



Composing an Interactive Musical: Lessons Learned from Creating Figment 22/03/18

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A BIT ABOUT ME

- Game designer, composer and audio designer
- 10 years in the games industry
- Freelance composer on the side
- Currently at Bedtime Digital Games
- Been touring most of Europe with various bands



A BIT ABOUT FIGMENT

- Action-adventure developed by Bedtime Digital Games
- Imagines the mind as a physical place
- Explores the subconscious and trauma through its story and characters



THE MUSIC IN FIGMENT

- Strong focus on music from the beginning of the production
- Characters sing like in a musical
- Music affects the world and gameplay
- Melodies help tell the story



ABOUT THIS TALK

1. The Musical Identity
 2. Composition Approaches
 3. Sound Effects as Music
 4. An Interactive Musical
 5. Music as the Storyteller
- Warning: Contains mild spoilers!





THE MUSICAL IDENTITY

THE AUDIO IN FIGMENT

- 160+ music files
- 1000+ sfx files
- 1000+ lines of spoken dialogue
- 2+ hours of unique music
- Various songs performed by four different artists
- 1 old man rapping



FINDING THE STYLE

- Strange yet recognizable style
- Hand-painted visuals vs. hand-played, analogue instruments
- Distinct styles define different places
- Style should work both for exploration and action



FINDING THE STYLE

- Unique position: Sound and game designer in one
- One-man-army: Play to my strengths
- Look in places I knew and loved:
Record collection and video games

DON'T MAKE IT HARDER
THAN IT HAS TO BE!



THE MUSICAL IDENTITY

Folk: Simplicity and melodic

Punk: Anarchist, DIY and unconfined by rules



PERF



THE MUSICAL IDENTITY

- Playful mix of styles with hand-played foundation
- DIY approach to recording
- Something recognizable and something unexpected
- Different moods with acoustic guitar as glue



CEREBRUM CITY



FREEDOM ISLES



CLOCKWORK TOWN



THE MUSICAL IDENTITY

- It's a musical!
- Picking styles that fit characters' personalities and mood of the boss fights
- Break the formula — nightmares don't belong
- Local musicians play the parts



WRITING CHARACTERS THROUGH SONG

THE PLAGUE

The fear of getting sick

- Dirty Tom Waits inspired beat
- Coughing and sneezing part of beat
- Fart tuba
- Raspy, out-of-control voice

