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Lecture 6

Interactive Storytelling

Gameplay vs. Narrative

- **Narrative**: non-interactive
  - Designer created narrative
  - Player experiences it
  - Even if there are choices
- **Gameplay**: interactive
  - Very definition of a game
  - Entirely player driven
- How do you combine these?

Elements of Game Narrative

- **Characters**
  - Protagonist: player controlled character
  - Supporting characters: NPCs
- **Storyline**
  - How does the story progress?
- **Dialogue**
  - Story vehicle in games and fiction
  - Easy way to allow player choice

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Characters: Agency vs. Empathy

- Like gameplay vs. narrative dichotomy
- **Agency**: Character represents the player
  - Can be utilitarian (allowing player choice)
  - Can support role playing, creativity
- **Empathy**: Develop emotional bond
  - Hard if complete player control
  - Requires some predefined personality

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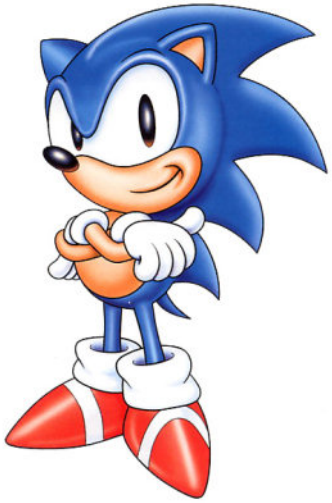
Characters vs. Avatars

Character ⟷ Avatar

Computer vs. Player Control

Computer Control ⟷ Player Control



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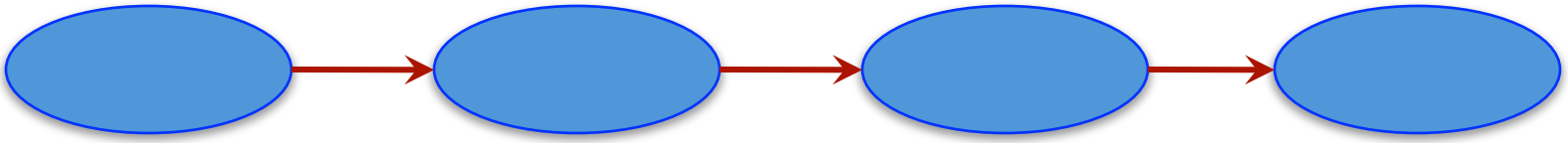
Storyline

- **Linear Storytelling**: Designer directed
  - Success is adherence to story
  - Very easy to design (cutscenes!)



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Example: *Fracture 2*

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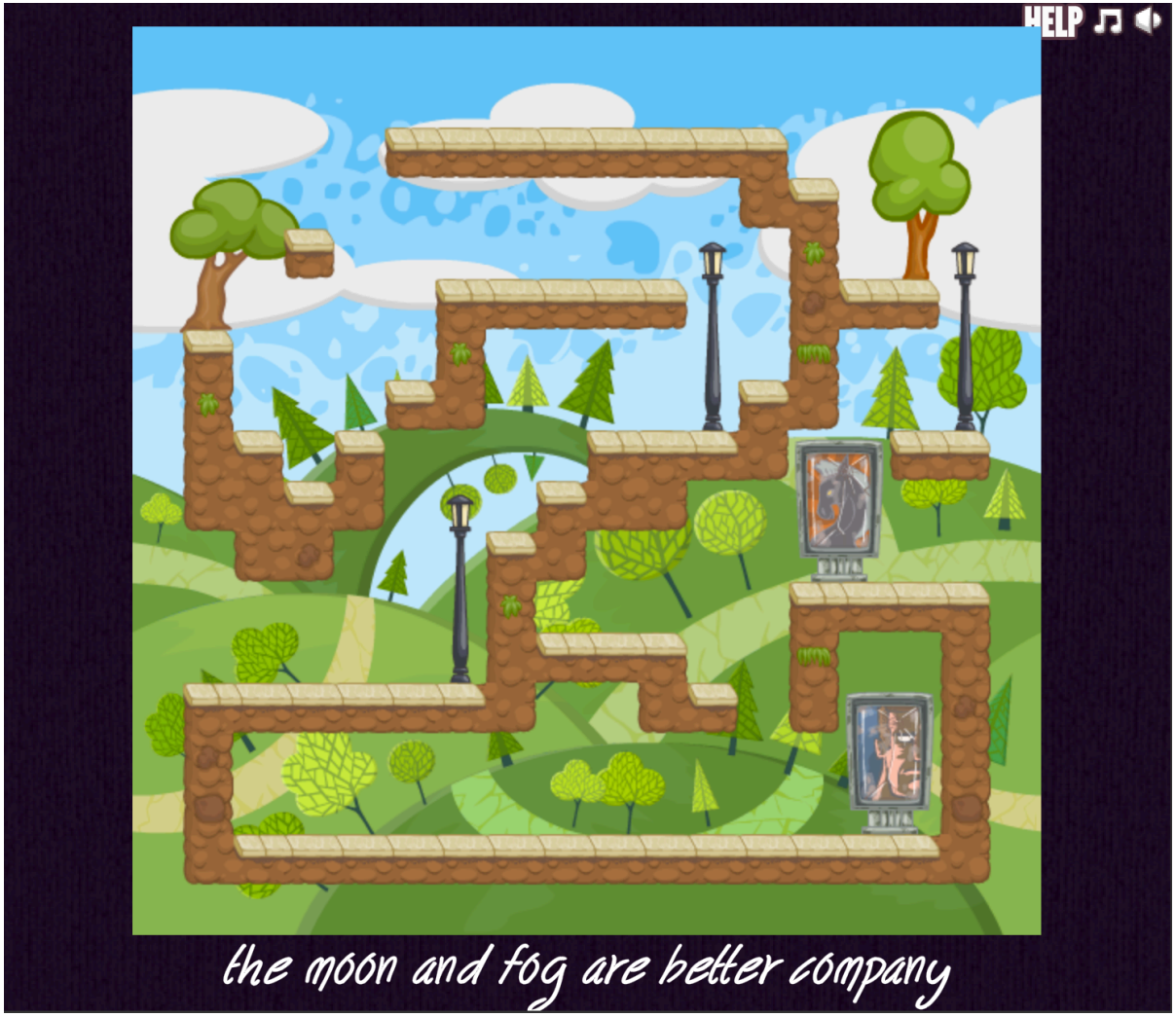
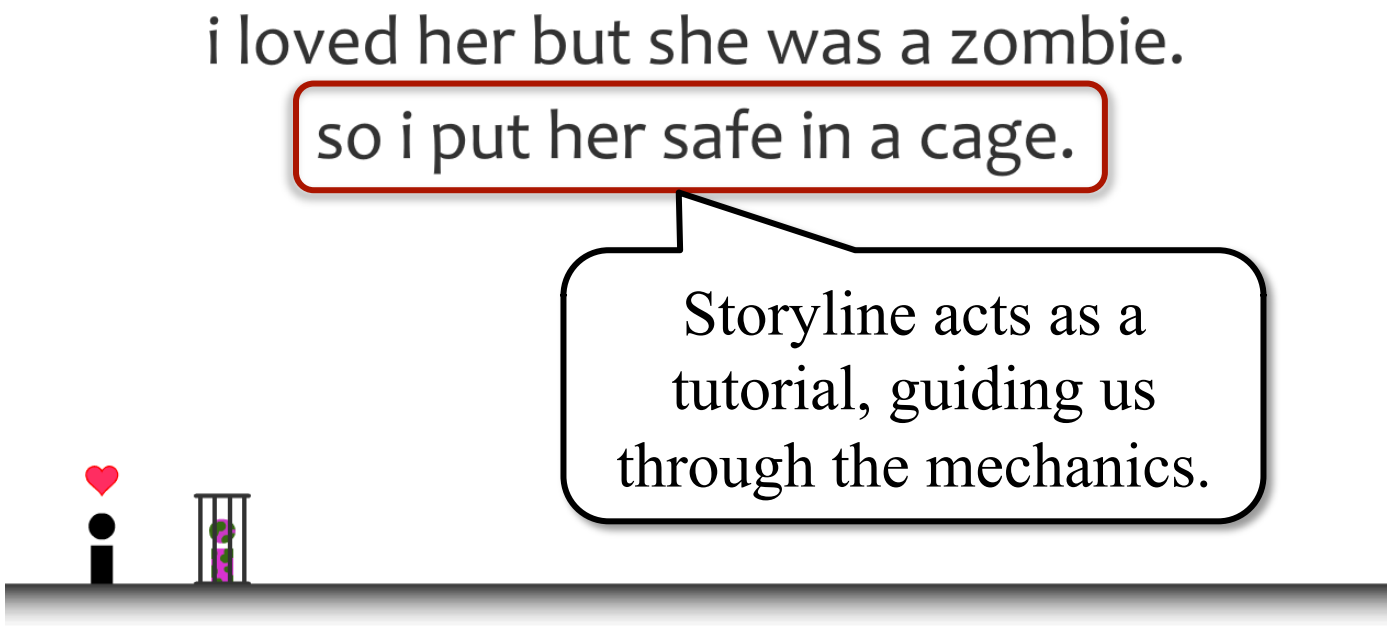


