GDC

Meaningless Choices and Impractical Advice
(Notes from a *Disco Elysium writer)*

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Writer, ZA/UM Studio

Instrumental vs Aestheticized Dialogue

1. *Instrumental dialogue* advances the gameplay loop in a clear, directed way.
   a. Dialogue structures are regularized depending on narrative function (quest giver, area boss, companion, seller, etc).
   b. Aesthetic qualities are subordinate to narrative function.

...
Big Marge - HORROR! THIEF! HORRIBLE THIEF! It came in the night. It took the eggs! It scrambled away, fast, fast, fast!
1. *Ask what the thief looked like.*
2. *Ask her where the creature ran off to.*
3. *Take your leave.*

Thank goodness you came! I am in desperate need of assistance. My daughter, Tandi, is missing. I do not know what to do!

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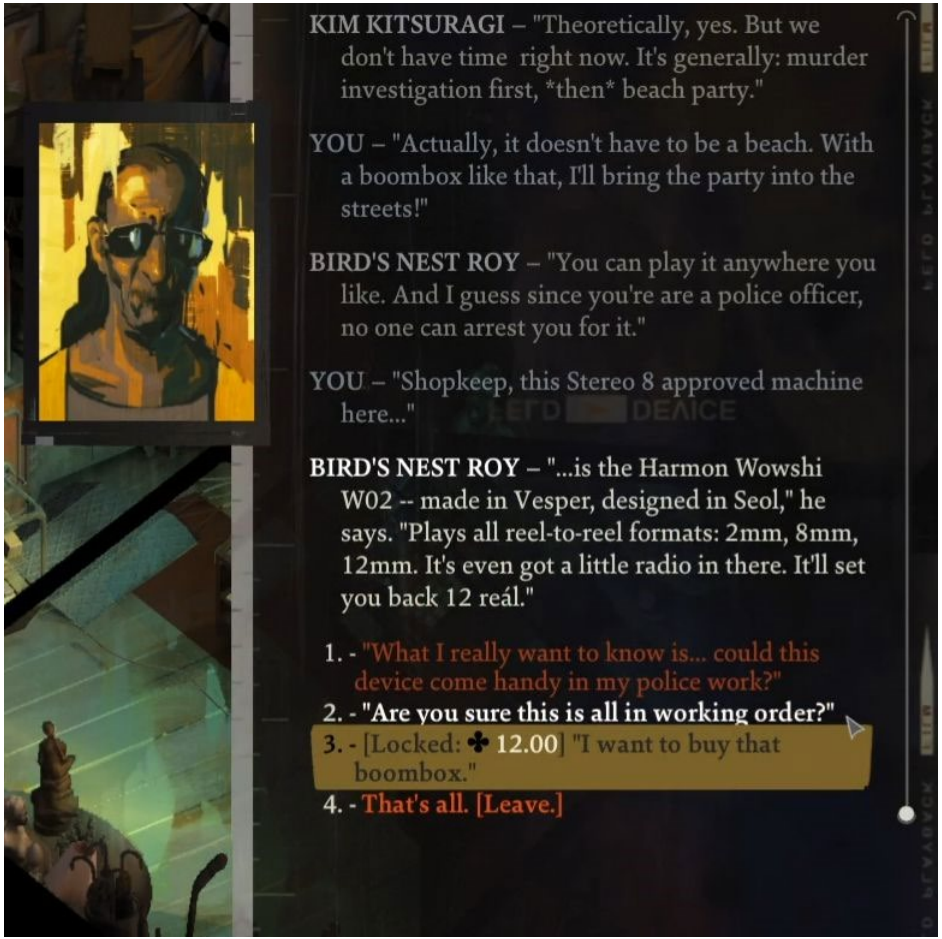
Instrumental vs Aestheticized Dialogue

1. *Aestheticized dialogue* is primarily interesting for its own sake and for the texture it adds to the world or narrative.
   a. Dialogue structures may be varied or unique.
   b. Narrative function may be downplayed or submerged.



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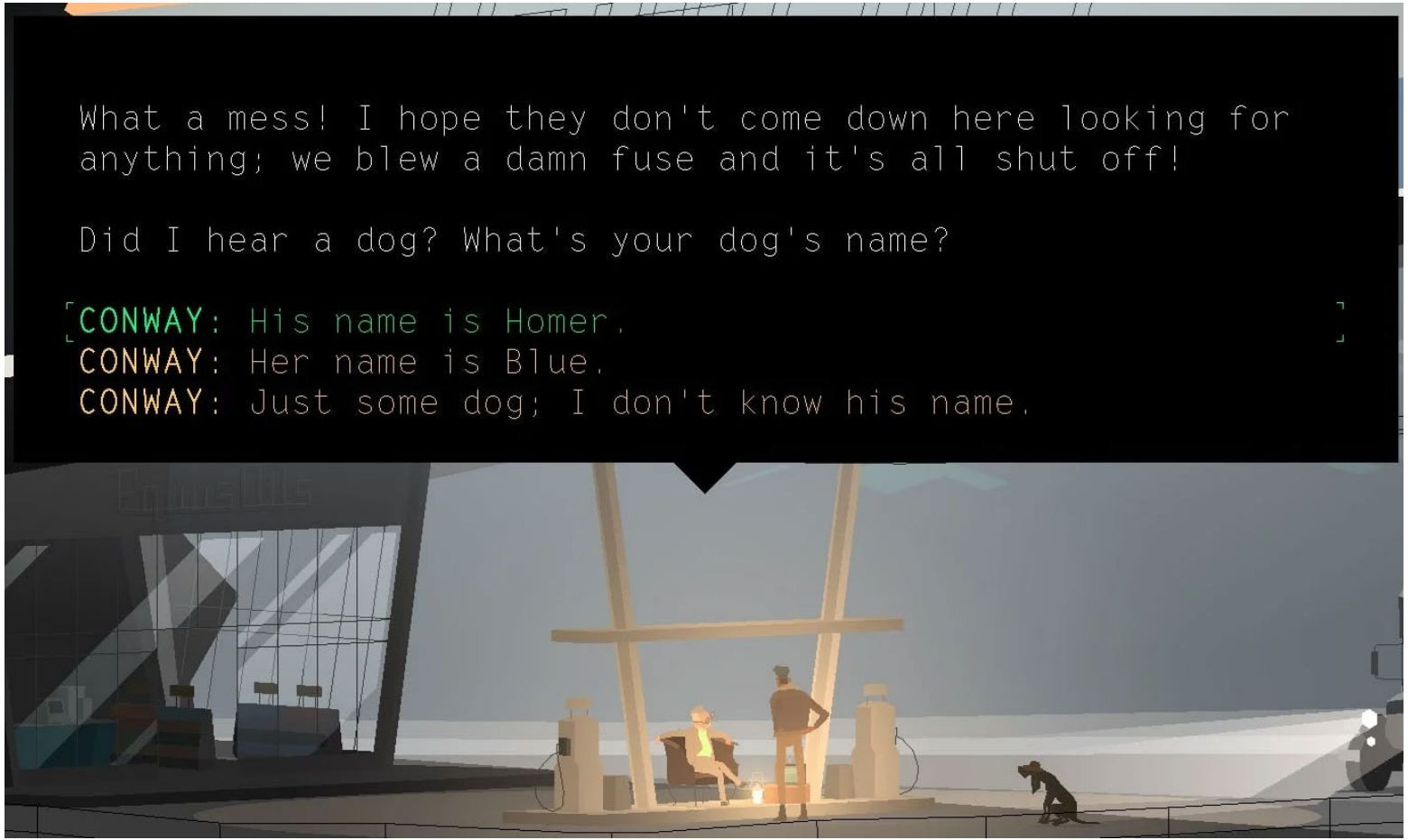
Four Features of Elytic Dialogue

1. Micro-reactivity.
2. Rhetorical approach.
3. Minimal gamification.
4. Radical asymmetry.

Micro -reactivity

The game remembers and responds to seemingly inconsequentia
player choices.


What a mess! I hope they don't come down here looking for anything; we blew a damn fuse and it's all shut off!
Did I hear a dog? What's your dog's name?
CONWAY: His name is Homer.
CONWAY: Her name is Blue.
CONWAY: Just some dog; I don't know his name.

WASHBASIN – On the table you see a bowl of water, a rough soap, and next to it a small hand mirror. A straight razor soaks inside the wash basin.

YOU – Is shaving the right call?

WASHBASIN – The water reflects back a vague image of your face -- nose bulbous and red, hair unkempt, wrinkles lining the eyes and forehead. The 'stache is gigantic.

COMPOSURE [Medium: Success] – A fresh start looms ahead. Clean yourself up and be born anew.

1. - Is shaving the right call?
2. - [Hand/Eye Coordination - Medium 10] Time to shave. Get these mutton chops off.
3. - [Leave.]

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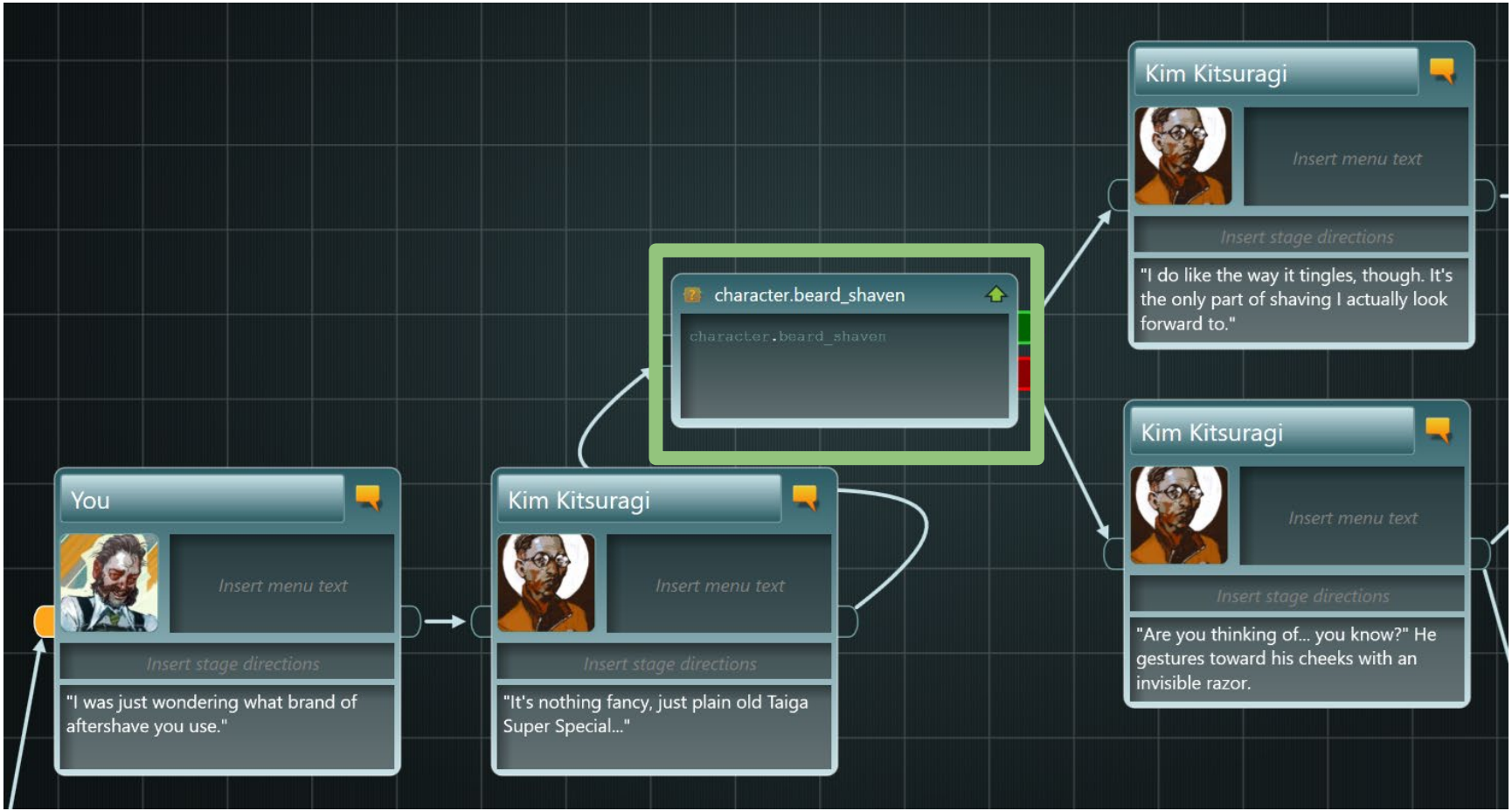
Kim Kitsuragi
Insert menu text
Insert stage directions
"I do like the way it tingles, though. It's the only part of shaving I actually look forward to."
character.beard_shaven
character.beard_shaven
Kim Kitsuragi
Insert menu text
Insert stage directions
"Are you thinking of... you know?" He gestures toward his cheeks with an invisible razor.
You
Insert menu text
Insert stage directions
"I was just wondering what brand of aftershave you use."
Kim Kitsuragi
Insert menu text
Insert stage directions
"It's nothing fancy, just plain old Taiga Super Special..."

