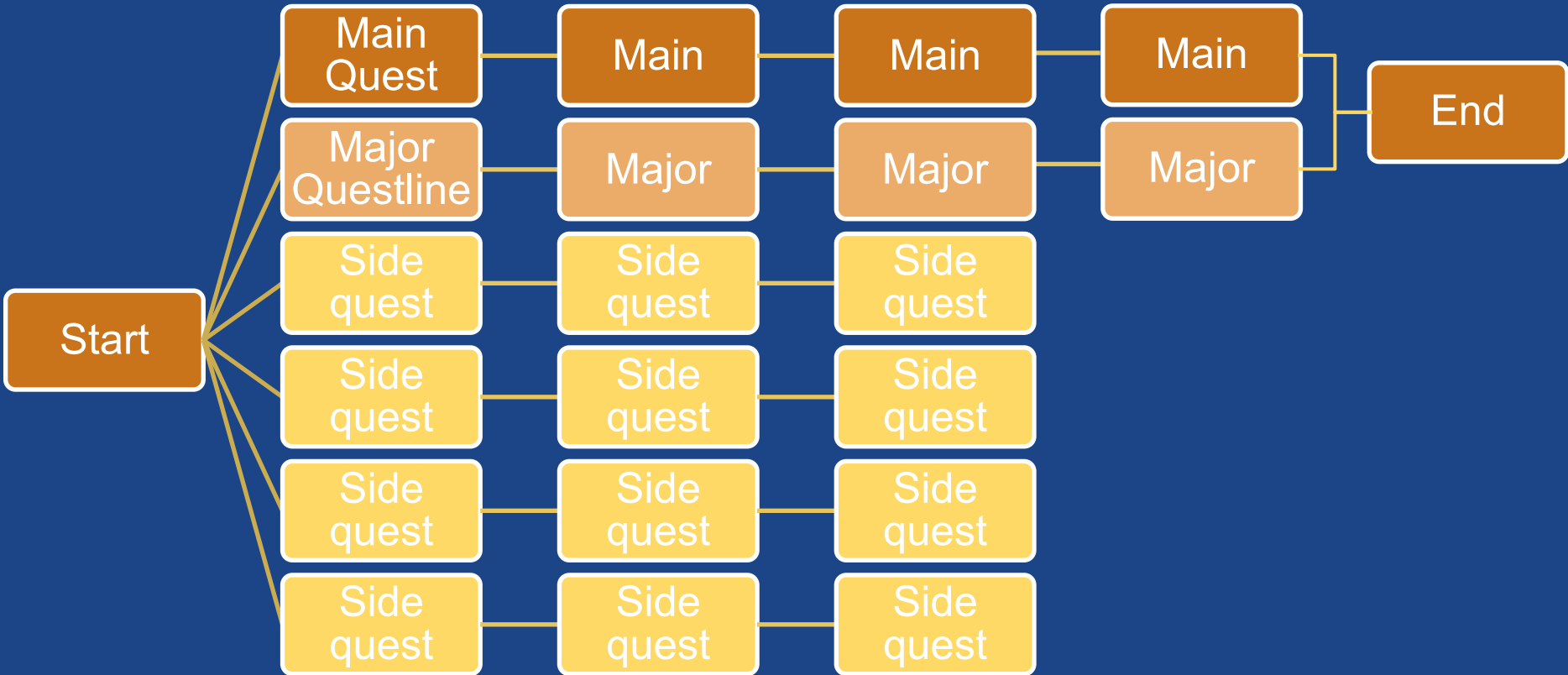
Non-LINEAR



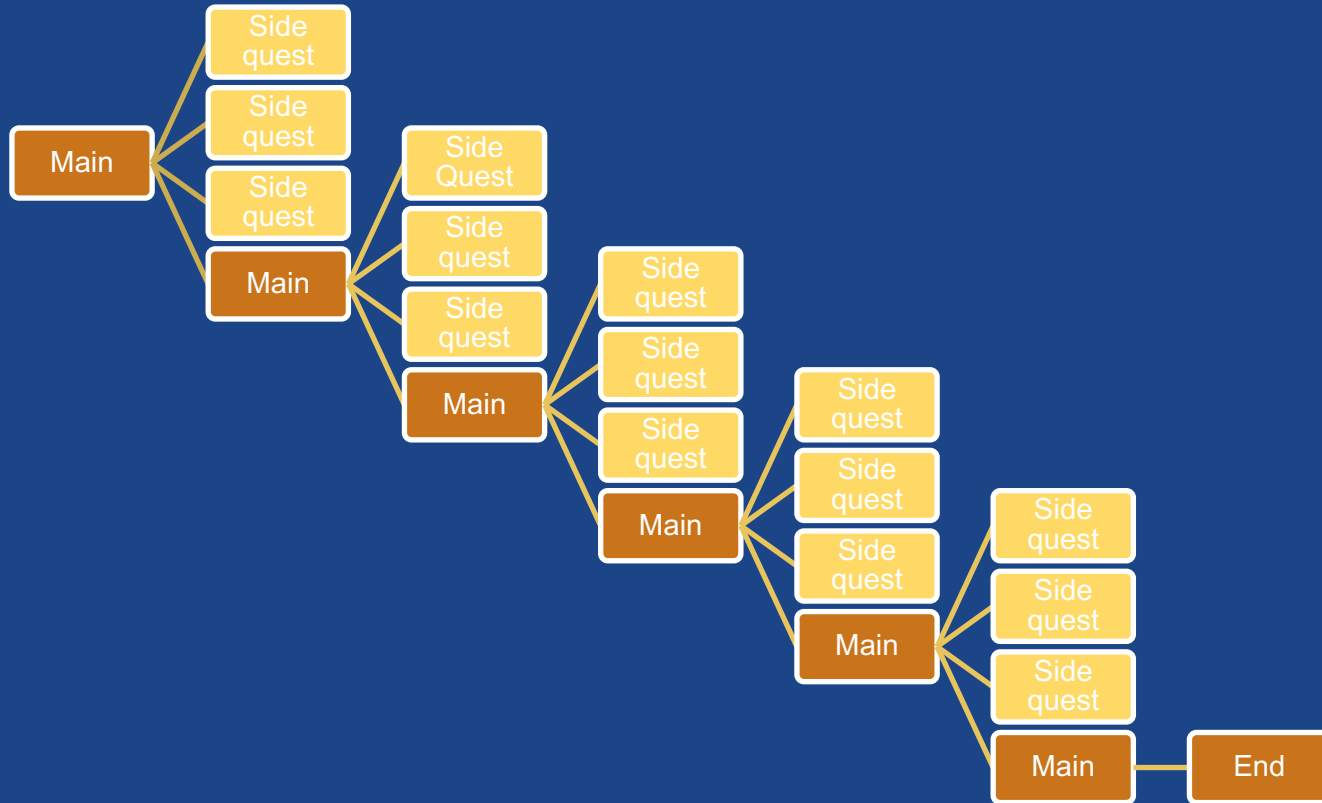
┆ LINEAR WITH SIDE QUESTS ┆



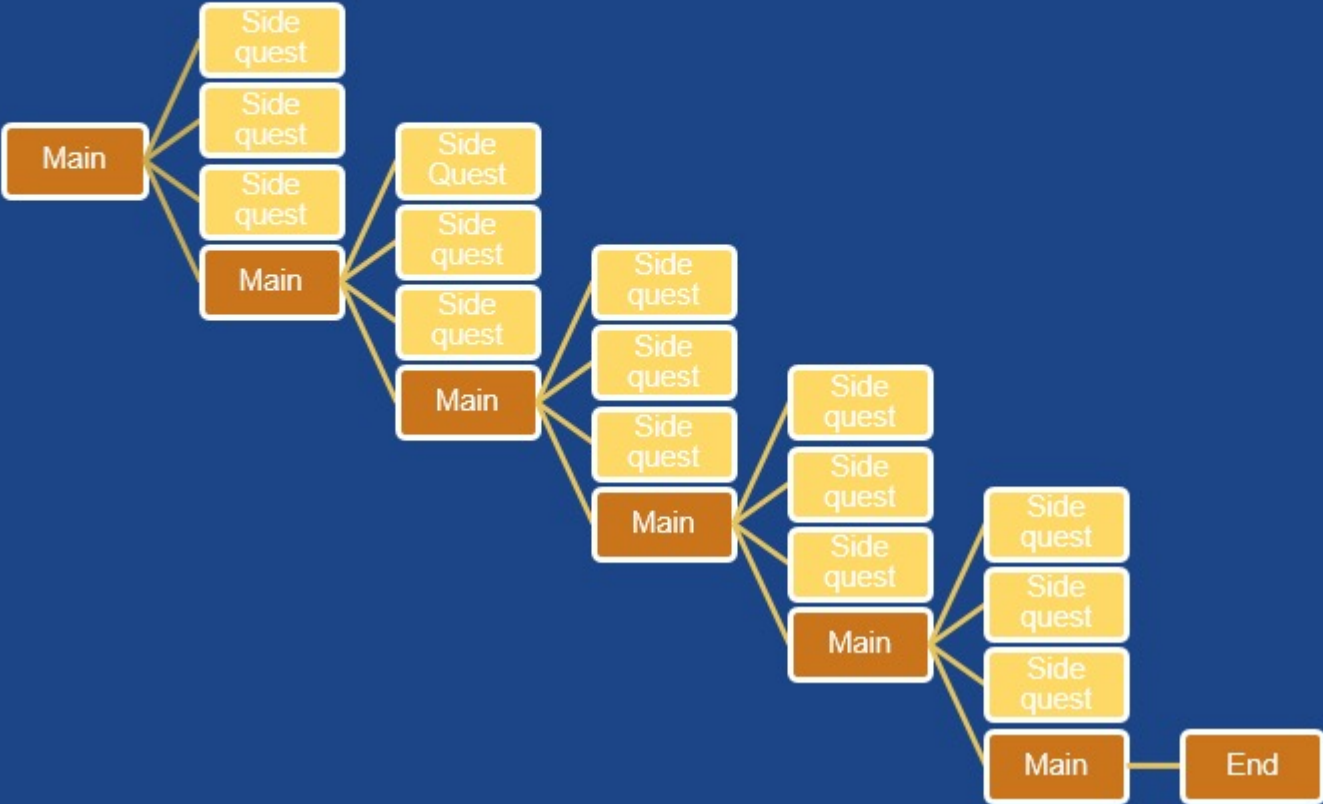
LINEAR STORY WITH SIGNIFICANT "B-STORY" † †