Example: *I Saw Her Standing There*

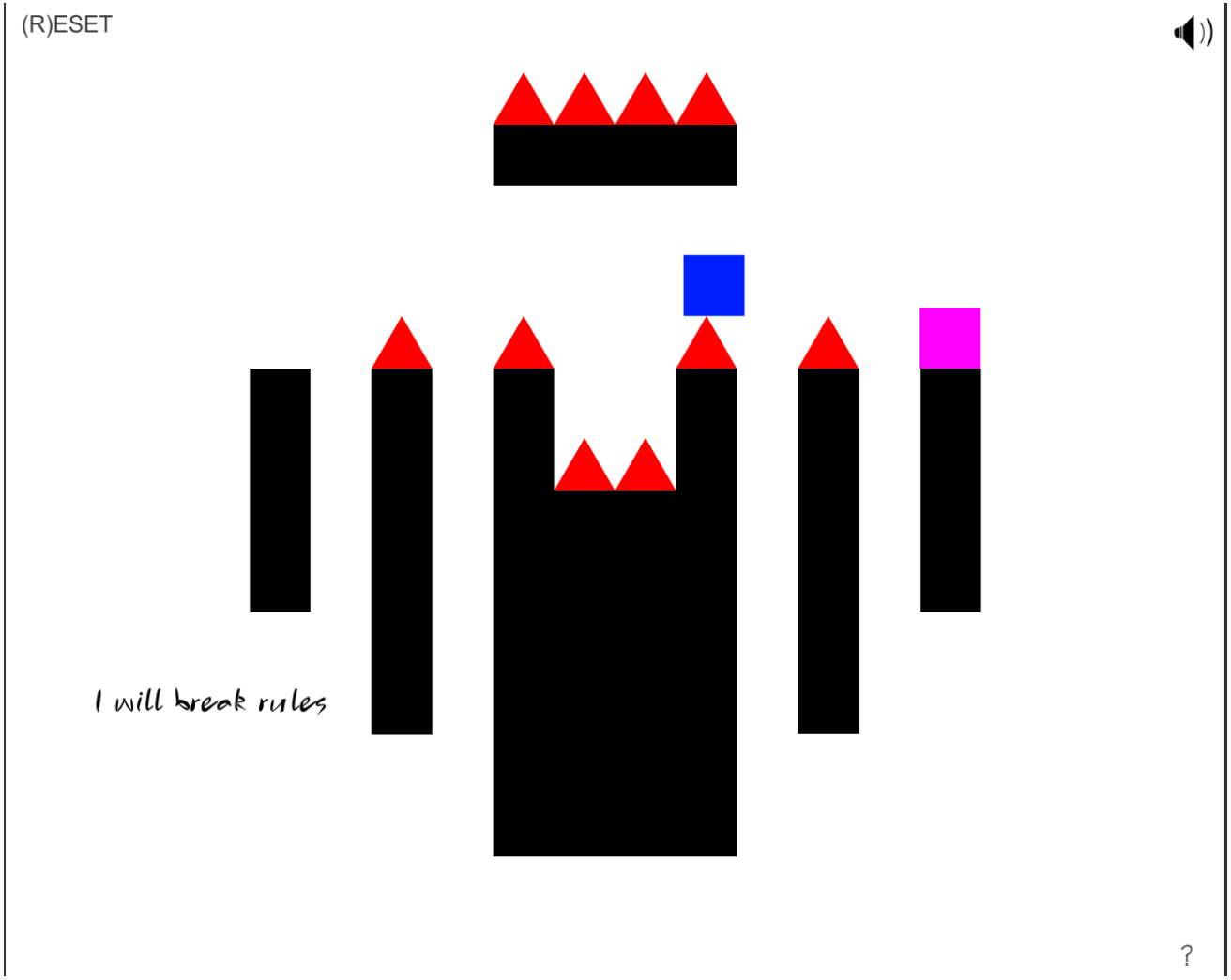
i loved her but she was a zombie.

so i put her safe in a cage.