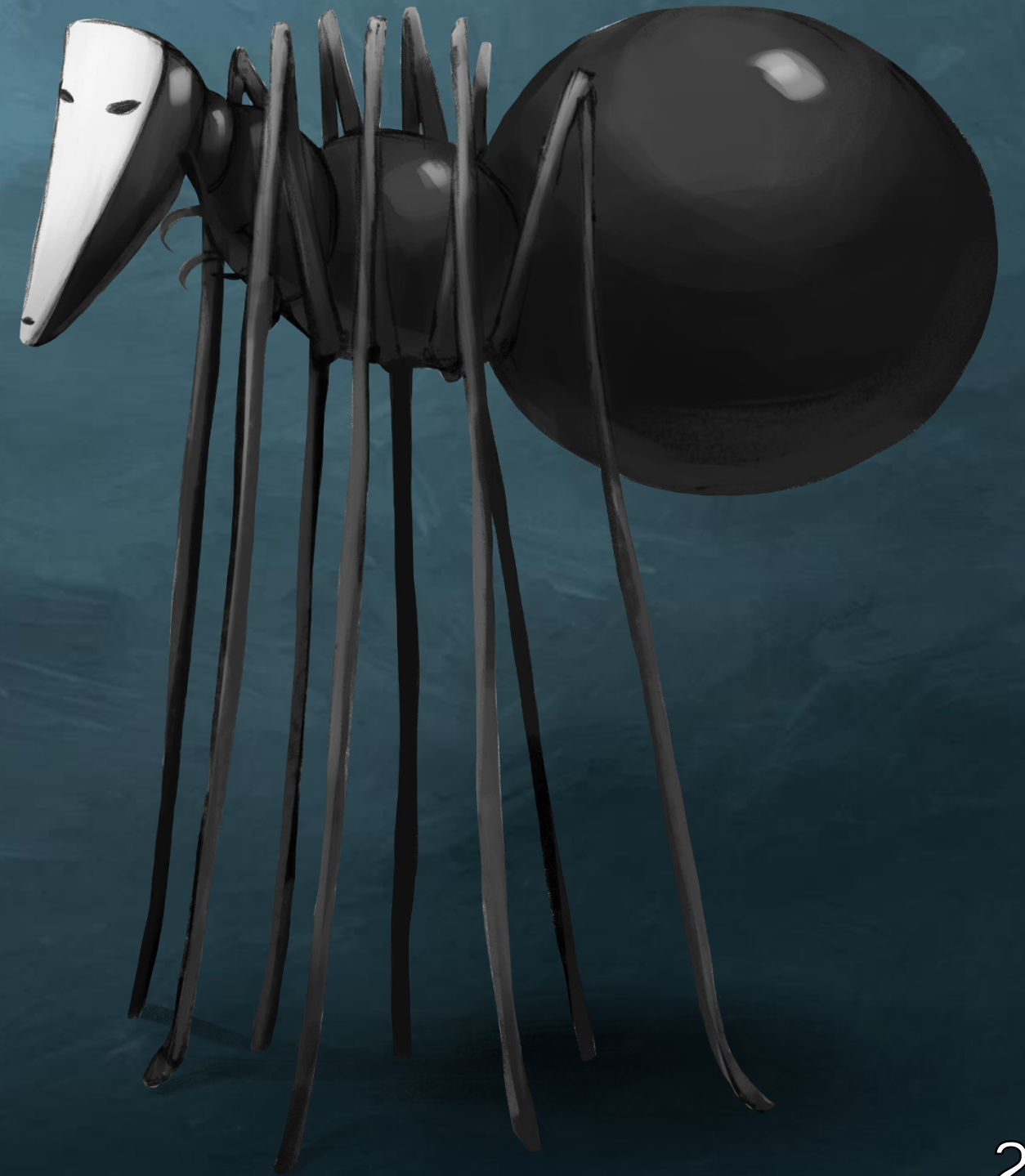


WRITING CHARACTERS THROUGH SONG

THE SPIDER QUEEN

The fear of everything the creeps and crawls

- Jazzy ballad of sorts
- Plucked strings
- Creepy, chromatic bassline
- Eerie, seductive vocals