Micro -reactivity

The game remembers and responds to seemingly inconsequentia
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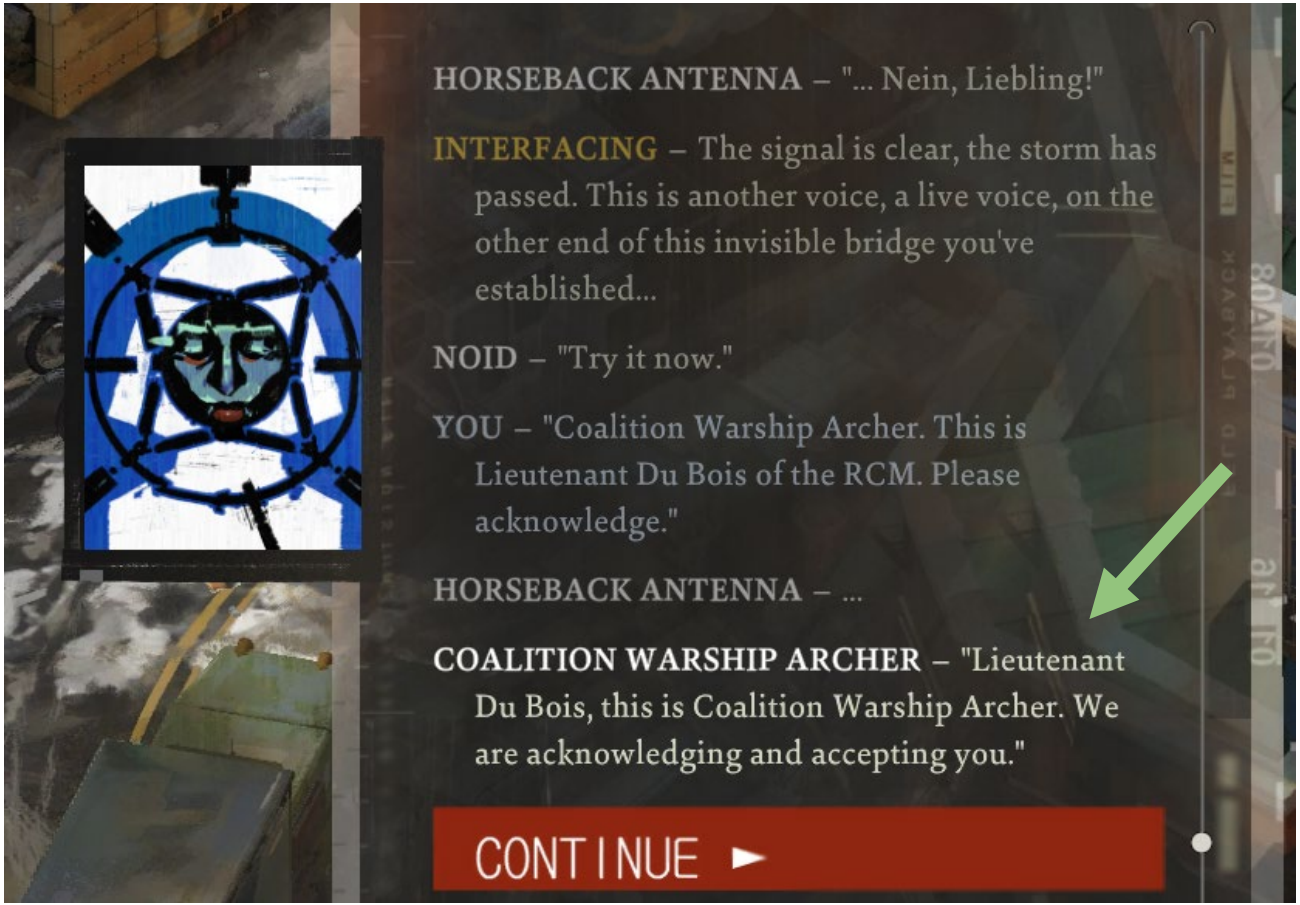
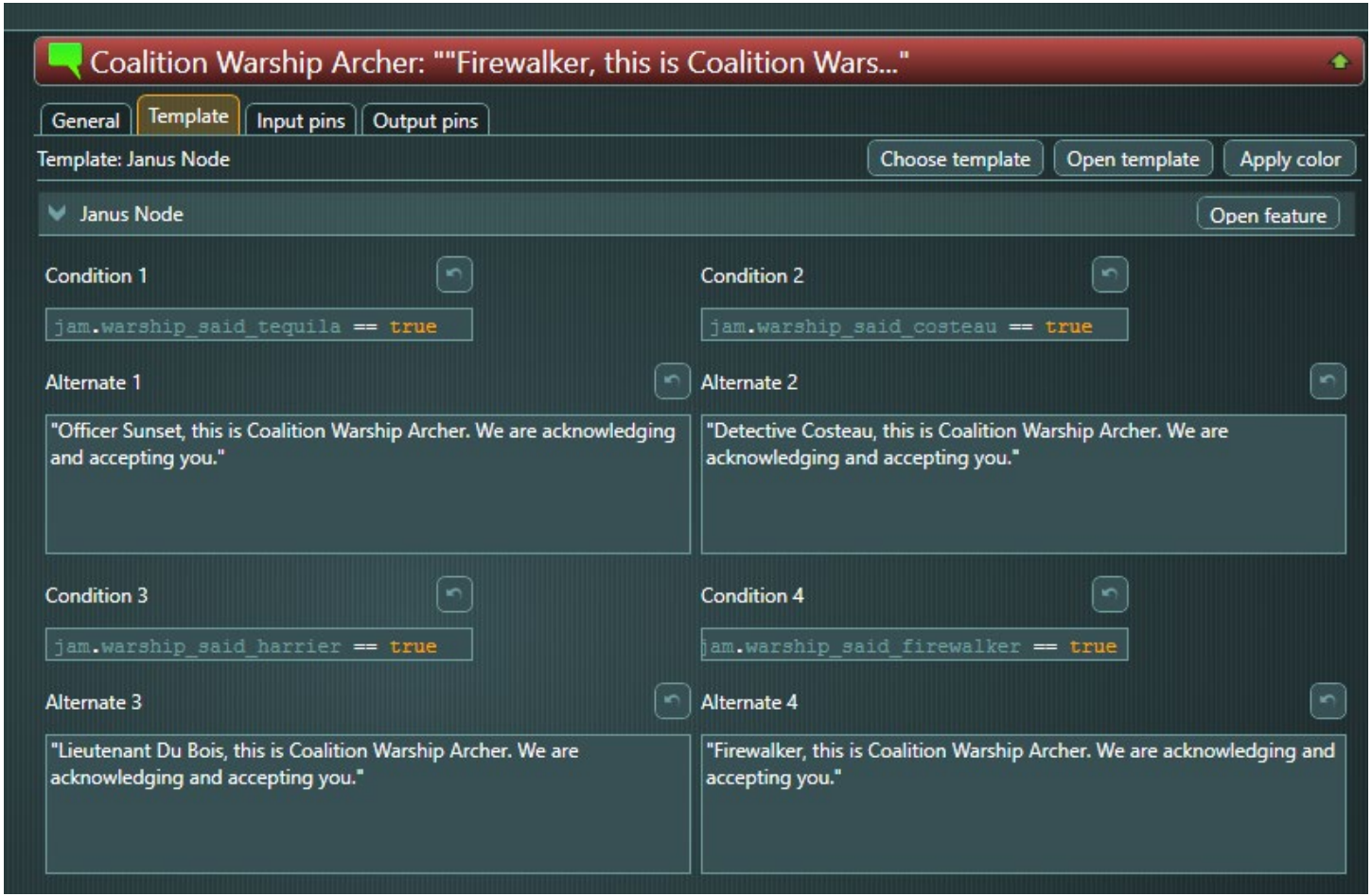
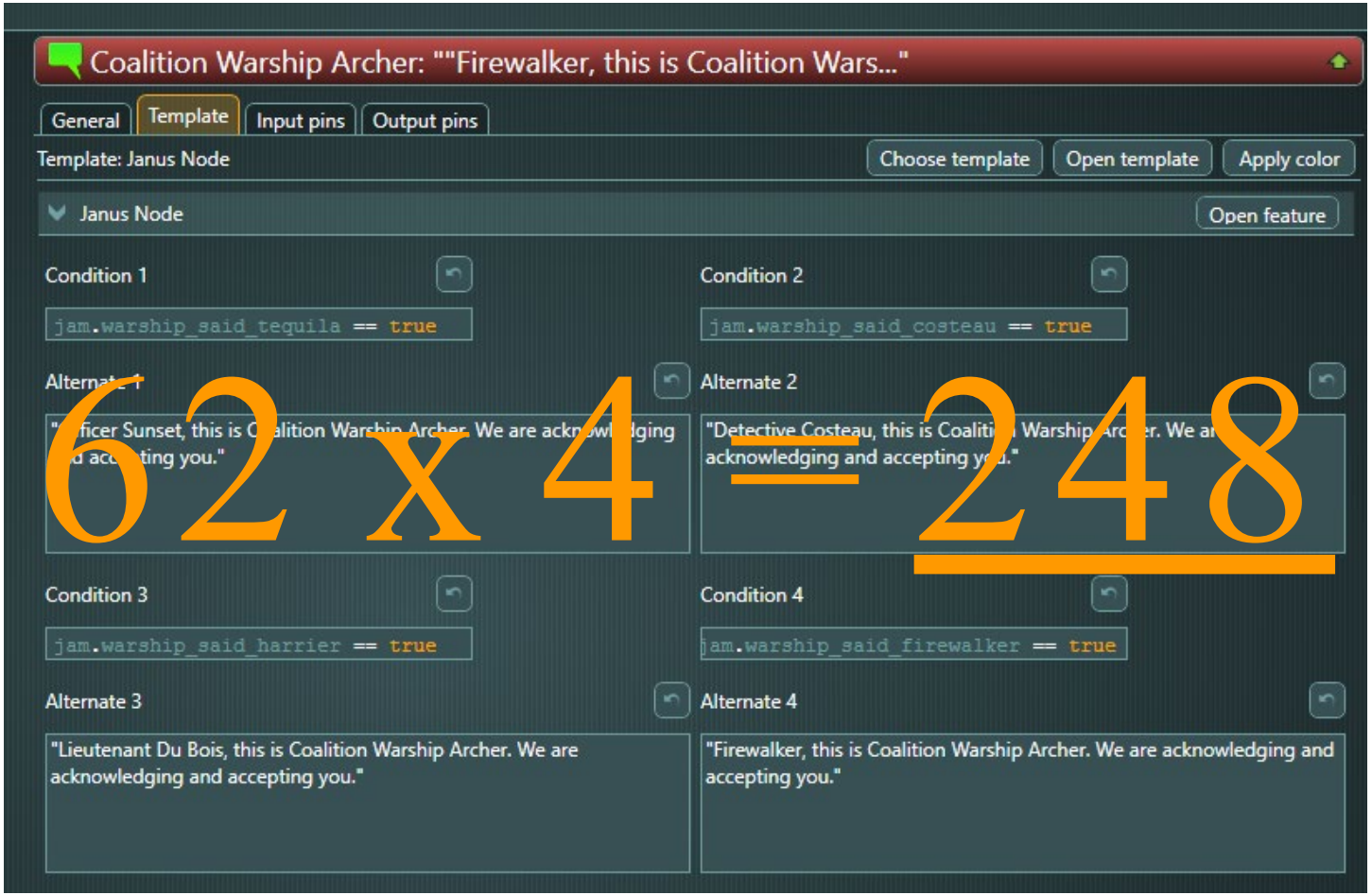
- Endless source of micro-ripples/regrets.
- Requires/causes brain damage.


HORSEBACK ANTENNA – "... Nein, Liebling!"
INTERFACING – The signal is clear, the storm has passed. This is another voice, a live voice, on the other end of this invisible bridge you've established...
NOID – "Try it now."
YOU – "Coalition Warship Archer. This is Lieutenant Du Bois of the RCM. Please acknowledge."
HORSEBACK ANTENNA – ...
COALITION WARSHIP ARCHER – "Lieutenant Du Bois, this is Coalition Warship Archer. We are acknowledging and accepting you."
CONTINUE


Coalition Warship Archer: ""Firewalker, this is Coalition Wars..."
General
Template
Input pins
Output pins
Template: Janus Node
Choose template
Open template
Apply color
Janus Node
Open feature
Condition 1
jam.warship_said_tequila == true
Condition 2
jam.warship_said_costeau == true
Alternate 1
"Officer Sunset, this is Coalition Warship Archer. We are acknowledging and accepting you."
Alternate 2
"Detective Costeau, this is Coalition Warship Archer. We are acknowledging and accepting you."
Condition 3
jam.warship_said_harrier == true
Condition 4
jam.warship_said_firewalker == true
Alternate 3
"Lieutenant Du Bois, this is Coalition Warship Archer. We are acknowledging and accepting you."
Alternate 4
"Firewalker, this is Coalition Warship Archer. We are acknowledging and accepting you."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62 x 4 = 248

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- Endless source of micro-ripples/regrets.
- Requires/causes brain damage.
- Feels like mind reading.

Rhetorical approach

Branching dialogue structures are treated as aesthetic objects tha
can evoke distinct player responses.

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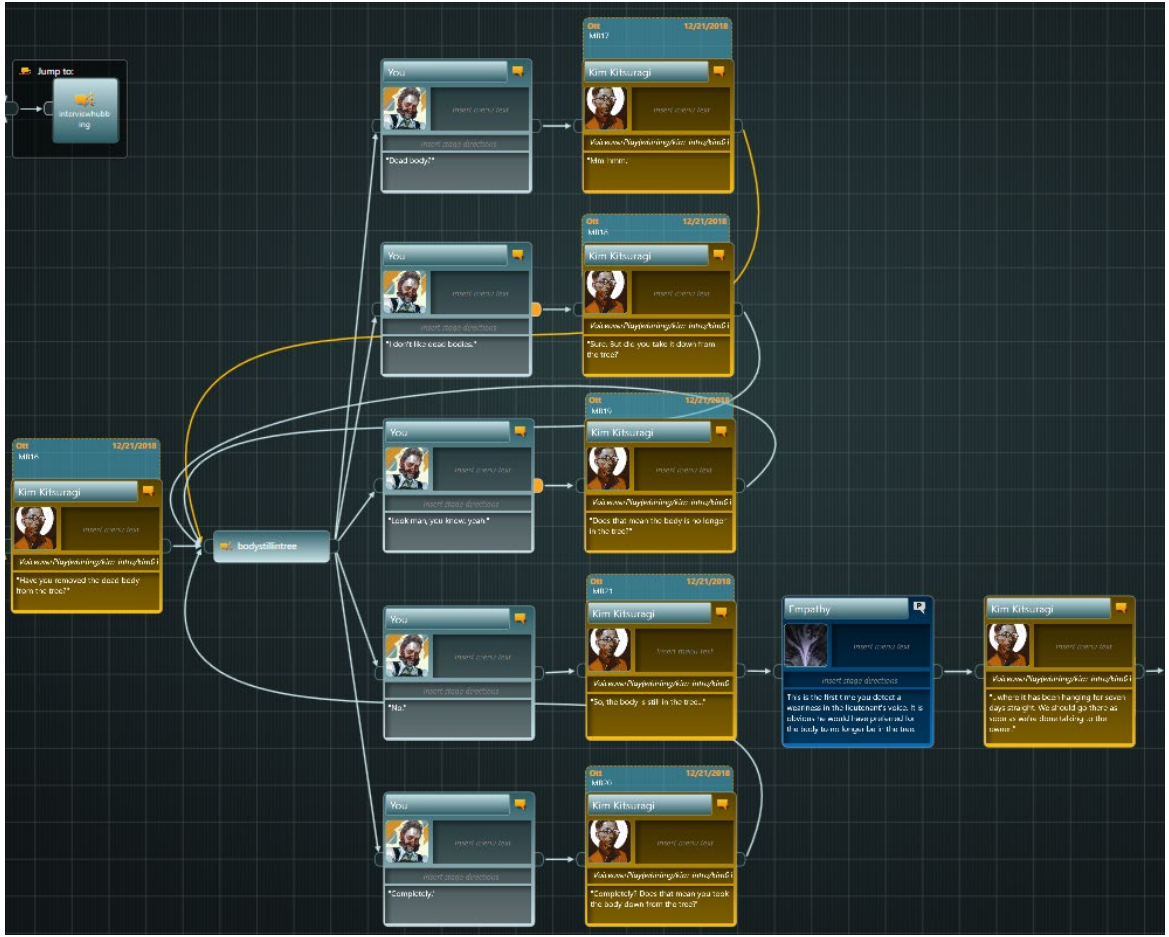