Example: *I Saw Her Standing There*



Going Meta: *Pretentious Game*



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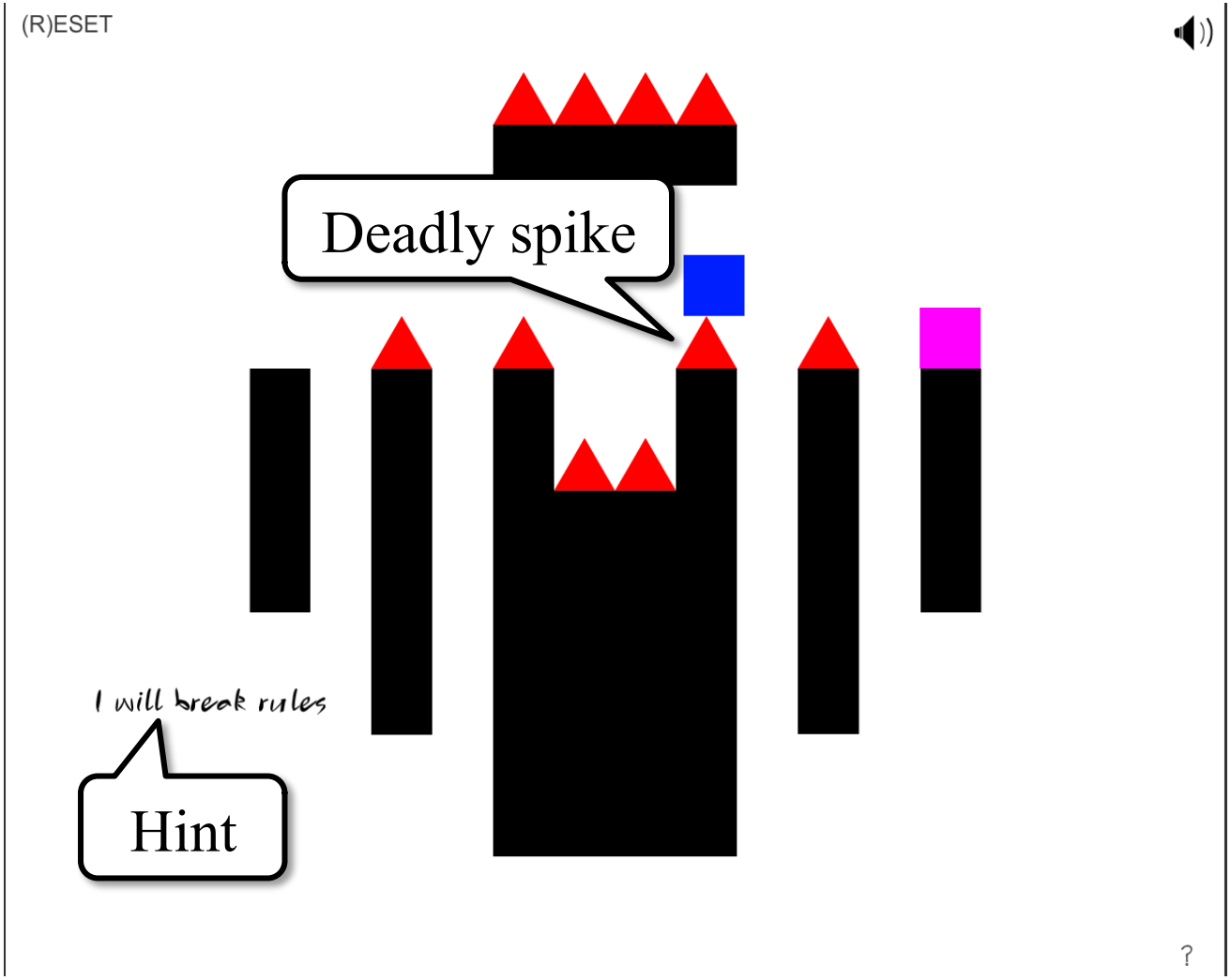
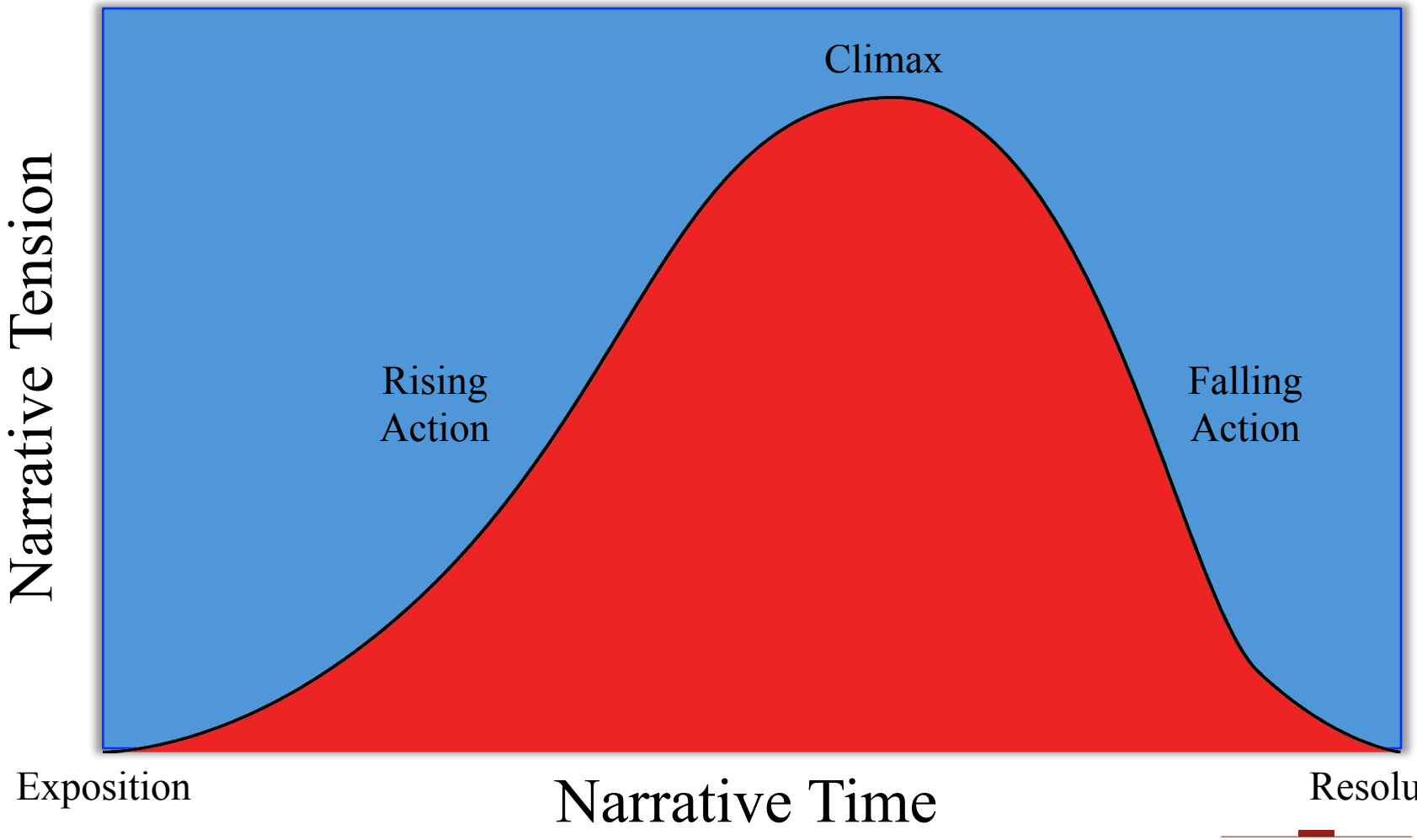
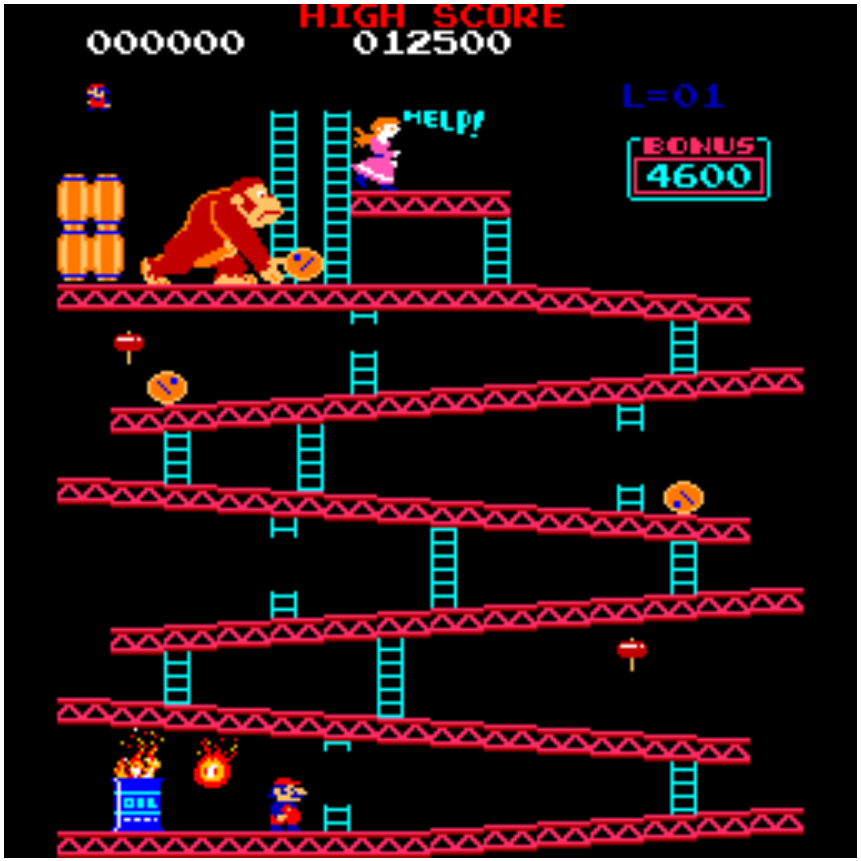