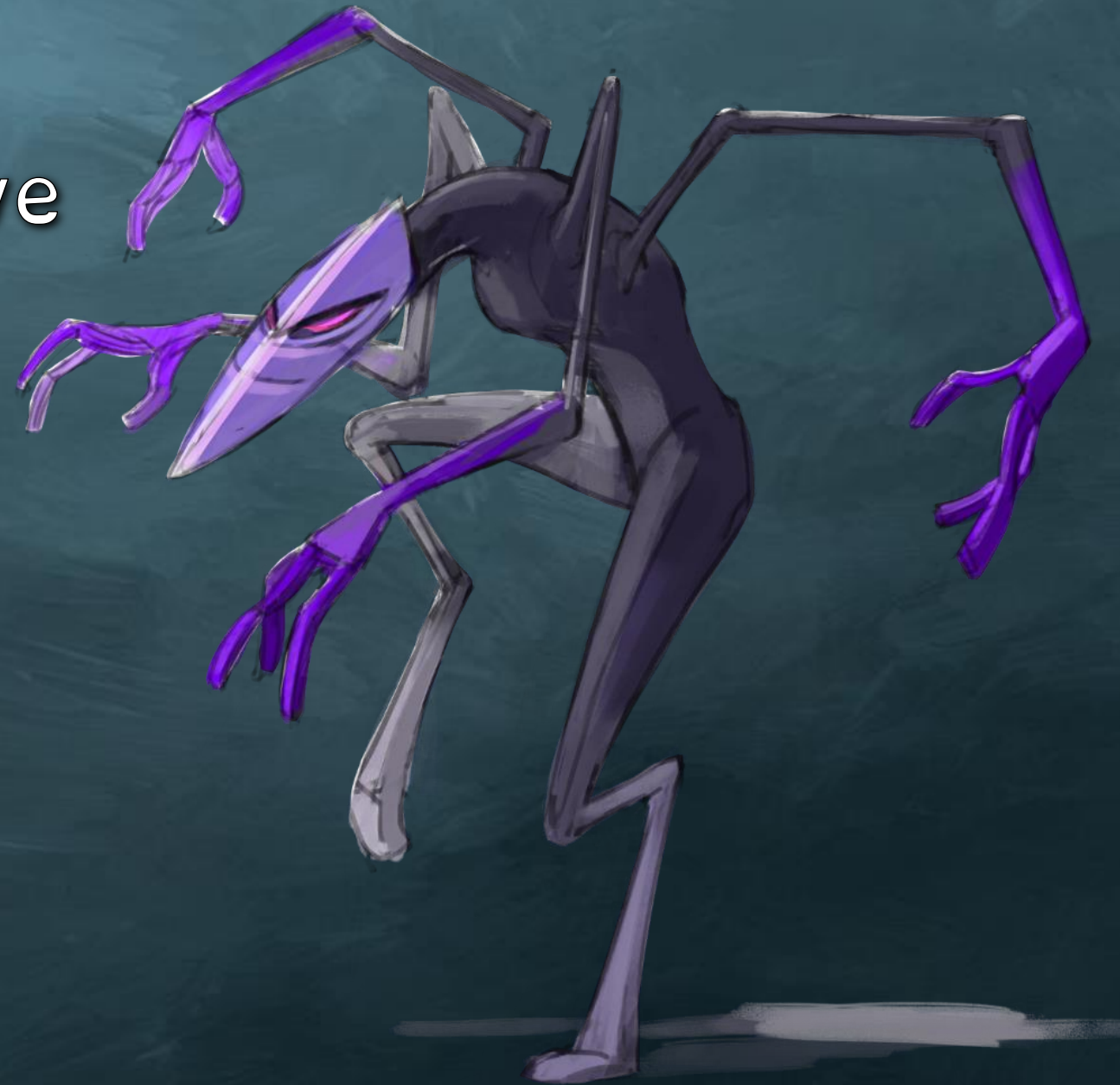


WRITING CHARACTERS THROUGH SONG

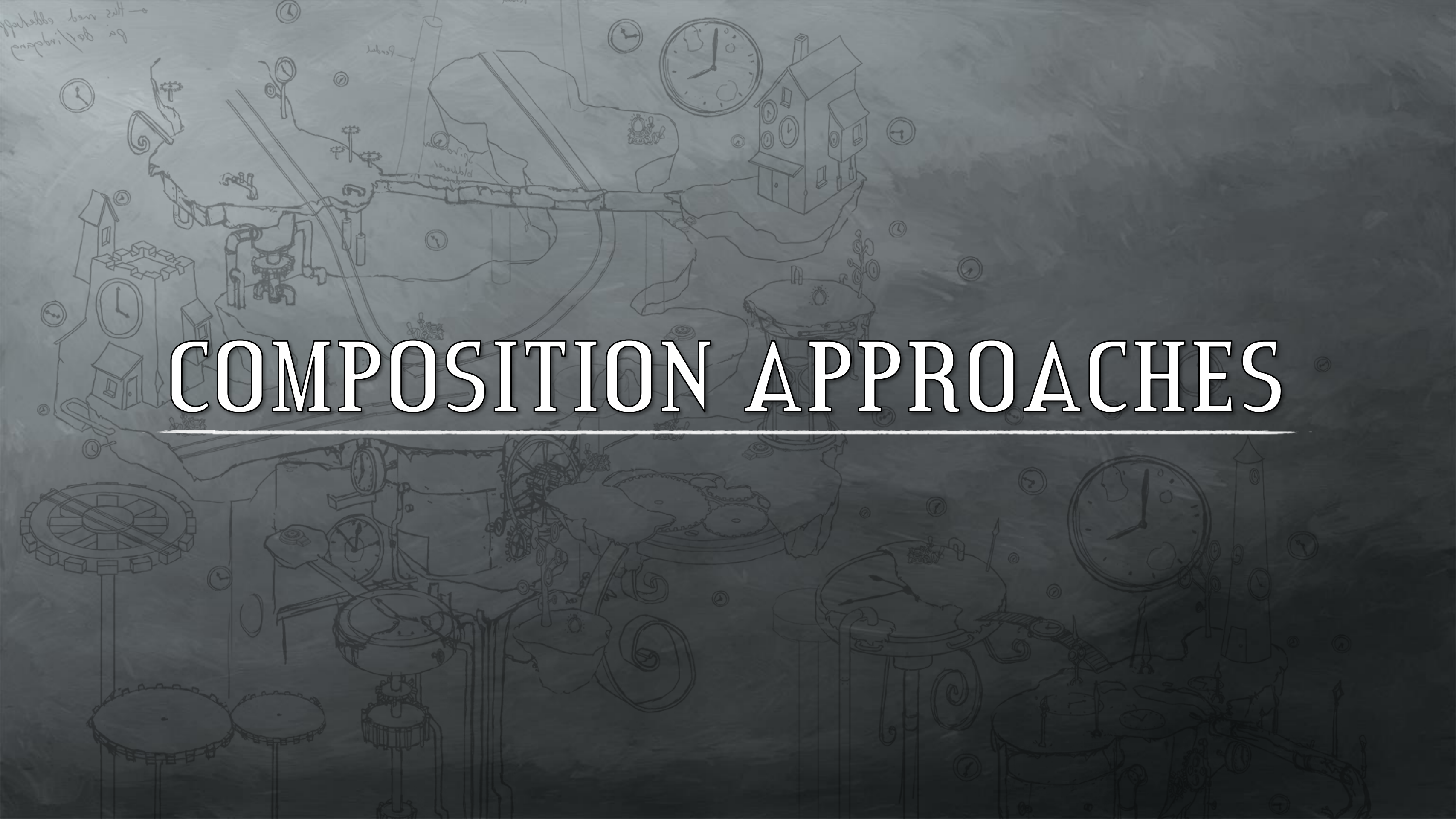
THE FEAR OF LOSS

The fear of losing possessions and love ones

- Balkan-infused metal ballad
- Organ and bells
- Builds from soft to grindcore
- Powerful, authoritarian vocals







COMPOSITION APPROACHES

HORIZONTAL COMPOSITION

- Music cut into smaller pieces
- Jump between tracks to create dynamic evolution
- Like tracks on a record