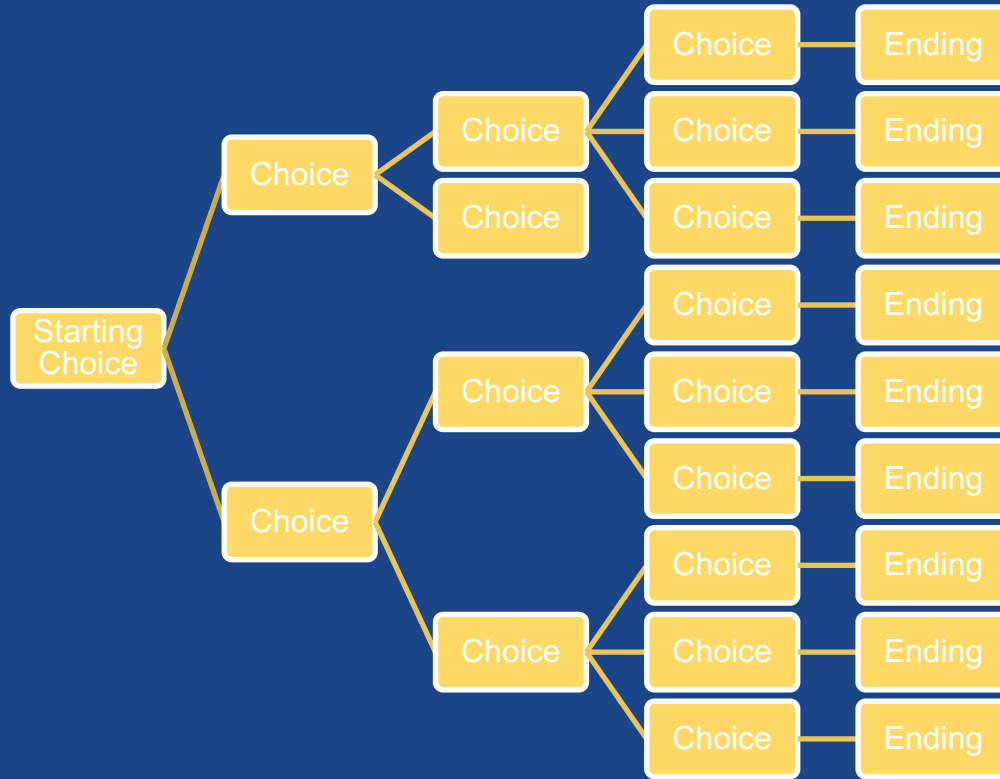
LINEAR WITH GATED SIDE QUESTS



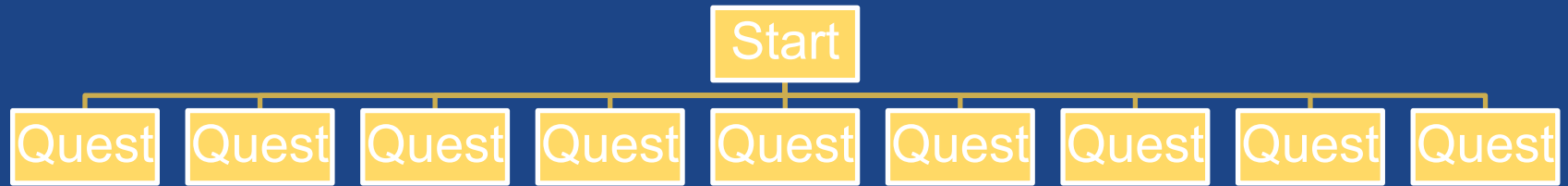
LINEAR WITH HARD-GATED SIDE QUESTS



NON-LINEAR BRANCHING STORYLINE

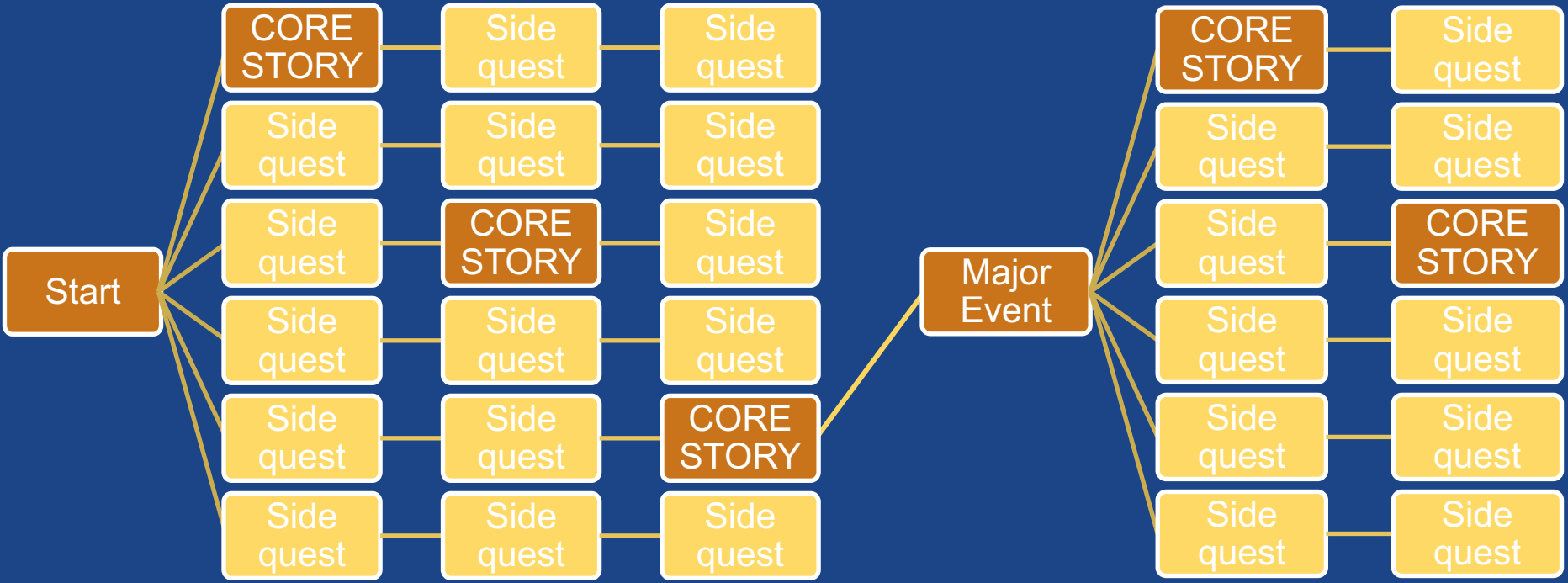


MODULAR STORYTELLING





MODULAR WITH GATES

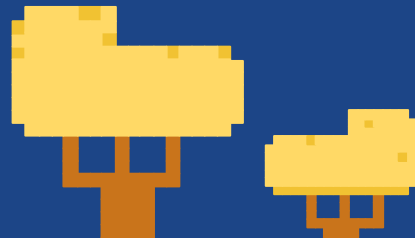




GAME PROGRESSION VS. NARRATIVE PROGRESSION



STORY STRUCTURE

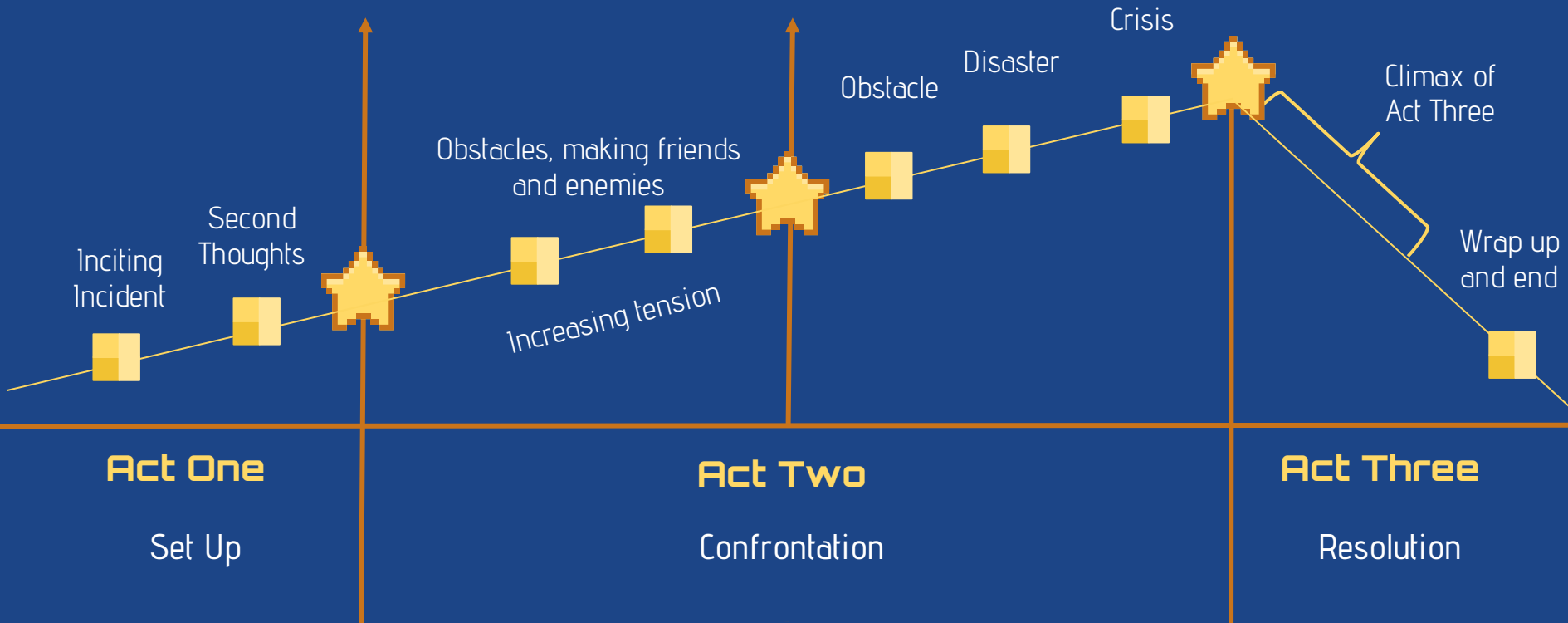


Three Act Structure

Climax of Act One

Midpoint
(a big twist/increase the stakes)