Introducing a Dramatic Arc

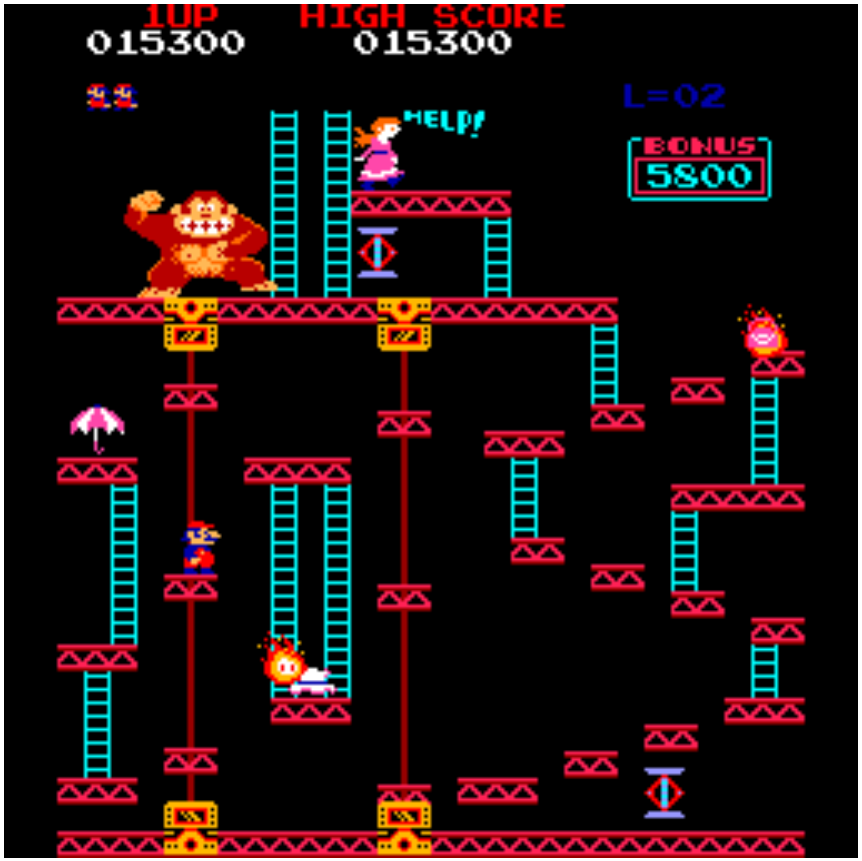


Example: *Donkey Kong*

Exposition, Act I



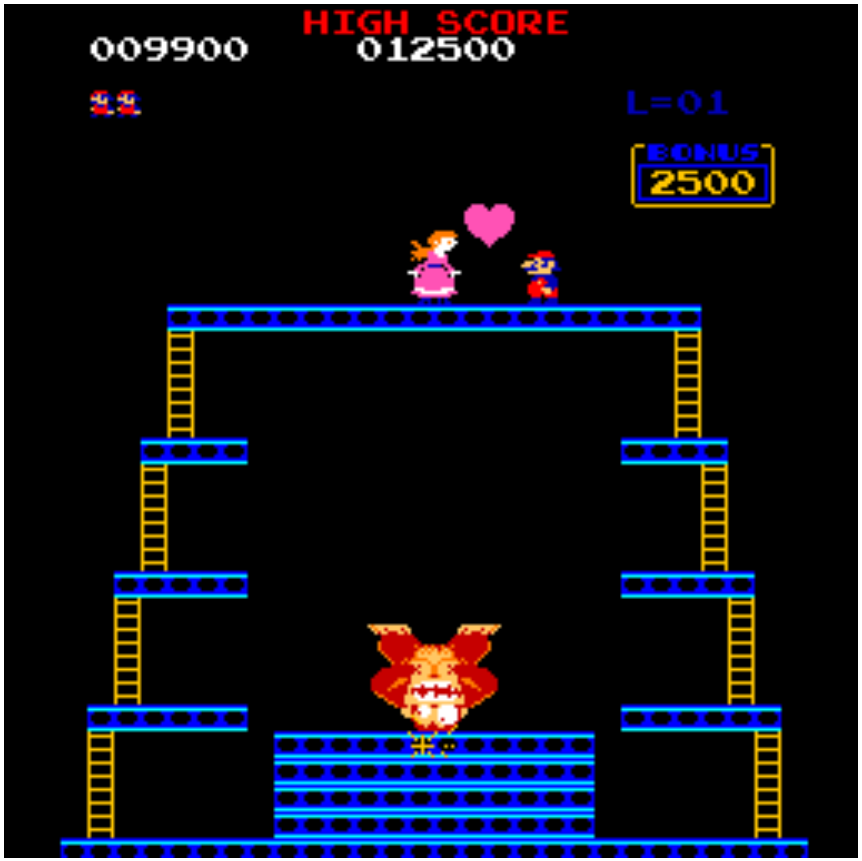
Rising Action, Act II



Example: *Donkey Kong*

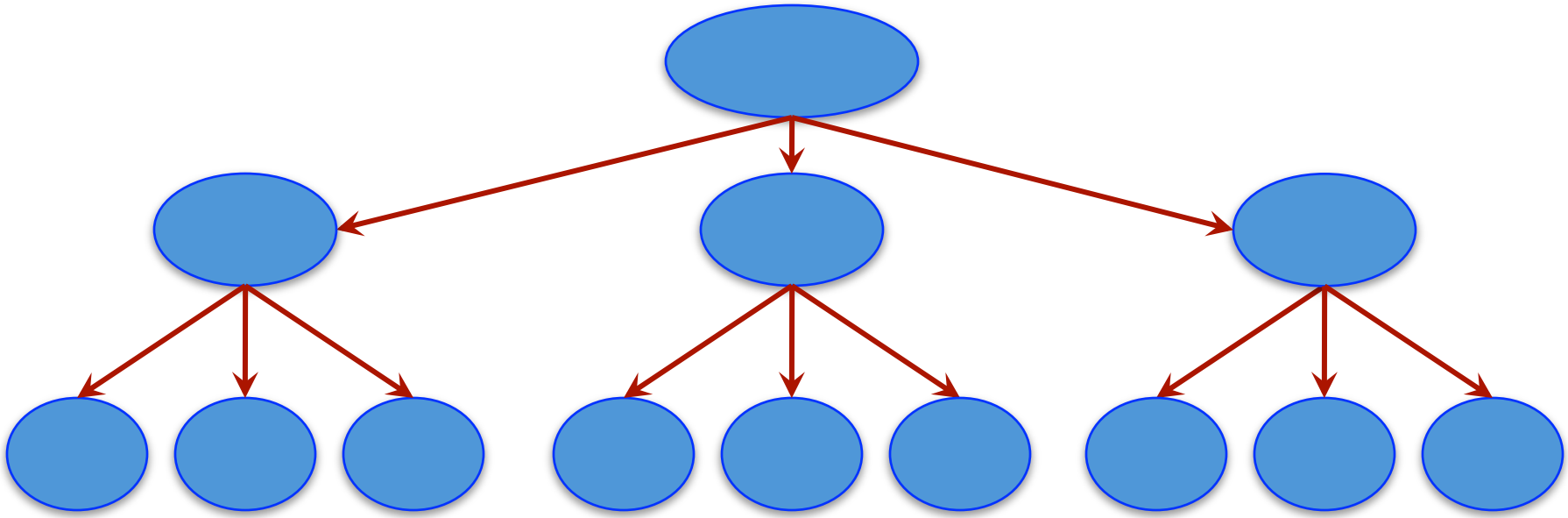
Climax, Act III

Denouement



Storyline

- **Branching Storytelling**: Player directed
  - *Choose Your Own Adventure*
  - Content becomes very expensive!



Example: *Year Walk*

Aside: *Year Walk* and Story Vehicle

Årsgång

Year Walk

Year walking was at its core a vision quest with the purpose being to foresee the future. There were very rigid rules concerning the year walk and not adhering to them could prove very dangerous, even fatal.

