



INDEPENDENT GAMES
SUMMIT

Storytelling Tools to Boost Your Indie Game's Narrative and Gameplay

Dr. Mata Haggis

Professor of Creative and Entertainment Games, NHTV University
Narrative & Game Design Consultant, Copper Stone Sea

GDC

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE® | FEB 27-MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1-3, 2017 #GDC17





INDEPENDENT GAMES
SUMMIT

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis
Professor of Creative and Entertainment Games

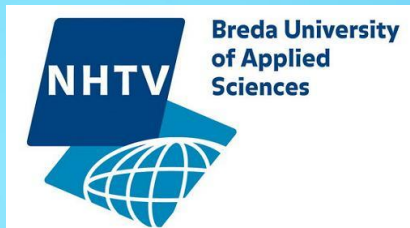


COPPER STONE SEA
tell your story better

WGGB THE WRITERS' UNION

Firstly, thanks!

- Hi! I'm Mata
- I'm a professor...



GDC

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE®

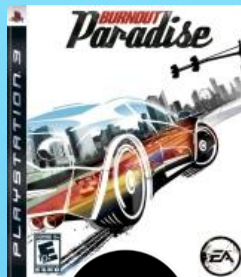
| FEB 27-MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1-3, 2017 #GDC17





Firstly, thanks!

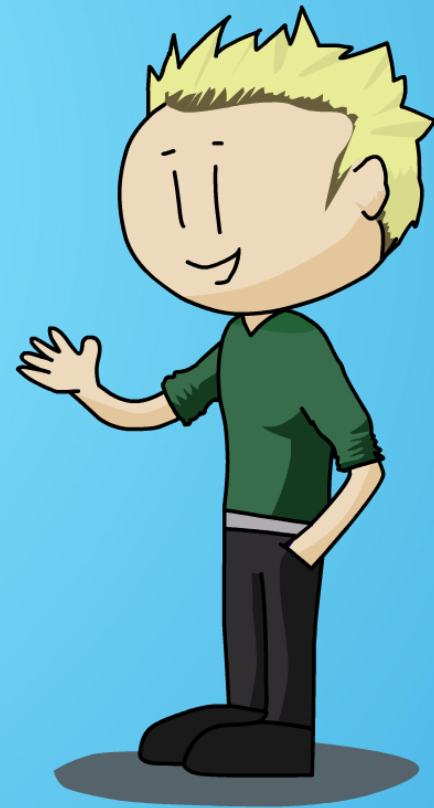
- Hi! I'm Mata
- I'm a professor...
- ... a games developer...





Firstly, thanks!

- Hi! I'm Mata
- I'm a professor...
- ... a games developer...
- ... a full member of the Writer's Guild of Great Britain...
- ... And I also consult and train people...
- ... And more.
- I do games stuff.





Firstly, thanks!

- Hi! I'm Mata
- I'm a professor...
- ... a games developer...
- ... a full member of the Writer's Guild of Great Britain...
- ... And I also consult and train people in narrative design...
- ... And more.
- I do games stuff.

COPPER STONE SEA
tell your story better





In this session...

- Why understanding story structures is a useful skill for game developers, and is often already used intuitively
- We'll look at a reliable storytelling structure you can use...
- And debug questions to help you fix stories or gameplay that feels unrewarding
- There will two takeaway diagrams at the very last slides of this presentation which summarise the important bits!
- This is a lot to cover, so I'm going to go fast – key points will be on screen!



INDEPENDENT GAMES
SUMMIT

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis
Professor of Creative and Entertainment Games



COPPER STONE SEA
tell your story better



FLOW IN GAMES

GDC

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE® | FEB 27-MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1-3, 2017 #GDC17