Climax of Act Two

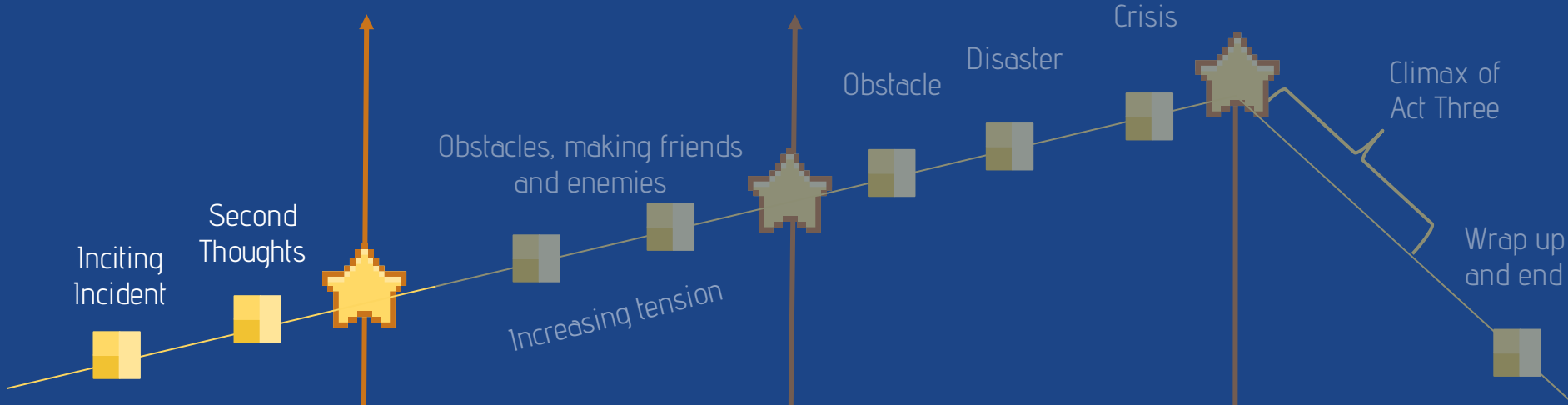


Three Act Structure

Climax of Act One

Midpoint
(a big twist/increase the stakes)

Climax of Act Two



Inciting Incident

Second Thoughts

Obstacles, making friends and enemies

Increasing tension

Obstacle

Disaster

Crisis

Climax of Act Three

Wrap up and end

Act One

Act Two

Act Three

Set Up

Confrontation

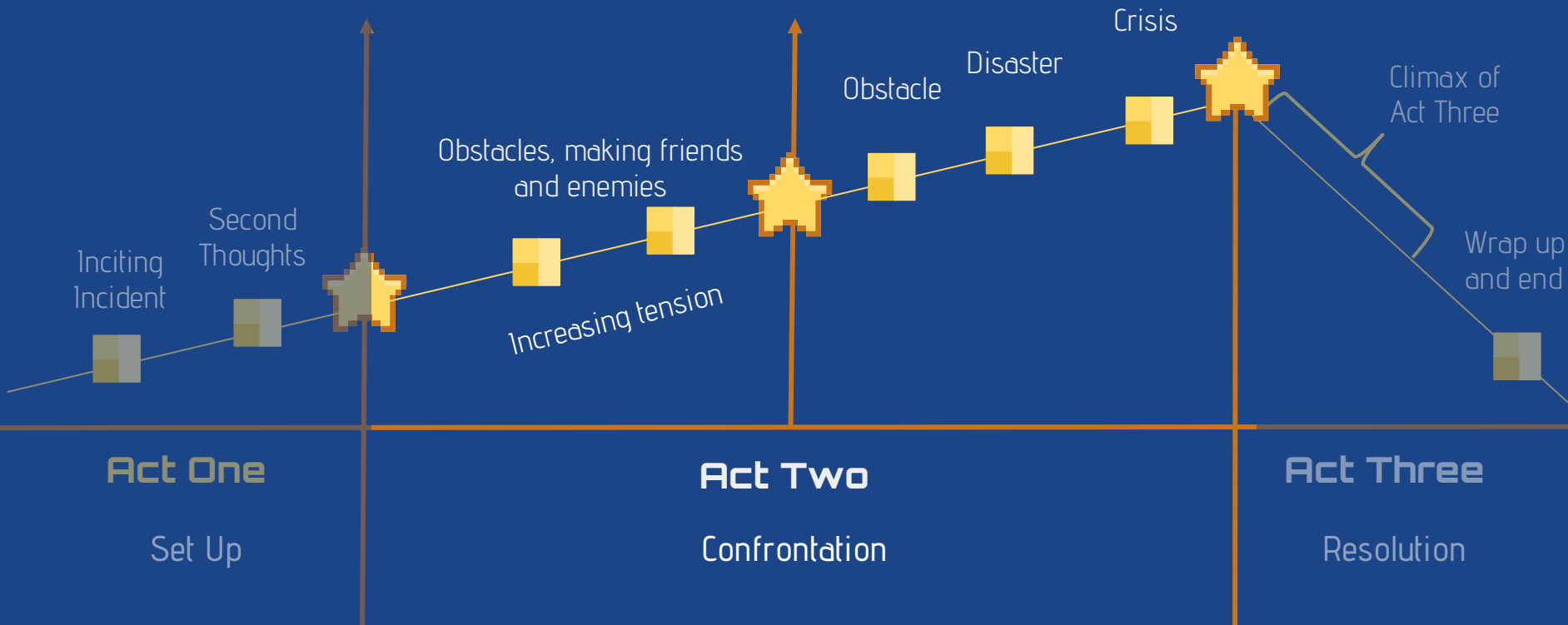
Resolution

Three Act Structure

Climax of Act One

Midpoint
(a big twist/increase the stakes)