How the practice of year walking came to be is shrouded in mystery, but it seems to have been a widespread practice in Sweden until the beginning of 19th century and in some rural

Example: Storyteller

Can move characters in each timeline

Affects state in other timelines

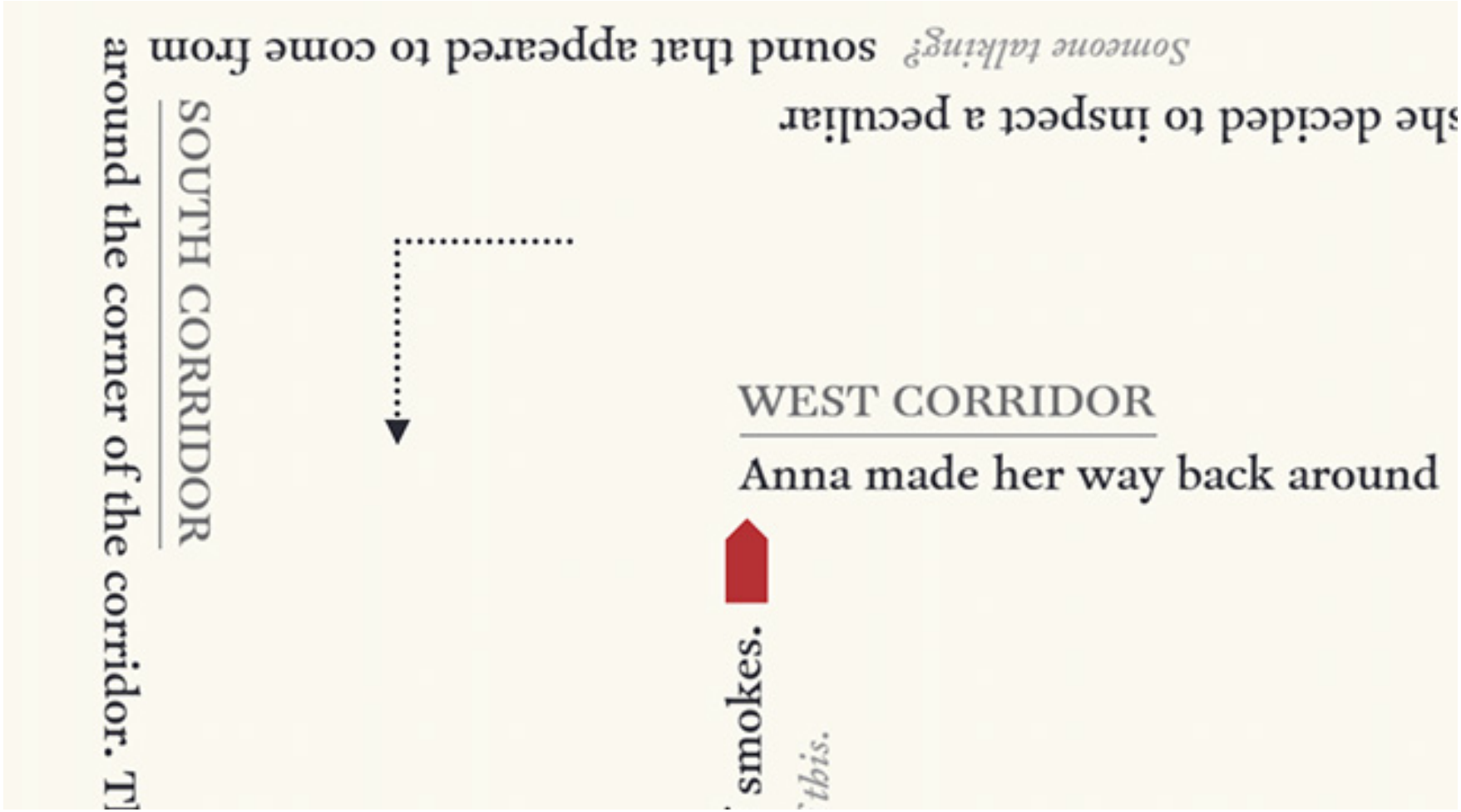
Example: Today I Die

Can replace words in the poem

Affects state of the world

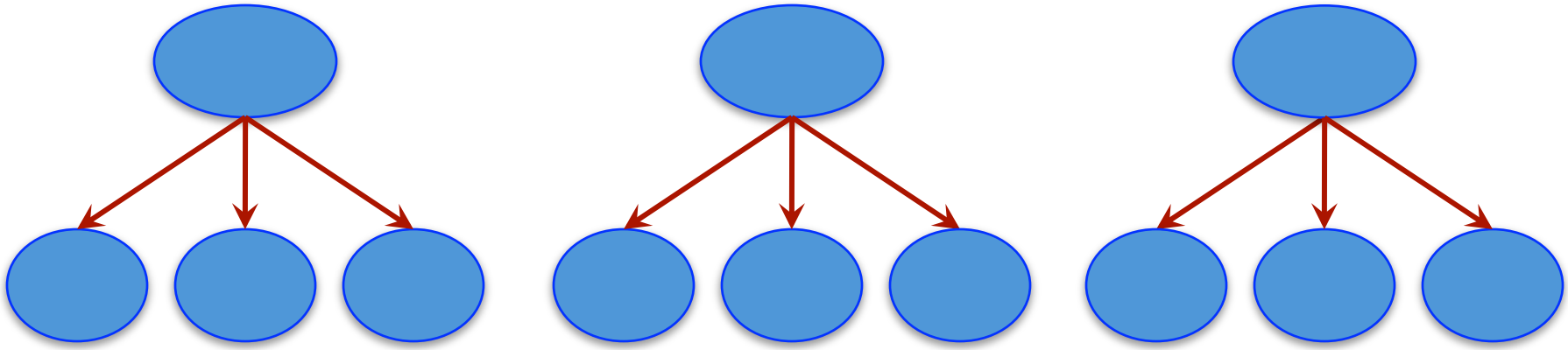
Used to be on App store. No longer available

What Category is *Device 6*?