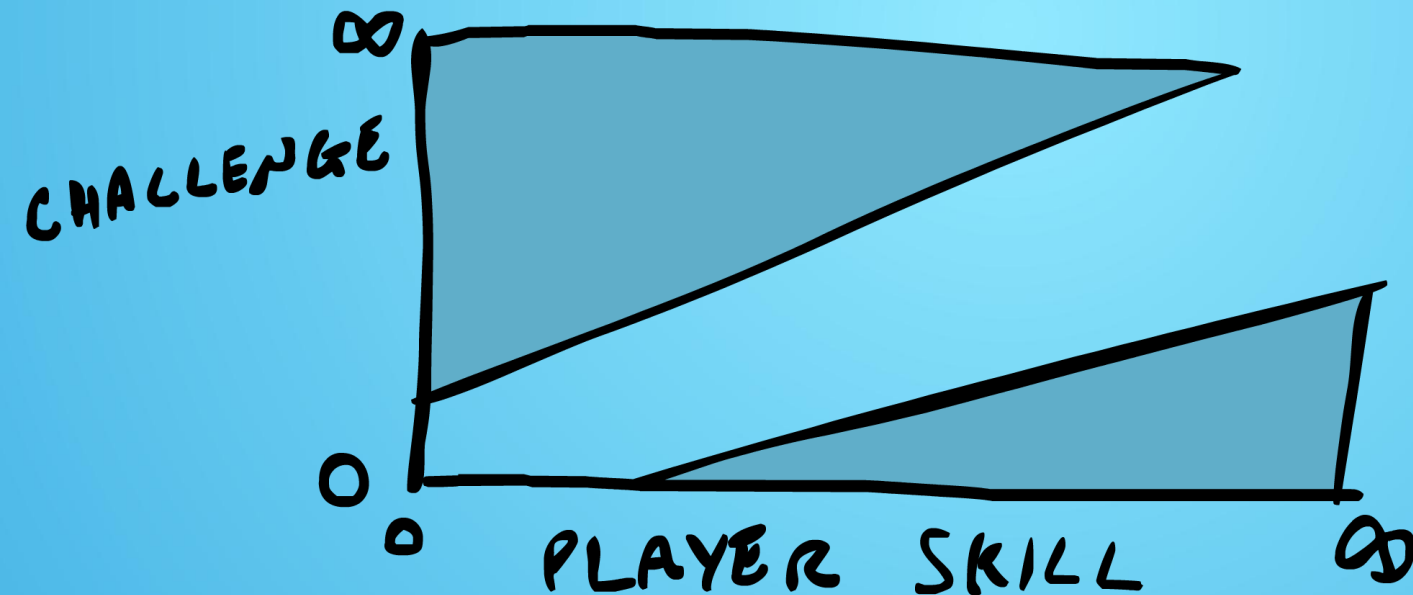


FLOW IN GAMES



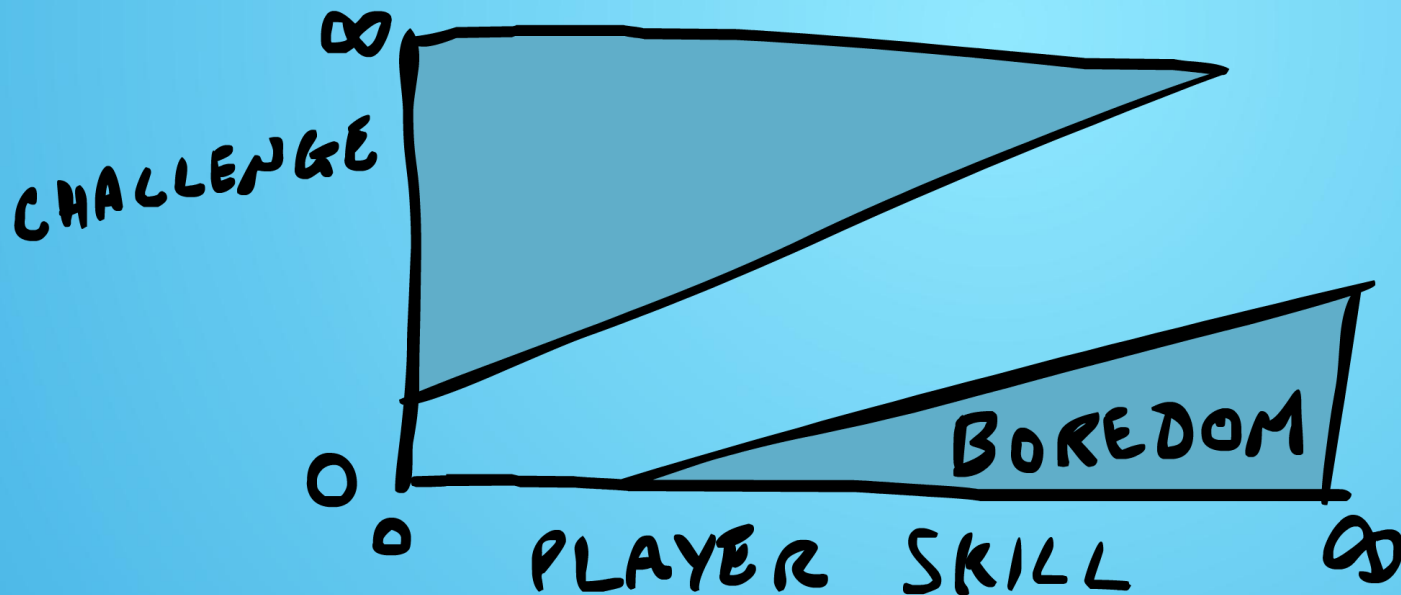


FLOW IN GAMES



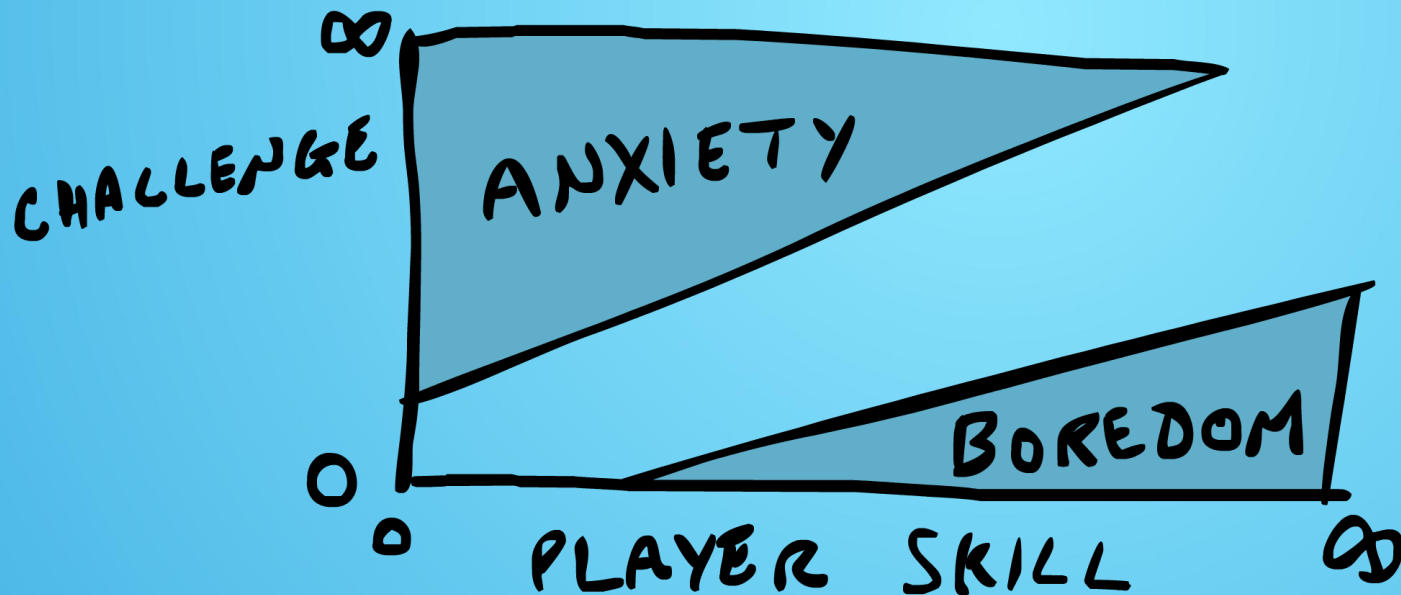


FLOW IN GAMES



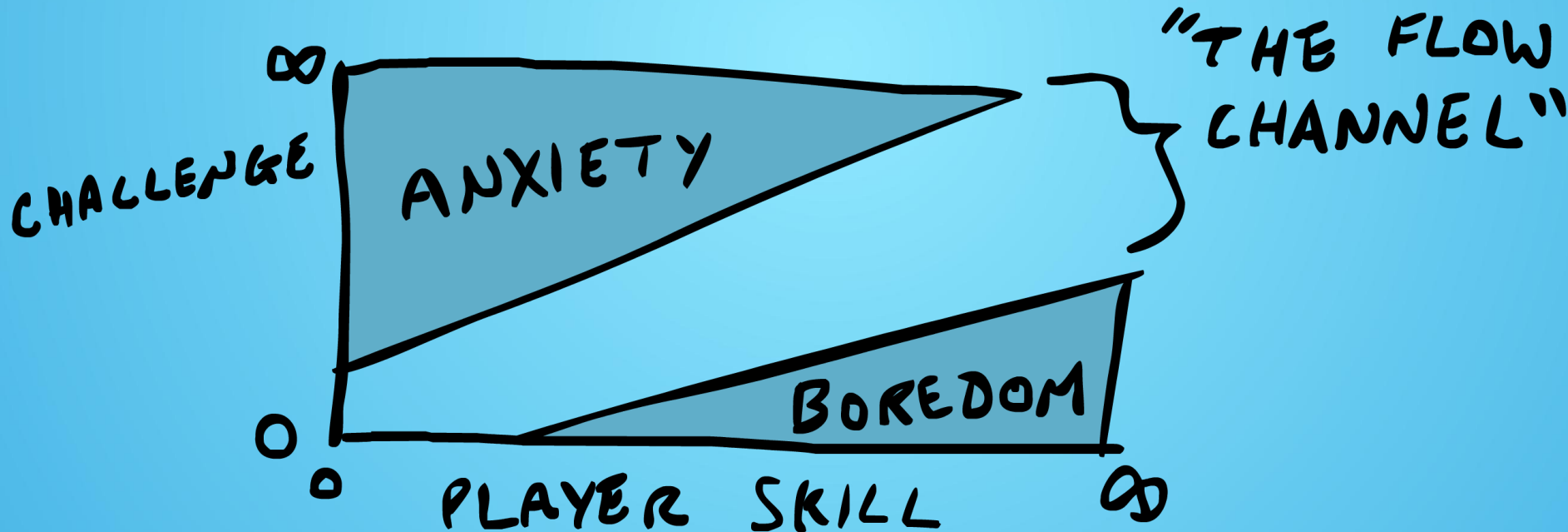


FLOW IN GAMES



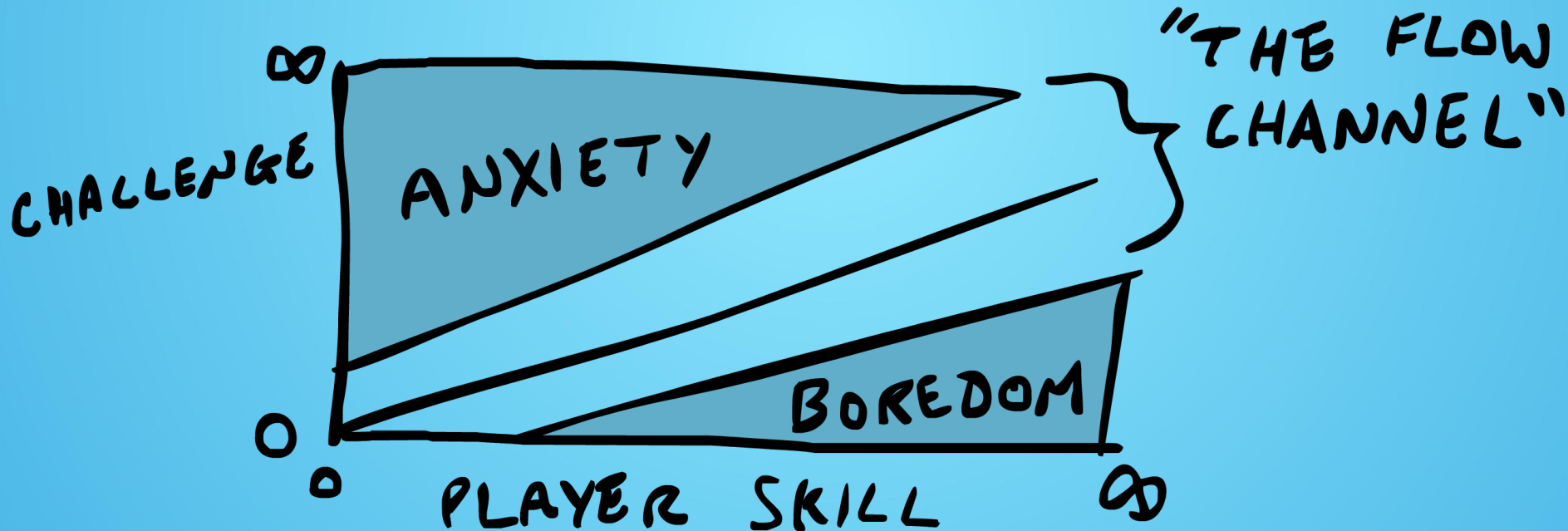


FLOW IN GAMES



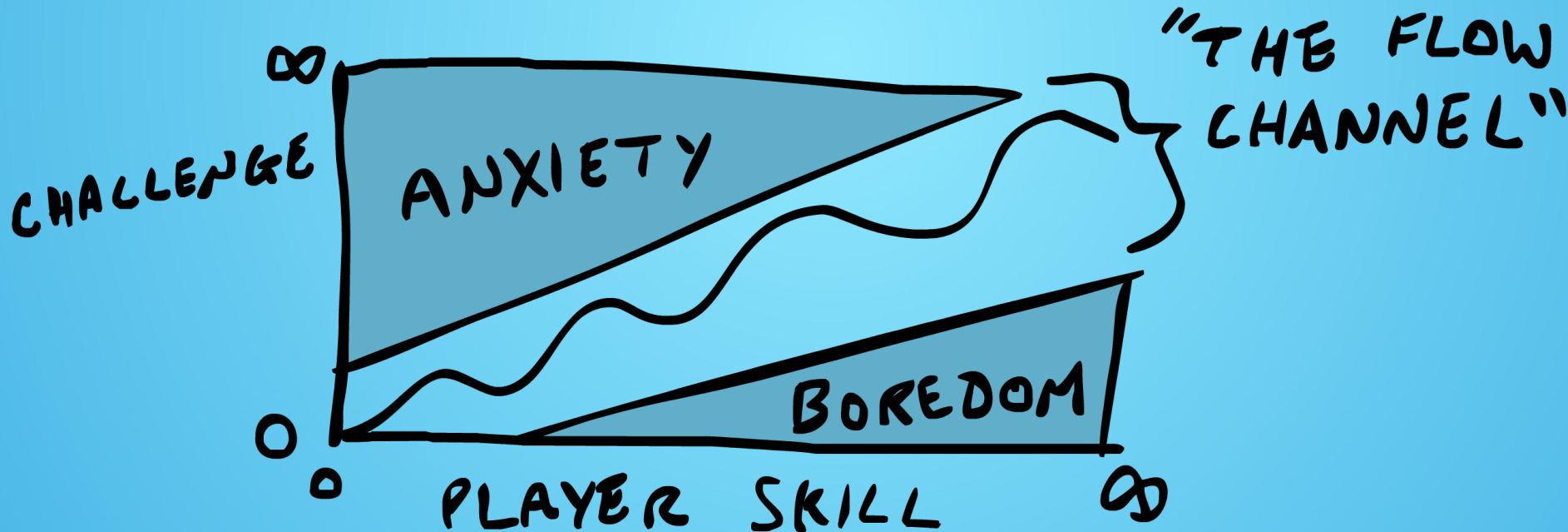


FLOW IN GAMES



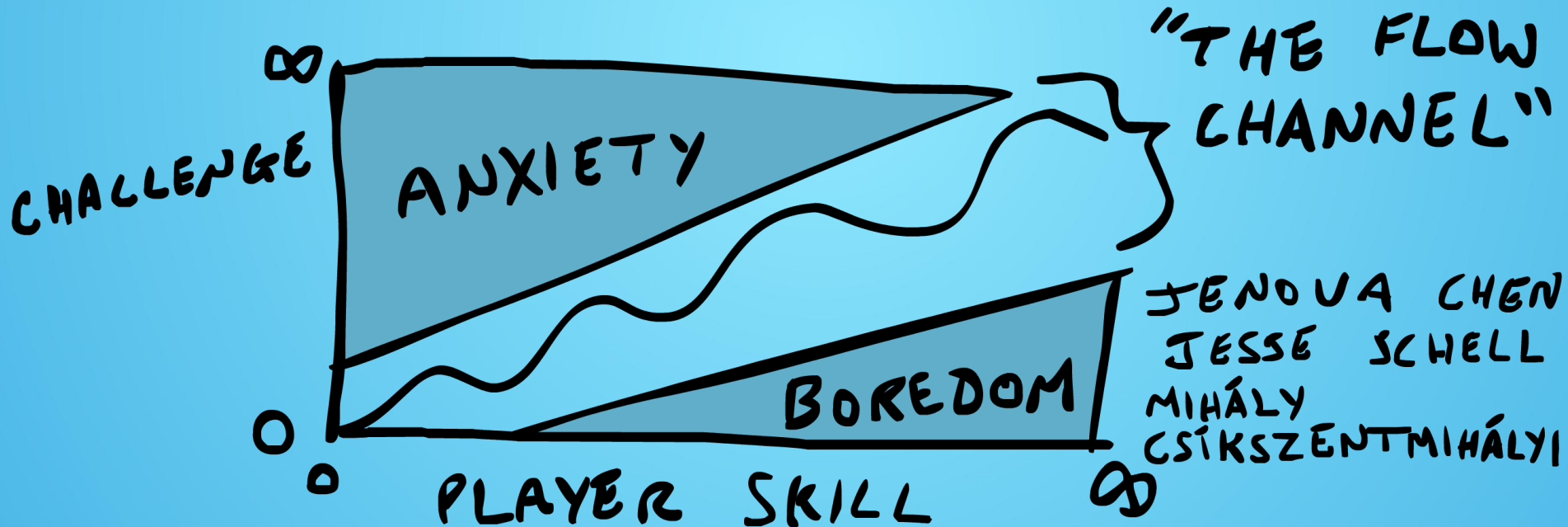


FLOW IN GAMES





FLOW IN GAMES





INDEPENDENT GAMES
SUMMIT

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis
Professor of Creative and Entertainment Games



COPPER STONE SEA
tell your story better

WGGB THE WRITERS' UNION



GDC

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE® | FEB 27-MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1-3, 2017 #GDC17





TENSION IN STORIES



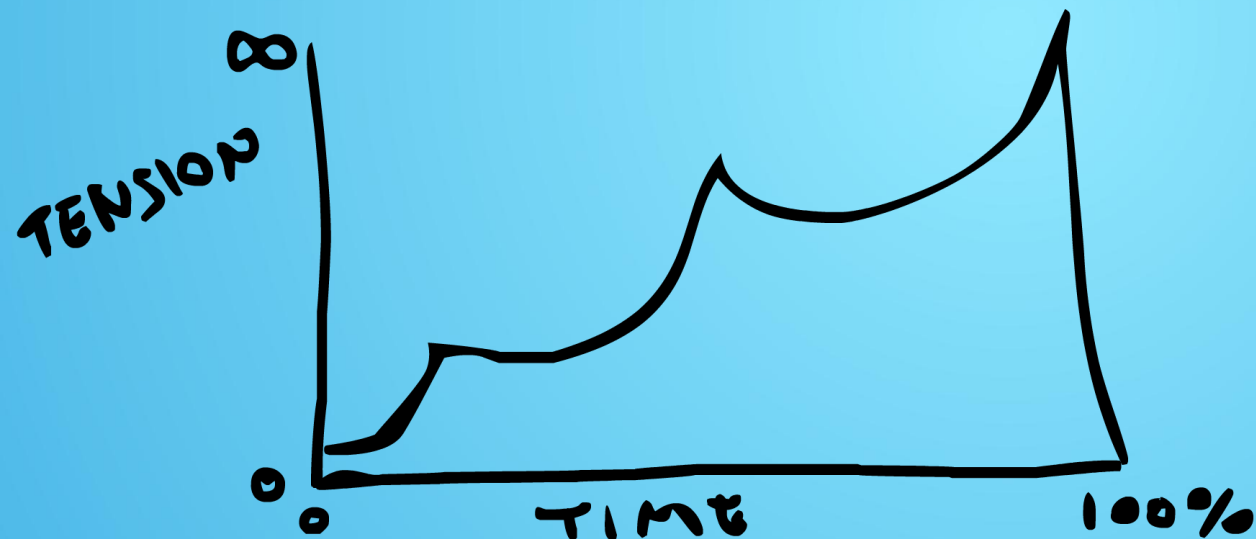


TENSION IN STORIES



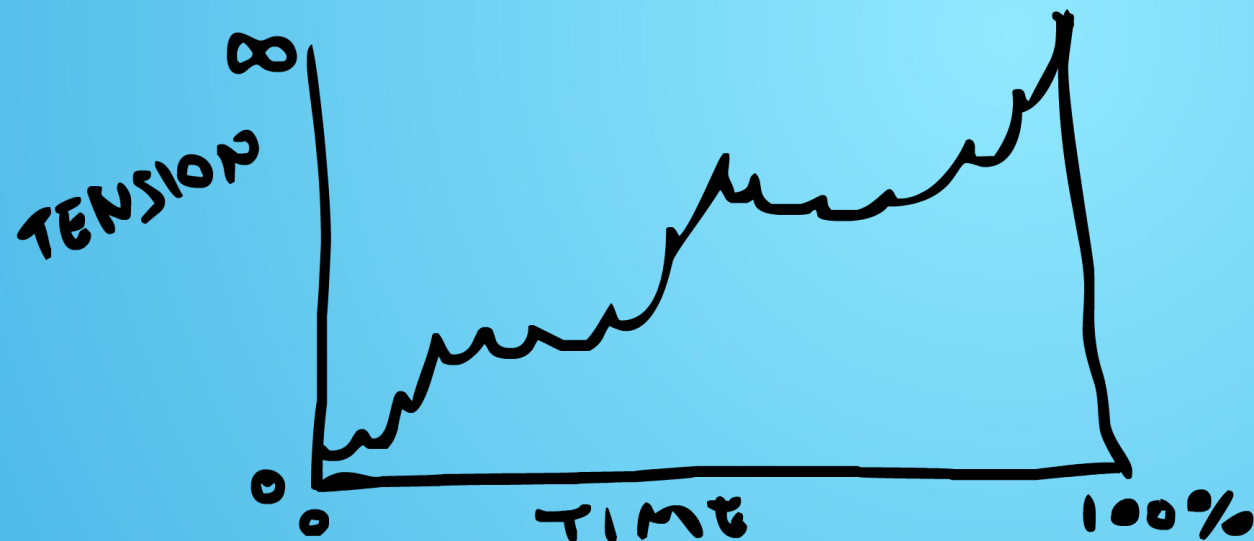


TENSION IN STORIES



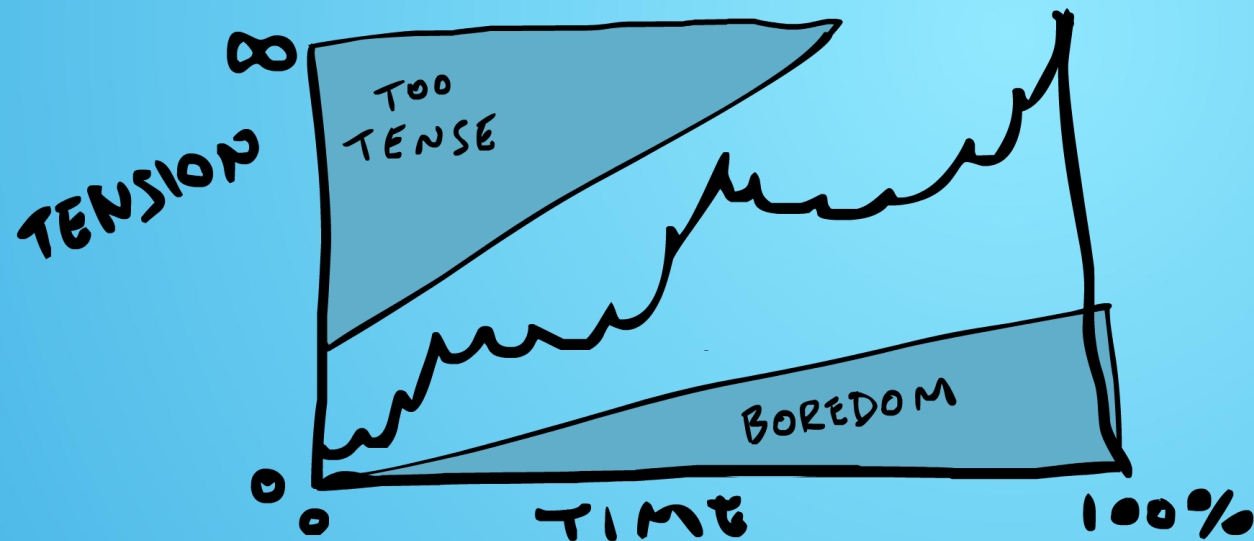


TENSION IN STORIES



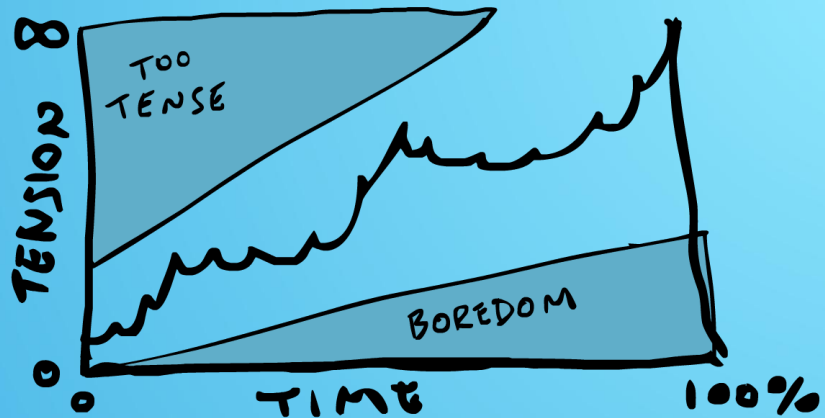


TENSION IN STORIES

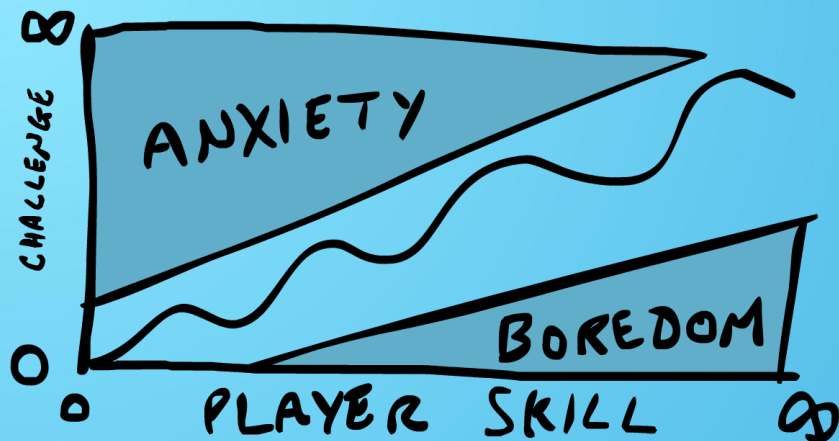




TENSION IN STORIES

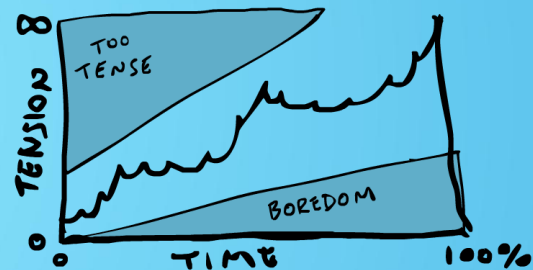


FLOW IN GAMES

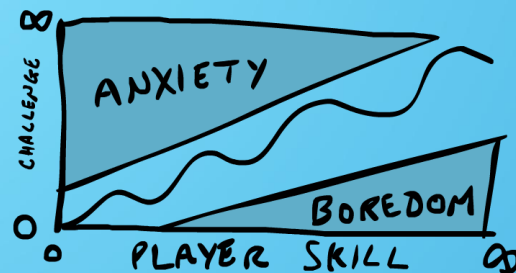




TENSION IN STORIES

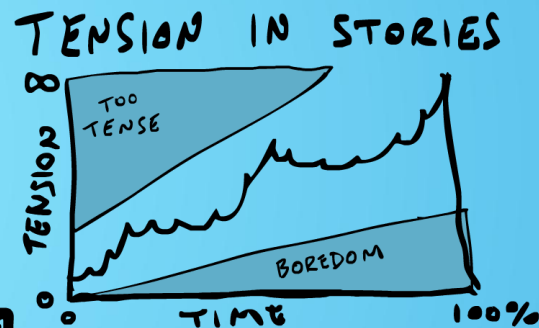


FLOW IN GAMES





WHAT DOES THE
WOBBLY LINE
REPRESENT?





