



UBISOFT

AAA-TYPICAL

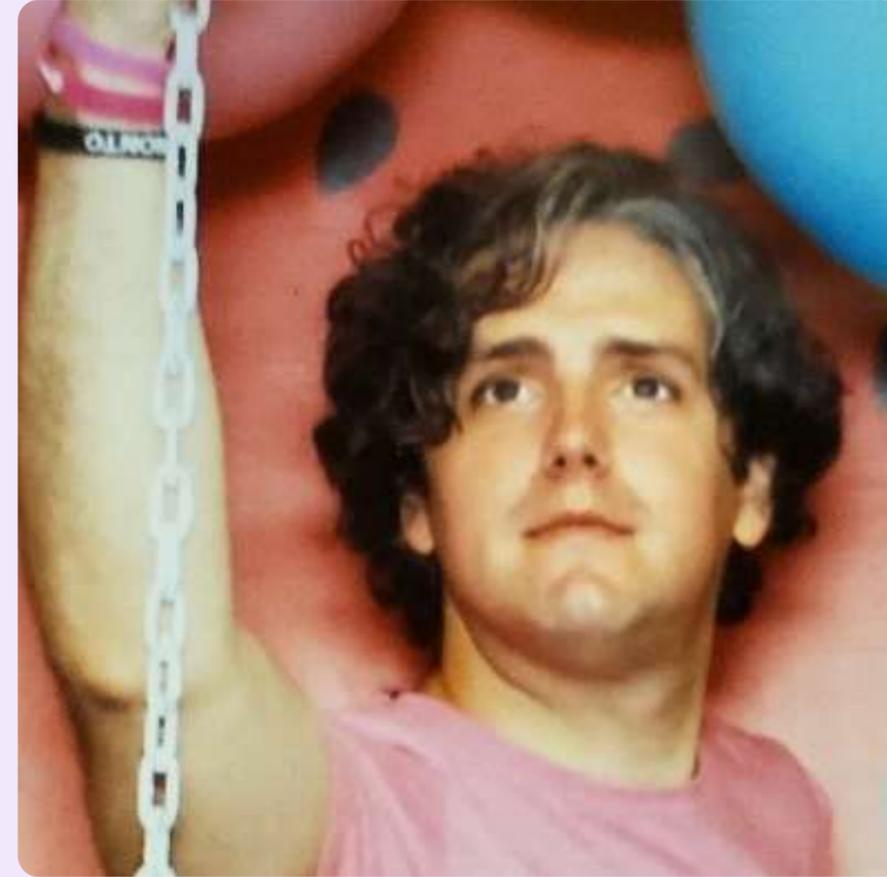
CHARACTER & STORY ARCS IN OPEN GAMEPLAY STRUCTURES

ABOUT US



HELI KENNEDY

Team Lead Writer
Ubisoft Toronto



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Narrative Designer
Ubisoft Toronto

GAMES LIKE THIS



BIG

Very expansive scope. Often dozens of hours of gameplay at a high realization level.



SYSTEMIC

Typically gameplay-first design, with a lot of big systems for narrative to support.



OPEN

Player-directed non-linear experiences where we have less control over how the story content gets seen.

AAA-TYPICAL

Open gameplay can make it difficult to tell classic, linear stories using common narrative devices.

This constraint is actually quite typical for AAA open world games.

So, to build story arcs, we've had to lean on atypical tools and strategies.

WATCH DOGS LEGION



FARCRY6



PART 1 - INTRODUCTION

FARCRY6 LOST BETWEEN WORLDS

A UBISOFT ORIGINAL





Part 1:

WATCH DOGS LEGION



Much obliged.

Appreciate it, fam.

Thank you, dearie.

PLAY AS ANYONE





AIDEN PEARCE

Gender: Male

Age: 39

Alias: "The Fox"

Race: White

Nationality: American

Date of Birth: 2 May 1974

Place of Birth: Belfast,
Northern Ireland

Occupation: Hacker





OUR (PLAYABLE) CHARACTERS



INTERCHANGEABLE

No character has a special narrative purpose or identity within the team.



TEMPORARY

Characters can join the team, die, or be switched out by the player at any time.



STATIC

Individual characters do not grow or change over the course of the story.

AGE

RELIGION

ETHNICITY

GENDER

SEXUALITY

BIRTHPLACE

INCOME

JOB

RELATIONS

HISTORY

NAME

ROLE IN STORY





ANCHOR CHARACTERS

CONTINUITY



Select Your First Operative



CONTEXT



Shruthi Masood
Sneaker Designer

Creates fake coupons

Recent Events

DedSec leaked footage of them being beaten by Albion guards

Demographics

- Age: 19
- Occupation: Sneaker Designer
- Salary: £97600

Associates

- Teagan Reid (Colleague)
- Jennifer Masood (Sister)

Metadata

- Recently purchased: "Ultimate Anime Body Pillow"
- Aspiring marine biologist
- Searched for "cruelty-free tissue fillers"
- Suspected of tax fraud
- Advocated for gay rights

View in Team **RB**

Antonina Jaworski
Stage Magician

Performing at Camden High Street
until 8:00

Pocketwatch
Switch Allegiance

SELF-CONTAINED AND NON-CONTRADICTIONARY

Y Talk

Potential Recruit





PERKS

Andy Sheehan Football Hooligan

Won award for most burpees at gym

GAMEPLAY

Recent Events

DedSec triggered an uprising in their borough

Demographics

- Age: 29
- Occupation: Football Hooligan
- Salary: £24700

Associates

- Andrew Kobayashi (Journalist)