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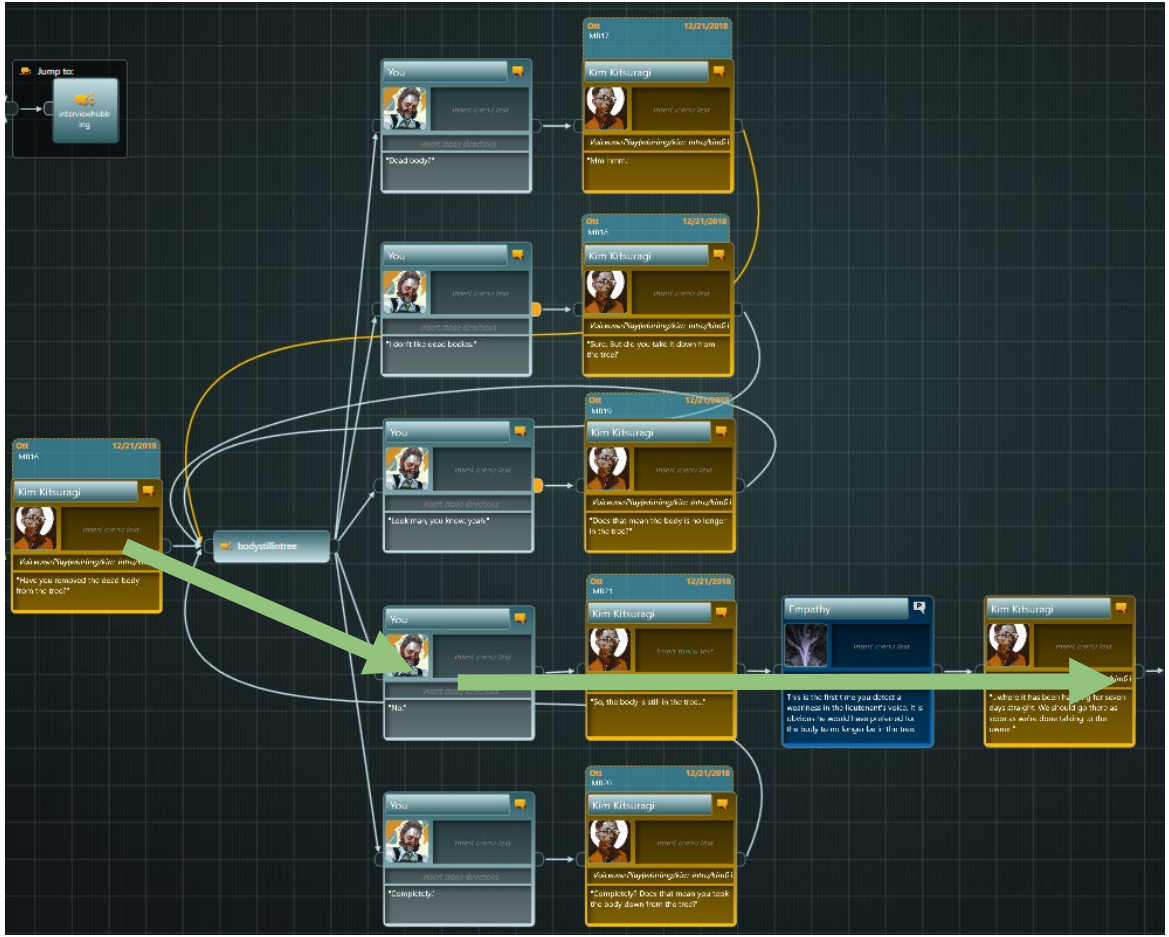

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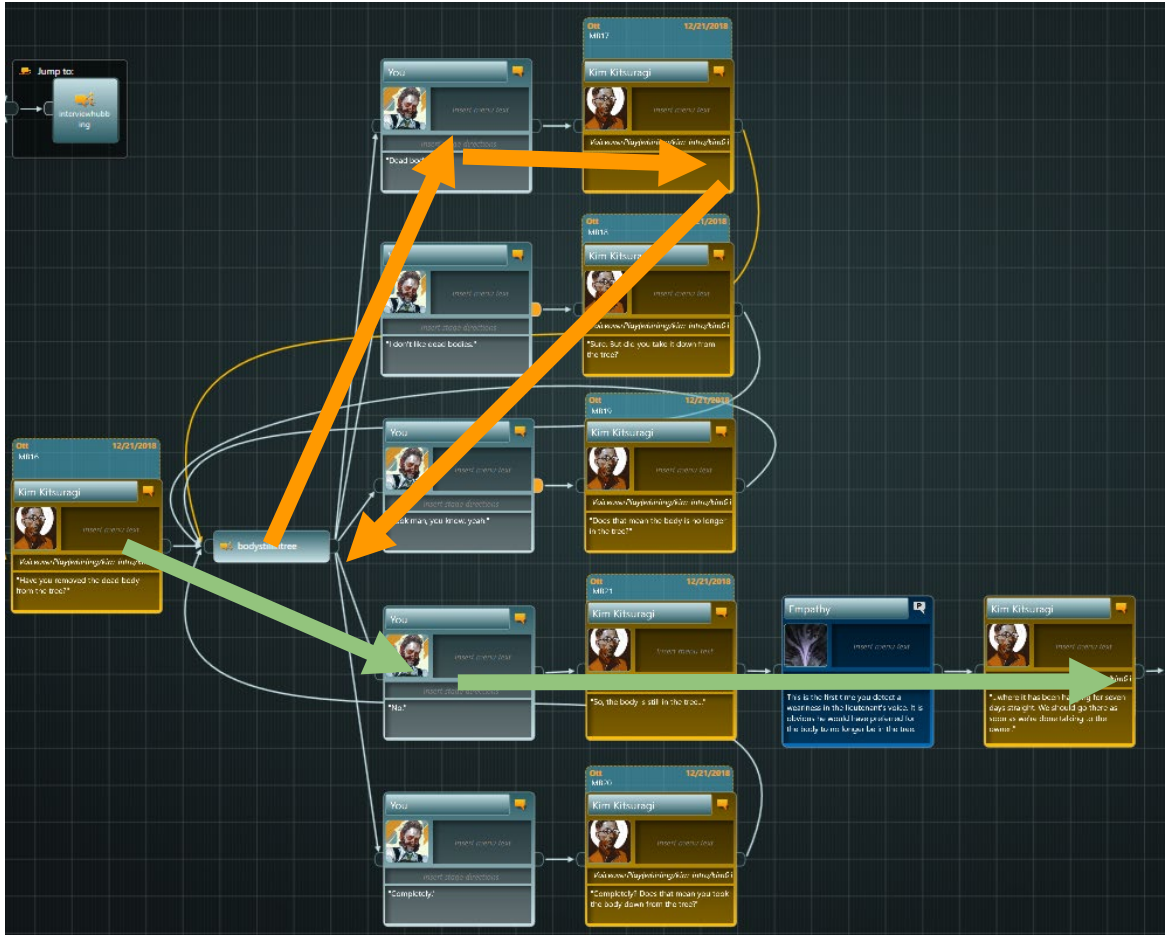

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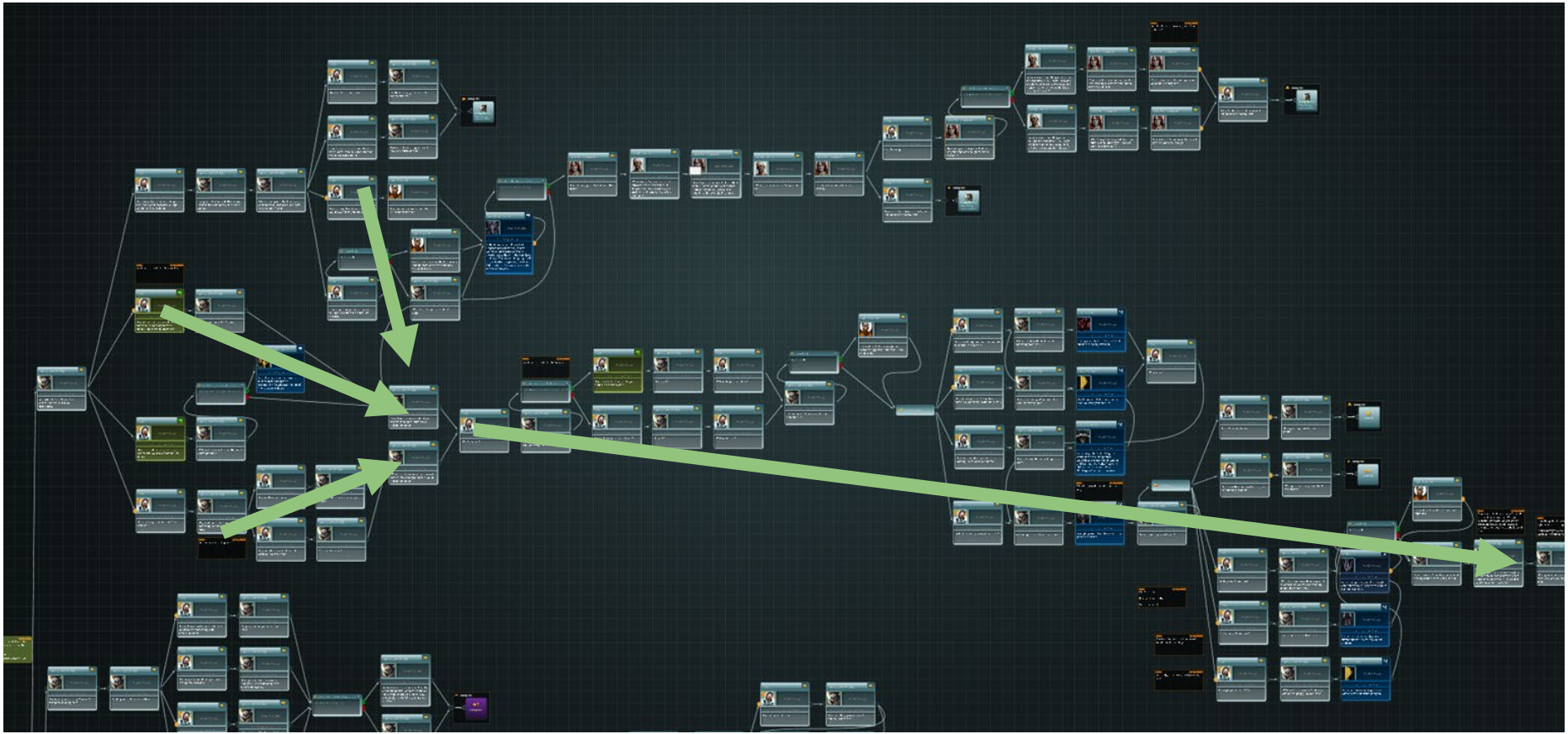