INDEPENDENT GAMES
SUMMIT

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis
Professor of Creative and Entertainment Games



NHTV
Netherlands
University of Applied
Sciences

COPPER STONE SEA
tell your story better

WIGGB
THE WRITERS' UNION

WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?

GDC

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE®

| FEB 27-MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1-3, 2017 #GDC17





INDEPENDENT GAMES
SUMMIT

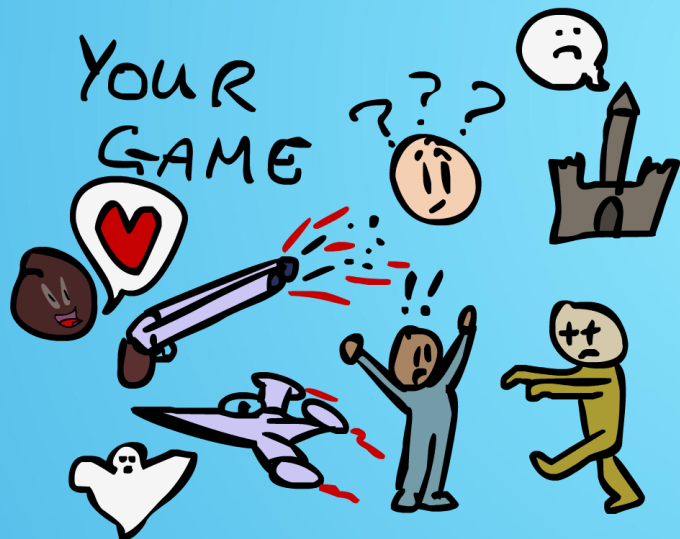
Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis
Professor of Creative and Entertainment Games



COPPER STONE SEA
tell your story better

WGGB THE WRITERS' UNION

WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?



GDC

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE®

| FEB 27-MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1-3, 2017 #GDC17

UBM



WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?





INDEPENDENT GAMES

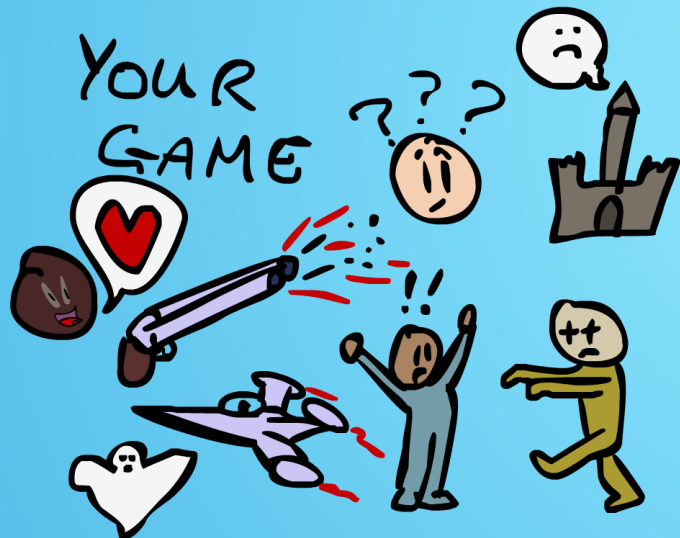
Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis
Professor of Creative and Entertainment Games



COPPER STONE SEA
tell your story better

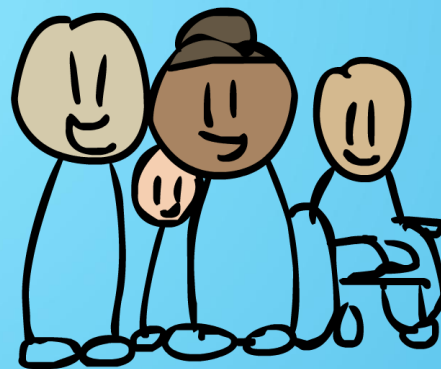


WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?



"PRE-AUTHORED"
(EVENTS + CONTENT)

PLAYERS





WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?

YOUR GAME

"PRE-AUTHORED"
(EVENTS + CONTENT)

PLAYERS

"USER-GENERATED"
(INTERACTION +
INTERPRETATION)



INDEPENDENT GAMES
SUMMIT

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis
Professor of Creative and Entertainment Games



COPPER STONE SEA
tell your story better

WGGB
THE WRITERS' UNION

WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?



GDC

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE®

| FEB 27-MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1-3, 2017 #GDC17





INDEPENDENT GAMES
SUMMIT

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis
Professor of Creative and Entertainment Games



COPPER STONE SEA
tell your story better

WGGB THE WRITERS' UNION

WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?



GDC

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE®

| FEB 27-MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1-3, 2017 #GDC17





INDEPENDENT GAMES
SUMMIT

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis
Professor of Creative and Entertainment Games

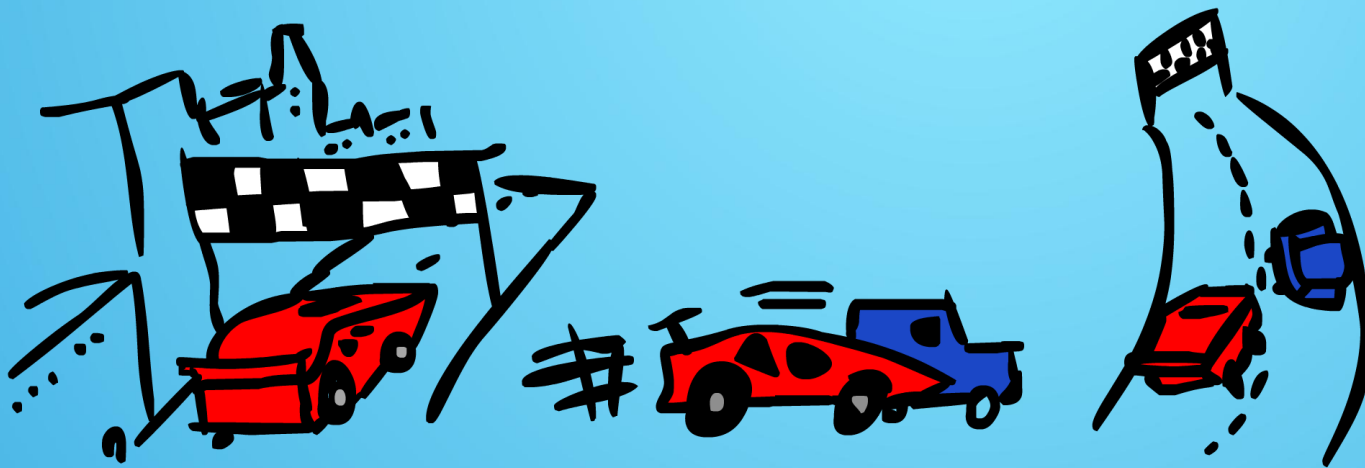


NHTV
Netherlands University of Applied Sciences

COPPER STONE SEA
tell your story better

WGGB
THE WRITERS' UNION

WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?



GDC

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE®

| FEB 27-MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1-3, 2017 #GDC17

UBM



INDEPENDENT GAMES
SUMMIT

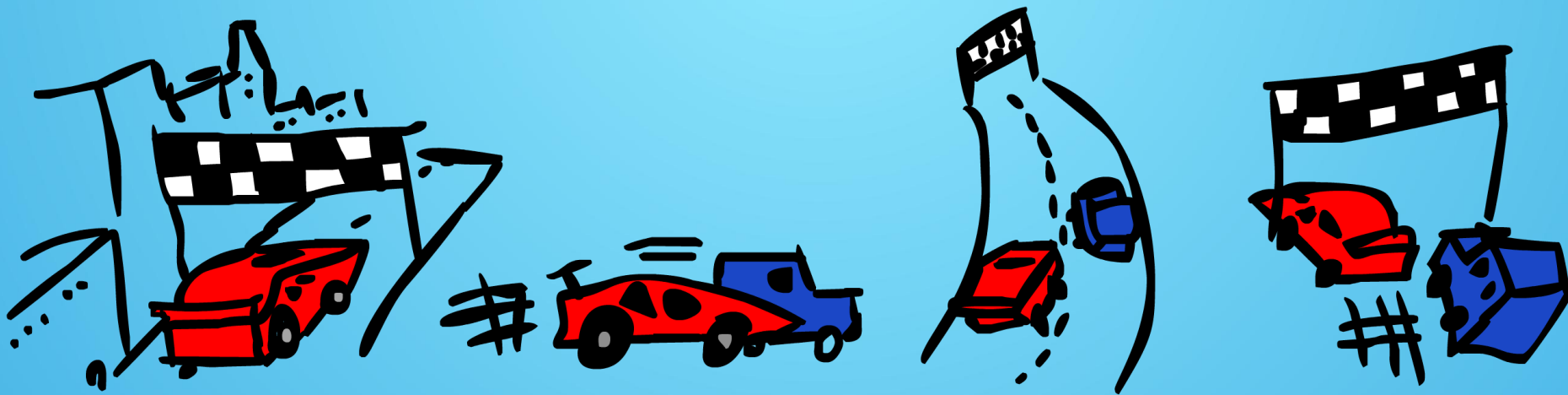
Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis
Professor of Creative and Entertainment Games



COPPER STONE SEA
tell your story better

WGGB THE WRITERS' UNION

WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?



GDC

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE®

| FEB 27-MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1-3, 2017 #GDC17





INDEPENDENT GAMES
SUMMIT

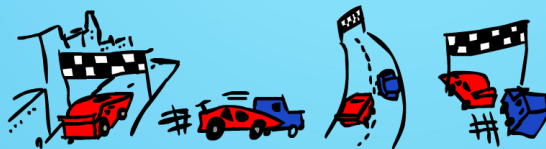
Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis
Professor of Creative and Entertainment Games



COPPER STONE SEA
tell your story better

WGGB THE WRITERS' UNION

WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?



GDC

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE®

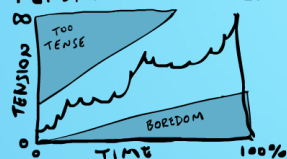
| FEB 27-MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1-3, 2017 #GDC17



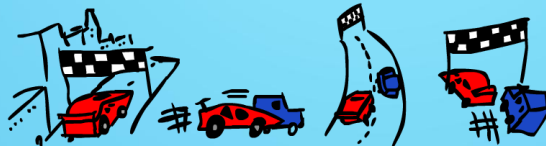


WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?

TENSION IN STORIES

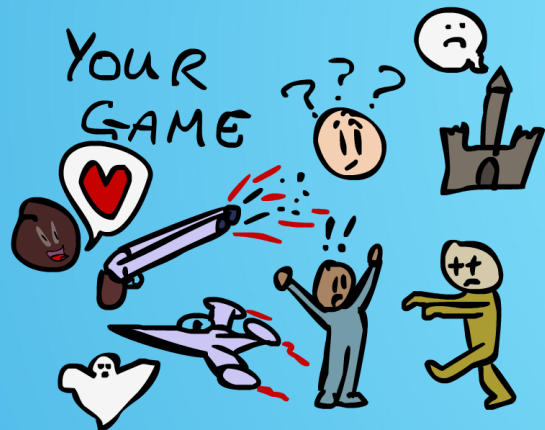


FLOW IN GAMES

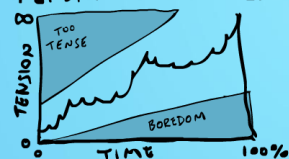




WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?



TENSION IN STORIES



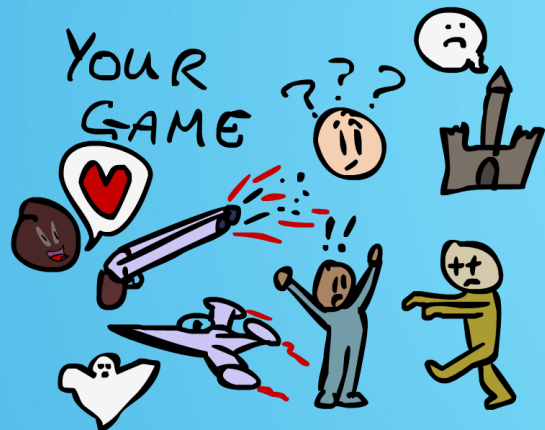
FLOW IN GAMES



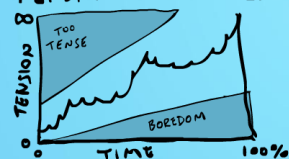
"PRE-AUTHORED"
(EVENTS + CONTENT)



WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?



TENSION IN STORIES



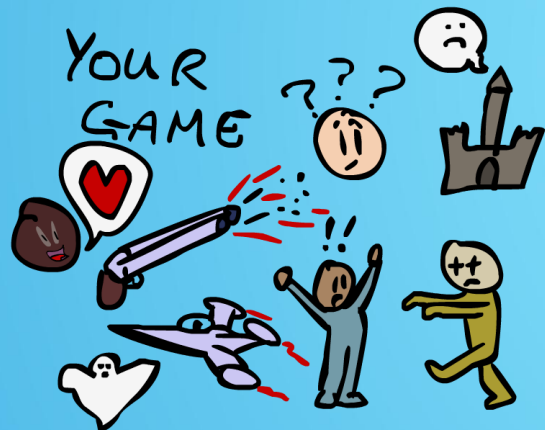
FLOW IN GAMES



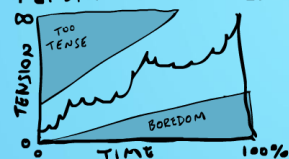
"PRE-AUTHORED"
(EVENTS + CONTENT)
• A.I.
• TRACK DESIGN



WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?



TENSION IN STORIES



FLOW IN GAMES



PLAYERS

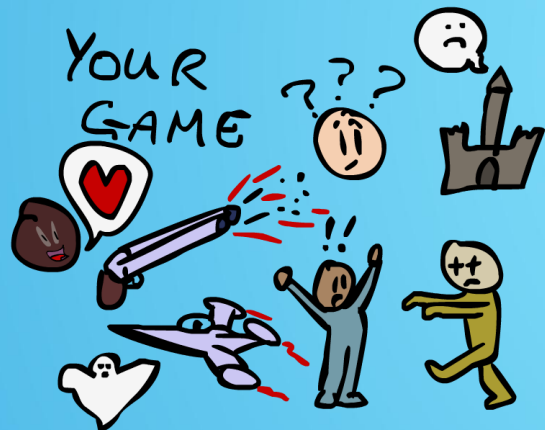


"USER-GENERATED"
(INTERACTION +
INTERPRETATION)

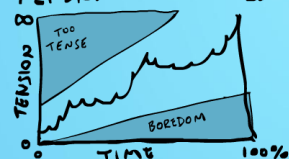
"PRE-AUTHORED"
(EVENTS + CONTENT)
• A.I.
• TRACK DESIGN



WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?