Climax of Act Two

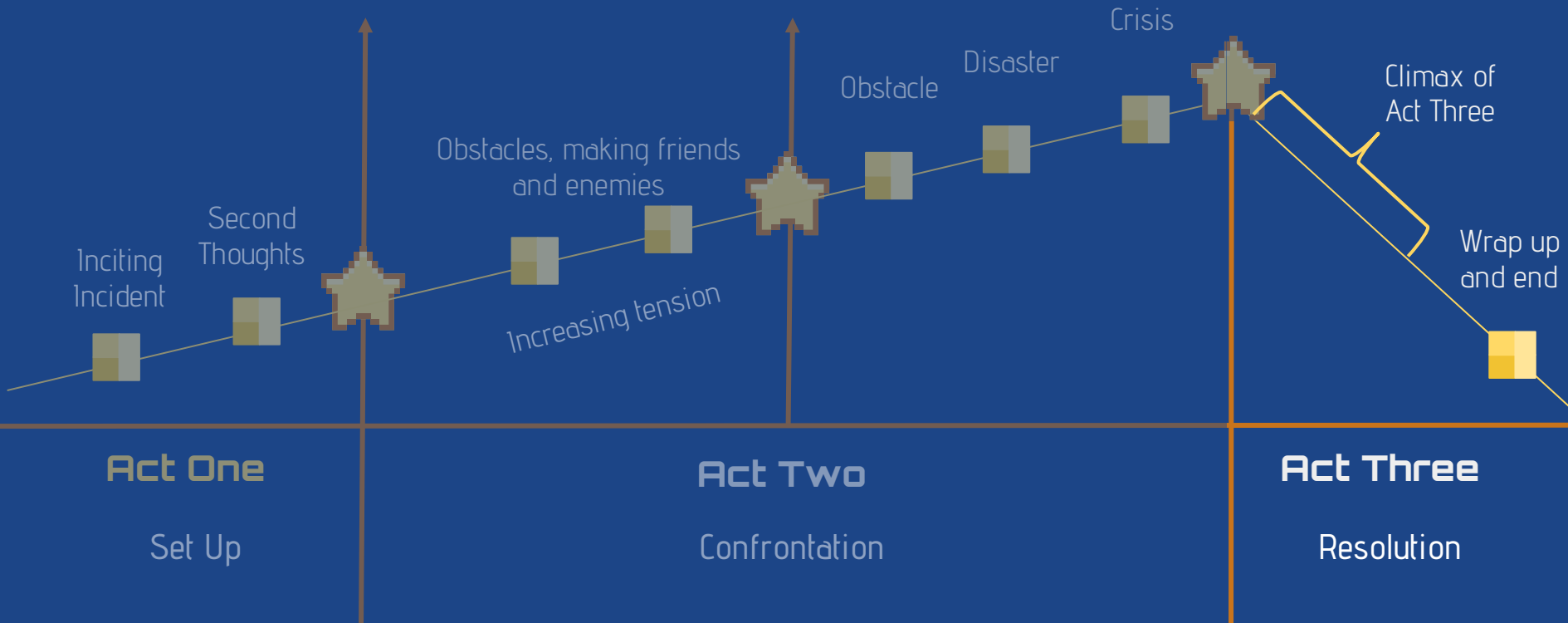


Three Act Structure

Climax of Act One

Midpoint
(a big twist/increase the stakes)

Climax of Act Two





STORY ARCS

FOR NPCs

Keep each character to one story arc. Otherwise it gets overly complicated, especially if you have multiple characters.





**The same thing, but
different.**

Questions?



WHAT IS YOUR GAME'S
THEME?





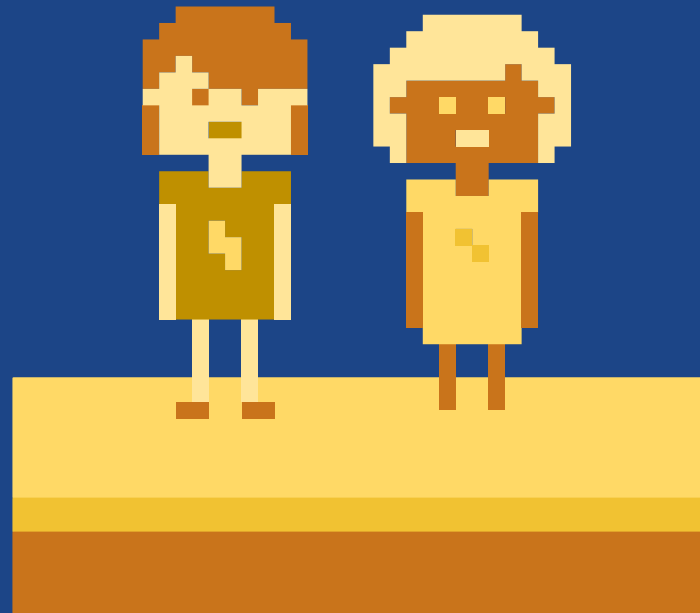
“War, war never changes.
Men do. Through the roads they walk.”

— **Fallout 4**




WHAT'S IN A THEME

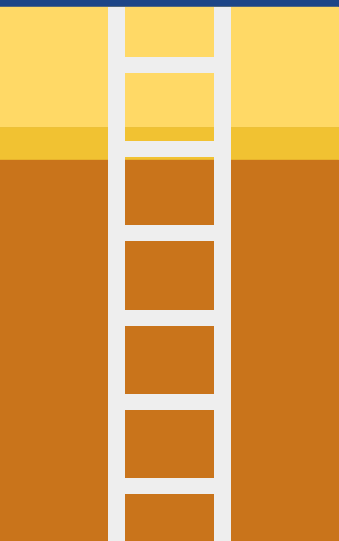
- Related to but not the same as genre
- It's what you're saying about the world (game or real)
- Theme isn't just story but is connected to gameplay





IDENTIFYING A THEME

1. Summarize the plot in one sentence. Don't forget to include game elements, such as HOW the player does this.
 2. Work out what the game is about.
 3. Identify the insight or truth that was learned about the subject. How did the characters or world change? What lesson did the resolution of the conflict teach?
- 





CONFLICTED THEMES



WHAT YOUR STORY SAYS

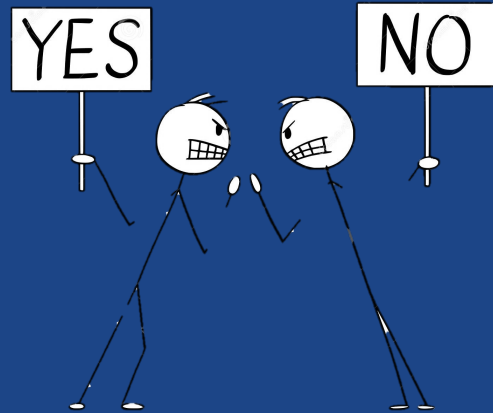
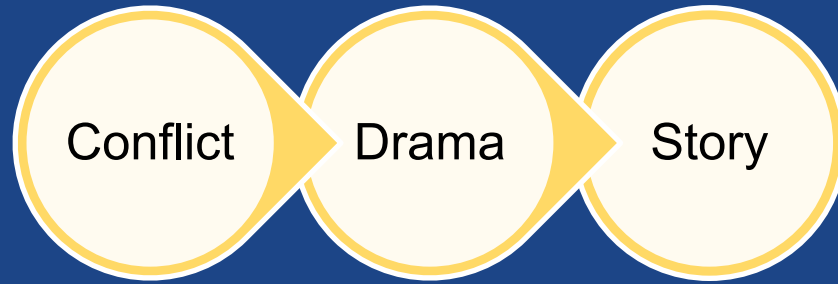
Our heroes are good, honorable people, fighting to defeat the evil invaders.



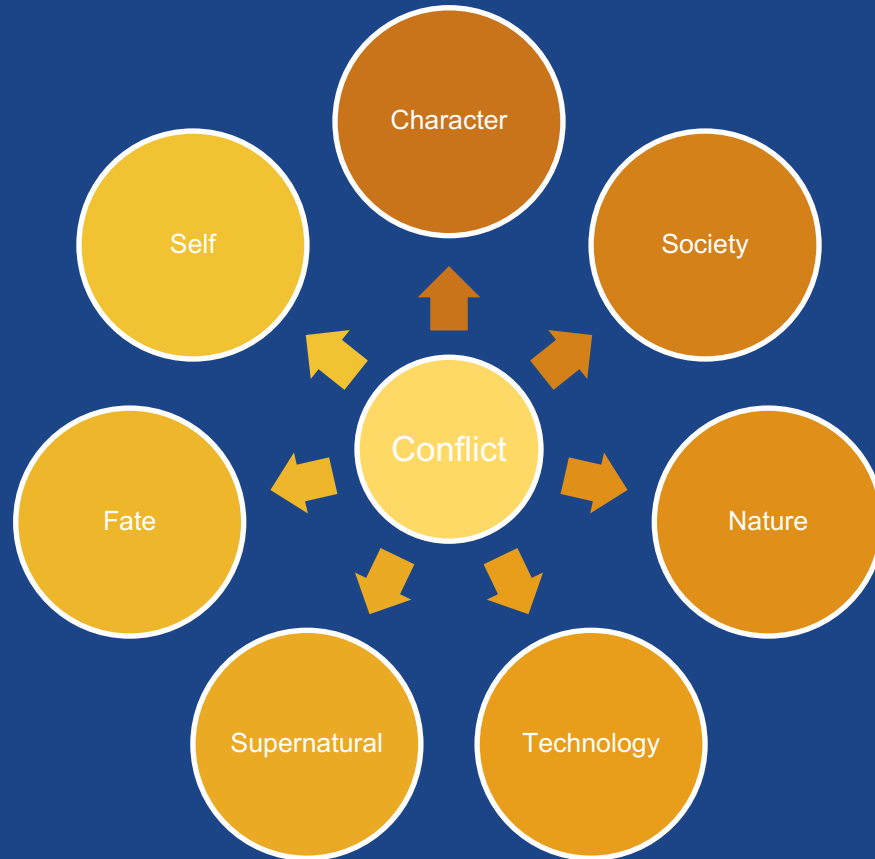
WHAT YOUR GAMEPLAY SAYS

Hold my sword while I loot this peasant's cottage and steal their last bag of grain.