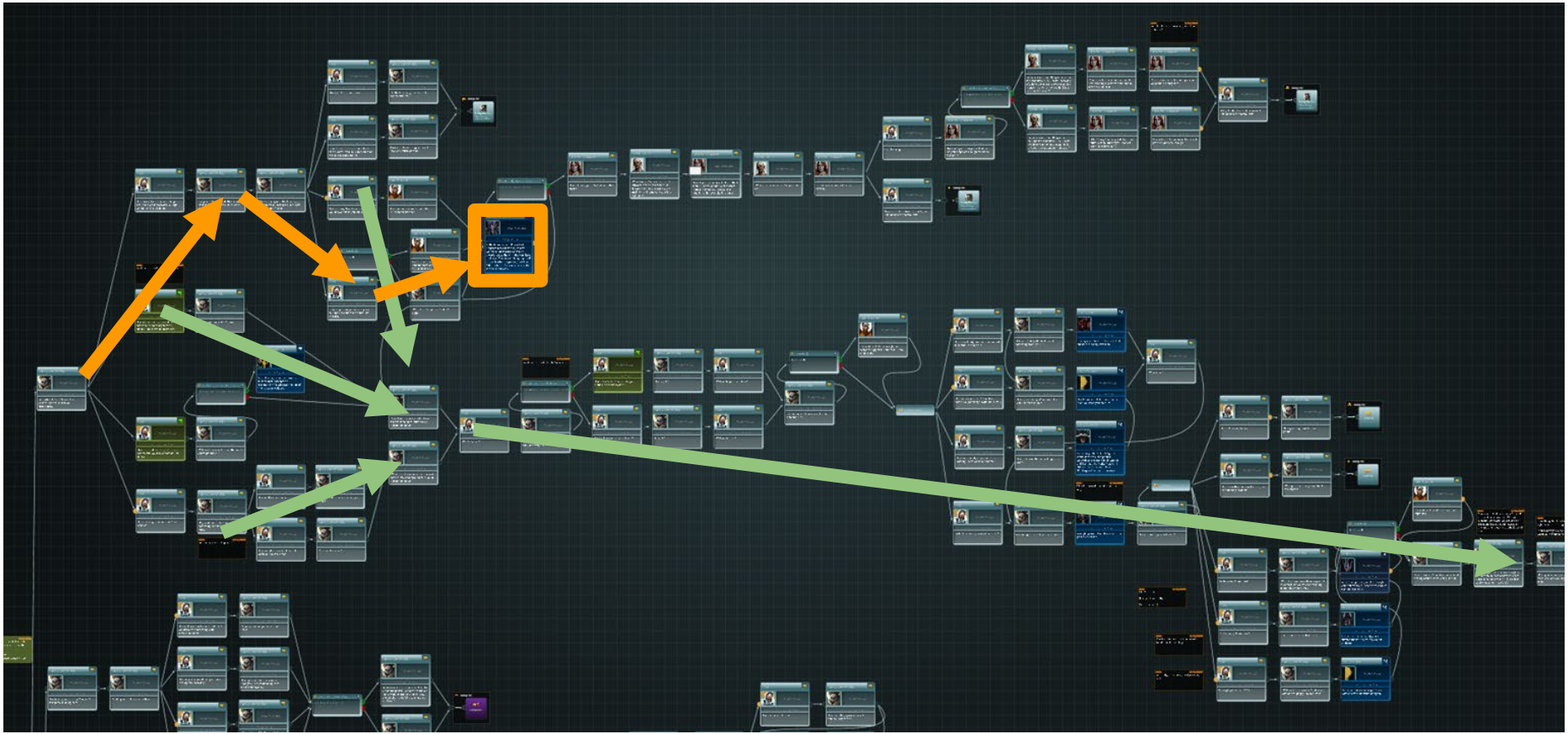

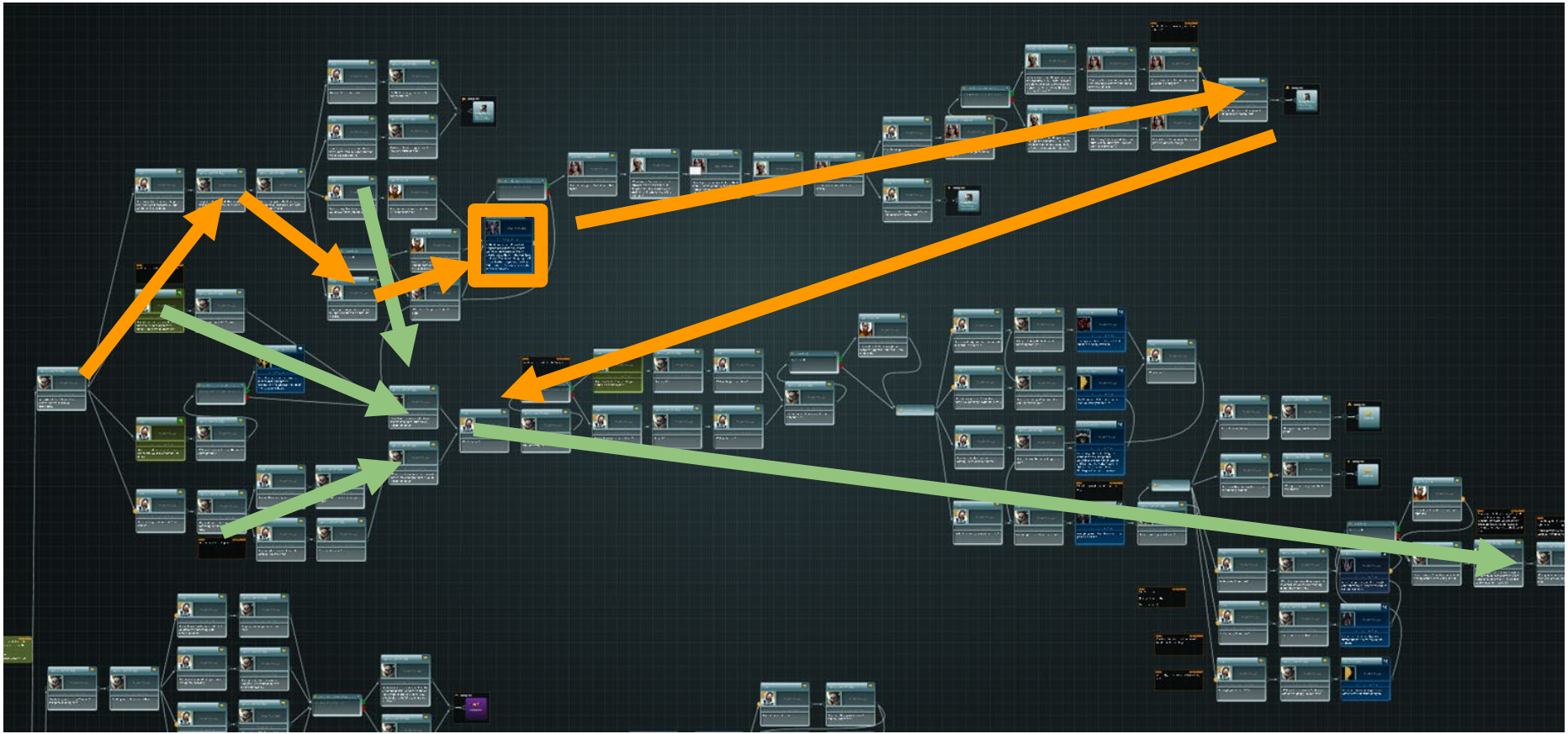

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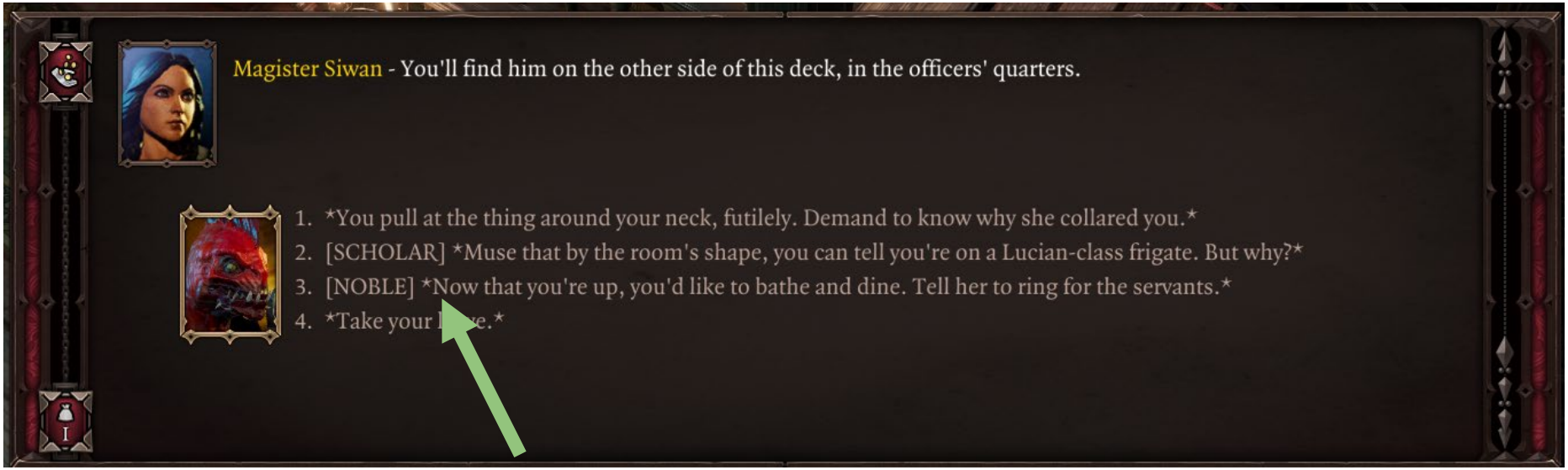
Branching dialogue structures are treated as aesthetic objects tha
can evoke distinct player responses.

- Nearly impossible to design in advance.
- Extravagant structures have unbelievably bad ROI.
- Advances art of branching dialogue.
- Unbreakable soul-bond between players and characters.

Minimal gamification

Downplaying or removing elements that reveal a dialogue's narrative or gameplay function.

High Priest Hati- "This will not go unnoticed, outsider."
Minor Negative reputation lost with Huana.
1: End Dialogue



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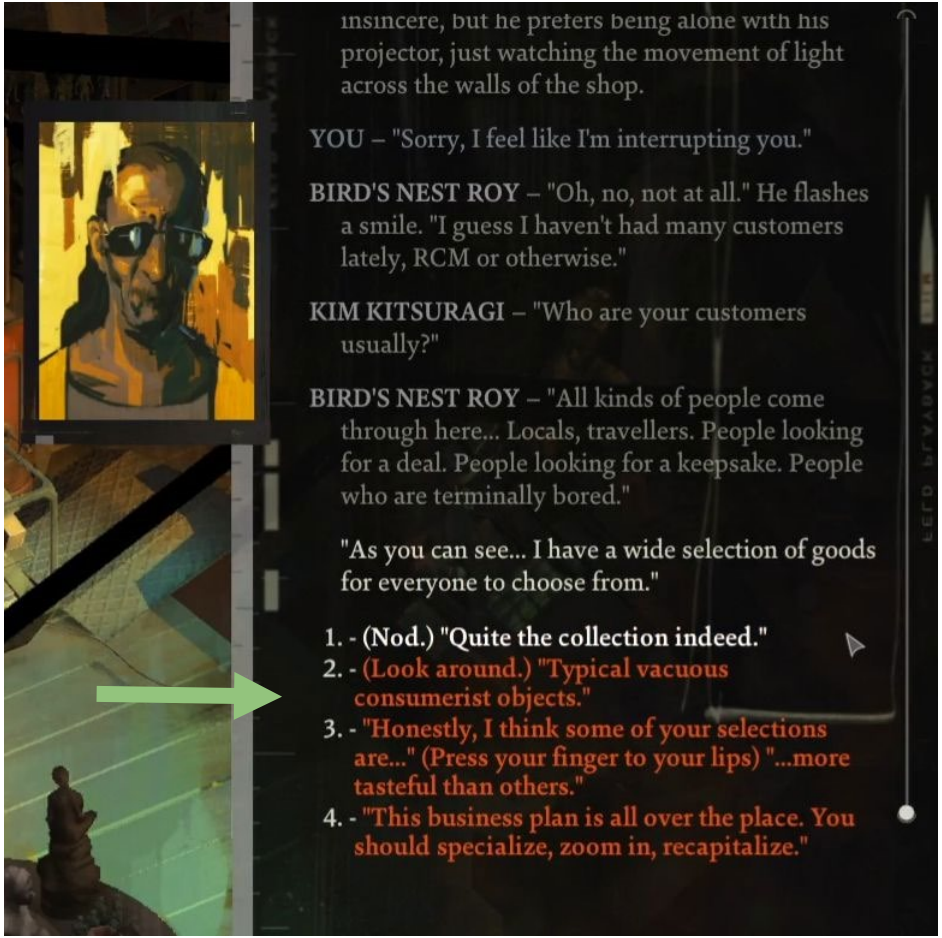
insincere, but he prefers being alone with his projector, just watching the movement of light across the walls of the shop.
YOU – "Sorry, I feel like I'm interrupting you."
BIRD'S NEST ROY – "Oh, no, not at all." He flashes a smile. "I guess I haven't had many customers lately, RCM or otherwise."
KIM KITSURAGI – "Who are your customers usually?"
BIRD'S NEST ROY – "All kinds of people come through here... Locals, travellers. People looking for a deal. People looking for a keepsake. People who are terminally bored."
"As you can see... I have a wide selection of goods for everyone to choose from."
1. - (Nod.) "Quite the collection indeed."
2. - (Look around.) "Typical vacuous consumerist objects."
3. - "Honestly, I think some of your selections are..." (Press your finger to your lips) "...more tasteful than others."
4. - "This business plan is all over the place. You should specialize, zoom in, recapitalize."

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- Requires careful writing.

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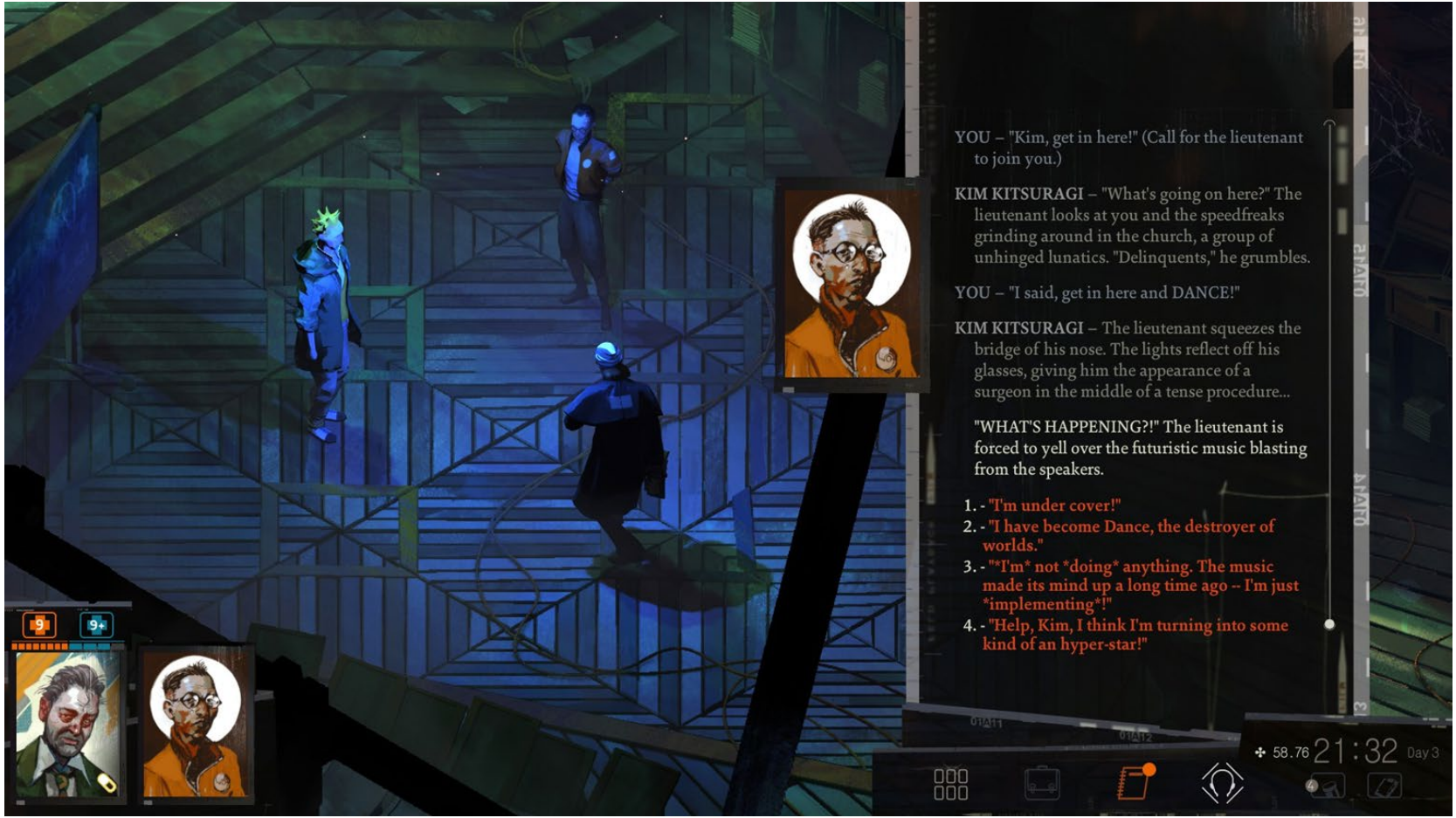
Downplaying or removing elements that reveal a dialogue's narrative or gameplay function.