TENSION IN STORIES



FLOW IN GAMES



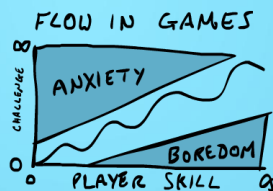
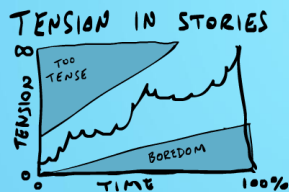
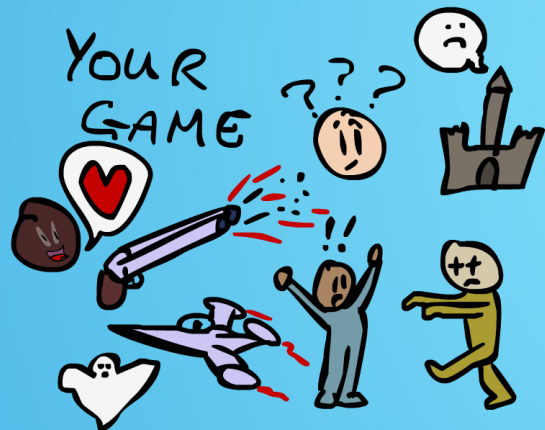
PLAYERS



"USER-GENERATED"
(INTERACTION +
INTERPRETATION)
• SKILL
• CHOICE



WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?



PLAYERS



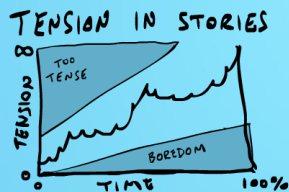
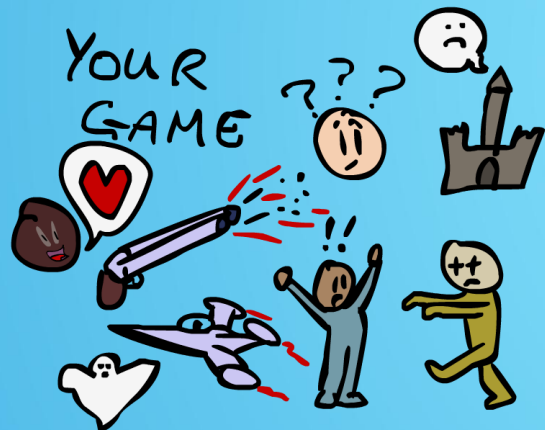
"PRE-AUTHORED"
(EVENTS + CONTENT)

IT'S ALL
PLAYER
EXPERIENCE

"USER-GENERATED"
(INTERACTION +
INTERPRETATION)



WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?



PLAYERS



"PRE-AUTHORED"
(EVENTS + CONTENT)

IT'S ALL
THE WOBBLY LINE!

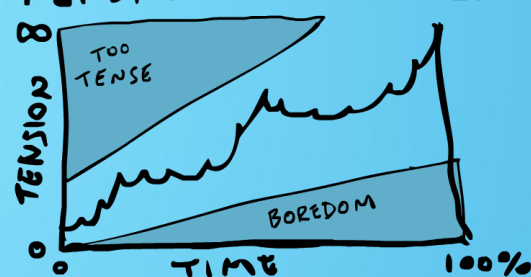
"USER-GENERATED"
(INTERACTION +
INTERPRETATION)



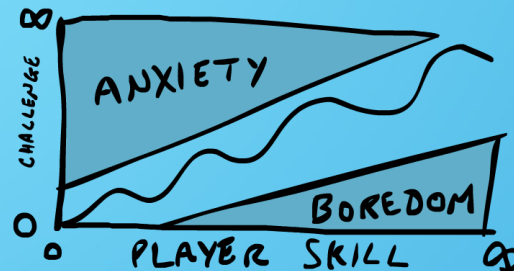
WHAT IS THE STORY OF YOUR GAME?

- Flow theory says it's good to keep players in 'the flow channel'
- ... But how do we do this?
- Storytellers have structured systems that reliably create a great audience experiences
- Rather than reinvent the wheel for understanding player experience, we can learn from storytellers.

TENSION IN STORIES



FLOW IN GAMES





INDEPENDENT GAMES
SUMMIT

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis
Professor of Creative and Entertainment Games



COPPER STONE SEA
tell your story better



BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

GDC

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE®

| FEB 27-MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1-3, 2017 #GDC17





INDEPENDENT GAMES

SUMMIT

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis
Professor of Creative and Entertainment Games



COPPER STONE SEA
tell your story better



BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

Per scene:

BEGINNING

A vertical bar composed of nine horizontal segments of different colors: light orange, light green, light yellow, light orange, light orange, light orange, light green, light orange, and light orange.

THE END

GDC®

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE®

| FEB 27-MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1-3, 2017 #GDC17





BASICS OF STORYTELLING

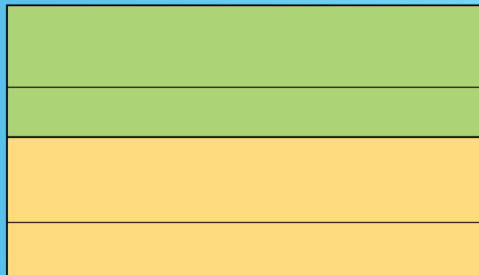
© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

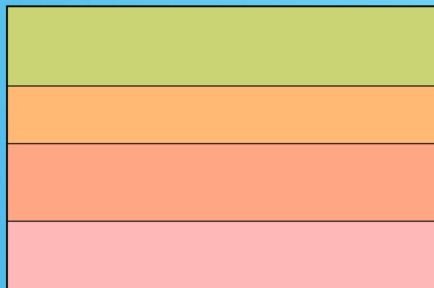
Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:



Per scene:



BEGINNING



← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%

THE END



BASICS OF STORYTELLING

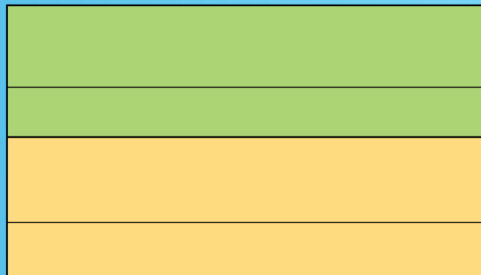
© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

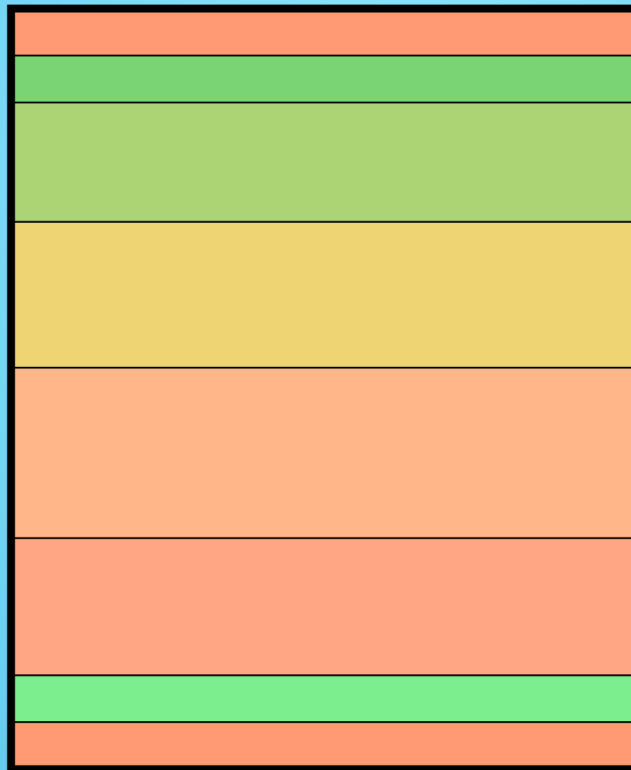
Motivations:



Per scene:



BEGINNING



THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

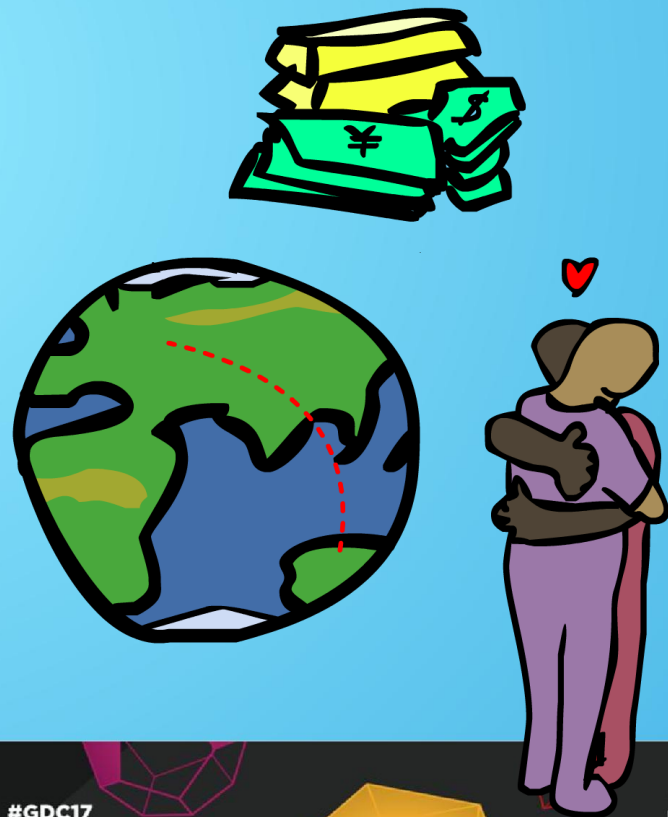
← 100%

← 101%



Motivations

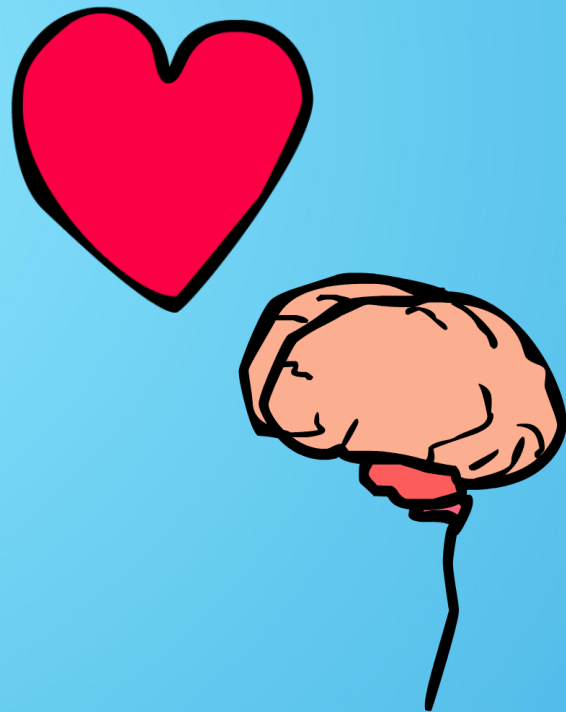
- For characters, these are divided between **external** and **internal**
- An **external** motivation is the desire to change something in the world outside...





Motivations

- An **internal** motivation is the desire to change something inside the person
- This is usually **overcoming a problem** (often emotional)
- Or **learning something new** (usually that they should have already known).

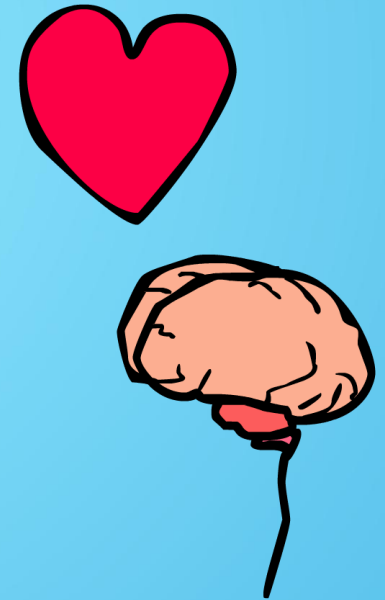




EXTERNAL



INTERNAL

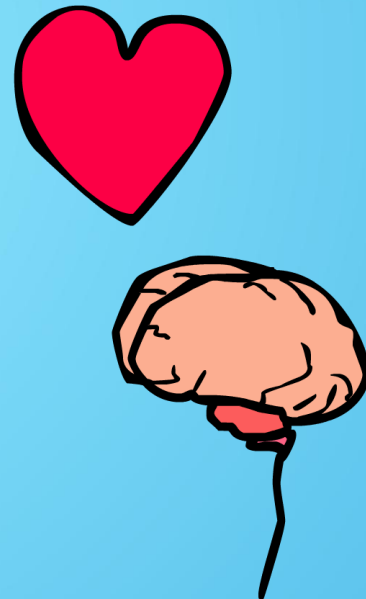




EXTERNAL



INTERNAL



A STORY
IS ABOUT
CHANGE.



Motivations

- **Change must happen!**
- But how does this apply to games?
- Tetris is not usually thought of as having a great plot...
- But it is a compelling player experience
- The player has external and internal goals (scores and a desire for order)
- This powerful internal goal is part of the lasting appeal of the game.





BASICS OF STORYTELLING

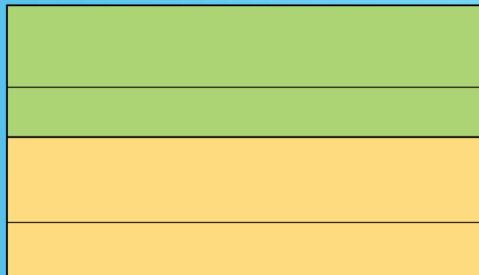
© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

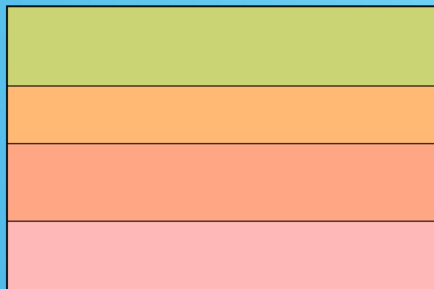
Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

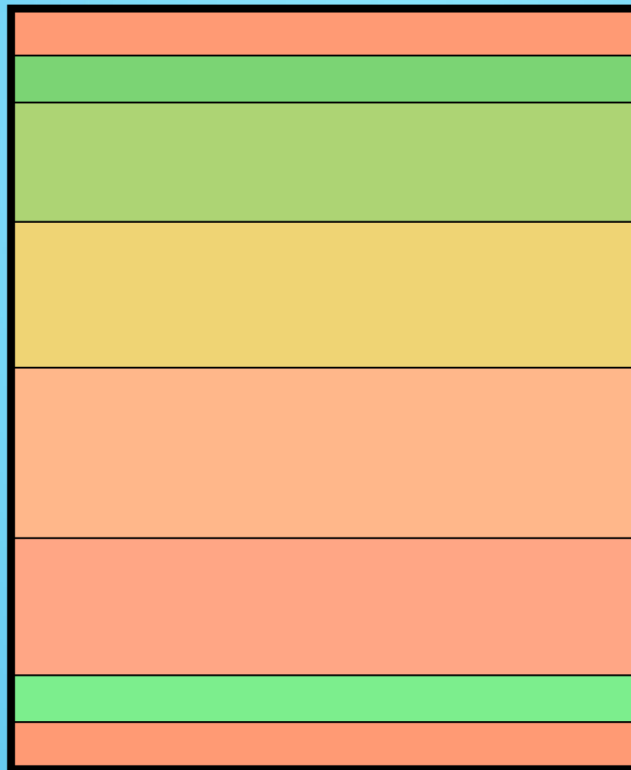
Motivations:



Per scene:



BEGINNING



THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%





BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

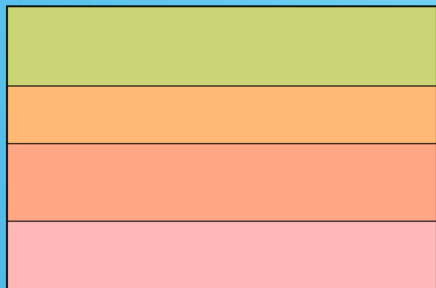
These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

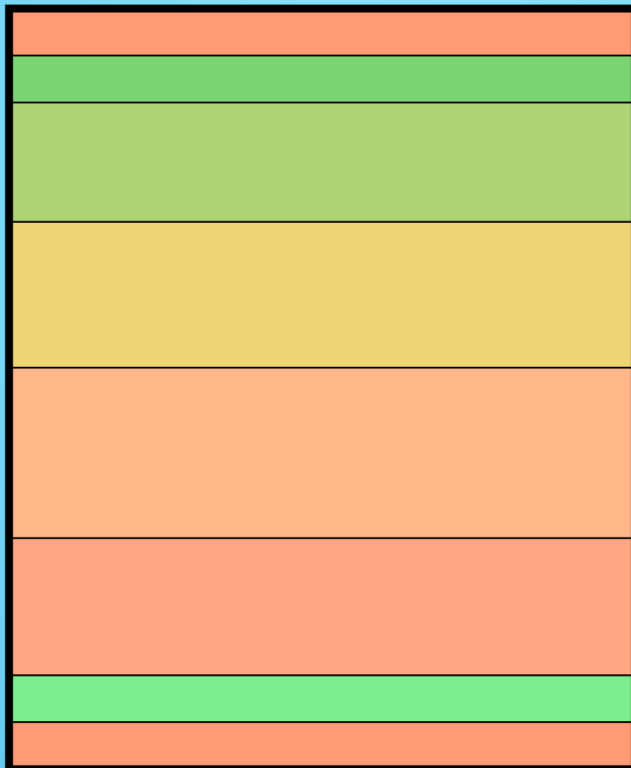
What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:



BEGINNING



THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

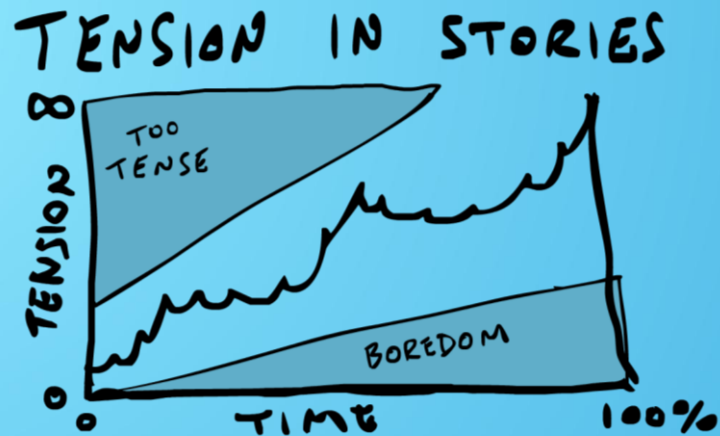
← 101%





Plot structure

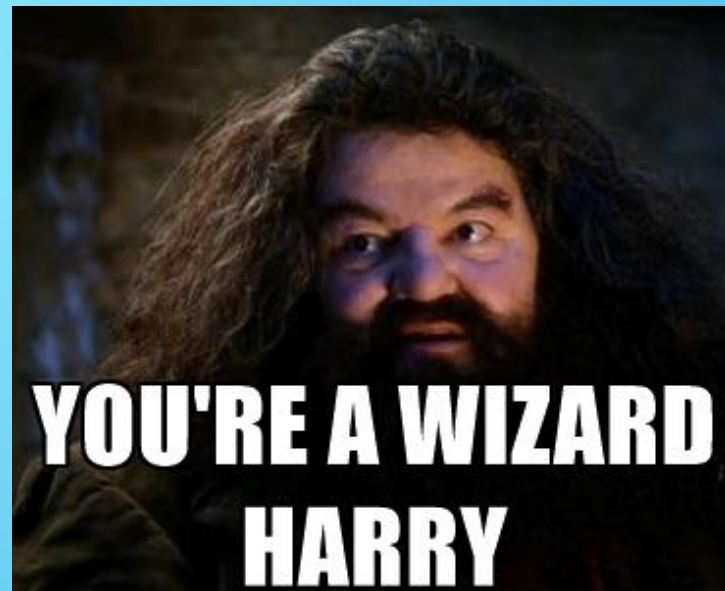
- The character/player has their goal
- Now we need a well-structured series of events through which **change** will happen
 - (i.e. a plot)
- The plot controls the speed of progress of the tension arc in the experience
- So...





Start before your big events begin

- You don't start your story with...
- You set up the character, the situation, and the basic rules
- This is otherwise known as 'the tutorial mission'.





Start before your big events begin...

- It's important to build empathy
- We must want the character to overcome the challenges ahead
- Before we reach the lake in Firewatch, we know a lot about Henry's life (setting up his external and internal objectives).





The inciting incident

- Now your player/character knows their place in the world, we can start to set up the challenges
- Increase the narrative or mechanical tension
- Add an antagonist/enemies, risk, or a break in the usual situation
- Overcoming this problem is usually the external motivation of your plot.





The player/character avoids this problem

- The player usually doesn't go straight for attacking the problem
- They either explore, avoid, or attempt smaller battles
- In VVVVVV the player/character has to rescue their colleagues...
- But, to begin with, they mostly wander aimlessly.





They make a choice to act with intention

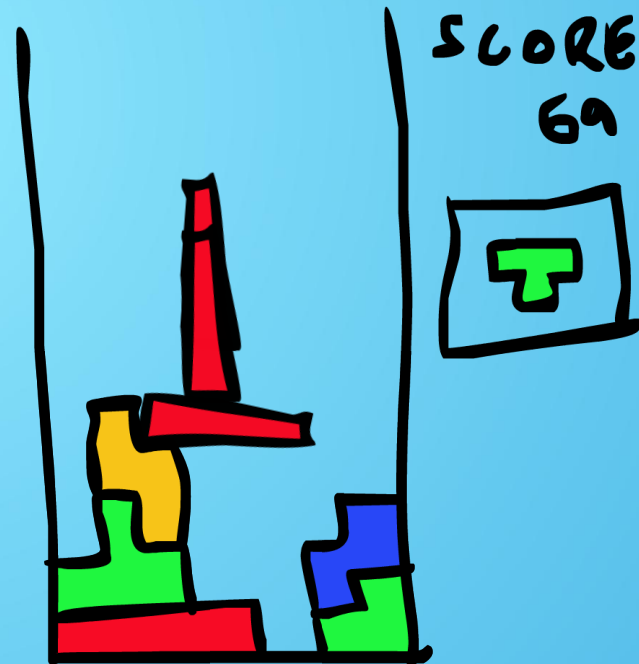
- After a while, the player feels they know enough of the territory to make a focused choice to act...
- Or there is no choice left but to act...
- e.g. "I'd better use the map more"
- They engage with the **external objective** of the game/story.





The complexity increases

- The basic abilities seem less effective, new enemies are added, new story elements show that things were not so simple...
- Tetris is a masterpiece because of this moment...
- Complexity has to increase to make the experience compelling
- (Narrative, mechanical, or both).





Complexity increases

- In Virginia we see divisions between the protagonists, and dreams call reality into question





Complexity increases

- In Virginia we see divisions between the protagonists, and dreams call reality into question
- In Firewatch an extra layer of conspiracy is added





Complexity increases

- In Virginia we see divisions between the protagonists, and dreams call reality into question
- In Firewatch an extra layer of conspiracy is added
- In Fragments of Him, Will doubts if he can sustain a relationship without hurting others.





Complexity raises the stakes

- The first strategies and weapons are no longer enough...
- In shooters, new patterns and combinations of enemies are added
- Enemies use better targeting, more bullets, or homing missiles





Complexity raises the stakes

- The first strategies and weapons are no longer enough...
- In shooters, new patterns and combinations of enemies are added
- Enemies use better targeting, more bullets, or homing missiles
- Enemies get dangerous new abilities.





Hope overcomes fear... With effort

- The player finds new weapons or strategies to overcome the enemies (**external change**, e.g. power-ups or grinding)
- They find strength they never knew they had (**internal change**)





Hope overcomes fear... With effort

- The player finds new weapons or strategies to overcome the enemies (**external change**, e.g. power-ups or grinding)
- They find strength they never knew they had (**internal change**)
- The character learns to unite their skills/team behind a purpose
- It has high risks, but it's the only hope.





'The Black Moment'

- All the hopes of overcoming the problem are at risk
- The final boss is killed... But this is not even its final form!





'The Black Moment'

- All the hopes of overcoming the problem are at risk
- The final boss is killed... But this is not even its final form!
- All the knowledge, the relationships, and the strategies developed through the player/character's experience are needed to overcome this final challenge.





And then you end it as fast as possible!

- Keep your ending neat and short.
- Let's add all of that to the diagram...



BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

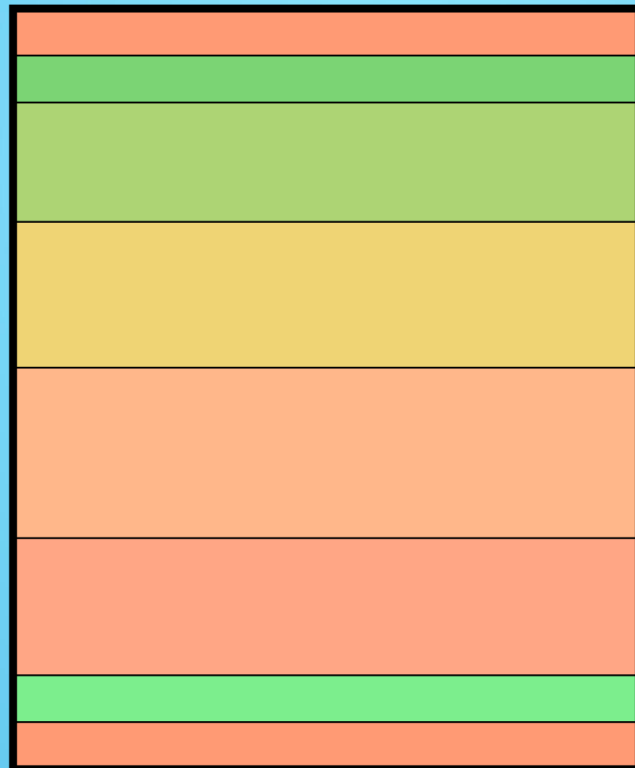
What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:



BEGINNING



THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%





BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

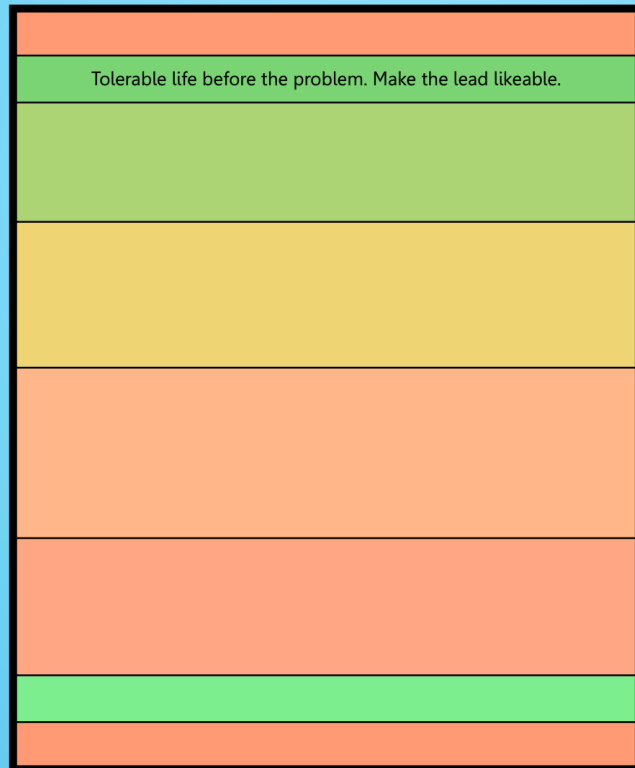
What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:



BEGINNING



THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%





BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

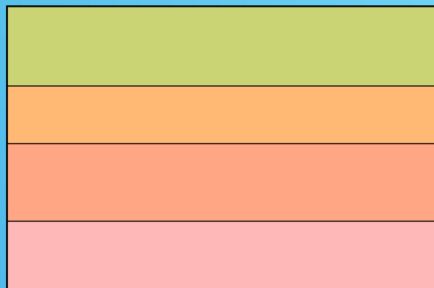
These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

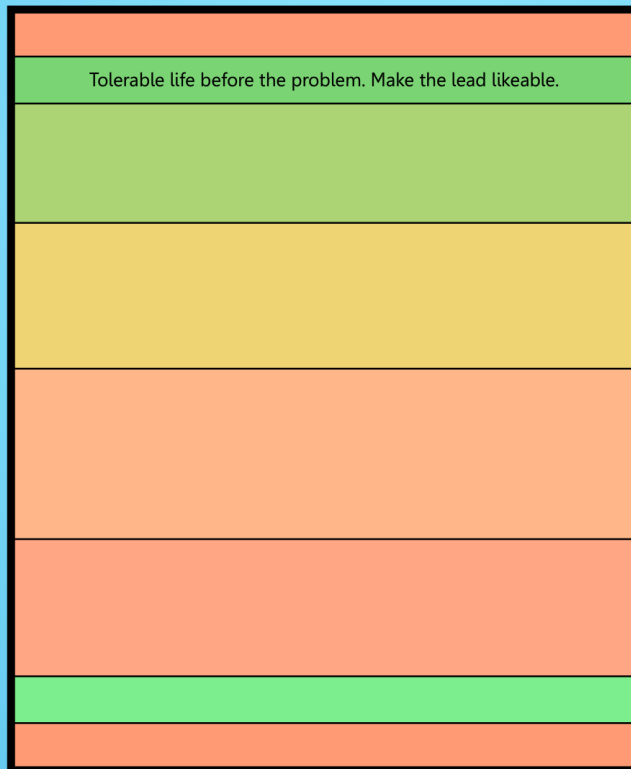
What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:



BEGINNING



THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%

'The Inciting Incident': something goes wrong, that means that the life of the protagonist **will need to change**.



BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

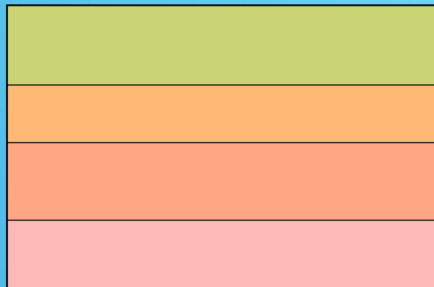
These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

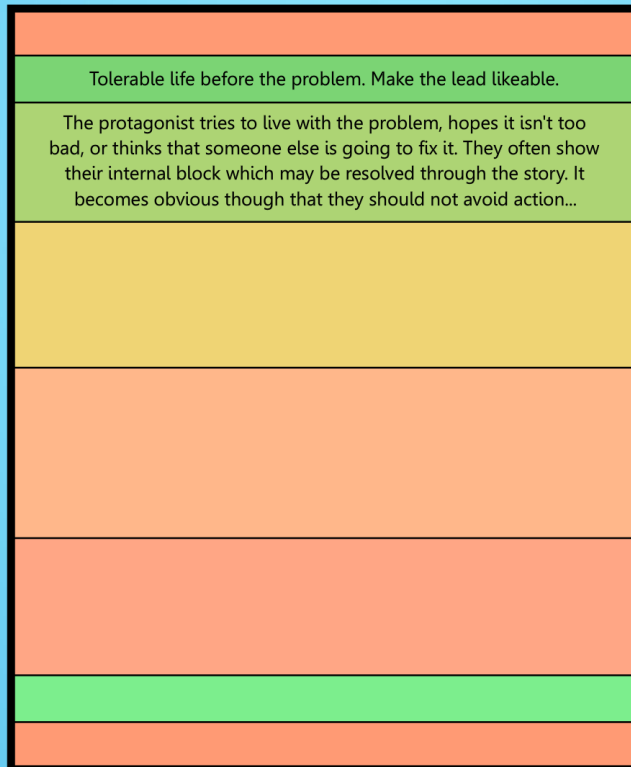
What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:



BEGINNING



THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%

'The Inciting Incident': something goes wrong, that means that the life of the protagonist **will need to change**.



BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

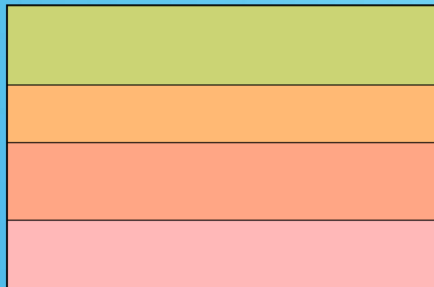
These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

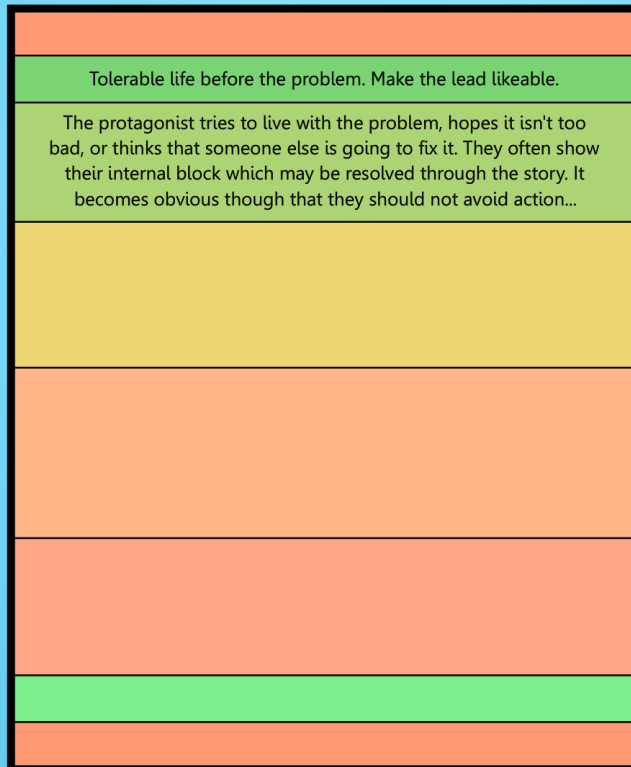
What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:



BEGINNING



THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%

'The Inciting Incident': something goes wrong, that means that the life of the protagonist **will need to change**.

State the external objective: the protagonist literally says what they are going to do to fix the problem (as they see it).



BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

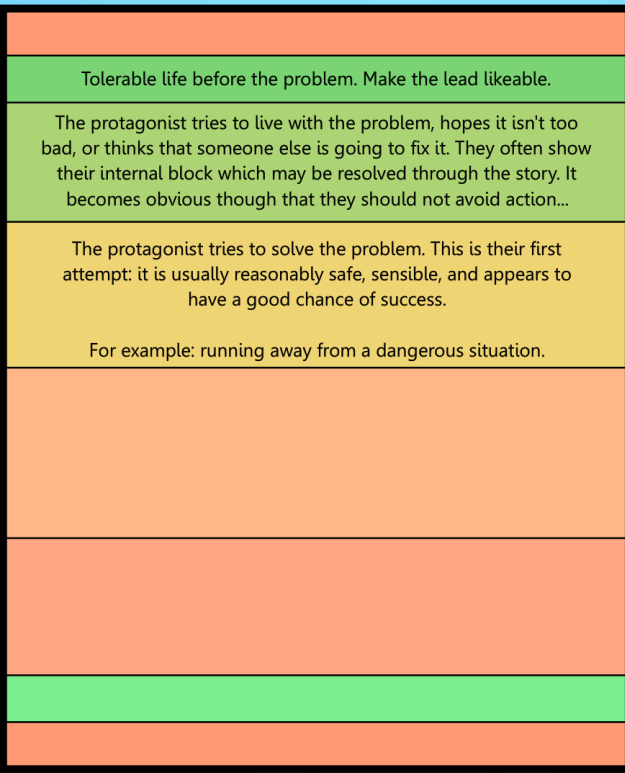
What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:



BEGINNING



THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%

'The Inciting Incident': something goes wrong, that means that the life of the protagonist **will need to change**.

State the external objective: the protagonist literally says what they are going to do to fix the problem (as they see it).





BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

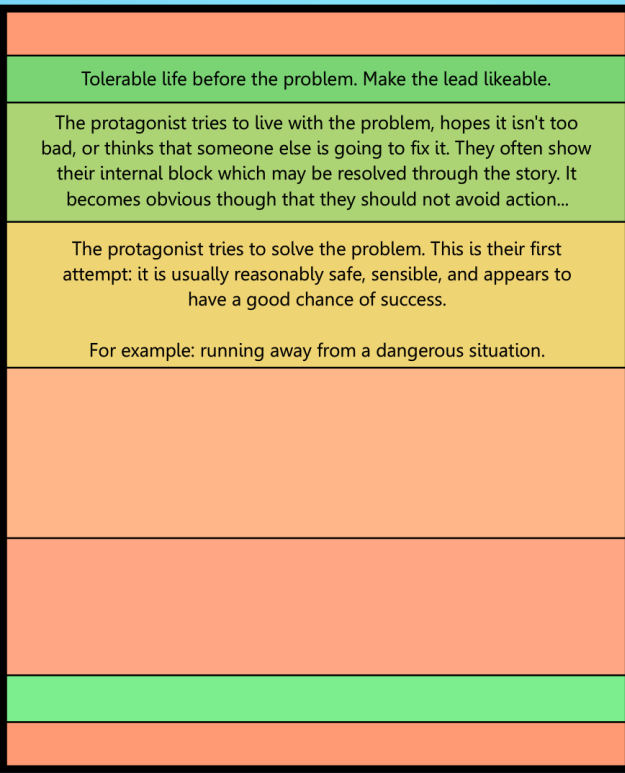
What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:



BEGINNING



THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%

'The Inciting Incident': something goes wrong, that means that the life of the protagonist **will need to change**.

State the external objective: the protagonist literally says what they are going to do to fix the problem (as they see it).

The low mid-point: the first try at fixing the plan didn't work, often causing (or caused by) a rift in the protagonist's group.





BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

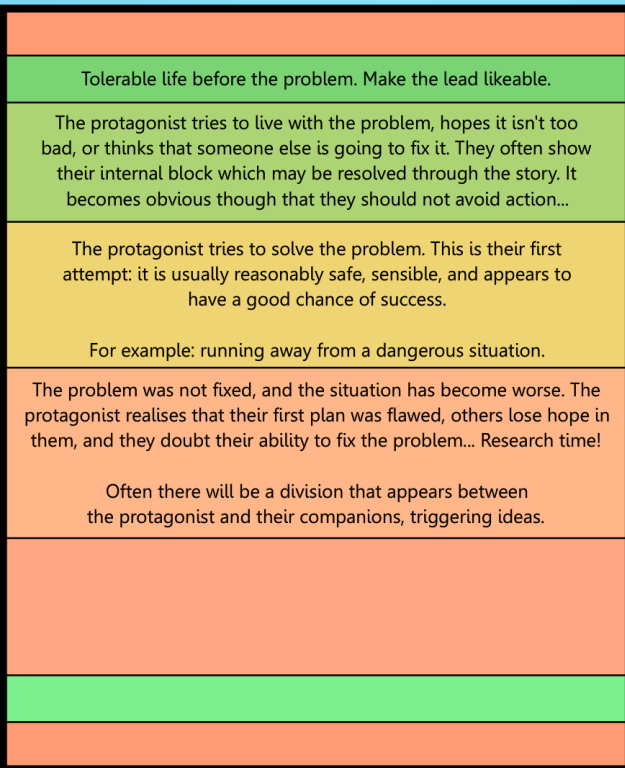
What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:



BEGINNING



Tolerable life before the problem. Make the lead likeable.

The protagonist tries to live with the problem, hopes it isn't too bad, or thinks that someone else is going to fix it. They often show their internal block which may be resolved through the story. It becomes obvious though that they should not avoid action...

The protagonist tries to solve the problem. This is their first attempt: it is usually reasonably safe, sensible, and appears to have a good chance of success.

For example: running away from a dangerous situation.

The problem was not fixed, and the situation has become worse. The protagonist realises that their first plan was flawed, others lose hope in them, and they doubt their ability to fix the problem... Research time!

Often there will be a division that appears between the protagonist and their companions, triggering ideas.

THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%

'The Inciting Incident': something goes wrong, that means that the life of the protagonist **will need to change**.

State the external objective: the protagonist literally says what they are going to do to fix the problem (as they see it).

The low mid-point: the first try at fixing the plan didn't work, often causing (or caused by) a rift in the protagonist's group.



BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

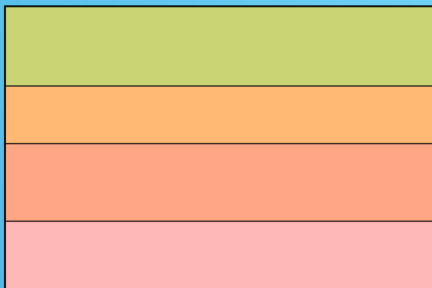
These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

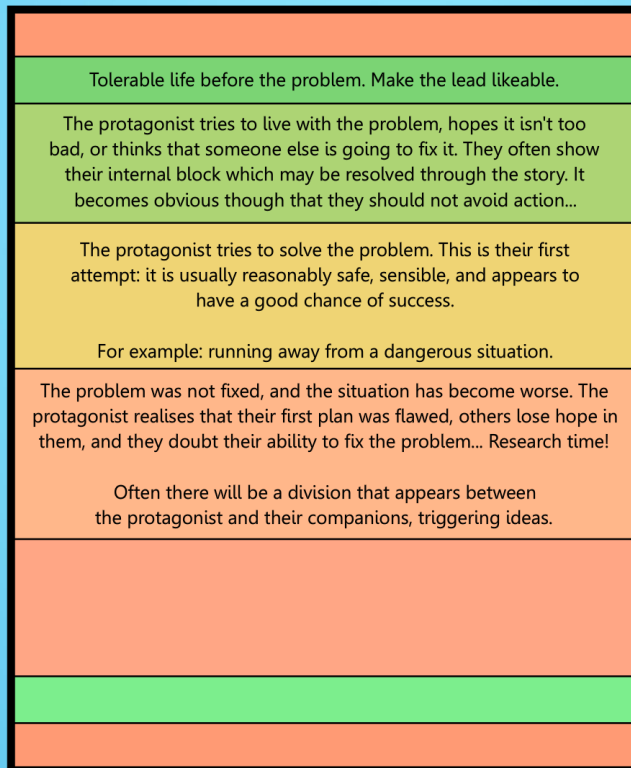
What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:



BEGINNING



THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%

'The Inciting Incident': something goes wrong, that means that the life of the protagonist **will need to change**.

State the external objective: the protagonist literally says what they are going to do to fix the problem (as they see it).

The low mid-point: the first try at fixing the plan didn't work, often causing (or caused by) a rift in the protagonist's group.

Hope: something is found or happens (int/ext. **change**) that gives the protagonist hope for overcoming the problem... If they risk everything!



BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

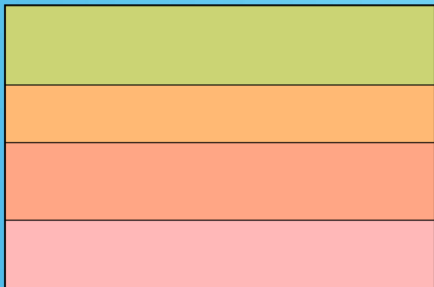
These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

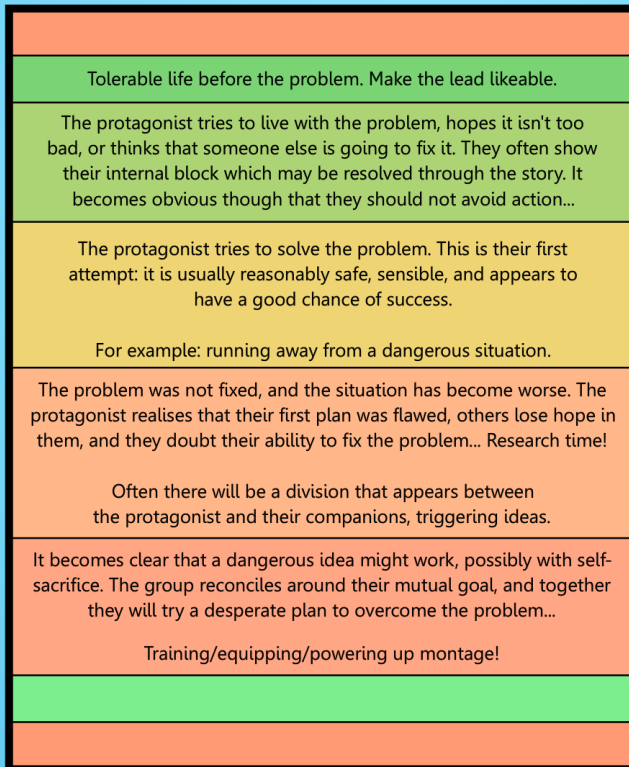
What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:



BEGINNING



THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%

'The Inciting Incident': something goes wrong, that means that the life of the protagonist **will need to change**.

State the external objective: the protagonist literally says what they are going to do to fix the problem (as they see it).

The low mid-point: the first try at fixing the plan didn't work, often causing (or caused by) a rift in the protagonist's group.

Hope: something is found or happens (int/ext. change) that gives the protagonist hope for overcoming the problem... If they risk everything!



BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

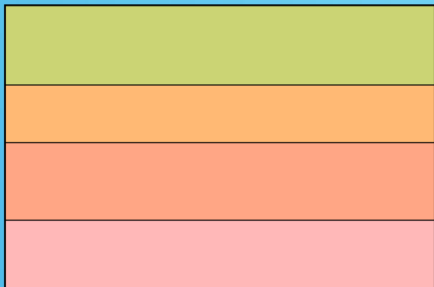
These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

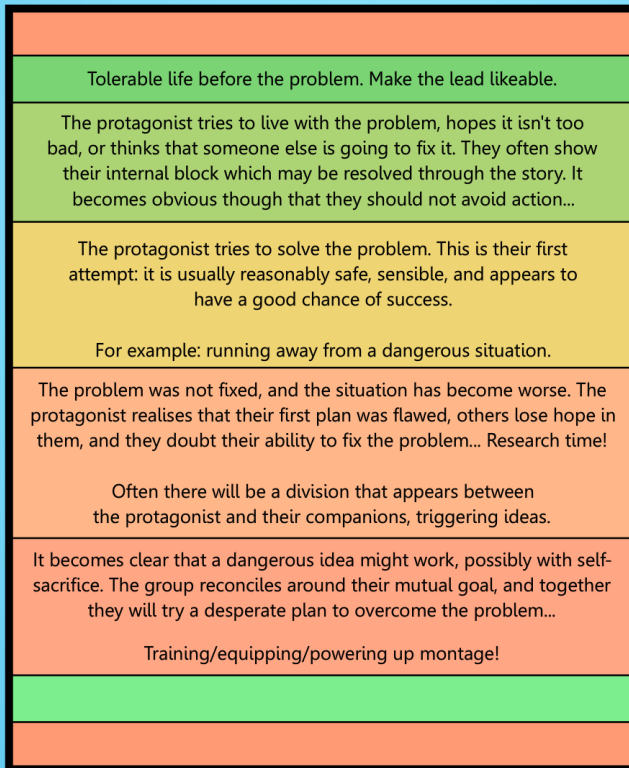
What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:



BEGINNING



THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%

'The Inciting Incident': something goes wrong, that means that the life of the protagonist **will need to change**.