Metadata

RELATIONS

- Searched for: "speed dating near me"
- Imported 600 lbs of bird seed from China
- Frequent online purchase: enema refill bottles
- Member of the Conservative Party
- Missed payments for tooth replacement procedure

FLAVOUR

INCOME

Lauren Pereira Street Artist

Contributes frequently to art forum "Kawaii Anime Cat Girls"

Recent Events

- Recruited Operative Brian Huang into DedSec
- Operative Roberta Odhiambo rescued their Friend
- Recruited by Operative Harriet Park
- Sabine Brandt recruited their Friend
- Saw DedSec stop Albion harassing a street sleeper

Demographics

- Age: 39
- Occupation: Street Artist
- Salary: £11900

Associates

- Operative Mindy Affleck (Friend)
- Leigh Yip (Opponent)

Metadata

- Holds degree in fine arts
- Attends singles functions
- Slam poet
- Searched for: "Optik delete history"

Jiang Ng Unemployed

Cited for kneeing Albion guard in the groin

Recent Events

- DedSec saved their friend from a trafficking ring

Demographics

- Age: 23
- Occupation: Unemployed
- Salary: £0

Associates

- Siripon Lek (Friend)

Metadata

- Competes in extreme pogo contests
- Harassed online for drinking brown sauce straight from bottle
- Asexual
- Searched: "how to get boss killed by gang"
- Broke into Buckingham Palace to take photographs of self

Juliette Savoie Bare Knuckle Fighter

Expelled from secondary school for hospitalizing PE teacher

Recent Events

- DedSec triggered an uprising in their borough
- DedSec failed to beat them at darts
- Heard DedSec are Tower FC fans

Demographics

- Age: 36
- Occupation: Bare Knuckle Fighter
- Salary: £21200

Associates

- Gwen Williams (Therapist, pending deportation)
- Evan Hoti (Trainee)
- Irene Savoie (Sister)

Metadata

- Free-climbed the 3 tallest standing structures in Europe
- Played on national under-17 football team
- Four-time under-18 fencing champion
- Hasn't visited the doctor in 5 years
- Amateur performance artist

TEAM STRUCTURE



Denise Watson
Drone Expert
 Builds drones from scavenged components

-  **Shock Drone**
Drone Summon
-  **Drone Betray Hack**
Gain Drone Allegiance
-  **Dive Bomb**
Homing Drones
-  **Fast Hacking**
Short Hack Cooldowns

WEAPONS



GADGET



Personas

Missions

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Storyline A	Yellow																			
Storyline B	Yellow																			
Storyline C	Yellow																			
Storyline D	Yellow																			
Storyline E	Yellow																			
Storyline F	Yellow																			
Storyline G	Yellow																			

Anchoring Procedural Story with Authored Characters

Adding Context Around Generated Characters

Overlapping Ownership Structure



Part 2:

FARCRY6

A UBISOFT ORIGINAL

PART 2

GAME PREMISE

- Dani from Yara
- Presidente Castillo
- Libertad, guerrilla revolution
- Hitting the economy: Viviro



CHALLENGES



A wide-angle, high-angle shot of a tropical landscape at sunset. The scene is dominated by large, rugged mountains with patches of green vegetation. In the foreground, there are several palm trees and other tropical plants. The middle ground shows a valley with various fields, some of which appear to be agricultural, and a few small structures. The sky is a mix of orange and blue, with the sun low on the horizon. A few birds are seen flying in the sky. The overall atmosphere is serene and expansive.

A VAST OPEN WORLD TO EXPLORE



How can we tell the epic story of Dani Rojas in a large world with complex themes and many characters that encourages open exploration?



THE WORLD ITSELF HAD A STORY TO TELL

Revolution is a huge topic to cover.

How do we convey a country in the throes of one?

Yara is filled with people fighting their own revolutions.

The image is a composite. The top half shows a man with a beard and a woman looking off to the side against a blue and red gradient background. The bottom half shows a soldier standing on a tank turret in a city at sunset, with the word 'LIBERTAD' on the tank. The text 'THE PLAYER SHOULD IMPACT AN UNTOUCHABLE PRESIDENT' is overlaid in the center.

THE PLAYER SHOULD IMPACT
AN UNTOUCHABLE PRESIDENT

The antagonist had to remain present in the story, and we needed to see the **protagonist's** impact on them.

But that was challenged by a premise that made it hard to get these characters to collide:

A reluctant civilian becomes a guerrilla hero who takes down a dictator.

SOLUTIONS





KEEPING CASTILLO
IN THE STORY:
CHANGING CINEMATIC LANGUAGE

FAR CRY 5 CINEMATIC



FAR CRY 6 CINEMATIC







Nooo!
I'm going to open you and pour your worst fears inside

1ST PERSON TO 3RD PERSON

- Relational: allowed us to see Dani forming connections
- Speaking protagonist
- Perspective change opened cinematic language for different shots & cutaways...



Philly (Beer.)



**INTIMATE CUTAWAYS TO CASTILLO'S LIFE
KEPT HIM IN THE STORY &
SHOWED DANI'S IMPACT**

Anton: Your mother is dead.





ORGANIZING THE OPEN WORLD: IT ALL STARTED WITH THEMES.