- Lack of agency indicators.
- Requires careful writing.
- Players forget it's a game.

Radical asymmetry

Creating dramatically different player experiences based on a player's character expressions.

THINKER
Extremely intelligent. Very bad with people. Knows interesting facts, comes up with original ideas.
5 INT
1 PSY
2 FYS
4 MOT
+ENCYCLOPEDIA
SENSITIVE
Very psychological. A magnetic personality, but unstable. (Might begin to lose his mind.)
1 INT
5 PSY
4 FYS
2 MOT
+INLAND EMPIRE
PHYSICAL
Extremely physical. Interacts with the world through his body. Gets things done, but dumb as a rock.
1 INT
2 PSY
5 FYS
4 MOT
+HAND/EYE COORDINATION



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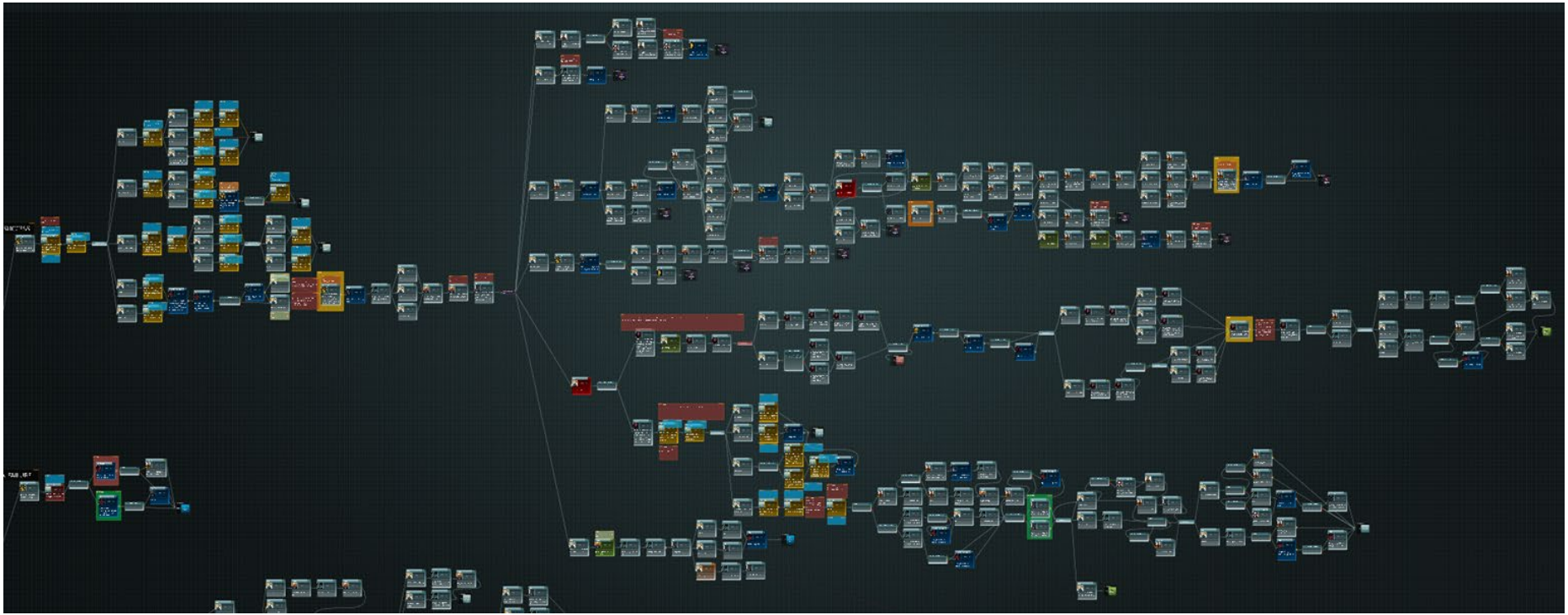

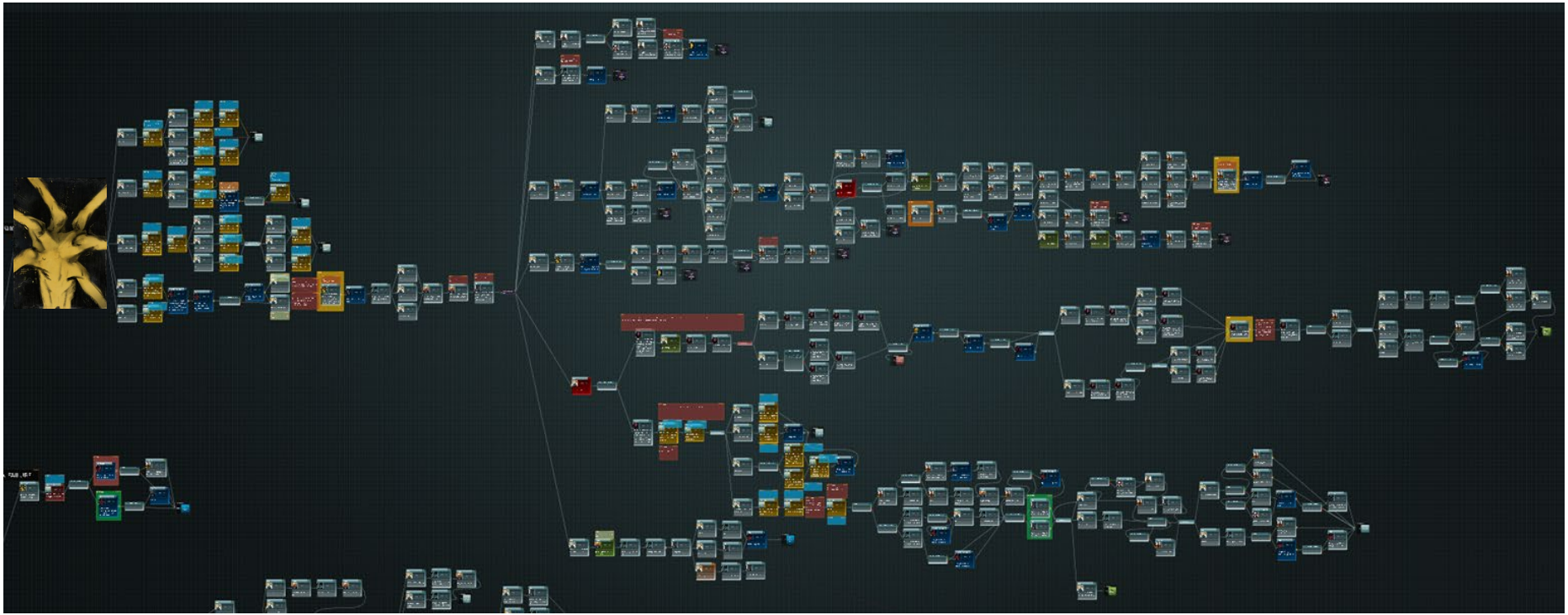

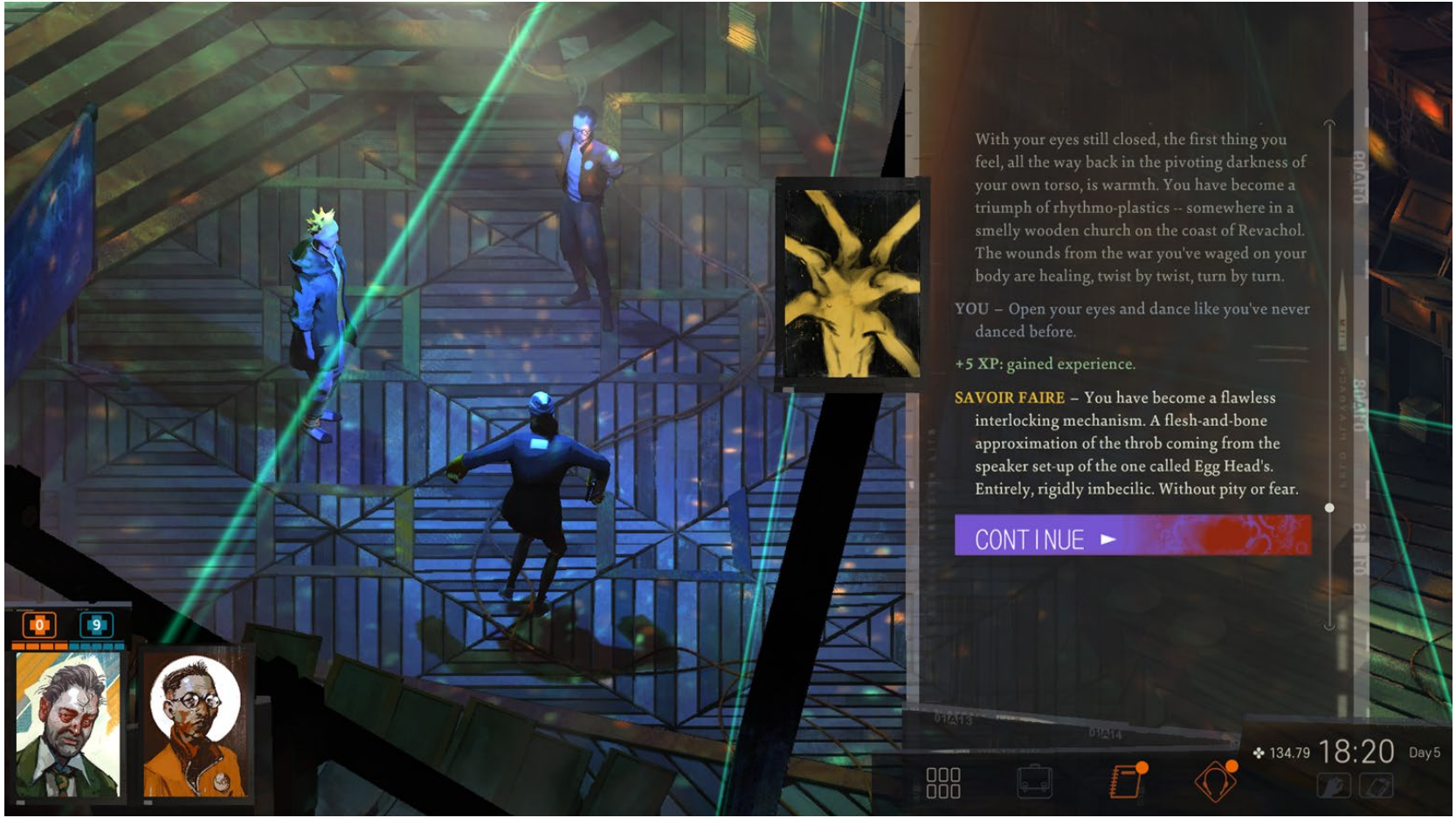

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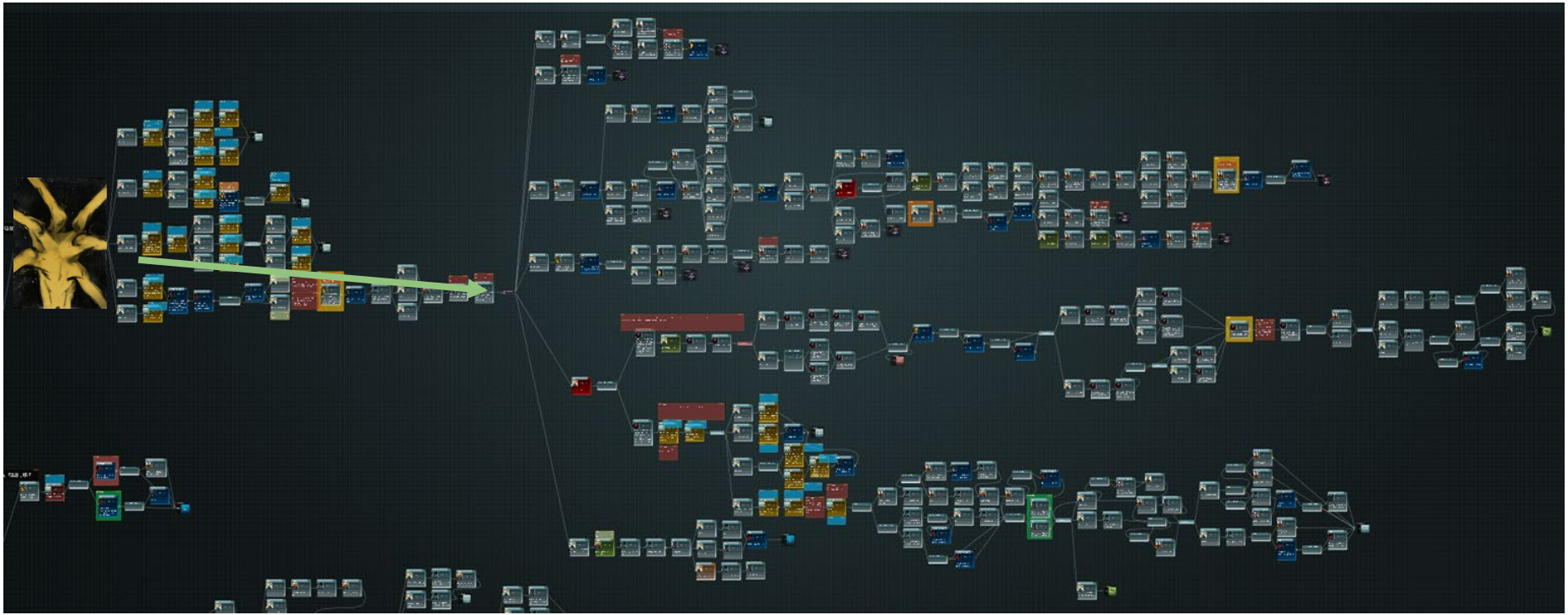