State the external objective: the protagonist literally says what they are going to do to fix the problem (as they see it).

The low mid-point: the first try at fixing the plan didn't work, often causing (or caused by) a rift in the protagonist's group.

Hope: something is found or happens (int/ext. change) that gives the protagonist hope for overcoming the problem... If they risk everything!

'The Black Moment': all those risks look like they won't pay off. All is lost! Except that one small thing they learnt/did along the journey might just help enough... Maybe!



BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

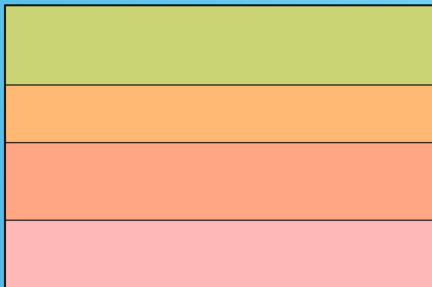
These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

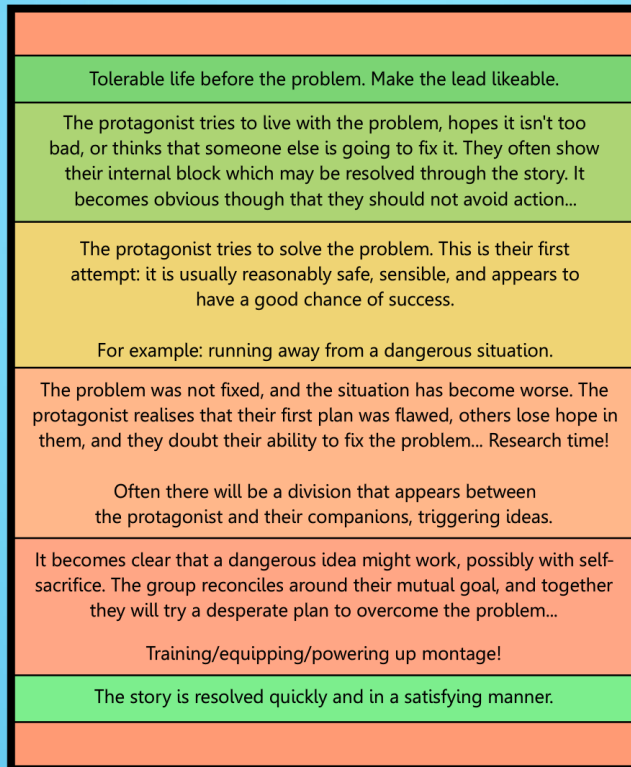
What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:



BEGINNING



THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%

'The Inciting Incident': something goes wrong, that means that the life of the protagonist **will need to change**.

State the external objective: the protagonist literally says what they are going to do to fix the problem (as they see it).

The low mid-point: the first try at fixing the plan didn't work, often causing (or caused by) a rift in the protagonist's group.

Hope: something is found or happens (int/ext. change) that gives the protagonist hope for overcoming the problem... If they risk everything!

'The Black Moment': all those risks look like they won't pay off. All is lost! Except that one small thing they learnt/did along the journey might just help enough... Maybe!



That's a model for *most* stories

- As a player/character journey, it fits most strong experiences
- This works on an intuitive and emotional level to feel rewarding
- But...



Making a thriller, action, or a horror story?

- There's an additional bit of the structure you might want to consider adding...
- **'The grabber'** is a burst of action or fear at the beginning that promises the future of the game before it slows down for the 'before the inciting incident' scene building
- It's a way to let the player/character know that there is excitement ahead.



Metroid Prime

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire



Making a thriller, action, or a horror story?

- There's an additional bit of the structure you might want to consider adding...
- **'The grabber'** is a burst of action or fear at the beginning that promises the future of the game before it slows down for the 'before the inciting incident' scene building
- It's a way to let the player/character know that there is excitement ahead.



Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire



Making a thriller, action, or a horror story?

- There's an additional bit of the structure you might want to consider adding...
- **'The grabber'** is a burst of action or fear at the beginning that promises the future of the game before it slows down for the 'before the inciting incident' scene building
- It's a way to let the player/character know that there is excitement ahead.



and the Goblet of Fire



Making a thriller, action, or a horror story?

- There's an additional bit of the structure you might want to consider adding...
- **'The grabber'** is a burst of action or fear at the beginning that promises the future of the game before it slows down for the 'before the inciting incident' scene building
- It's a way to let the player/character know that there is excitement ahead.





Making a thriller, action, or a horror story?

- In horror stories, you also often have a final moment of fear at the end...
- **Evil lurks!**





Making a thriller, action, or a horror story?

- In horror stories, you also often have a final moment of fear at the end...
- **Evil lurks!**





Making a thriller, action, or a horror story?

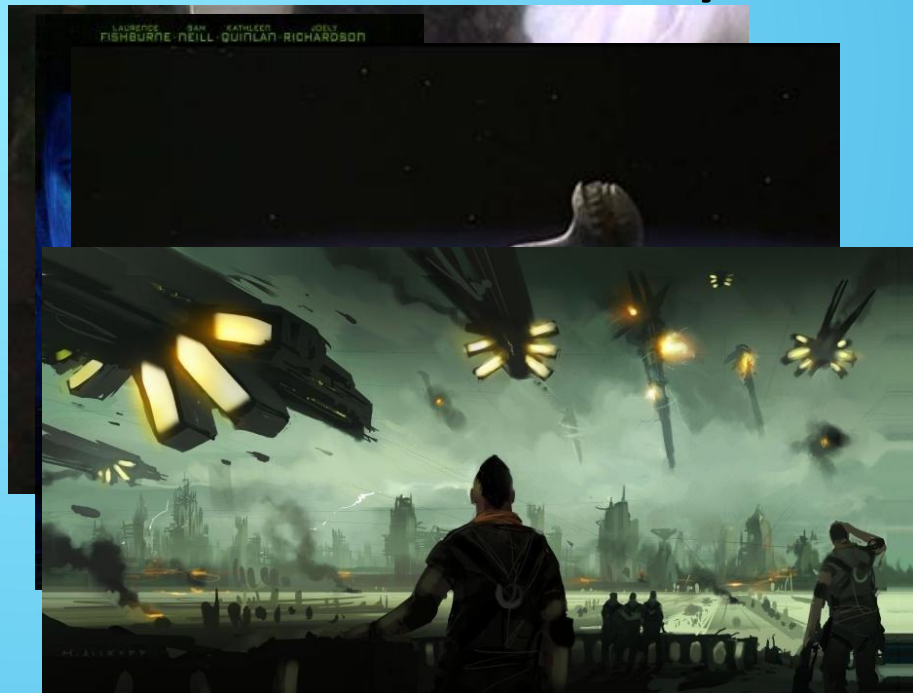
- In horror stories, you also often have a final moment of fear at the end...
- **Evil lurks!**
- But you also sometimes have this for thrillers, where the defeated organisation has actually survived or the war was bigger than the one battle we've seen.





Making a thriller, action, or a horror story?

- In horror stories, you also often have a final moment of fear at the end...
- **Evil lurks!**
- But you also sometimes have this for thrillers, where the defeated organisation has actually survived or the war was bigger than the one battle we've seen.





BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

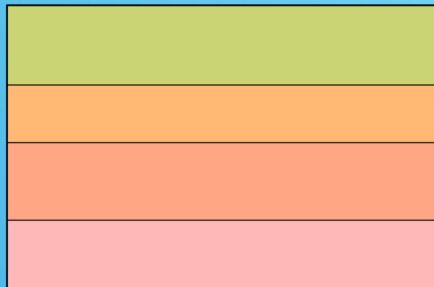
These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:



BEGINNING

Tolerable life before the problem. Make the lead likeable.

The protagonist tries to live with the problem, hopes it isn't too bad, or thinks that someone else is going to fix it. They often show their internal block which may be resolved through the story. It becomes obvious though that they should not avoid action...

The protagonist tries to solve the problem. This is their first attempt: it is usually reasonably safe, sensible, and appears to have a good chance of success.

For example: running away from a dangerous situation.

The problem was not fixed, and the situation has become worse. The protagonist realises that their first plan was flawed, others lose hope in them, and they doubt their ability to fix the problem... Research time!

Often there will be a division that appears between the protagonist and their companions, triggering ideas.

It becomes clear that a dangerous idea might work, possibly with self-sacrifice. The group reconciles around their mutual goal, and together they will try a desperate plan to overcome the problem...

Training/equipping/powering up montage!

The story is resolved quickly and in a satisfying manner.

THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%

'The Inciting Incident': something goes wrong, that means that the life of the protagonist **will need to change**.

State the external objective: the protagonist literally says what they are going to do to fix the problem (as they see it).

The low mid-point: the first try at fixing the plan didn't work, often causing (or caused by) a rift in the protagonist's group.

Hope: something is found or happens (int/ext. change) that gives the protagonist hope for overcoming the problem... If they risk everything!

'The Black Moment': all those risks look like they won't pay off. All is lost! Except that one small thing they learnt/did along the journey might just help enough... Maybe!



BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:

BEGINNING

OPTIONAL: '**Grabber**' - start with tension or high-action.

Tolerable life before the problem. Make the lead likeable.

The protagonist tries to live with the problem, hopes it isn't too bad, or thinks that someone else is going to fix it. They often show their internal block which may be resolved through the story. It becomes obvious though that they should not avoid action...

The protagonist tries to solve the problem. This is their first attempt: it is usually reasonably safe, sensible, and appears to have a good chance of success.

For example: running away from a dangerous situation.

The problem was not fixed, and the situation has become worse. The protagonist realises that their first plan was flawed, others lose hope in them, and they doubt their ability to fix the problem... Research time!

Often there will be a division that appears between the protagonist and their companions, triggering ideas.

It becomes clear that a dangerous idea might work, possibly with self-sacrifice. The group reconciles around their mutual goal, and together they will try a desperate plan to overcome the problem...

Training/equipping/powering up montage!

The story is resolved quickly and in a satisfying manner.

THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%

Action/thriller/horror genres

Foreshadows future events and possibilities.

'The Inciting Incident': something goes wrong, that means that the life of the protagonist **will need to change**.

State the external objective: the protagonist literally says what they are going to do to fix the problem (as they see it).

The low mid-point: the first try at fixing the plan didn't work, often causing (or caused by) a rift in the protagonist's group.

Hope: something is found or happens (int/ext. change) that gives the protagonist hope for overcoming the problem... If they risk everything!

'The Black Moment': all those risks look like they won't pay off. All is lost! Except that one small thing they learnt/did along the journey might just help enough... Maybe!



BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:

BEGINNING

OPTIONAL: **'Grabber'** - start with tension or high-action.

Tolerable life before the problem. Make the lead likeable.

The protagonist tries to live with the problem, hopes it isn't too bad, or thinks that someone else is going to fix it. They often show their internal block which may be resolved through the story. It becomes obvious though that they should not avoid action...

The protagonist tries to solve the problem. This is their first attempt: it is usually reasonably safe, sensible, and appears to have a good chance of success.

For example: running away from a dangerous situation.

The problem was not fixed, and the situation has become worse. The protagonist realises that their first plan was flawed, others lose hope in them, and they doubt their ability to fix the problem... Research time!

Often there will be a division that appears between the protagonist and their companions, triggering ideas.

It becomes clear that a dangerous idea might work, possibly with self-sacrifice. The group reconciles around their mutual goal, and together they will try a desperate plan to overcome the problem...

Training/equipping/powering up montage!

The story is resolved quickly and in a satisfying manner.

OPTIONAL: **Evil lurks!** The enemy may return, resurrect, or have escaped.

THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%

Action/thriller/horror genres

Foreshadows future events and possibilities.

'The Inciting Incident': something goes wrong, that means that the life of the protagonist **will need to change**.

State the external objective: the protagonist literally says what they are going to do to fix the problem (as they see it).

The low mid-point: the first try at fixing the plan didn't work, often causing (or caused by) a rift in the protagonist's group.

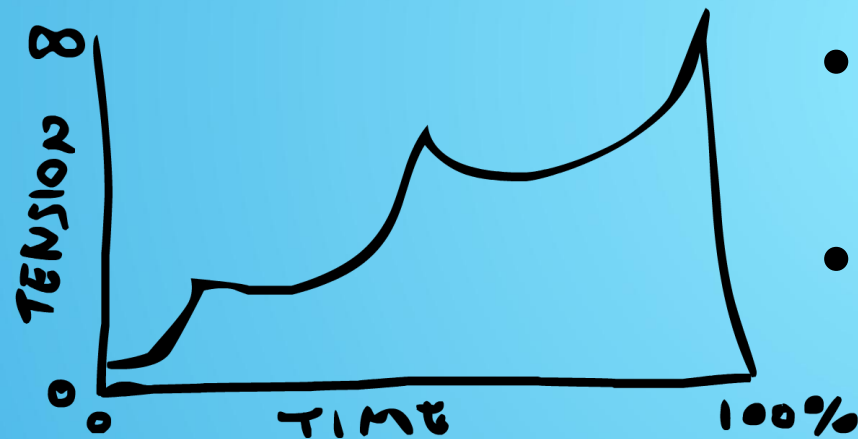
Hope: something is found or happens (int/ext. change) that gives the protagonist hope for overcoming the problem... If they risk everything!

'The Black Moment': all those risks look like they won't pay off. All is lost! Except that one small thing they learnt/did along the journey might just help enough... Maybe!

Usually only horror/thriller genres.



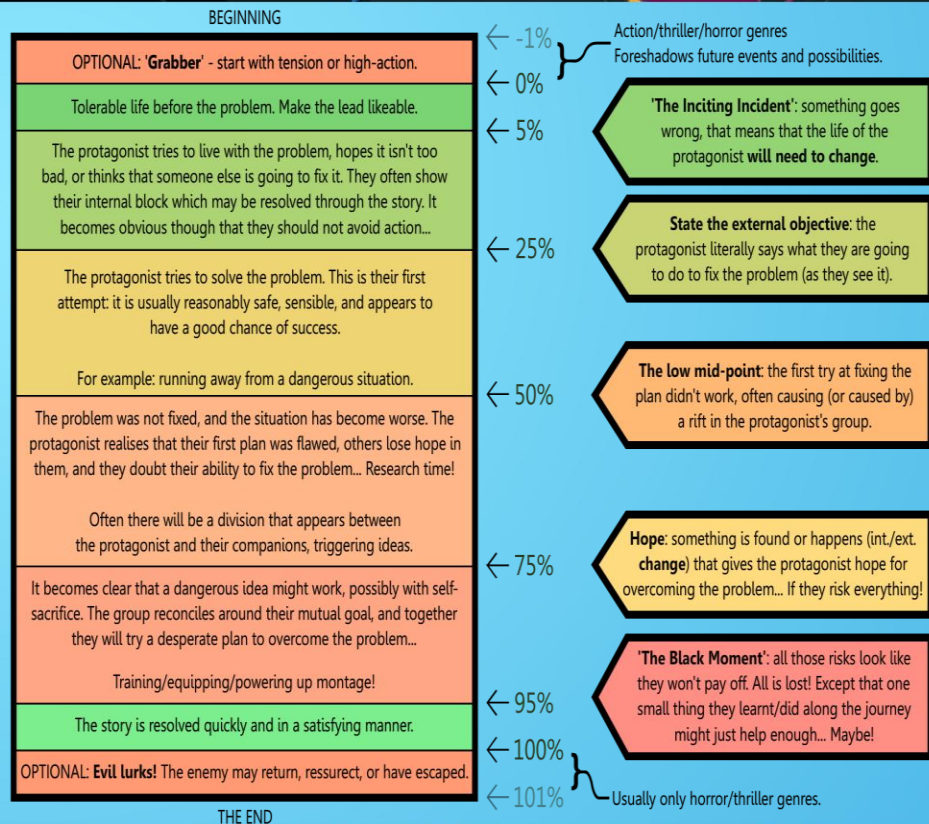
- We've described this...