STORY IS CONFLICT

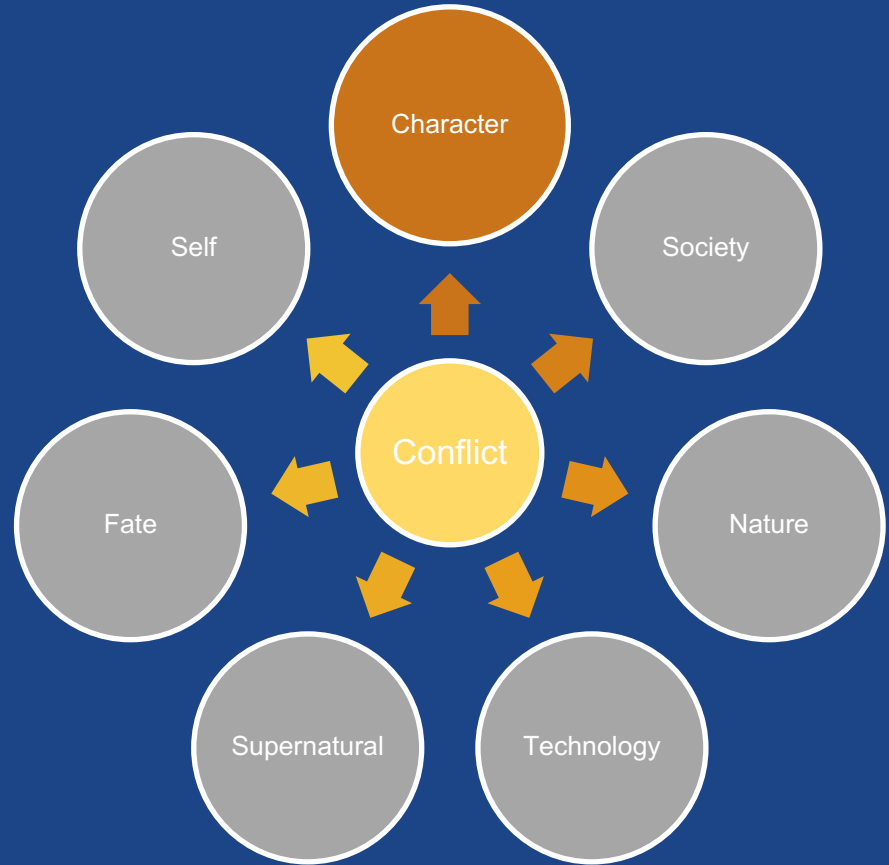


KINDS OF CONFLICT



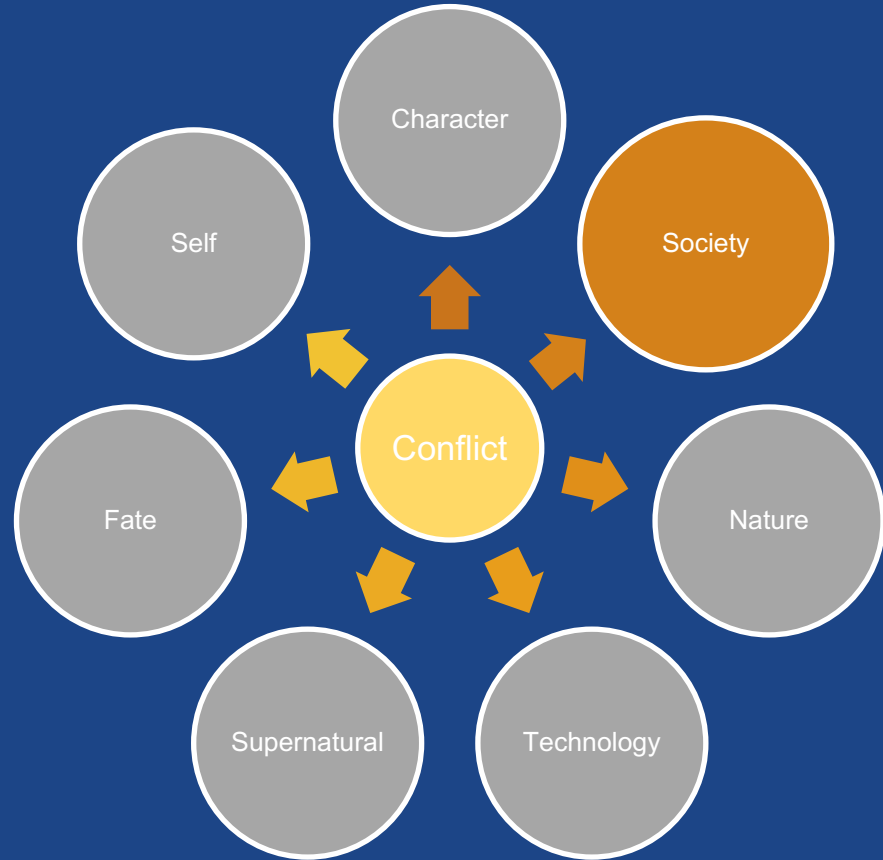


Character



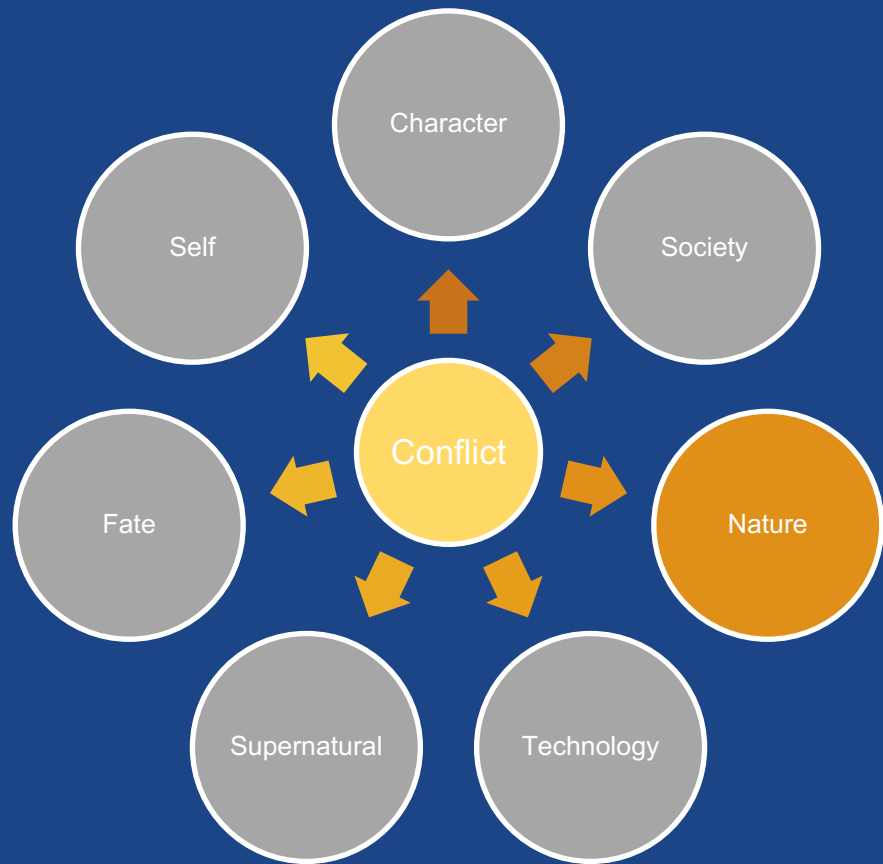


SOCIETY



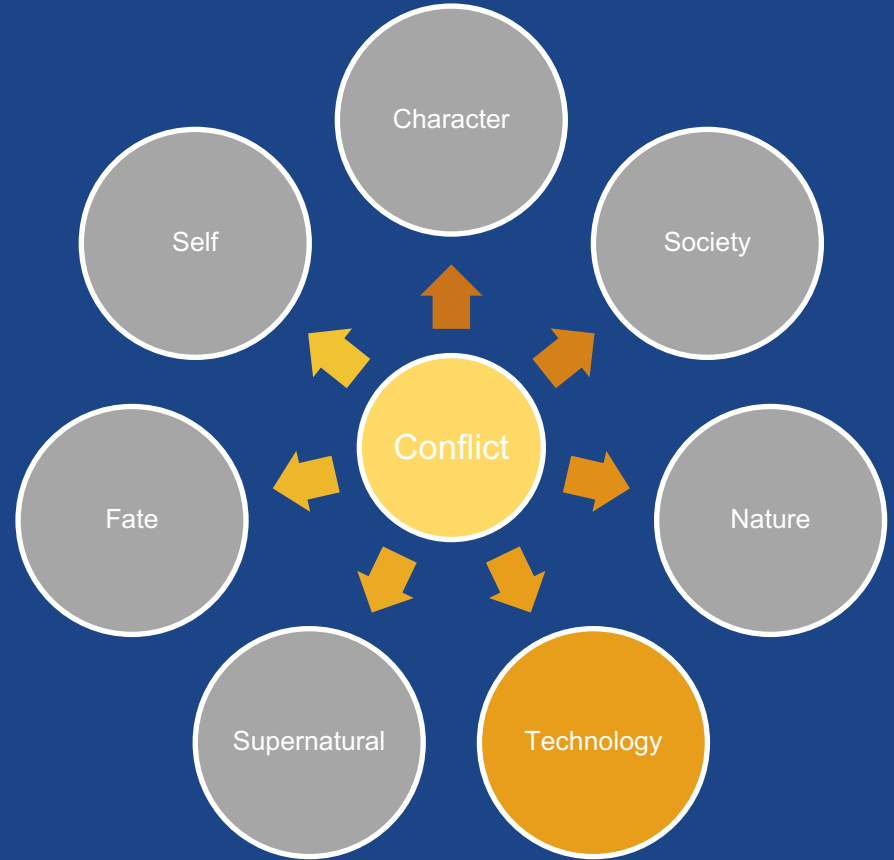


NATURE



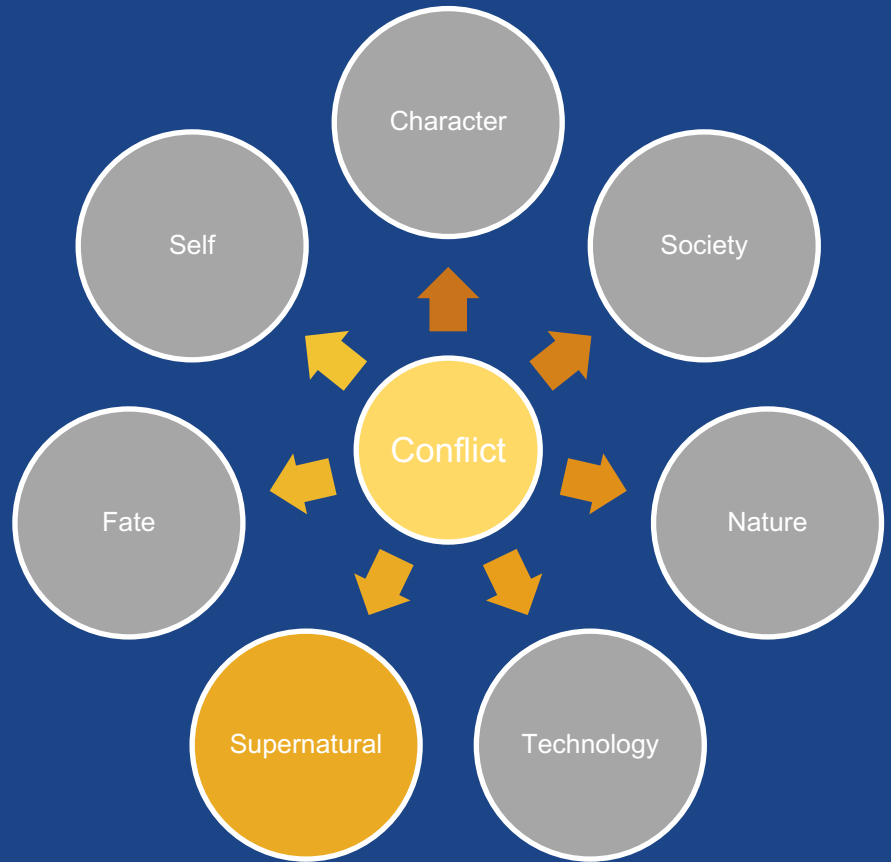


TECHNOLOGY



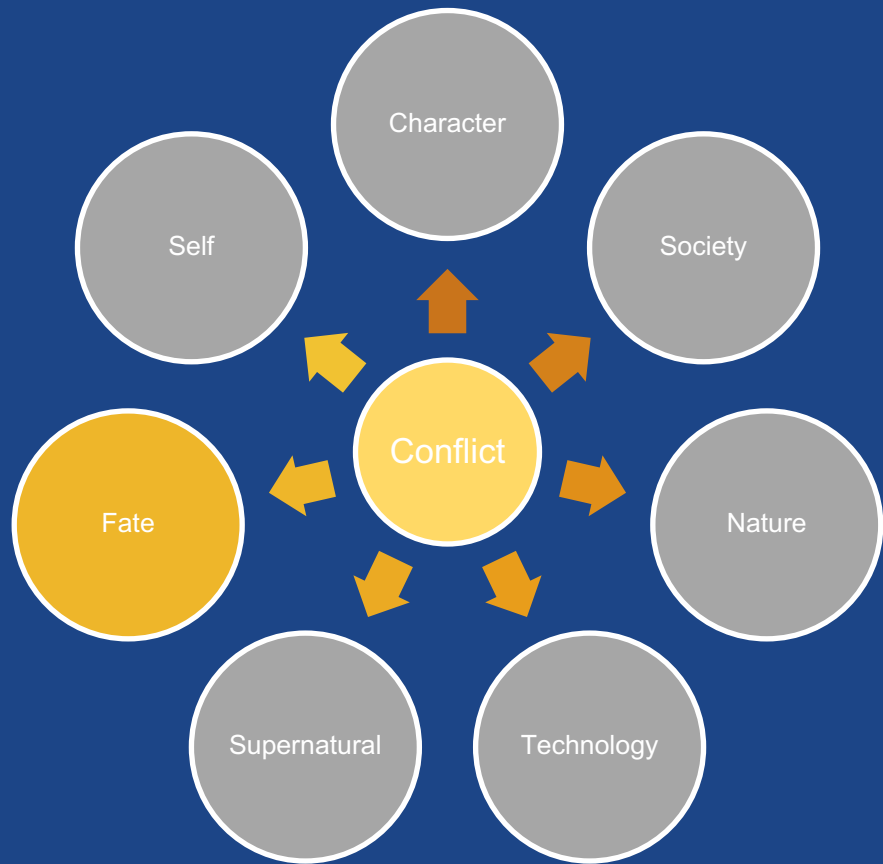