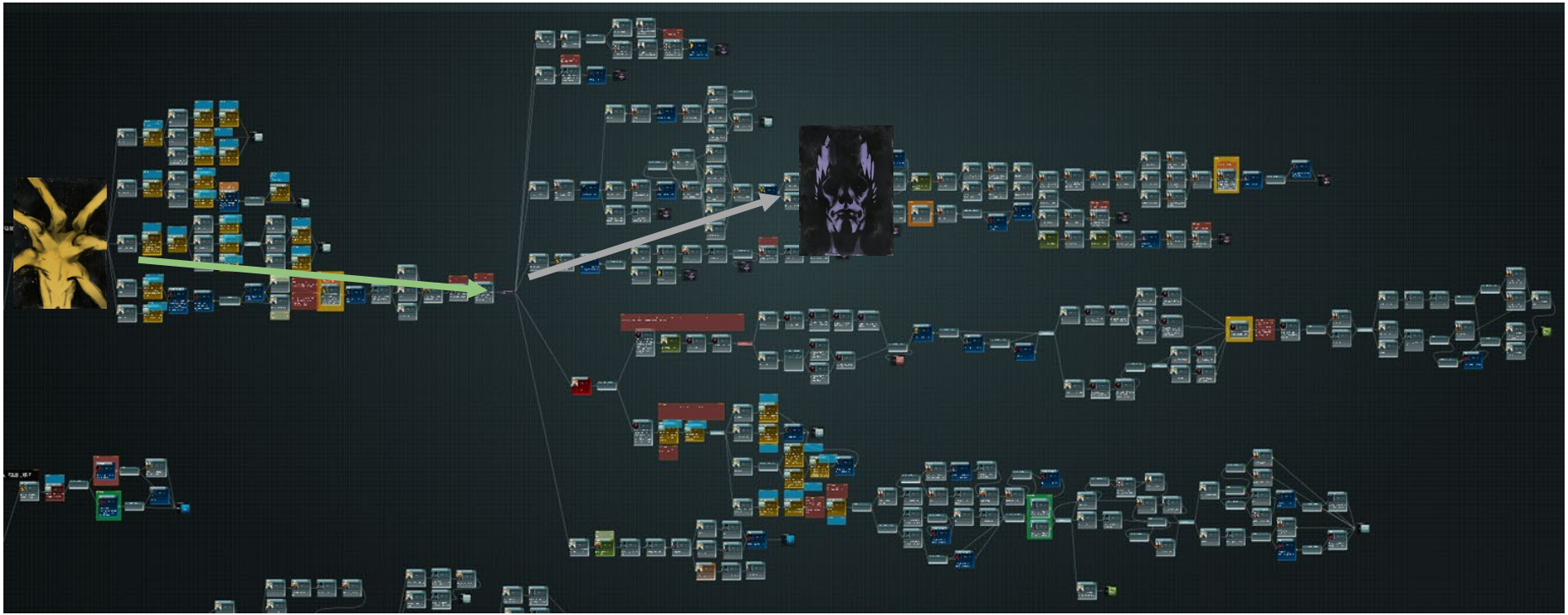

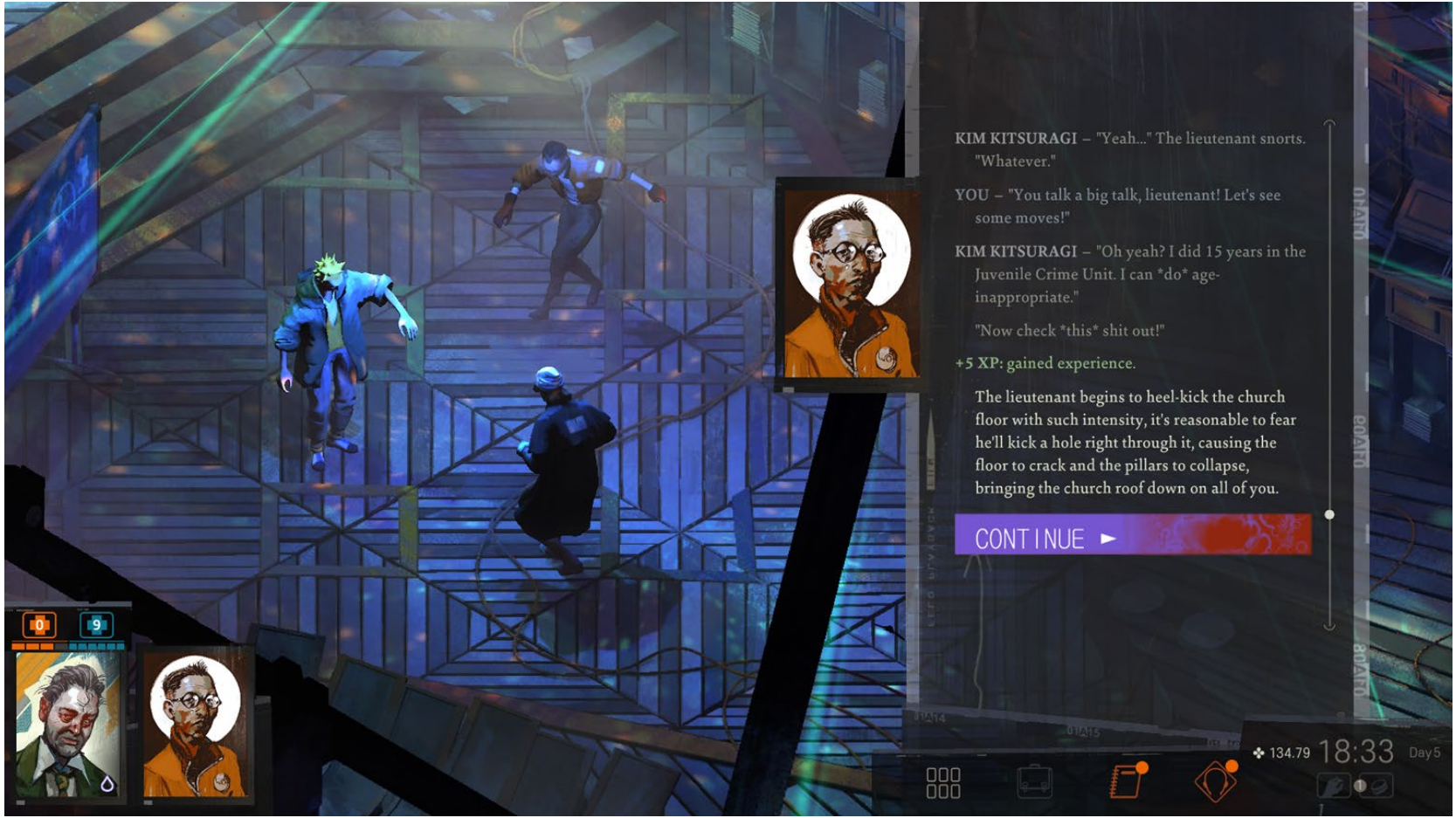

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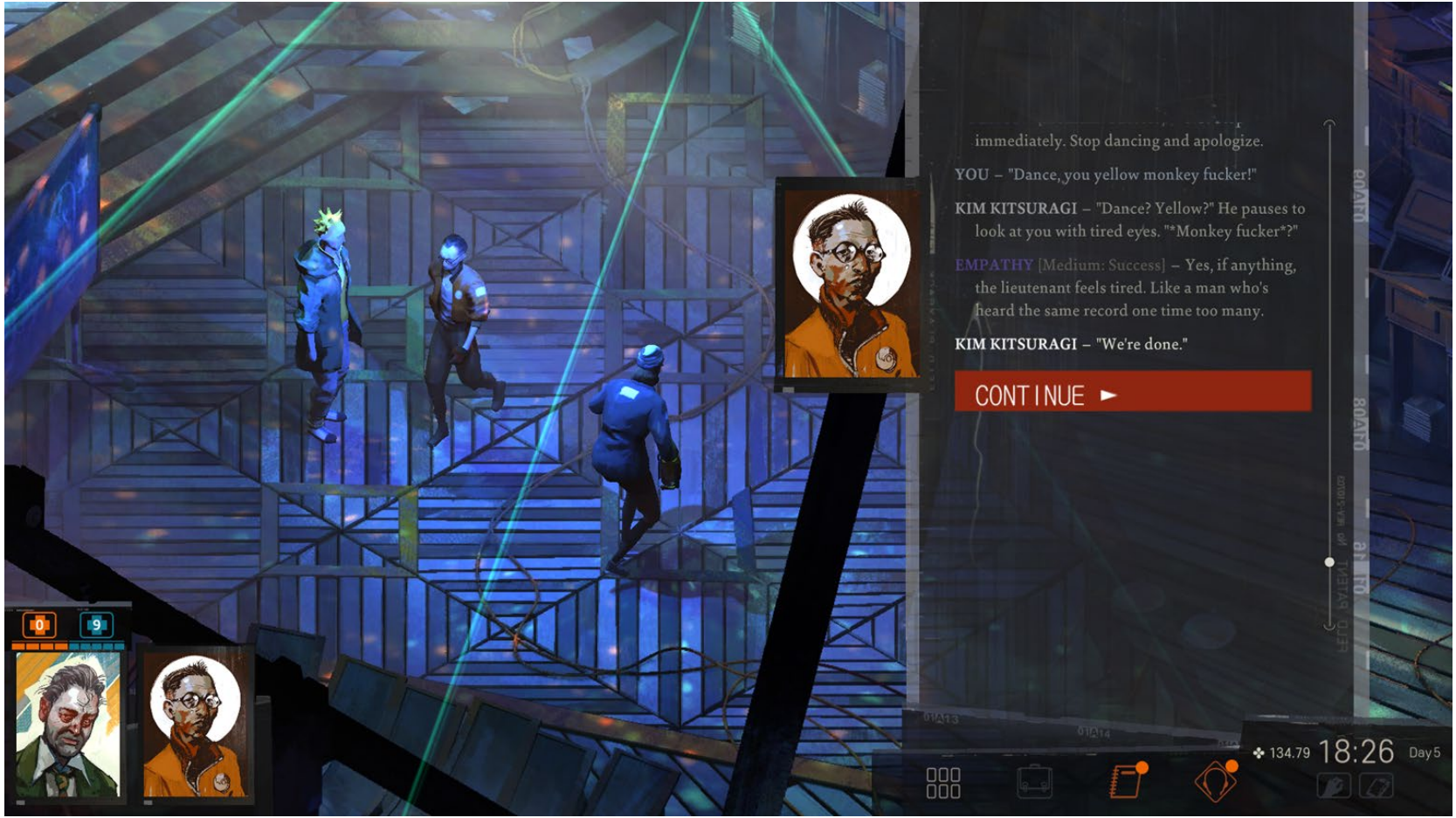

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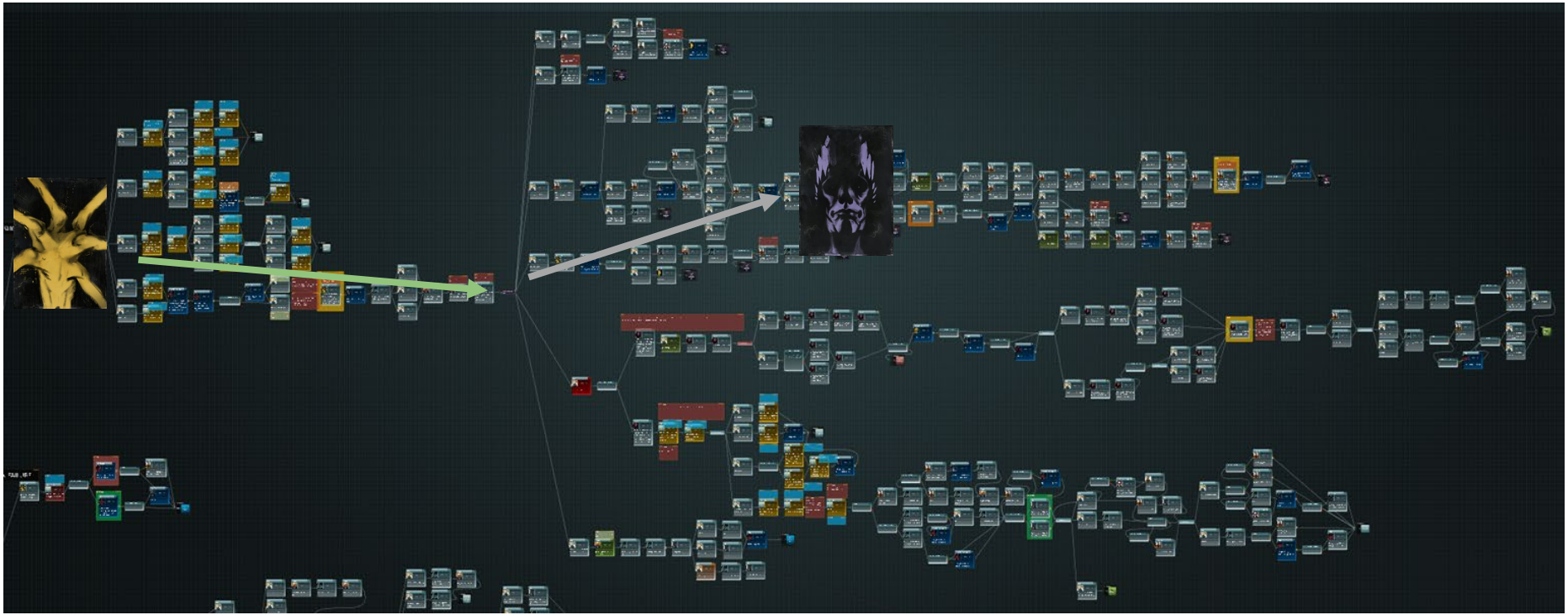