SHOWCASING AND EXPLAINING A FICTIONAL NATION WHEN...



THE PLAYER CAN GO
ANYWHERE

We had to ensure the story progressed effectively, no matter where the player roams.



THE ENVIRONMENT
MUST TELL
A SPECIFIC STORY

"Revolution" had to be present in every facet of a country that was hundreds of years old.



THERE ARE MANY
CHARACTERS
TO MEET

The country and rebellion had to feel full and alive. We needed to juggle a nation of unique characters with stories.

5 MAIN REGIONS.

EACH HAD DISTINCT THEMES & CHARACTERS THAT EMBODY THEM.

WITH STORYLINES DRIVING MAIN PLOT & PROGRESSION TO ESPERANZA.





ISLA SANTUARIO, TUTORIAL:
Intro to Libertad, Clara &
Answering the "Call"



MADRUGADA, THE WEST:
Farming, family & tradition



VALLE DE ORO, CENTRAL:
Propaganda, oppression
& freedom of speech



EL ESTE... THE EAST:
Old guard vs. New gen,
Past revolutions

A cinematic view of a city at sunset. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, with many birds flying. A tall, pointed skyscraper stands on the left. The city below is filled with buildings, some with lights on. The text 'ESPERANZA: THE NATION'S CAPITAL & SEAT OF CASTILLO' is overlaid in the center.

ESPERANZA: THE NATION'S CAPITAL & SEAT OF CASTILLO

BUT HOW?
SO MANY CHARACTERS.
SO MANY STORIES.



YARA
UNIVERSIDAD

TYPES OF MISSIONS, STORY EVENTS & PLAYING WITH STRUCTURE...



MAIN MISSIONS:
CRITICAL PATH



GATING MISSIONS &
STREAMLINING FLOW



IMPACT ON CASTILLO:
CINEMATIC INTERLUDES



PRIMO MISSIONS:
LOOP IN CLARA &
LIBERTAD



OPEN WORLD MISSIONS:
YARAN STORIES

BREAK IT DOWN

CENTRAL MISSION STRUCTURE & FLOW

YOU hear me?

KEY CHARACTERS, WHAT THEY WANTED & WHAT HAPPENED IN THE END.

TALIA

MARÍA

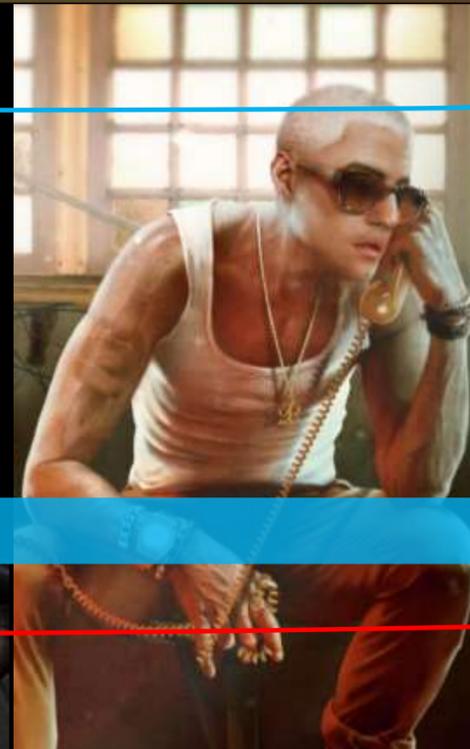
ANTÓN

PAOLO

BEMBE

BICHO

EL DOCTOR





Est. Regional Villain

A character that **doesn't** want to join Libertad



Est. Bembé



PRIMO MISSION MAY TRIGGER

Break the Chains

Balance the Books

Est. Bembé

Hype Bomb

Radio Libertad

Re-Education

Precious Cargo

Guerrilla Radio

Castillo Cinematic (Radio hijacked)



Bottle Episode

Firebrand

Paolo Missing, No Missions

Face Time with EL DOCTOR

Words Like Bullets

Castillo Cinematic (Mother is dead)





Face Time with EL DOCTOR

Bottle Episode

Firebrand

Paolo Missing, No Missions

Words Like Bullets

Castillo Cinematic (Mother is dead)



Lost and Found

Revisit Bembé



Intervention

Paolo Missing, No Missions



Focus switches to El Doctor, connected to Castillo

Surgical Extraction

Ángel de la Muerte

Castillo Cinematic (Announces El Doctor is dead)



VALLE DE ORO REGION = COMPLETE



Main Story & Progression Triggered Missions

Changing the Cinematic Language

Building the World Around Story Themes

THE



END

Part 3:

FARCRY 6 LOST BETWEEN WORLDS

A UBISOFT ORIGINAL



BRANCHING LEVEL-BASED REPEATABLE



WHAT WE KNEW:



The rift levels would be **replayed 5 times** in a nearly **random** order.



Our narrative genre was sci-fi with an **extraterrestrial** character.



We were going to have **cinematics** & needed a **character arc**.