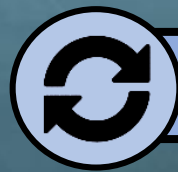


EXAMPLE: SPIDERLING FIGHT

MUSIC PIECES:

Level
Base Loop

Intro



Fight Loop

Run Away

Win Fight

TRANSITIONS:



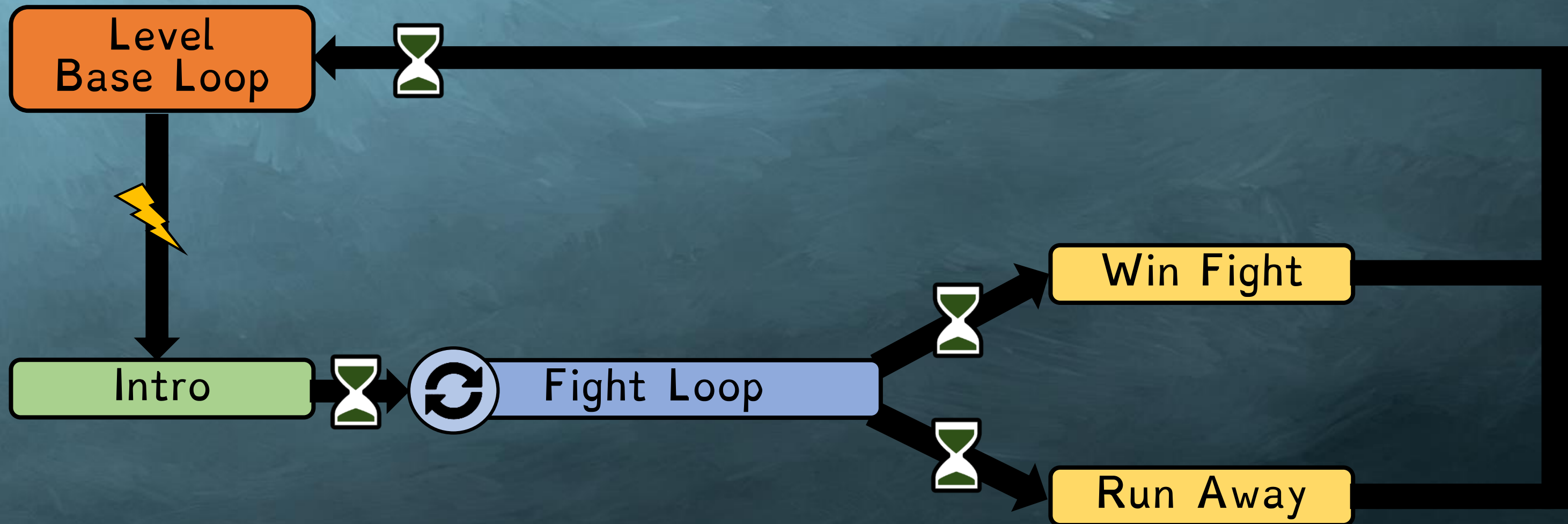
: Instant



: Wait for the beat

EXAMPLE: SPIDERLING FIGHT

MUSIC FLOW:



HORIZONTAL APPROACH

PROS:

- Dynamic evolution
- Ability to change tempo and harmony

CONS:

- Transitions are hard to get smooth
- Must wait for beat to not sound disruptive