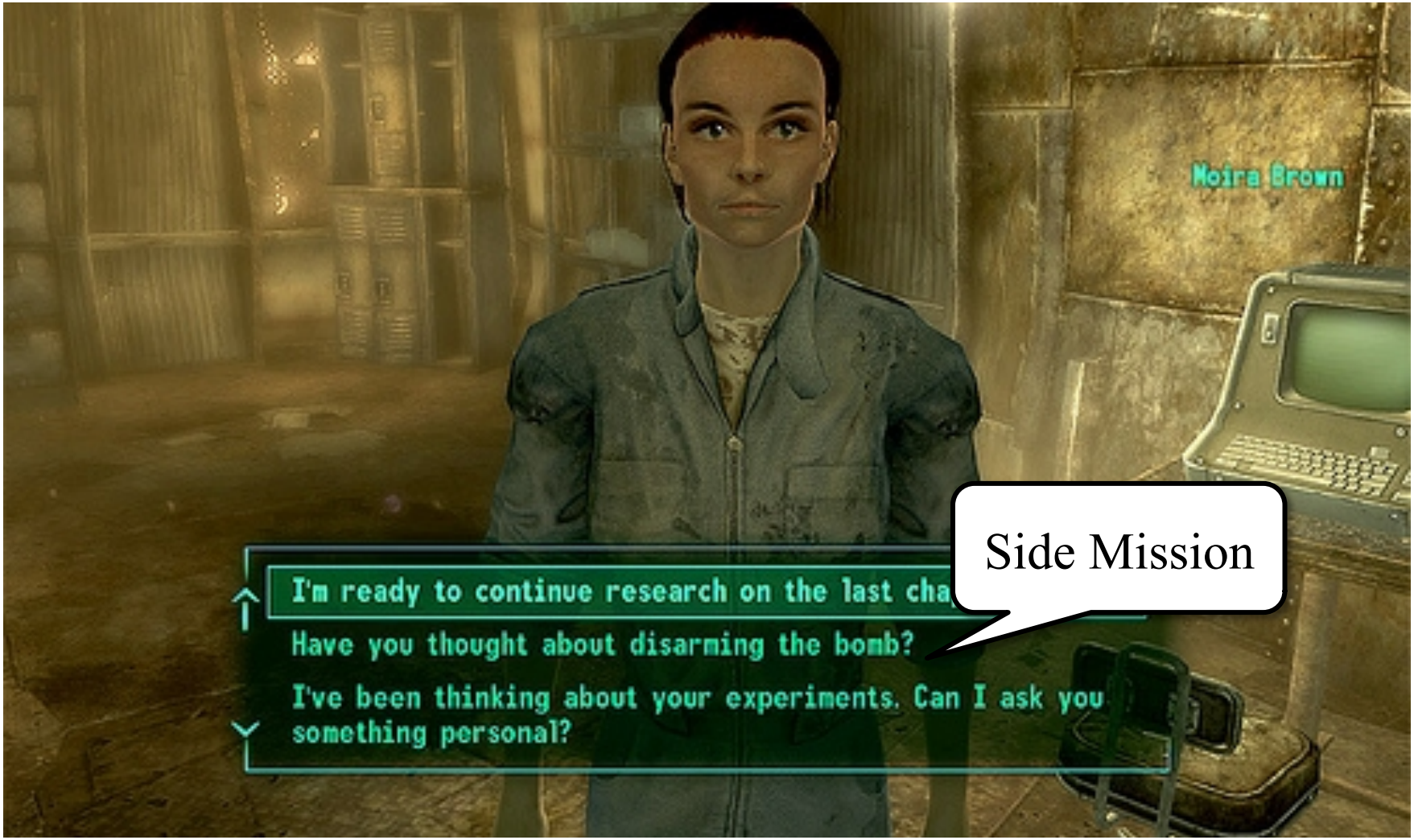


Storyline

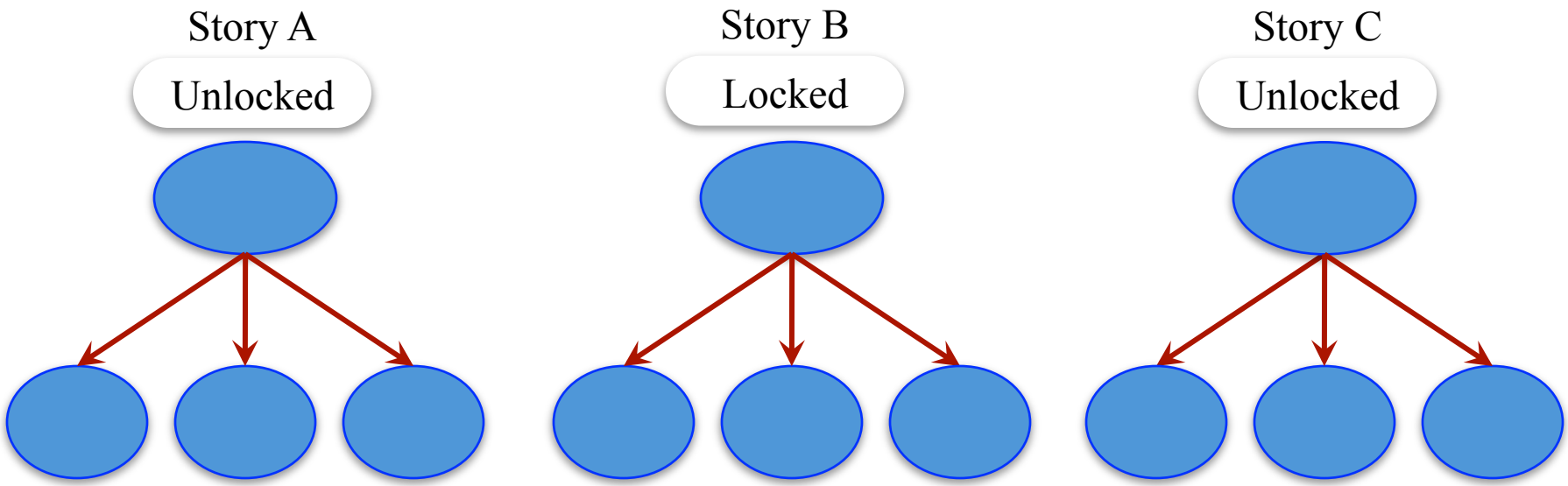
- **Component Design**: Dialogue heavy games
  - Game has "components" each with different story
  - Simple branching story per component
  - Player's story is a mix-and-match of components