SIMPLICITY





STORYBOOK NARRATIVE



- Clear arcs
- Constant plot movement
- Page turns push story forward

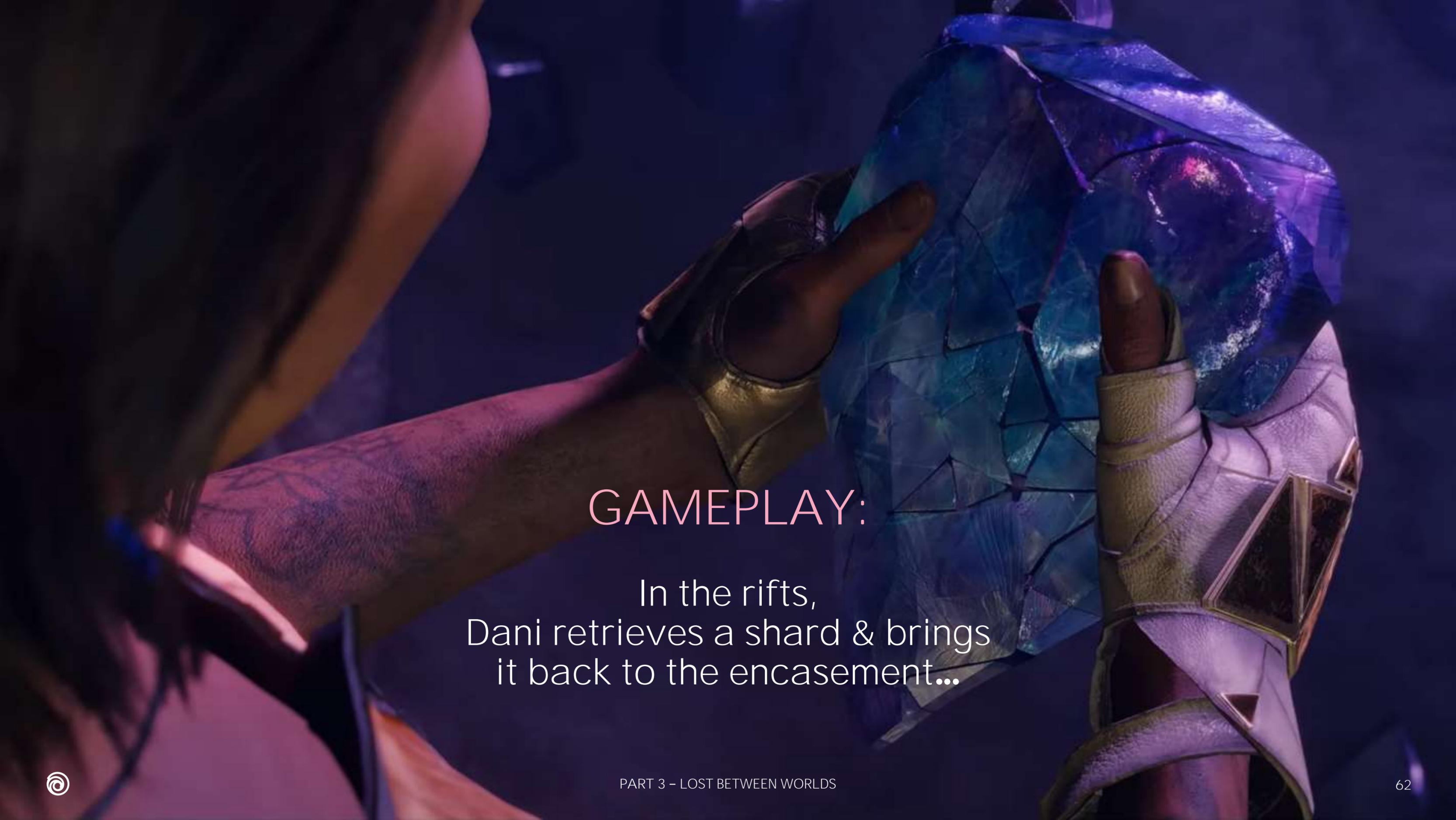
Simple 5-act structure,
punctuated by transformations,
focusing on the experience of being human,
contributing to **Fai's** arc,
cinematics were our page turns.



Dani finds a "meteorite"
in Yara...



...then finds herself
trapped with an arrogant
extraterrestrial



GAMEPLAY:

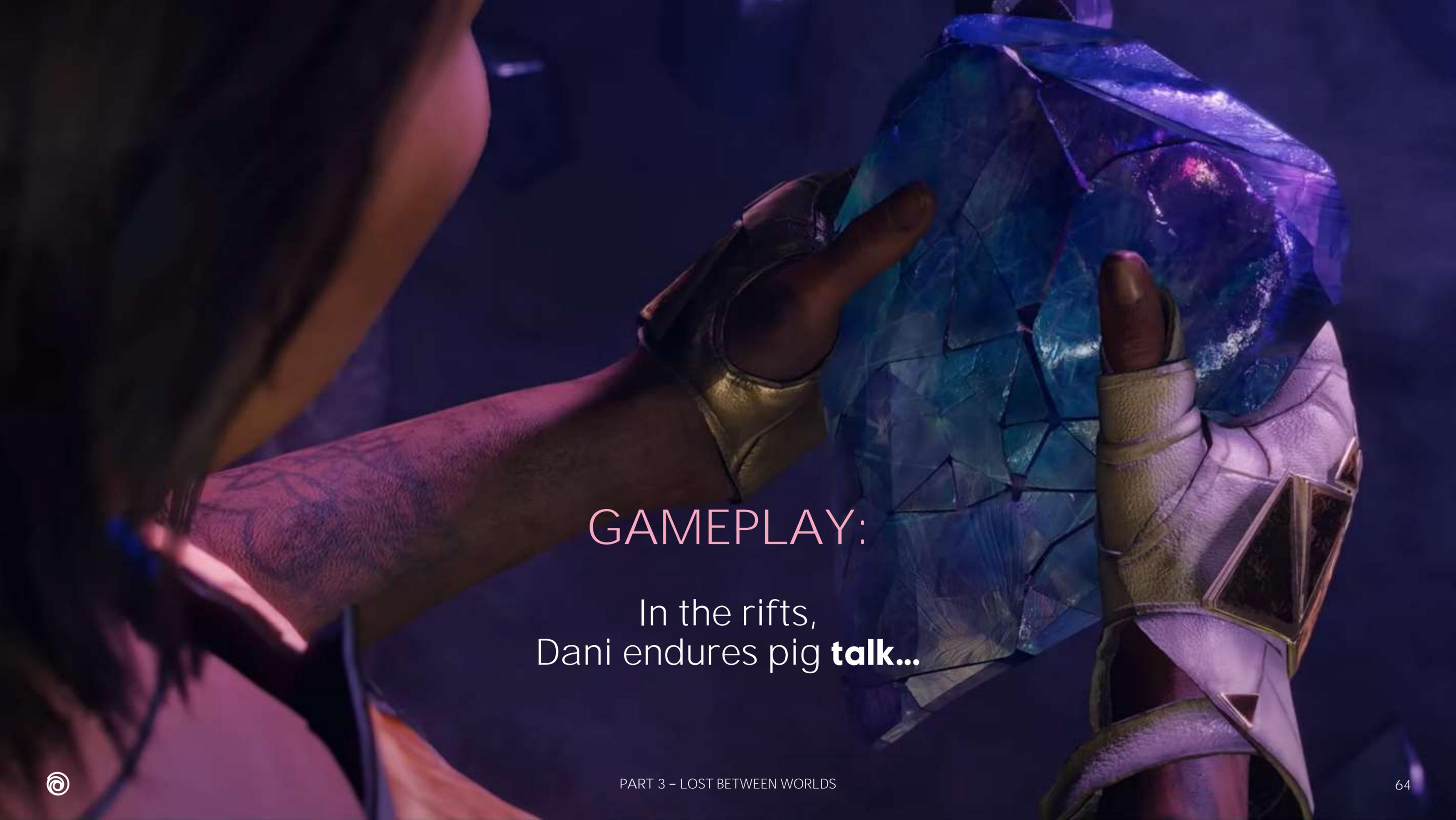
In the rifts,
Dani retrieves a shard & brings
it back to the encasement...

The 1st shard enters
the vessel...



...giving Fai power to
become a... pig.





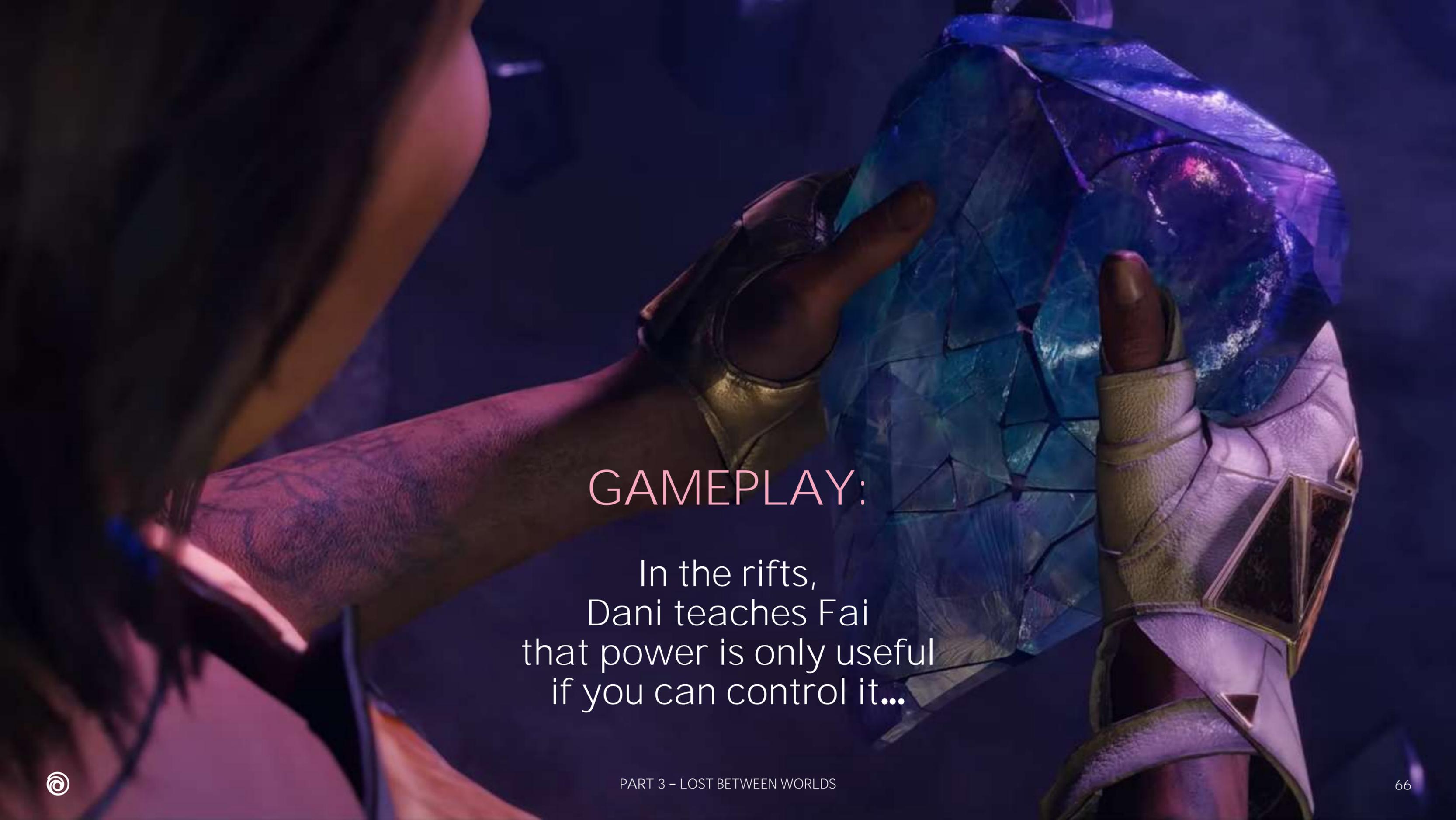
GAMEPLAY:
In the rifts,
Dani endures pig **talk...**