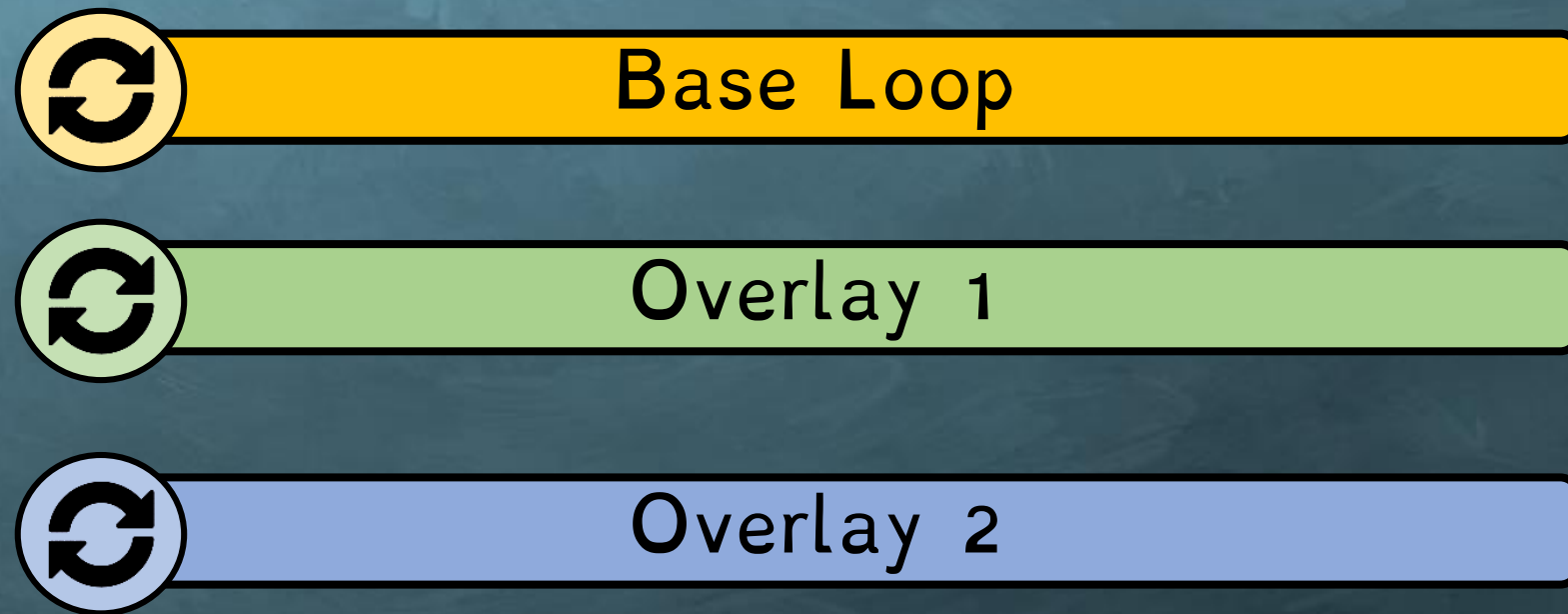
CONSIDERATIONS:

- Timing is very important
- Requires a relatively fast tempo
- Great for action with many sound effects



VERTICAL COMPOSITION

- Layers playing simultaneously
- Mute and enable layers to create dynamics

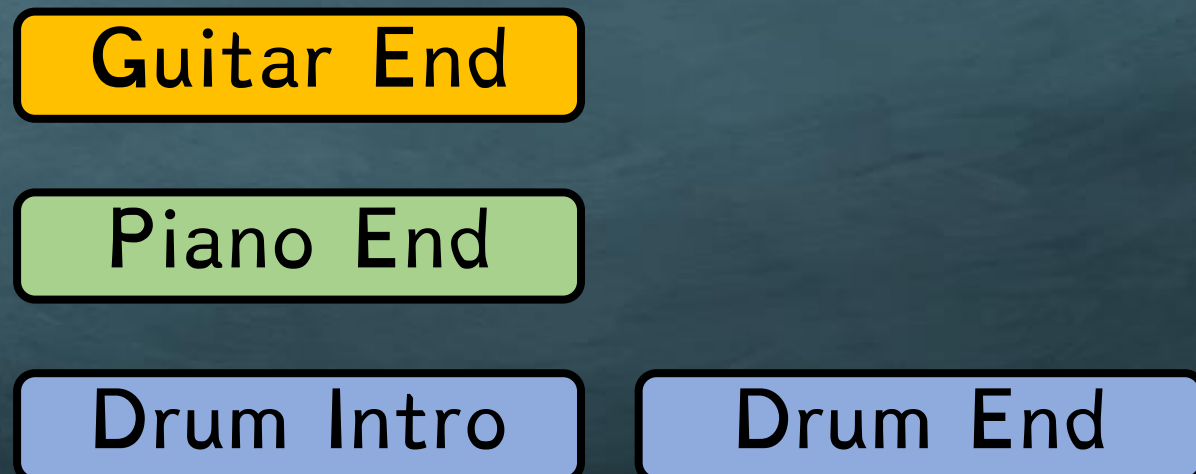


EXAMPLE: CEREBRUM CITY

MUSIC LOOPS:



TRANSITION PIECES:



VERTICAL APPROACH

PROS:

- Smooth transitions
- Immediate changes

CONS:

- Transitions might feel unmusical
- Can easily get very cluttered

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Tempo and harmony of pieces must sync perfectly
- Good for ambient tracks and storytelling
- Great for slow build-ups and subtle variation





SOUND EFFECTS AS MUSIC

MAKING THE WORLD SING

- The game world should be musical too and play along
- Vertical approach to sound effects
- Sound effects played in a rhythm can also be music
- Think about decorations as instruments in the game world



MAKING THE WORLD DANCE

- Why not make the world dance along?
- Animations to highlight the sound
- “Mickey Mousing”
- Surreal, diegetic music





MAKING THE MECHANICS SING AND DANCE

- Gimme more! Gimme game play!
- Game play blending into the music
- Music blending into the game play





MAKING THE MECHANICS SING AND DANCE

- Great dynamic between design and music
- Great feedback from players
- Music amplifies the feeling of the places you explore
- People don't hear the music unless it's shoved in their faces





AN INTERACTIVE MUSICAL

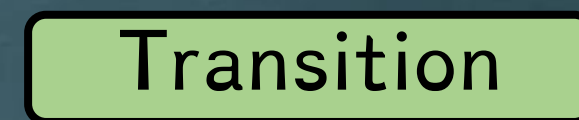
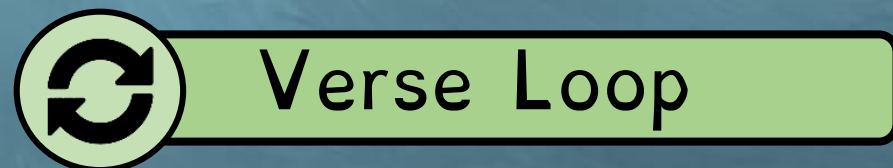
COMPOSING AN INTERACTIVE MUSICAL

- Take it up a notch for the boss fights
- Combine composition approaches and musical game play into songs
- Build mechanics around the music
- Create boss fights that almost play out as a dance