Component Design: Quests

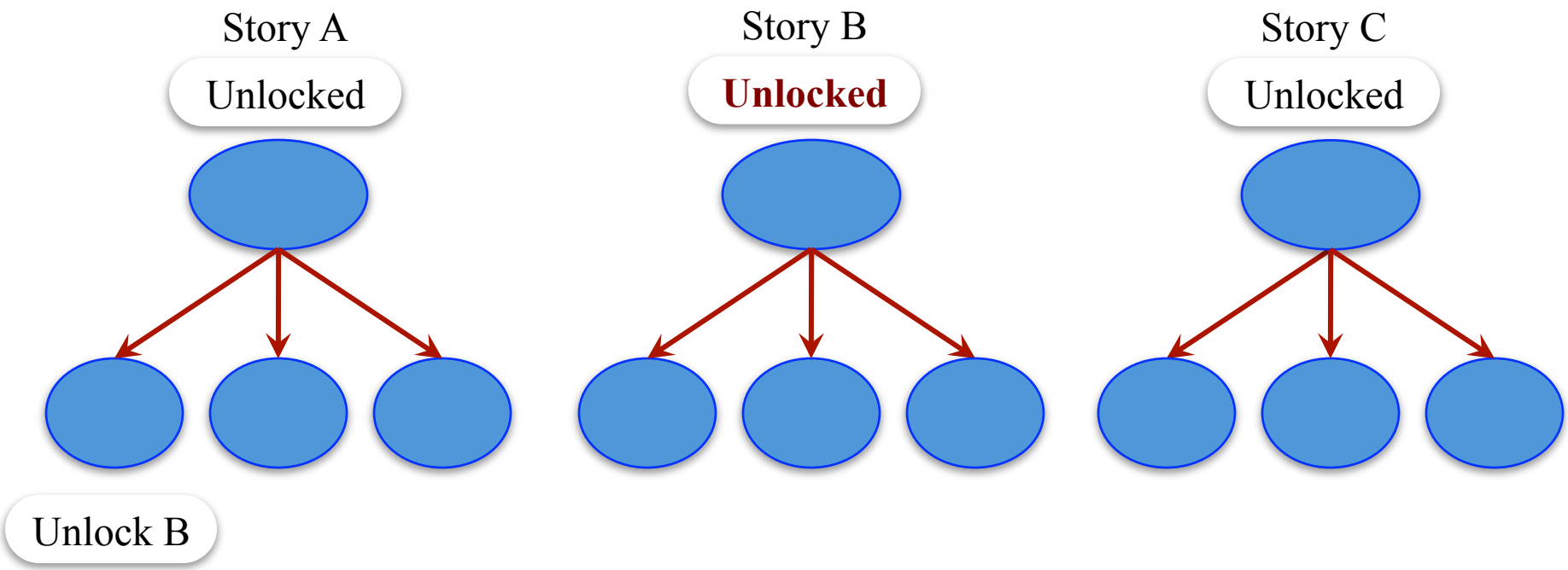


Symbolic Effects and Component Based Storylines



Story is elevated to a primary mechanic

Symbolic Effects and Component Based Storylines



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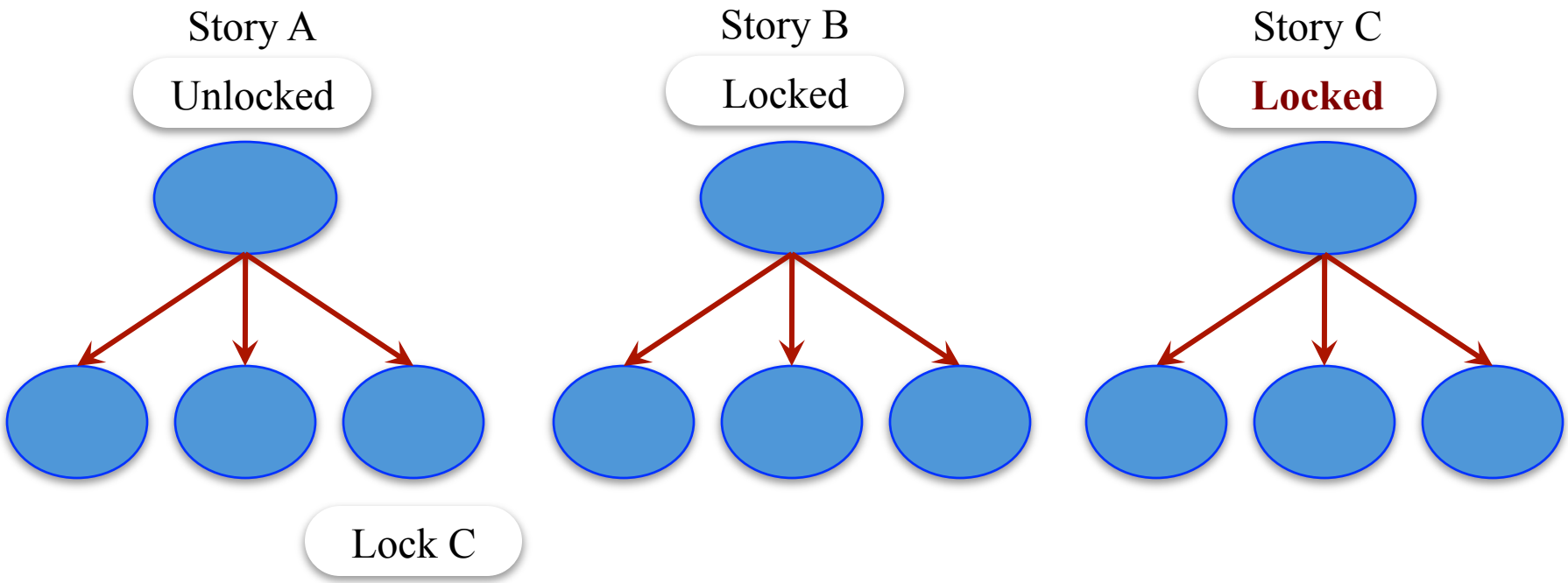
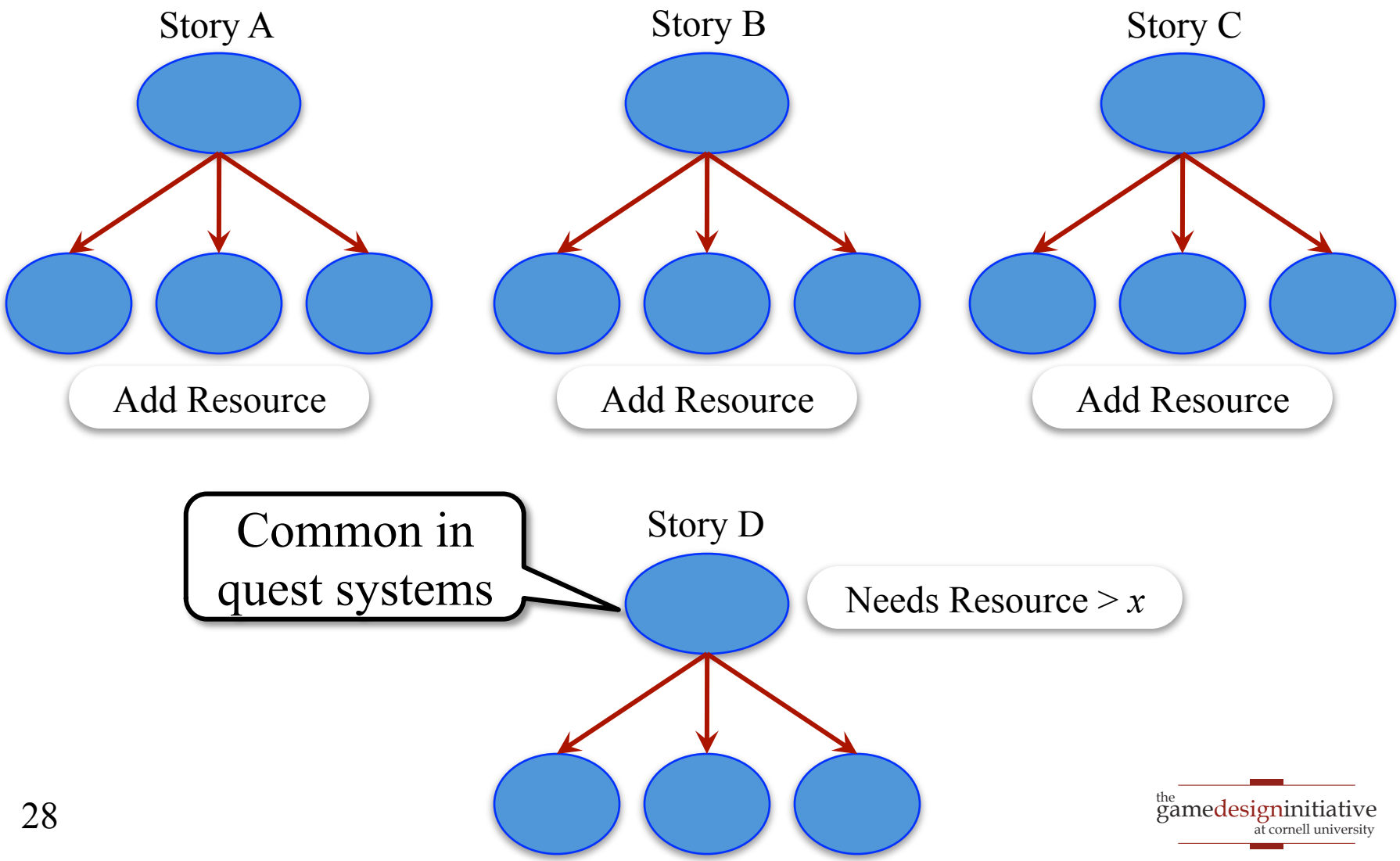