SUPERNATURAL



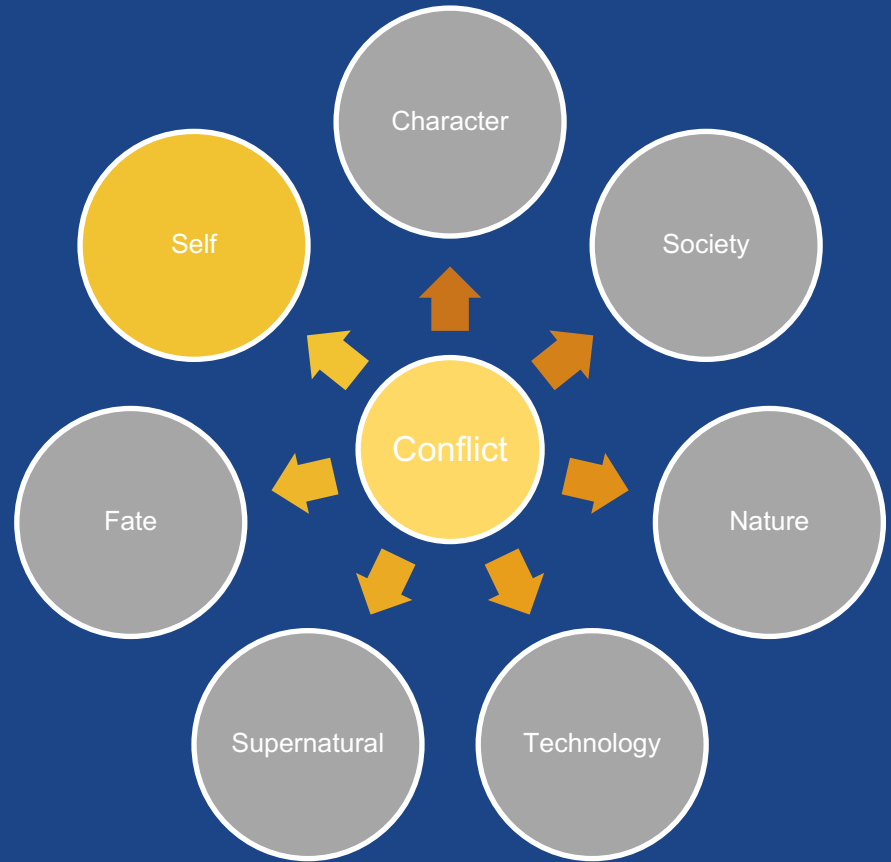


FATE





SELF



Create Your Hunter

- Presets
- Face
- Skin
- Hairstyle
- Eyebrows
- Eyes
- Nose
- Mouth
- Facial Hair
- Makeup 1
- Makeup 2

Hairstyle

Type



4/4

Change Color

Confirm

Confirm Cancel

CREATING CHARACTERS



WHAT'S MY
MOTIVATION?