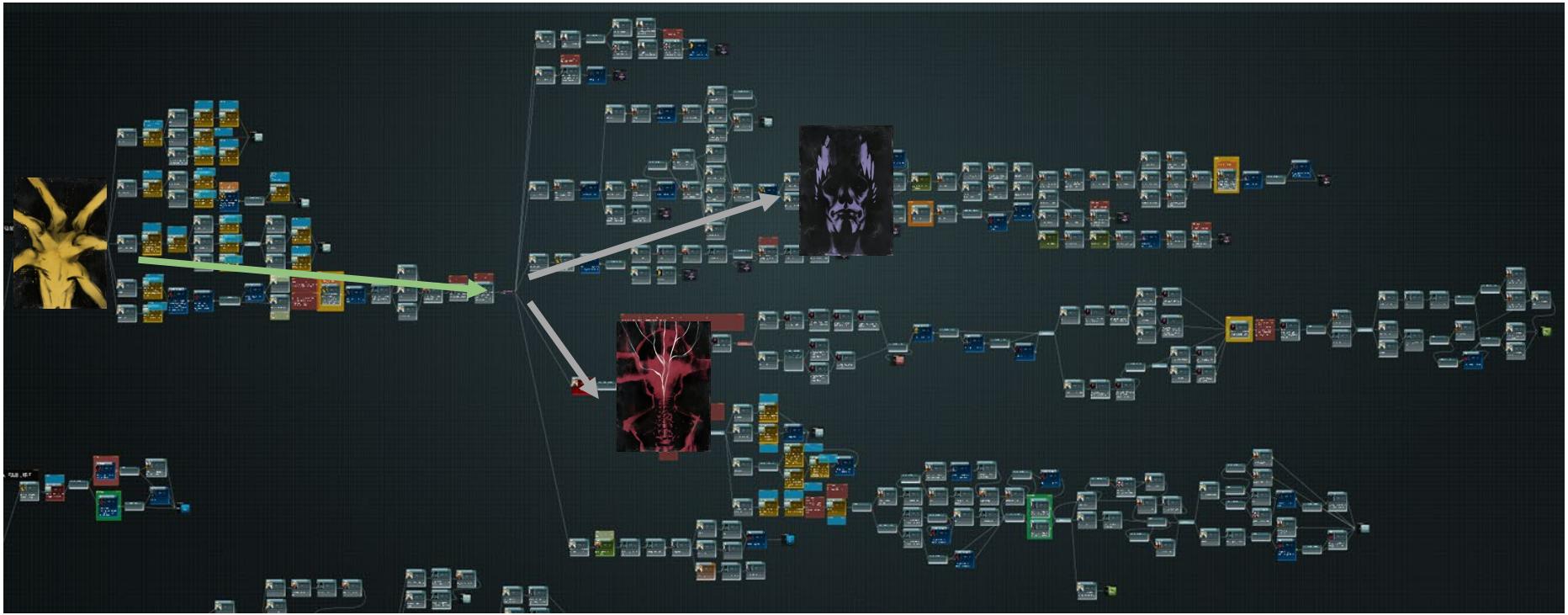

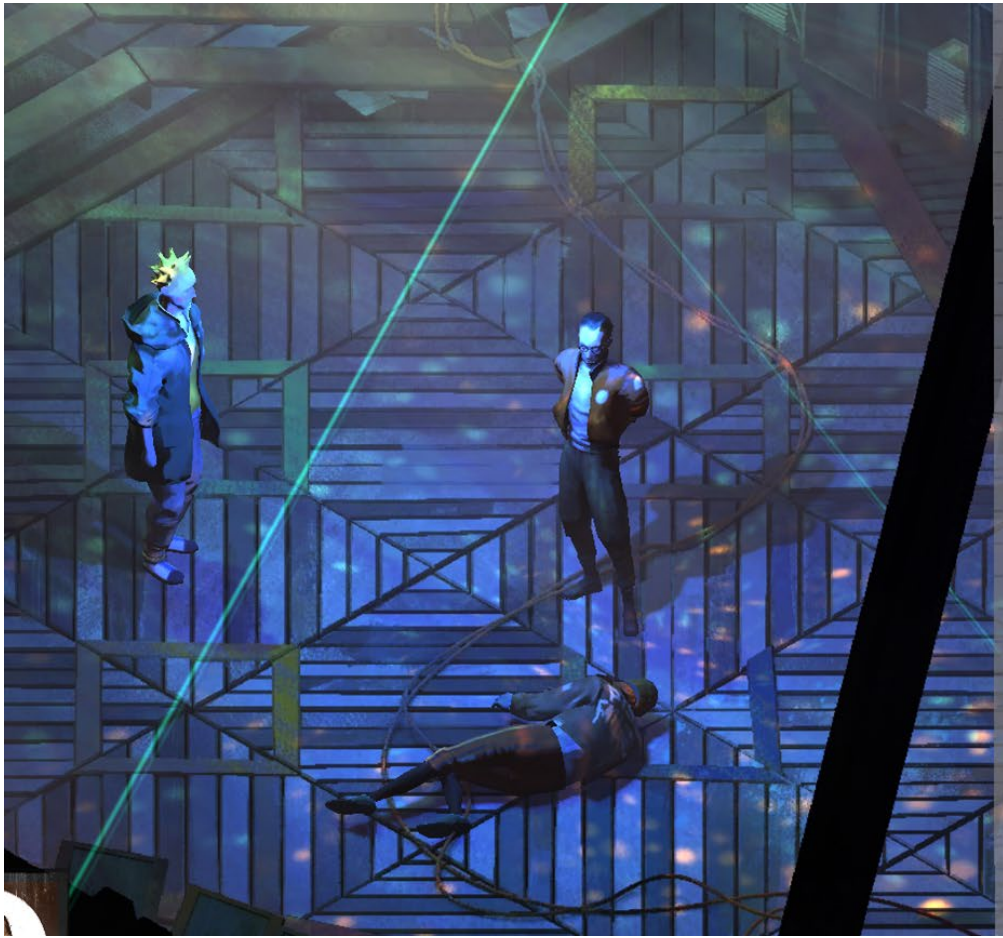

You're gripped by panic, alongside a dizzying feeling of deja vu. Then everything goes silent.

YOU – What's happening to me?

SPINAL CORD – Not sure, but it's definitely not a normal dance-floor experience. There's something seriously wrong with you, brah.

YOU – What happens next?

SPINAL CORD – You'll lay here in complete darkness for a while, far away from everything and everyone.

Then consciousness will slowly begin to return. It won't be fun.

But you already know -- it rarely is.

CONTINUE ►

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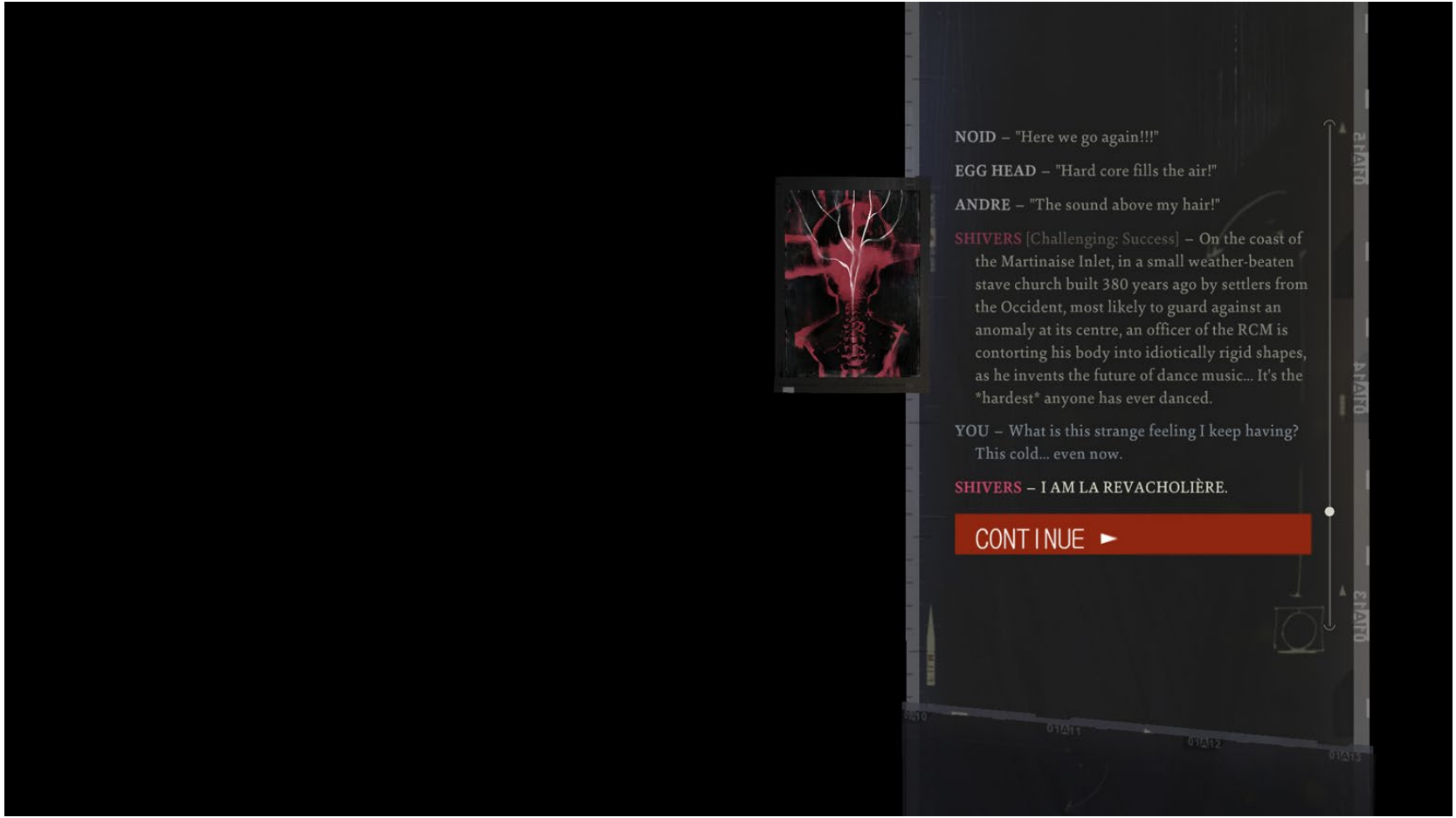

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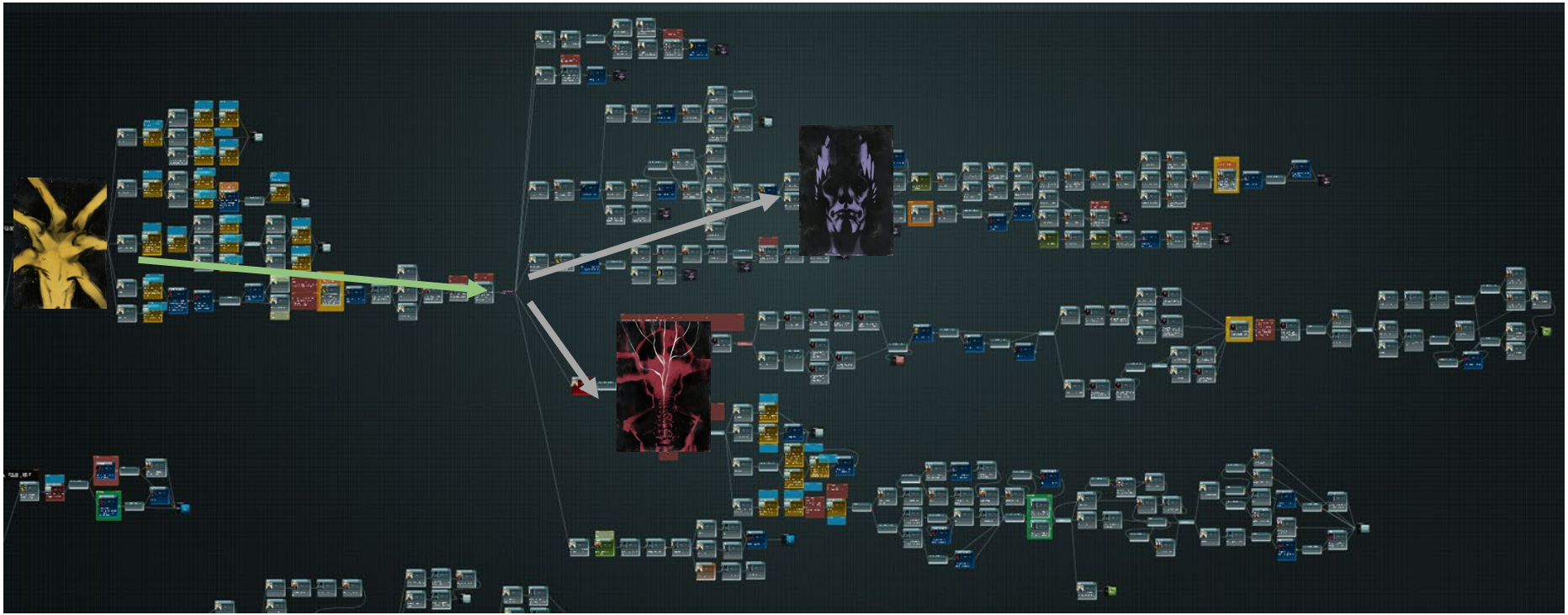
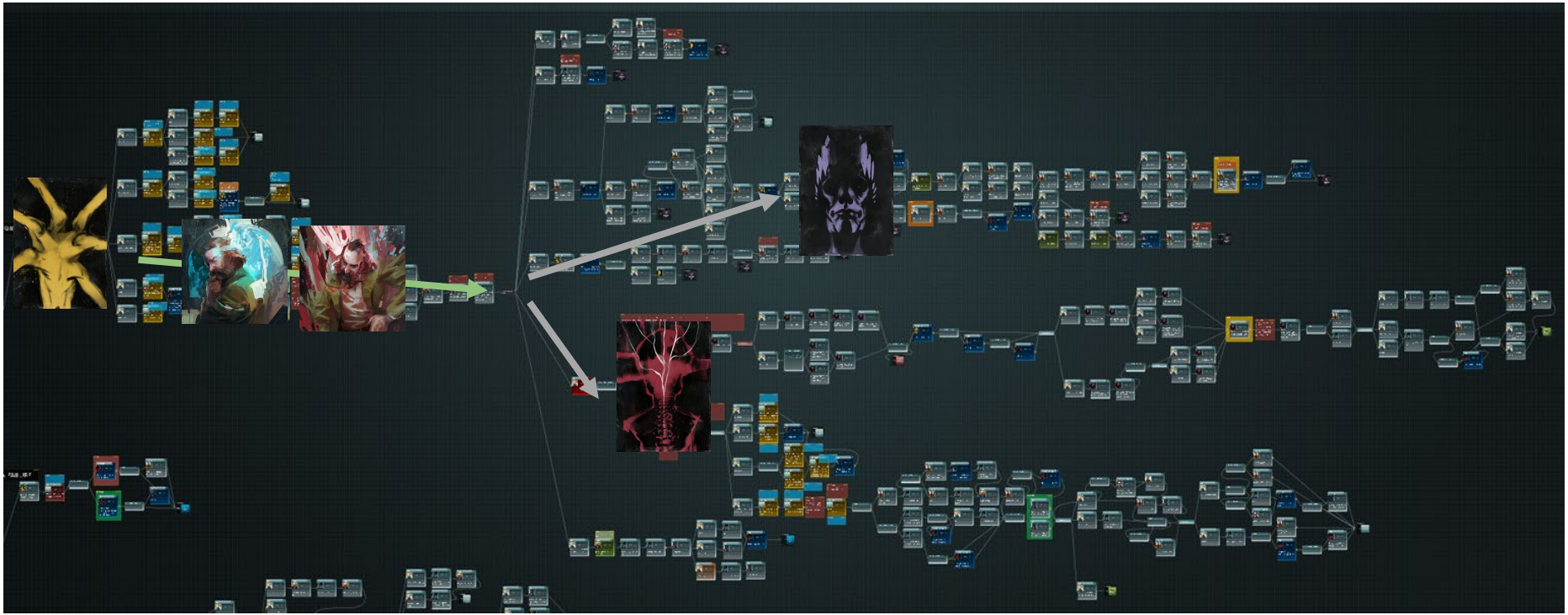
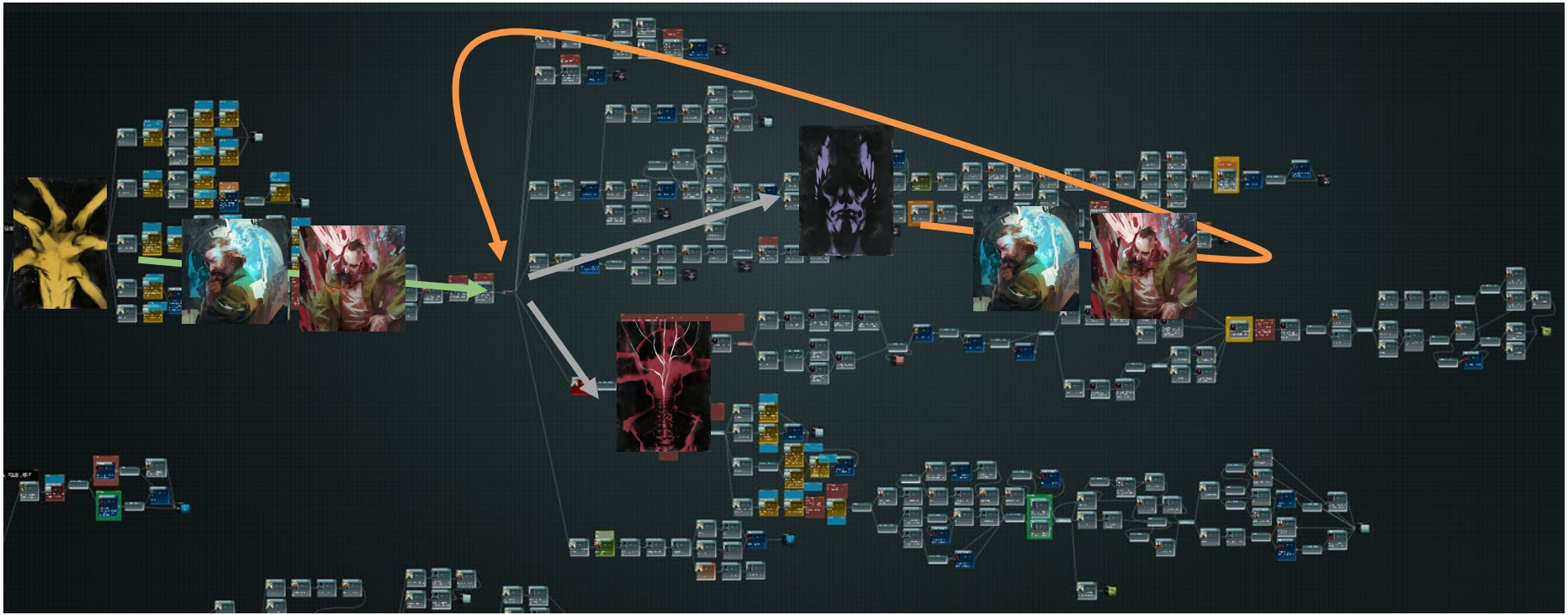
Radical asymmetry