Resources and Storylines



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Resources: Reputation Systems

- Dialogue as pure gameplay
  - "Good" choices are source
  - "Bad" choices are drain
  - Resources lock story
- Global reputation: **morality**
  - Pioneered in 90s RPGs
  - Mass Effect most recently
- Local reputation: **influence**
  - Each NPC has an opinion
  - Story locking very complex

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Drama Managers

- Freeform component design
  - Player can do any action
  - AI matches to component
  - Choice may be contextual
- Built for dramatic tension
  - Tracks the current tension
  - Picks storyline options most consistent with tension
- Guide player through hints
  - Help understand context
  - “You need a drink.”

Façade Story Structure

- Story broken into **beats** and **joint dialogue behaviors**
  - JDBs are 1-5 lines between Trip & Grace (banter)
  - Beat is 10-100 JDBs resolving single plotline
- Storyline designed with goals and mix-ins
  - Goals specify how story proceeds if no interaction
  - Mix-ins give the player opportunities to join in
- AI planning algorithms used for dramatic tension
  - Each JDB is an operator that affects on dramatic tension
  - Pick JDBs consistent with story, that best build tension

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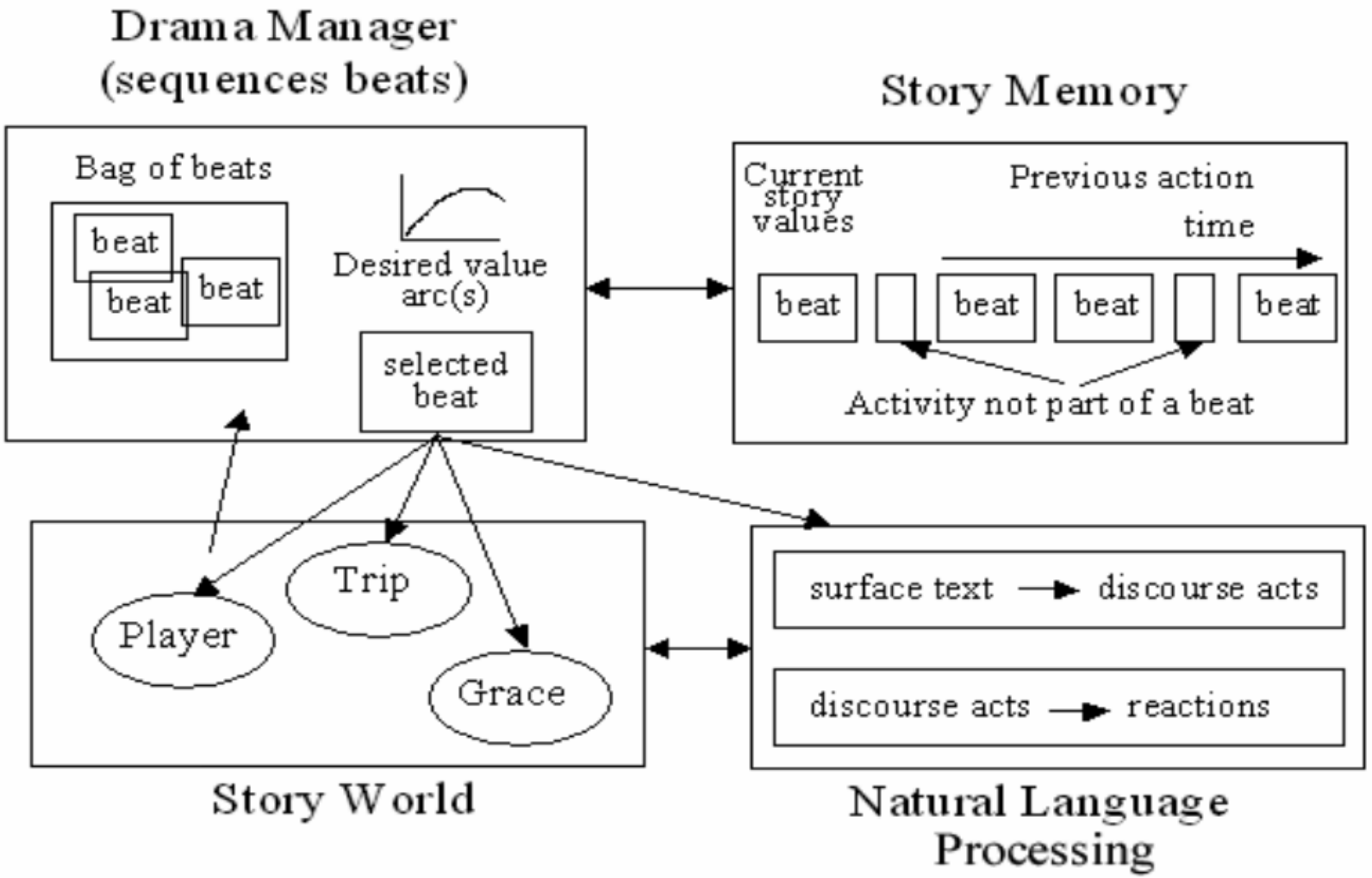
Drama Manager in *Façade*



Summary

- Story is integrating **narrative** with gameplay
  - **Character design**: agency vs. empathy
  - **Storyline**: controlling game progression
  - **Dialogue**: often a vehicle for storyline
- Storyline is the most interesting challenge
  - Linear story is simple, but often shallow
  - Branching story leads to expensive content
  - Component design makes story *core mechanic*

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