- The diagram explains a player/character journey
- It can be applied literally to help write an in-game story...
- Or as a metaphorical structure to shape tension in a compelling mechanics-driven experience.



- This model works as a meta-structure for a game and also as a micro structure





- This model works as a meta-structure for a game and also as a macro structure
- For example, it can repeat per-level, with each level contributing to the completion of the internal/external motivations
- But it's too much detail for each encounter or scene
- We need a simpler guide for shorter events.



} level 1 {

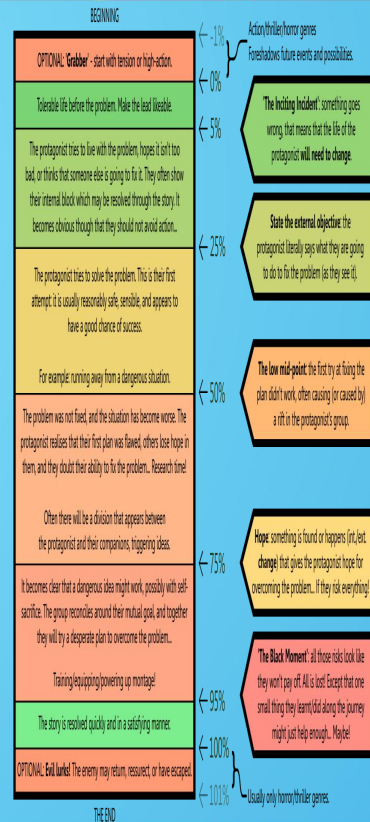
} level 2 {

} level 3 {

} level 4 {

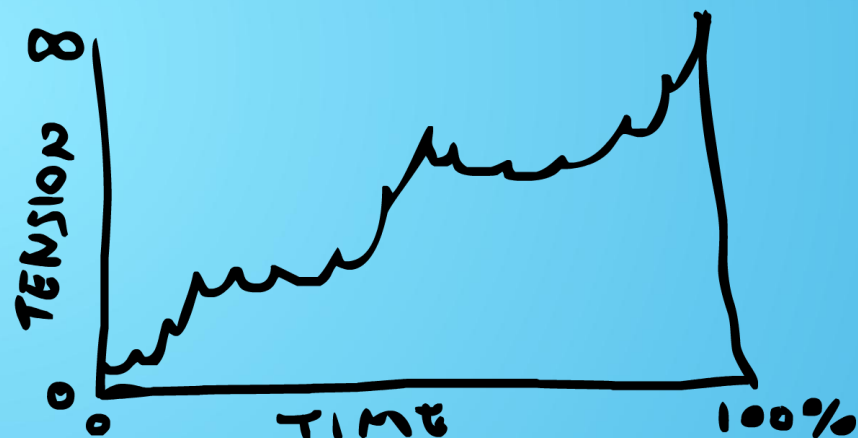
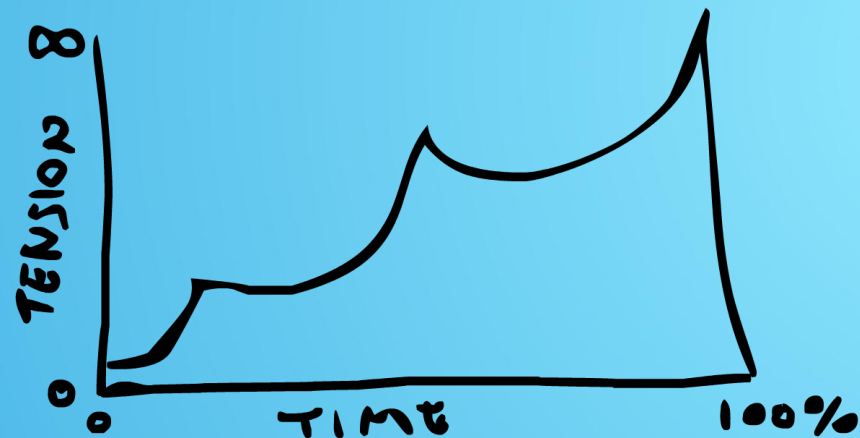
} level 5 {

} level 6 {





- We need to turn this...



- Into this
- How?



Scene structure

- All scenes or levels of your game must have:
 - an **objective** (a target player goal or experience)
 - '**conflict**' (something that makes the objective more difficult to reach: narrative/mechanics/both)
 - an **outcome** is then reached by requiring change from the player/character
- They either resolve or adapt to the conflict, building to the next part of the experience.



Scene structure

- Narrative example: Aliens Versus Predator
- **Objective** – reset power to get the colony working again
- **Conflict** – the **player successfully resets the power**, but it blows circuits across the colony
- **Outcome** – The colony is more at risk than before and **the character's life is more complex**.





Scene structure

- Mechanics example: God of War
- **Objective** – continue killing everything
- **Conflict** – enemies with shields block the usual attacks
- **Outcome** – the player needs to use new attacks to progress, making the game more challenging – **complexity increases for the player.**





BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:

BEGINNING

OPTIONAL: **'Grabber'** - start with tension or high-action.

Tolerable life before the problem. Make the lead likeable.

The protagonist tries to live with the problem, hopes it isn't too bad, or thinks that someone else is going to fix it. They often show their internal block which may be resolved through the story. It becomes obvious though that they should not avoid action...

The protagonist tries to solve the problem. This is their first attempt: it is usually reasonably safe, sensible, and appears to have a good chance of success.

For example: running away from a dangerous situation.

The problem was not fixed, and the situation has become worse. The protagonist realises that their first plan was flawed, others lose hope in them, and they doubt their ability to fix the problem... Research time!

Often there will be a division that appears between the protagonist and their companions, triggering ideas.

It becomes clear that a dangerous idea might work, possibly with self-sacrifice. The group reconciles around their mutual goal, and together they will try a desperate plan to overcome the problem...

Training/equipping/powering up montage!

The story is resolved quickly and in a satisfying manner.

OPTIONAL: **Evil lurks!** The enemy may return, resurrect, or have escaped.

THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%

Action/thriller/horror genres

Foreshadows future events and possibilities.

'The Inciting Incident': something goes wrong, that means that the life of the protagonist **will need to change**.

State the external objective: the protagonist literally says what they are going to do to fix the problem (as they see it).

The low mid-point: the first try at fixing the plan didn't work, often causing (or caused by) a rift in the protagonist's group.

Hope: something is found or happens (int/ext. change) that gives the protagonist hope for overcoming the problem... If they risk everything!

'The Black Moment': all those risks look like they won't pay off. All is lost! Except that one small thing they learnt/did along the journey might just help enough... Maybe!

Usually only horror/thriller genres.



BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

These often start with verbs such as 'Find...', 'Arrest...', 'Save...', etc.

INTERNAL

What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words 'Overcoming...' or 'Learning...' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:

OBJECTIVE

What does the protagonist want to do or expect to learn in this scene?

CONFLICT

What prevents this from happening?

OUTCOME

What happens that sends the protagonist on a new course, or makes their life more difficult?

The more times they fail to get exactly what they want, the more challenging their life becomes, and the greater their final achievement will be.

BEGINNING

OPTIONAL: '**Grabber**' - start with tension or high-action.

Tolerable life before the problem. Make the lead likeable.

The protagonist tries to live with the problem, hopes it isn't too bad, or thinks that someone else is going to fix it. They often show their internal block which may be resolved through the story. It becomes obvious though that they should not avoid action...

The protagonist tries to solve the problem. This is their first attempt: it is usually reasonably safe, sensible, and appears to have a good chance of success.

For example: running away from a dangerous situation.

The problem was not fixed, and the situation has become worse. The protagonist realises that their first plan was flawed, others lose hope in them, and they doubt their ability to fix the problem... Research time!

Often there will be a division that appears between the protagonist and their companions, triggering ideas.

It becomes clear that a dangerous idea might work, possibly with self-sacrifice. The group reconciles around their mutual goal, and together they will try a desperate plan to overcome the problem...

Training/equipping/powering up montage!

The story is resolved quickly and in a satisfying manner.

OPTIONAL: **Evil lurks!** The enemy may return, resurrect, or have escaped.

THE END

← -1%

← 0%

← 5%

← 25%

← 50%

← 75%

← 95%

← 100%

← 101%

Action/thriller/horror genres

Foreshadows future events and possibilities.

'The Inciting Incident': something goes wrong, that means that the life of the protagonist **will need to change**.

State the external objective: the protagonist literally says what they are going to do to fix the problem (as they see it).

The low mid-point: the first try at fixing the plan didn't work, often causing (or caused by) a rift in the protagonist's group.

Hope: something is found or happens (int/ext. **change**) that gives the protagonist hope for overcoming the problem... If they risk everything!

'The Black Moment': all those risks look like they won't pay off. All is lost! Except that one small thing they learnt/did along the journey might just help enough... Maybe!

Usually only horror/thriller genres.



Games are players' stories

- If your game feels flat, then thinking of your player's experience as a story is a way of debugging it
- Here are four debug questions to ask if a game, event, or level feels unsatisfying (there will be a diagram of these at the end too) :
 - Is the player's **objective** clear?
 - Is there escalating mechanical or narrative **conflict**, or is it only repetition?
 - Does the **outcome** meaningfully add to the mechanics, narrative, or both?
 - Over the level or the game, was there **change** from the start to the finish, for the player, the character or both?



Conclusion

- Good designers already *intuitively* use story structures to create compelling and rewarding games
- Learning to do it *consciously* is a powerful way of understanding how we shape great experiences
- Whether your game is narrative or mechanics oriented, learning to think like a storyteller helps you make intelligent player-focused design choices
- I hope you've found this talk interesting and useful, get in touch if you want to know more, and please leave comments with your review after the session – I do read them all 😊
- Have fun, make great games, and tell great stories!



INDEPENDENT GAMES
SUMMIT

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis
Professor of Creative and Entertainment Games



COPPER STONE SEA
tell your story better



Thank you for listening!

Storytelling Tools to Boost Your Indie Game's Narrative and Gameplay

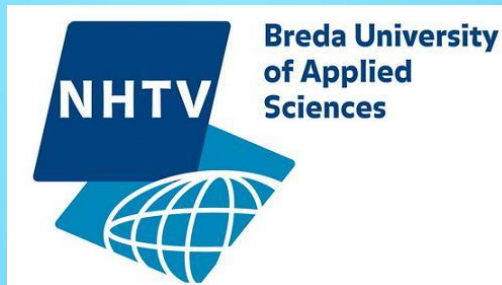
Dr. Mata Haggis

e: Haggis.M@nhtv.nl

t: @MataHaggis @CopperStoneSea

li: linkedin.com/in/matazone

w: CopperStoneSea.com



COPPER STONE SEA
tell your story better

(Big version of the diagram and debug questions coming up next!)



GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE®

| FEB 27-MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1-3, 2017 #GDC17



BASICS OF STORYTELLING

© 2017 v3.0

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis

Professor of Creative And Entertainment Games

(Inspired by Ray Bradbury, Cathy Yardley, & Blake Snyder)

Motivations:

EXTERNAL

What does the protagonist want to **change in the world around them** or in their status/relationships?

These often start with verbs such as '**Find...**', '**Arrest...**', '**Save...**', etc.

INTERNAL

What does the protagonist need to **change inside them** to make them a more complete person?

These often start with the words '**Overcoming...**' or '**Learning...**' followed by an emotion or feeling relating to an event.

Per scene:

OBJECTIVE

What does the protagonist want to do or expect to learn in this scene?

CONFLICT

What prevents this from happening?

OUTCOME

What happens that sends the protagonist on a new course, or makes their life more difficult?

The more times they fail to get exactly what they want, the more challenging their life becomes, and the greater their final achievement will be.

BEGINNING

OPTIONAL: '**Grabber**' - start with tension or high-action.

Tolerable life before the problem. Make the lead likeable.

The protagonist tries to live with the problem, hopes it isn't too bad, or thinks that someone else is going to fix it. They often show their internal block which may be resolved through the story. It becomes obvious though that they should not avoid action...

The protagonist tries to solve the problem. This is their first attempt: it is usually reasonably safe, sensible, and appears to have a good chance of success.

For example: running away from a dangerous situation.

The problem was not fixed, and the situation has become worse. The protagonist realises that their first plan was flawed, others lose hope in them, and they doubt their ability to fix the problem... Research time!

Often there will be a division that appears between the protagonist and their companions, triggering ideas.

It becomes clear that a dangerous idea might work, possibly with self-sacrifice. The group reconciles around their mutual goal, and together they will try a desperate plan to overcome the problem...

Training/equipping/powering up montage!

The story is resolved quickly and in a satisfying manner.

OPTIONAL: **Evil lurks!** The enemy may return, ressurect, or have escaped.

THE END

← -1%

Action/thriller/horror genres
Foreshadows future events and possibilities.

← 0%

← 5%

'**The Inciting Incident**': something goes wrong, that means that the life of the protagonist **will need to change**.

← 25%

State the external objective: the protagonist literally says what they are going to do to fix the problem (as they see it).

← 50%

The low mid-point: the first try at fixing the plan didn't work, often causing (or caused by) a rift in the protagonist's group.

← 75%

Hope: something is found or happens (int./ext. **change**) that gives the protagonist hope for overcoming the problem... If they risk everything!

← 95%

'**The Black Moment**': all those risks look like they won't pay off. All is lost! Except that one small thing they learnt/did along the journey might just help enough... Maybe!

← 100%

← 101%

Usually only horror/thriller genres.



SCENE DEBUGGING QUESTIONS

Dr. Mata Haggis
@MataHaggis
Professor of Creative And
Entertainment Games

CopperStoneSea.com

Is the character/player's *objective* clear?

In context of internal/external motivations, why does this scene exist? (e.g. drama, traversal, combat, building atmosphere.) If its only filler, remove it to improve quality.

Does the *outcome* meaningfully add to the mechanics, narrative, or both?

The outcome should be different than the expected objective, provoking change. If the outcome is exactly in line with the character/player's objective then strengthen or recontextualise the conflict until a new, meaningful adaptation is necessary.

Tips:

The character can fail while the player succeeds - let the apparently right choices be flawed, leading to more interesting conflicts. Internal change is more powerful than external change. Give breaks between events and conflict to build tension ('waves' of info/enemies).

Is there escalating mechanical or narrative *conflict*, or is it only repetition?

What prevents the predictable completion of the objective? (e.g. character disagreement, forking paths, new enemies, foreshadowing through environmental storytelling.) Check pacing of when new elements are introduced (mechanics, scenarios, information, characters) or recombine existing elements in challenging new ways.

Over the level or the game, was there *change* from the start to the finish, for the character/player/both?

What has changed about how they will play following this? Is the player/character different/smarter/damaged/better equipped for having gone through this scene/game? Ensure they have progressed or (finally) satisfied their external/internal/both motivations.

© Mata Haggis 2017 v1.0



INDEPENDENT GAMES
SUMMIT

Dr. Mata Haggis @MataHaggis
Professor of Creative and Entertainment Games



COPPER STONE SEA
tell your story better



Don't forget to leave feedback 😊

Q&A in the wrap-up room!

Storytelling Tools to Boost Your Indie Game's Narrative and Gameplay

Dr. Mata Haggis

e: Haggis.M@nhtv.nl

t: @MataHaggis @CopperStoneSea

li: [linkedin.com/in/matazone](https://www.linkedin.com/in/matazone)

w: CopperStoneSea.com



Breda University
of Applied
Sciences



COPPER STONE SEA

tell your story better



GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE®

| FEB 27-MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1-3, 2017 #GDC17