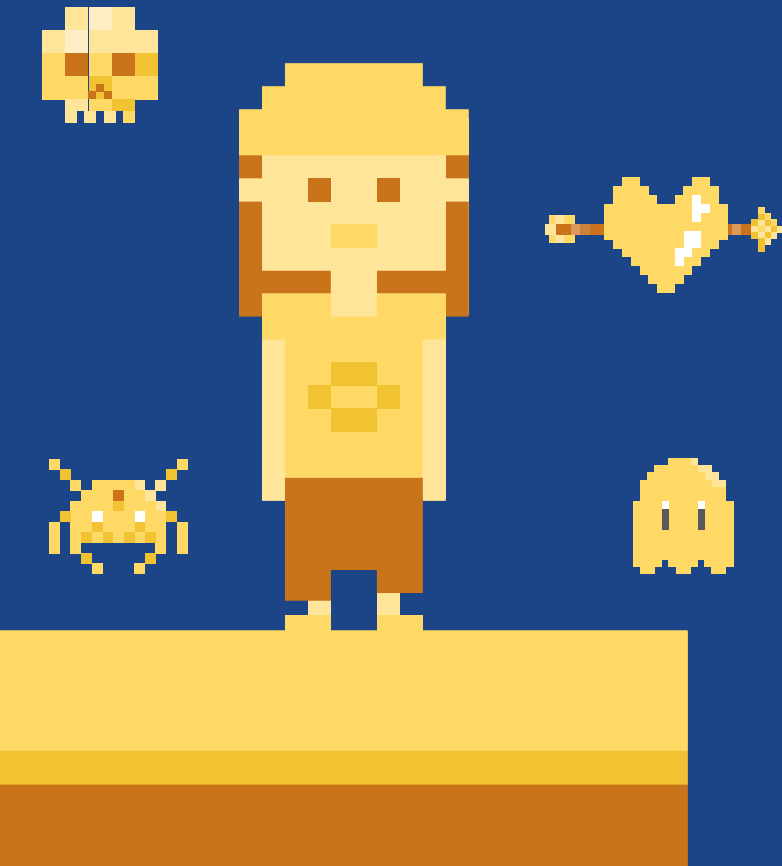
THE PROTAGONIST(S)



Who the player is?

- What does the character want?
- What's the point of the game?
- How much agency does the player have in deciding this?

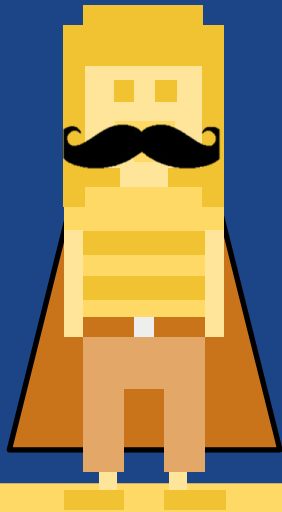
MAKING YOUR PROTAGONIST INTERESTING



Top Tips

- Put them in danger
- Show they're willing to sacrifice themselves for others
- Show their misfortune is undeserved
- Share their painful past
- Show they are brave
- Taking responsibility for them (sims style)

THE ANTAGONIST(S)



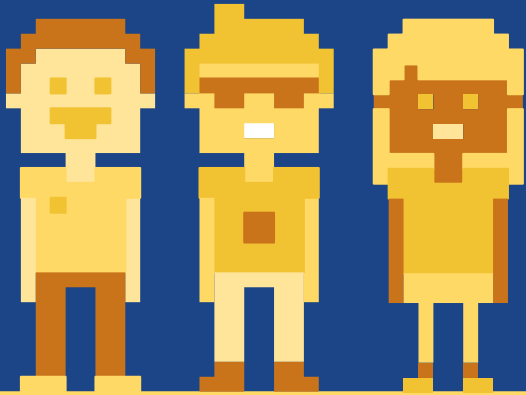
Who's stopping the player?

- What does the antagonist want?
- How do their wants make things hard for the player?
- What are they willing to do to get what they want?

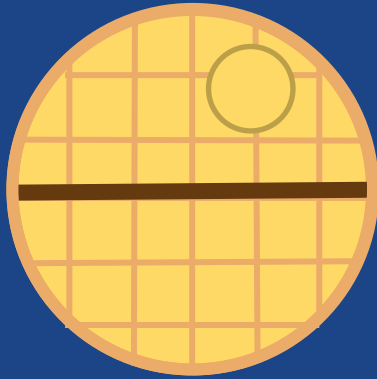
NPCs

Who else is in the world

- What do other people want?
- Are they helping or hindering the player?
- Do their motivations make sense?
What's their end goal?



Society and Factions



What motivates factions,
corporations, galactic
empires?



MOTIVATING YOUR TEAM



Questions?





ANYONE CAN WRITE

But should they?

By the way, here's some concept art
I did for your game.



**DO YOU HAVE
TIME?**

Things I've been asked to do as writer

- Write dialogue (including barks, cutscenes and interactive conversation)
- Design and document characters (personas, backstories, relationships etc)
- Create item descriptions
- Design fake languages
- Write notes, books, audio scripts for in-world items
- Design and document the world lore and story in the story bible
- Design quests and quest systems
- Script cutscenes
- Direct voice actors
- Respond to journalists and write articles
- Create game screenshot posters with character quotes
- Write social media posts
- Name locations in the world
- Create factions in the world and flesh them out with motivations, histories and key characters

Narrative Designer vs. writer

Writer

- Advocate for the game story
- Story premise and arc
- Story background, game lore and character development
- Scriptwriting for dialogue and cutscenes
- World building
- Communicating the project vision through the team

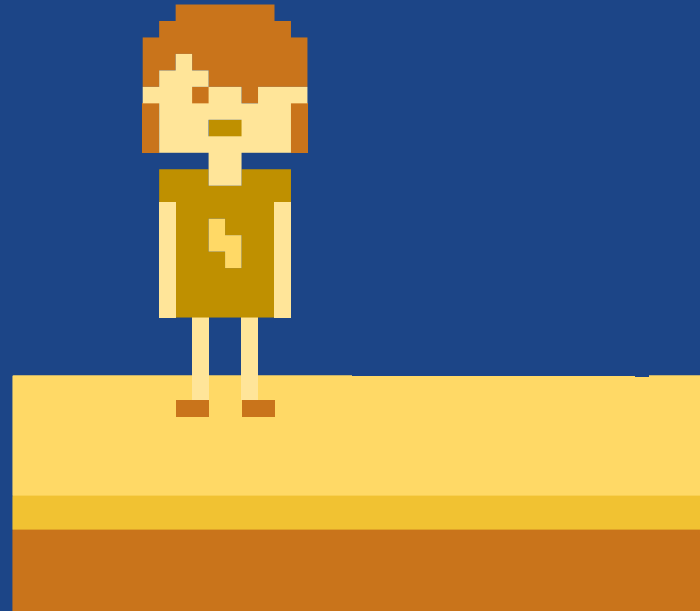
Narrative Designer

- Advocate for the player experience of the story
- Designs how the story will be delivered to the player
- Quest design



What to look for in a writer

- Experience writing dialogue (tv, film, radio plays, theatre, comics, other games)
- Ability to be concise
- Ideas around non-verbal narrative delivery.
- Understanding of how non-linear narrative works (in interactive media, not film/tv)
- Great skills around story and character arcs and building stories that are satisfying, varied and open to expansion.



What to look for in a narrative designer

- Understanding of the game development process and the iterative nature of development
- Ability to design quests (and work with programmers and designers to implement it)
- Some game engine experience helps, but more helpful is an ability to envision and request features in a way that makes sense to the rest of the team
- Meticulous record keeping and planning
- Understanding of all the different ways you could deliver the story and how to do it effectively to keep them engaged without being overwhelmed.
- Patience.



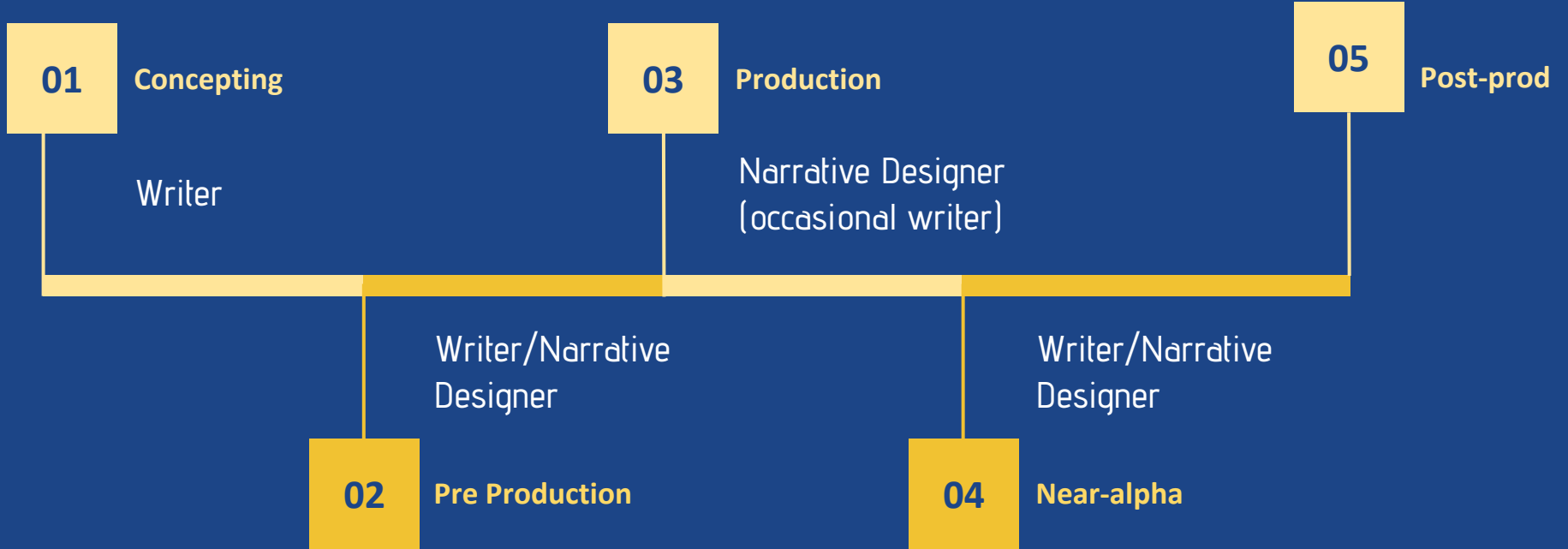


THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE



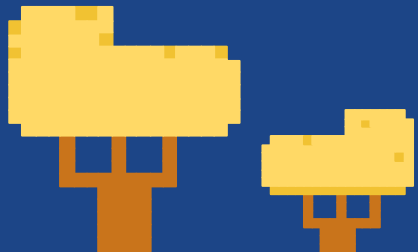


WHEN TO HIRE WHO



┆ Six Months Before Alpha ┆

“Cool, so we built most of a game and we’ve got this really cool dolphin with a gun for a nose and it’s running around the ocean shooting everyone. Can you give us a story and like, mission dialogue and stuff?”