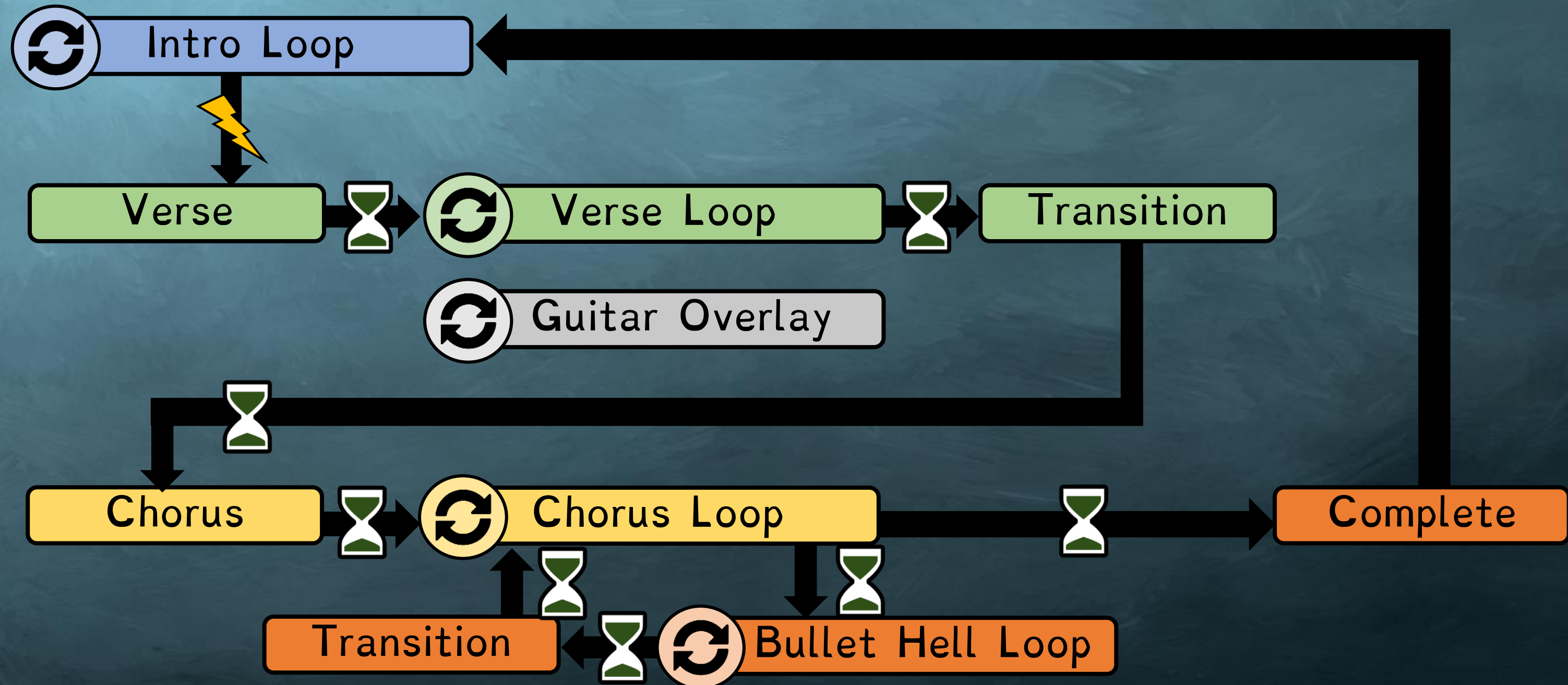
EXAMPLE: FEAR OF LOSS 2nd VERSE

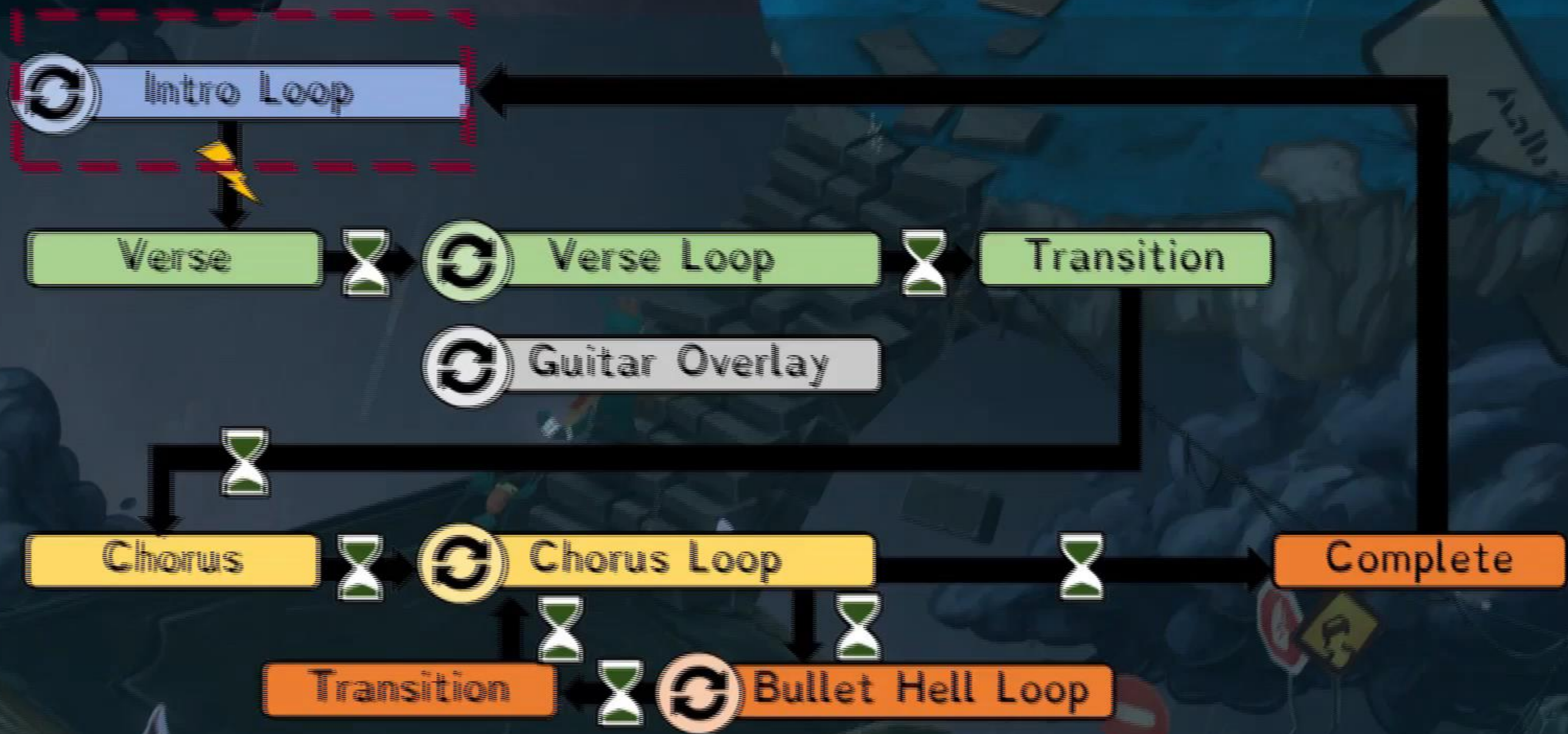
MUSIC PIECES:



EXAMPLE: FEAR OF LOSS 2nd VERSE

MUSIC FLOW:





COMPOSING AN INTERACTIVE MUSICAL

A few things we learned:

- Lyrics take brainpower to process
- Design game play flow around lyrics
- The more stuff in sync with the music the better
- People like musicals for some reason...





MUSIC AS THE STORYTELLER

TELLING A STORY THROUGH MUSIC

- Game world motifs and chord progressions
- Villain and game object vertical overlays
- Character Melody Motifs



CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MUSIC

DUSTY'S MOTIF

- Game main theme
- Follows the character's arch
- Motif develops from a few notes to the entire melody — from zero to hero



CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MUSIC

DUSTY'S MOTIF

- Full melody is presented in main menu



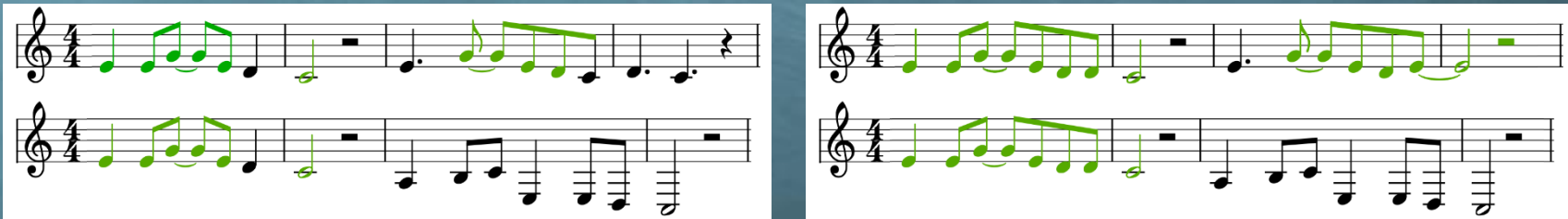
- Used as stinger. E.g. Finding sword.



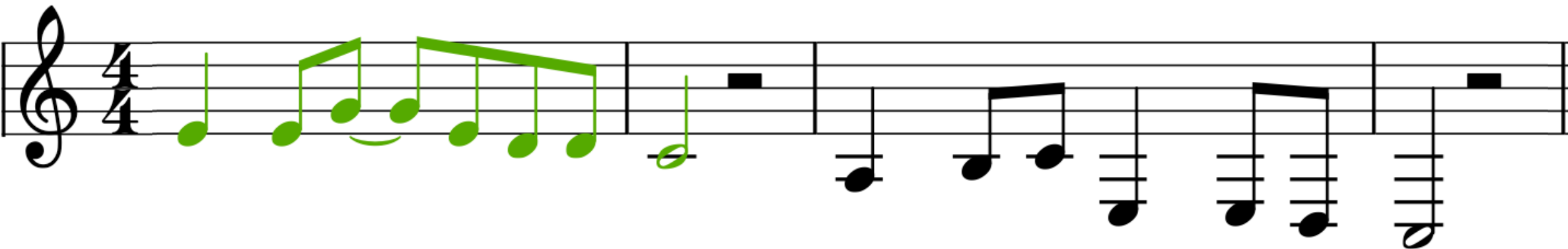
CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MUSIC

DUSTY'S MOTIF

- As the player pass important thresholds the theme is developed



- Piano stingers become increasingly present as vertical overlays towards ending



TELLING A STORY THROUGH MUSIC

THE FEAR OF LOSS'S MOTIF

- Melody line from chorus from the final musical song. “You will lose everything”



- Motif is intertwined in game play sequences where the villain is present.
- Preface final boss battle song



TELLING A STORY THROUGH MUSIC

THE FEAR OF LOSS'S MOTIF

- Morphs with Dusty's stingers as the villain starts to change him



TELLING A STORY THROUGH MUSIC

- Defeating the final nightmare, lets theme return to original form through stinger
- Completing the game, completes the main theme by adding lyrics during credits
- Like this...



Figment

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