Dani returns with the 2nd shard
and is surprised when...



...**Fai** becomes a creature
with bloodlust.



GAMEPLAY:

In the rifts,
Dani teaches Fai
that power is only useful
if you can control it...



Using the 3rd shard, Fai becomes a human to see how they feel **about Dani...**



...but admits to lying to their “friend” about surviving, and suffers from the pain of guilt.

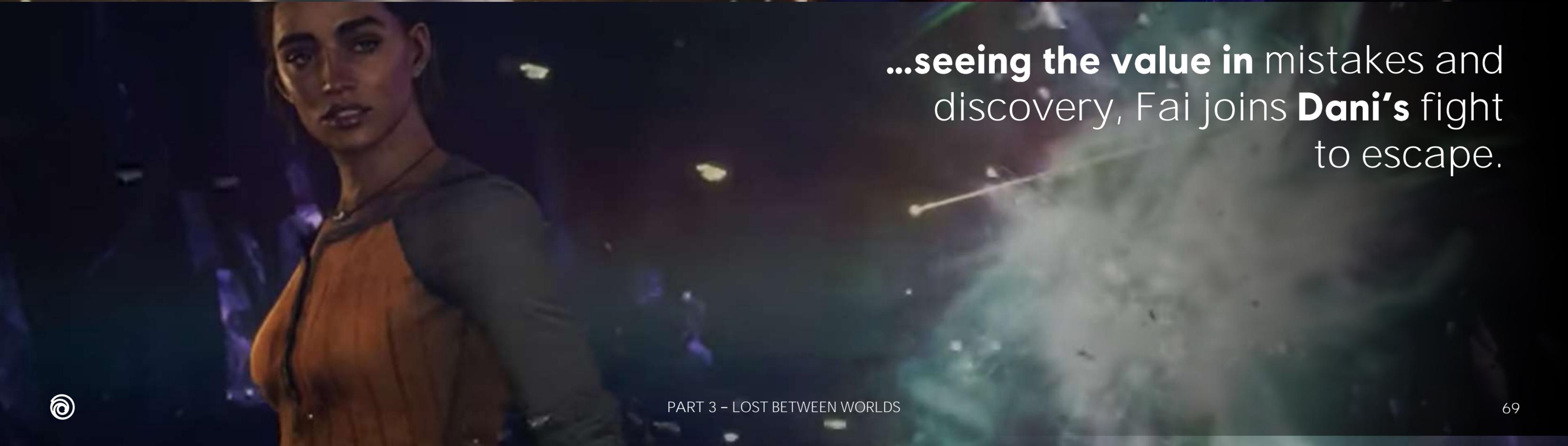


GAMEPLAY:

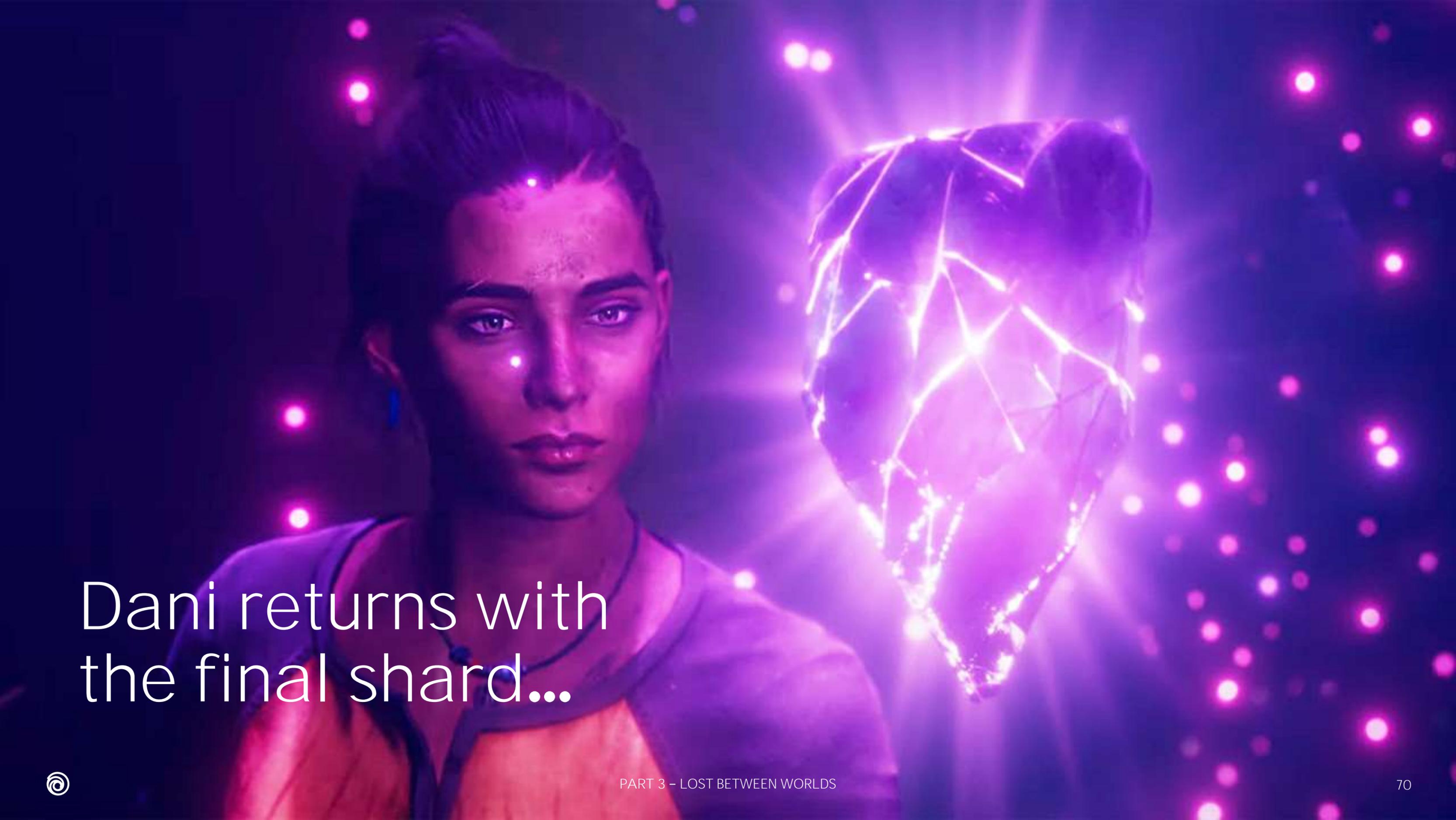
Angry, Dani goes into the rifts while Fai suffers in its human **body**...



The 4th shard. Fai realizes Dani **isn't** reckless, **they're** willing to make mistakes...



...**seeing the value in** mistakes and discovery, Fai joins **Dani's** fight to escape.



Dani returns with
the final shard...

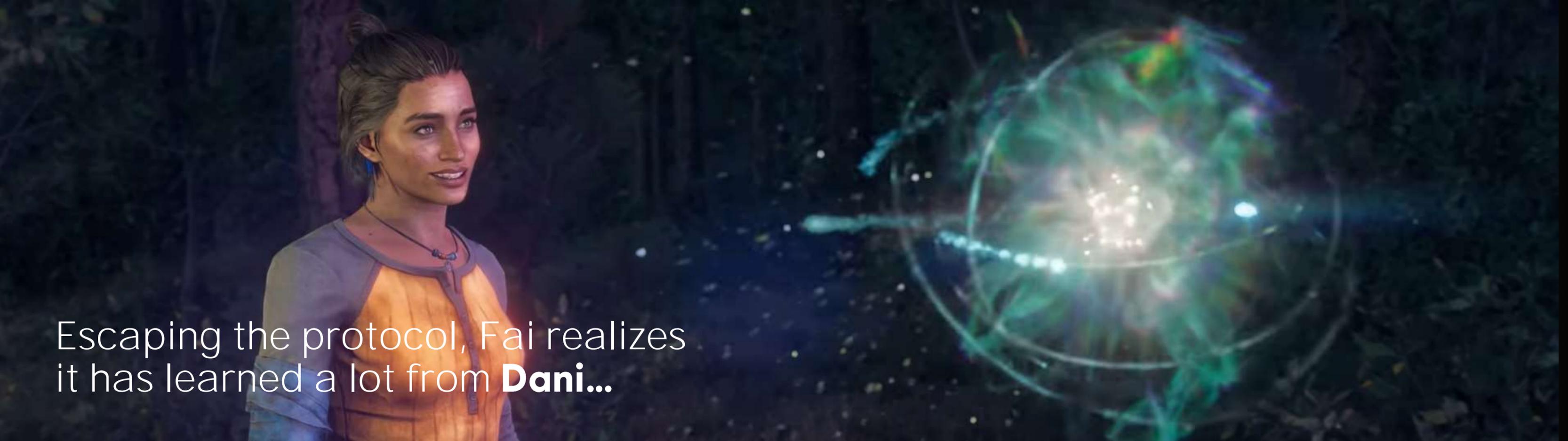


But Fai realizes it was right—
the defense protocol will kill **Dani...**

...to save its friend, Fai risks
fighting the system meant to
protect it.