No person is an island

- Writers rooms and how they help

Helpful Roles for a Writer's Room

Creative Director

Lead designer

Writer

Narrative designer

Art director

Audio director

Questions?



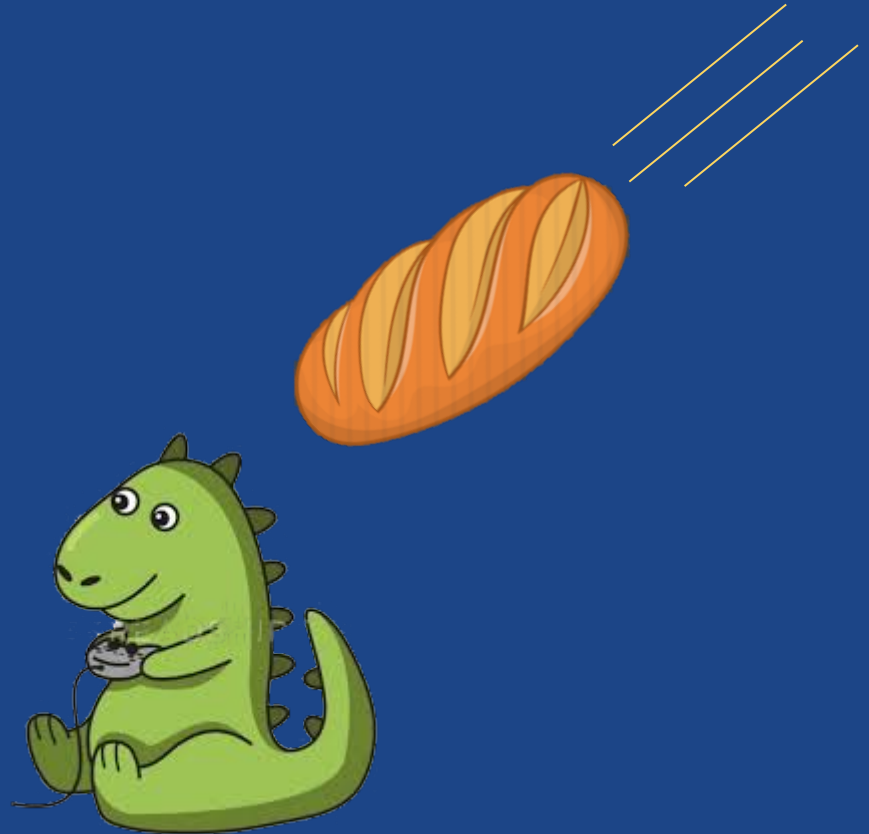
WRITING

A still from the movie Toy Story showing Woody and Buzz Lightyear. Woody is on the left, looking slightly concerned. Buzz is on the right, wearing his green and purple space suit, with his arms raised in a dramatic gesture. The background is a simple room with a door and a window.

WRITING EVERYWHERE

DELIVERING YOUR STORY

Deliver the story in breadcrumbs, don't throw the whole loaf at the player all at once.



ENVIRONMENTAL STORYTELLING

Examples

- You can hear a helicopter circling somewhere but can't see it.
- A decayed cake rests in the centre of a circle of toys, a brightly-coloured party hat placed on a single chair.
- A wall of family pictures, one has half of it missing.
- A door with scratch marks around the handle, an empty cage and blood spatters in the room.
- A section of forest where no birds sing and the wind doesn't blow.
- A room is filled with plungers attached to every conceivable flat surface.
- An abandoned house with lights on and food left half eaten on the table.

MENUS AND ITEM DESCRIPTIONS



Stygia Dowser
Item Level 1
Binds when picked up
Unique
Use: Siphon Stygia from a Stygia Nexus in the Maw.
Divines and marks the minimap at the location of Stygia laden areas in the Maw while the Stygia Dowser remains in your inventory.
Requires Level 60



Plank Shield
A solid union of scrap and wood.

A Take LB Switch Panel



Solar panel
Powers habitat oxygen generation and other habitat modules. Converts available sunlight into low power electrical energy.

Quartz x2 Titanium x2 Copper ore

TRAINER Item

Potion



Heal 30 damage from 1 of your Pokémon.

You may play any number of item cards during your turn.



Bit Cartridge
x11



Light Ammo
x19



Sentry Sabre

Bit Cartridge
Cartridge storing an amount of bits, used as currency in the colonies.
Bits are an electronic currency generated by room-sized Earth Directorate "miniframes" back on Earth. They consist of non-duplicatable codes and ciphers, and can be transferred from one cartridge to another.

E Take Hold E Take All

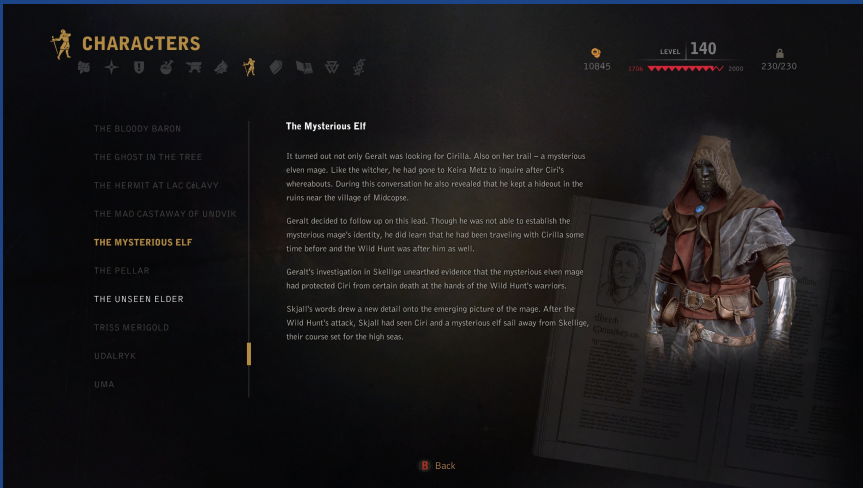
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Basic Tunic



A modest tunic for the modest traveler.





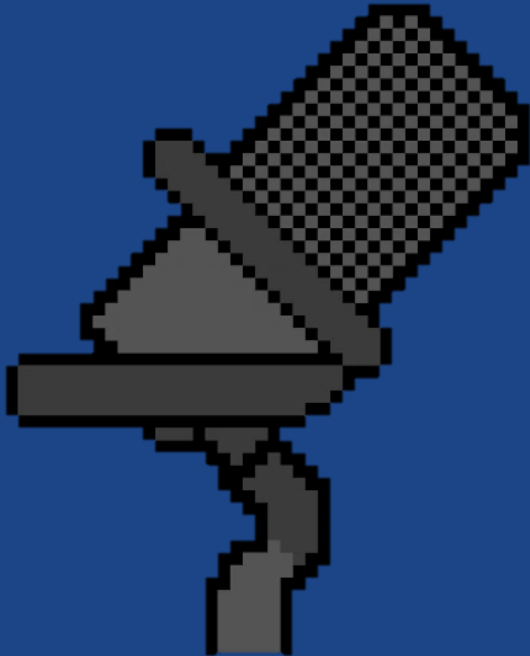
MAKING UP YOUR OWN LANGUAGE

Audio tools to create fake languages
Using emotive sounds



DIALOGUE

- To voice or not to voice?



Considerations:

- Budget
- Localisation
- DLC/Sequel plans
- Number of characters
- Variations of NPC dialogue
- Diversity of voices



DIVERSE CHARACTERS



“Y’all gott hear about this snake I found.”

JOHN JAMES



“Like OMG did you see that snake?”

LIZ PATTERSON



“Now that is an intresting speciamen, dangernoodalis if I’m not mistaken”

JENNA SMITH






Inner or Outer Monologue

- Some games choose to bare their protagonist's thoughts.
 - Others stick to factual information.
- Some keep that information in a notepad or journal.

Localisation



"Good evening,
gentlemen. All your base
are belong to us!"

RESOURCES

Creating Emotion in Games

David Freeman

The Narrative Design Toolbox

Tobias Heussner

Writing for Video Game Genres

Wendy Despain (ed)

Story

Robert McKee

Video Game Storytelling

Evan Skolnick, D.G. Chichester, et al.





QUESTIONS





THANKS!



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