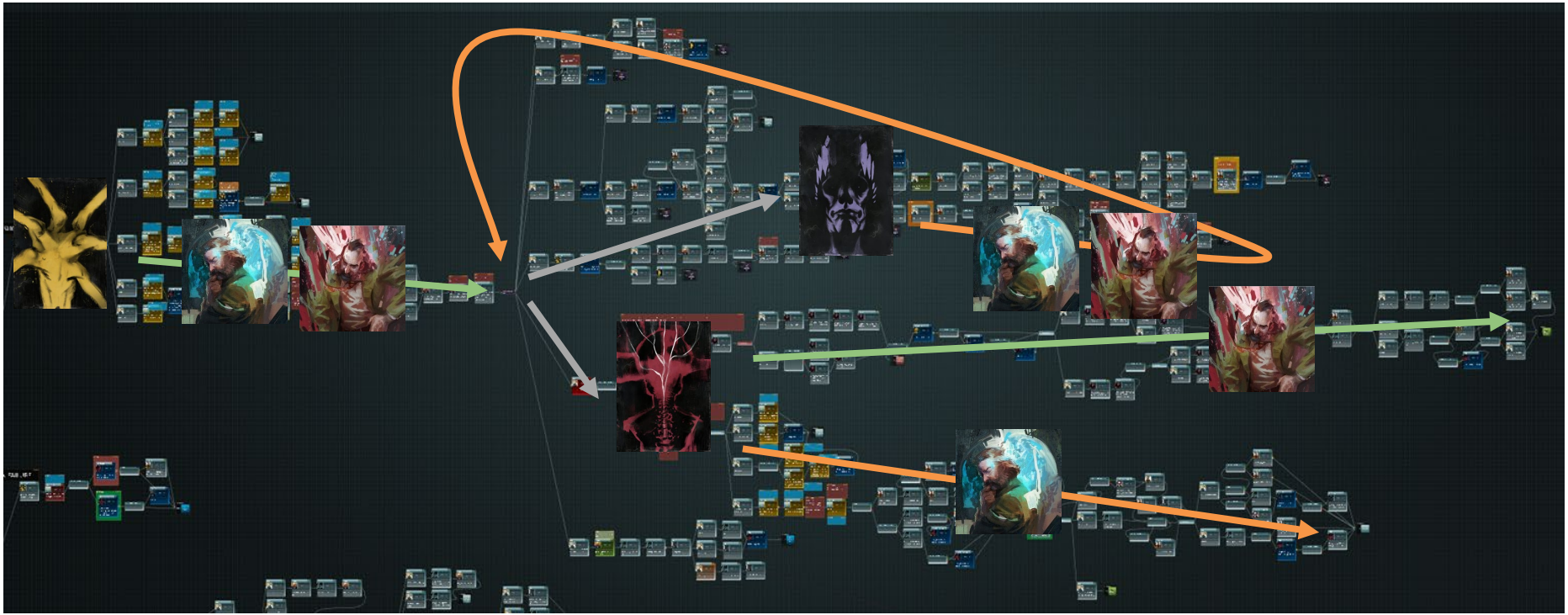
Creating dramatically different player experiences based on a player's character expressions.

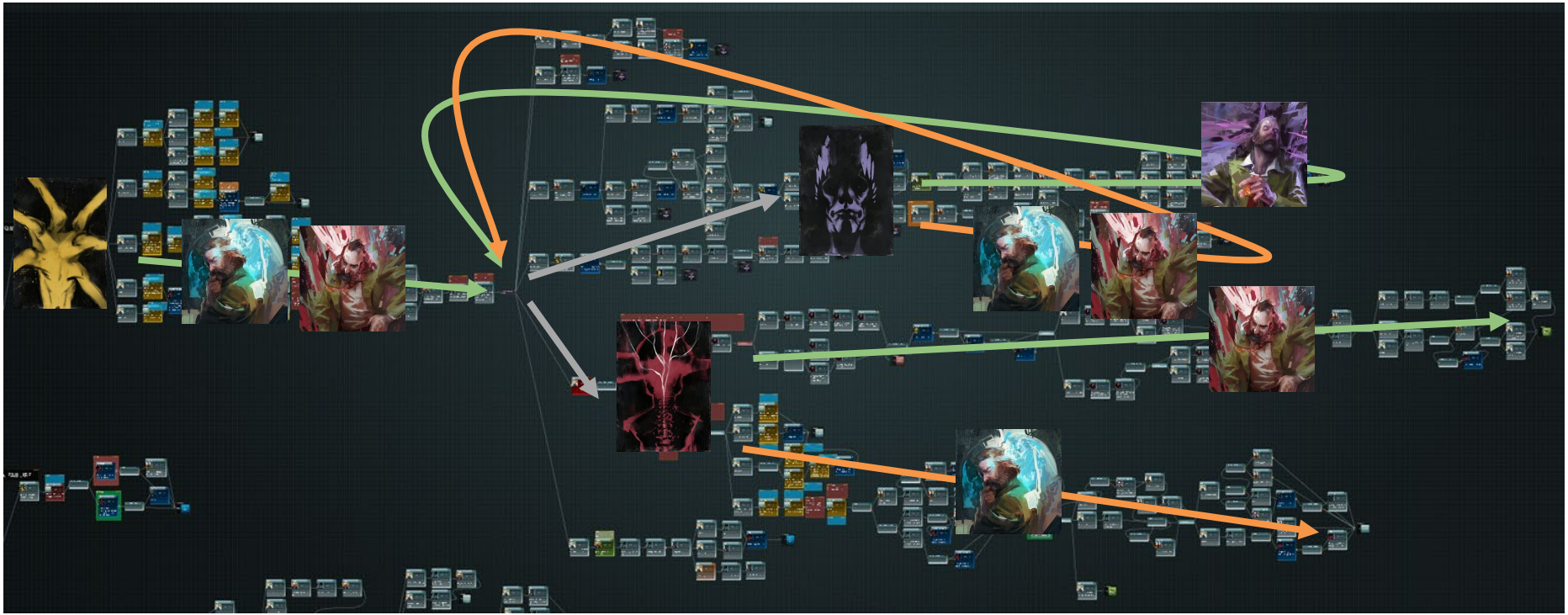
- Massive design challenge.
- Some players won't feel validated.

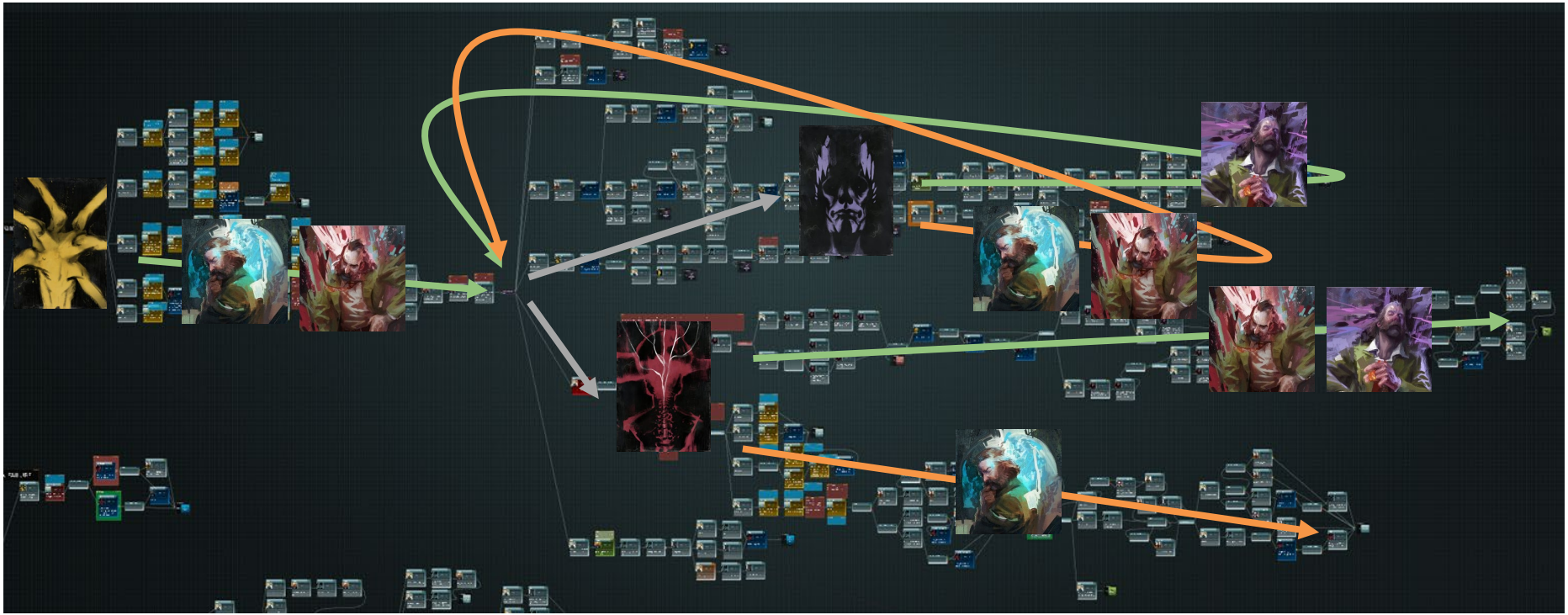












Easy to start scene. Likely to damage relationship with Kim, but experience transcendent visions.

Difficult to start scene. Likely to convince Kim to dance and experience transcendent visions.

East to start scene. Likely to damage relationship with Kim and pass out from dehydration.

Also possible to convince Kim to dance but pass out from dehydration. Players may also skip either red check.

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Creating dramatically different player experiences based on a player's character expressions.

- Massive design challenge.
- Some players won't feel validated.
- Accurate reflection of reality.
- Seemingly infinite replay opportunity.

Parting thoughts

1. Integrating more sophisticated dialogue systems with more complex gameplay loops.
    a. *How can players to define/build their own gameplay loops dialogue?*

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1. Integrating more sophisticated dialogue systems with more complex gameplay loops.
    a. *How can players to define/build their own gameplay loops dialogue?*
2. Further developing the aesthetics of branching dialogue structures.
    a. *What other structures are out there? What states can they*

Thank you

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