GAMEPLAY





Escaping the protocol, Fai realizes it has learned a lot from **Dani...**



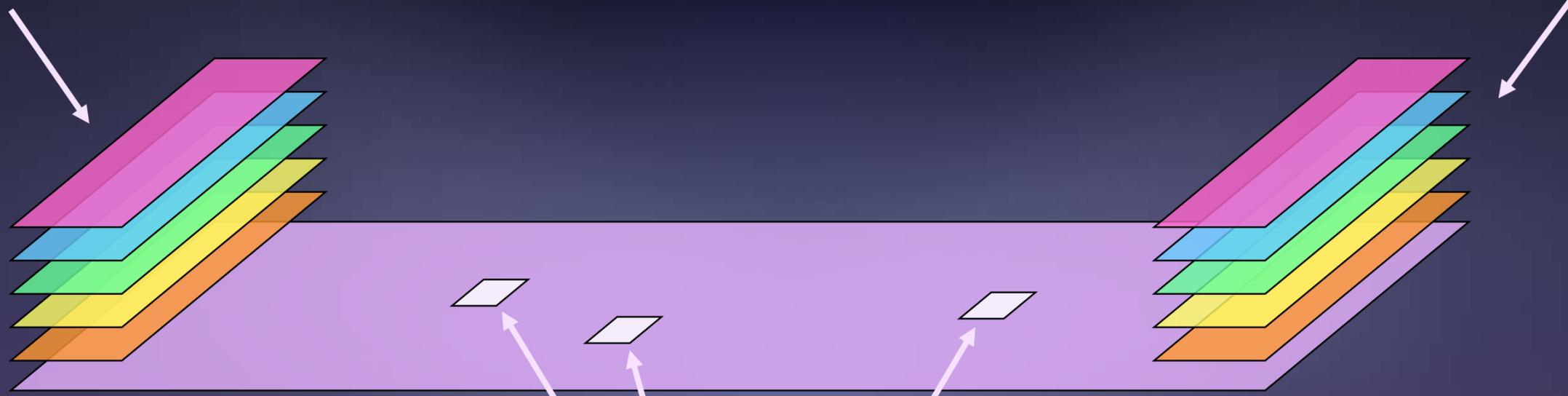
...then returns home with new knowledge, leaving its friend in Yara.

FILLING IN THE FRAMEWORK



Intro narrative

Outro narrative



Quick little mission updates

PLAYING TO STRENGTHS



Replayable structure was an opportunity to *explore character*



Separation from gameplay meant *less exposition and objective-based writing*



Writers were free to own and explore *emotional and philosophical subjects*



Curiosity, superiority, bewilderment, fear



Intrigued, sensations, novelty, infant-like



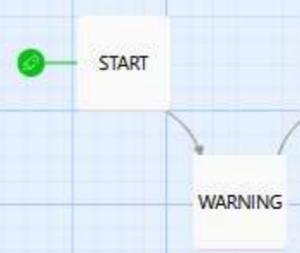
Instinct, power vs. control, death, childlike



Relating, emotions, thought, connections



Benefit of mistakes, friends, understanding



TRIAL-01 (Fortress Above)

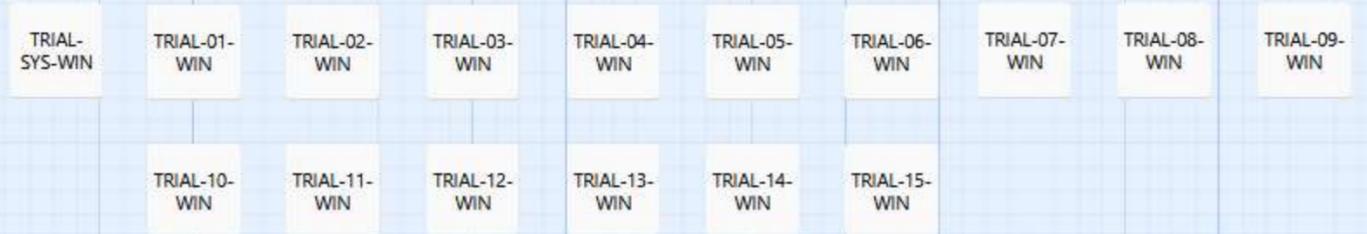
Dani and FAI talk about entering the first trial. Dani reiterates that she's trying to find a way out. FAI thinks it's hopeless but figures it'll be amusing to watch.

The player navigates a floating sky fortress.

- Complete Trial
- Die

ALERT-REPEAT

PREVIOUS



ORIGINAL FAI FORM

AI\SP_Conversations\Calls\Year2_Calls\Phase01_Calls\CAL_PHS01_HUB\Version 2\

Dani respawns in the Hub after dying during Phase 01.

DANI_F
Ugh.. I always feel like shit when
you bring me back.

FAI
Don't blame me. You're the one with
the rigid molecular structure.

FAI
[NO AUDIO]

AI\SP_Conversations\Calls\Year2_Calls\Phase01_Calls\CAL_PHS01_HUB\Version 3\

Dani respawns in the Hub after dying during Phase 01.

FAI
Are there better humans in Yara?
More genetically enhanced?

DANI_F
No. There's no one stronger or
smarter than me on the island. No
one hotter, either.

AI\SP_Conversations\Calls\Year2_Calls\Phase02_Calls\CAL_PHS02_HUB\Version 35\

Dani respawns in the Hub after dying during Phase 02.

FAI
(pig)
Dani. Come here. I want to see what
you taste like when you're alive.

DANI_F
Are you saying you licked me when I
was dead?

FAI
[NO AUDIO]

PIG FORM



COMMON THREADS

- Picking our moments and finding authored story moments to hold together open gameplay
- Developing character and story in a way that **doesn't rely on linear plot**
- Identifying our scope and scale early and writing around our constraints

QUESTIONS?



THANK YOU