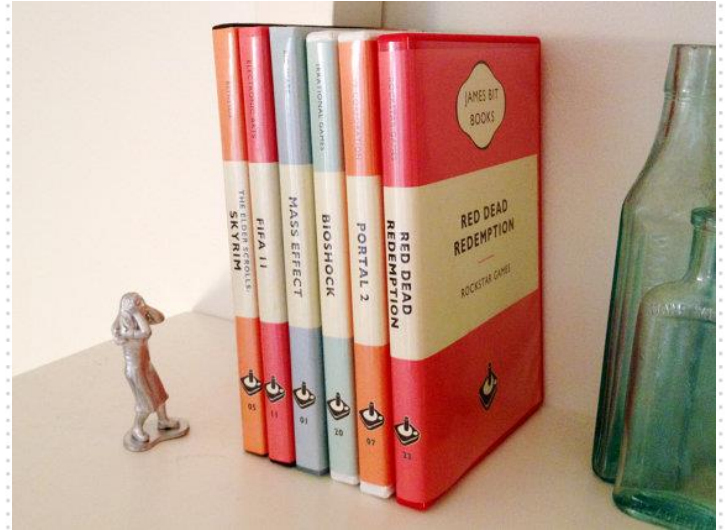


Using User Research to Improve Game Narratives

Deborah Hendersen, PhD
Games User Researcher
Microsoft Studios





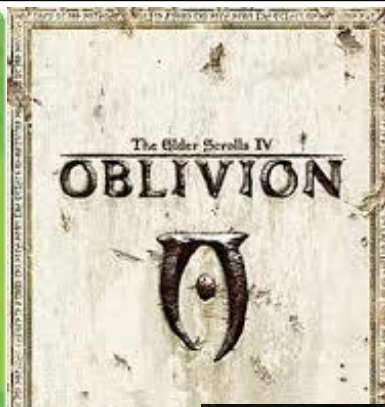


Can we get players to talk richly about story?



Can we get players to talk richly about story?

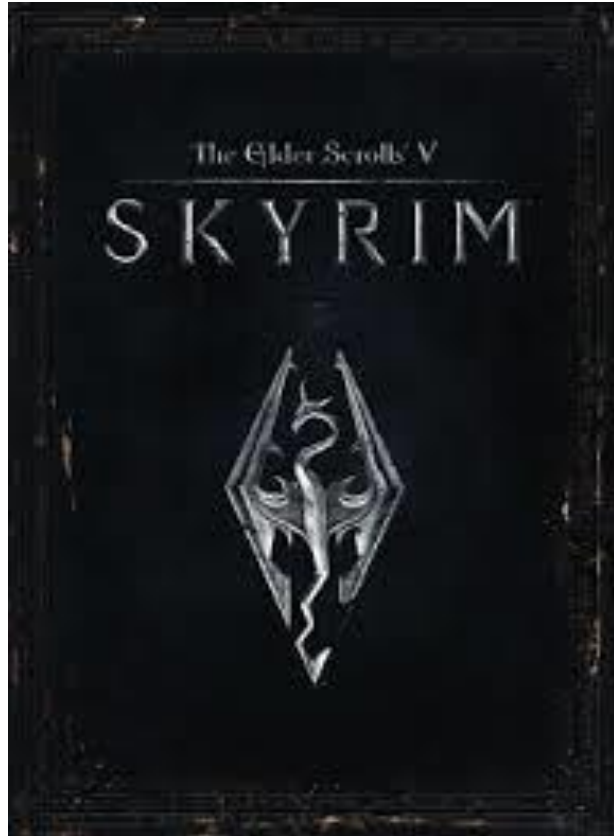
What makes players passionate about stories?







"The Scary Lady"



"The Scary Lady"

*"I dunno just like her voice
and... just because I knew I
wasn't supposed to be in there
and I was like 'Oh god, what's
gonna happen next??"*

*...you walk in the door and she
like comes up to you and you're
just like 'Whoa...' like she won't
let you move anywhere."*



"The Scary Lady."





"I had to. I had to save Walter. He's a good friend."

Retell the story...

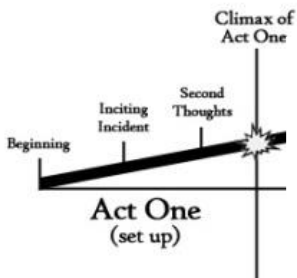
“That was crazy! I was super freaked out about that.”

Retell the story...

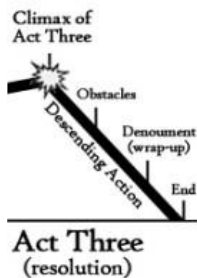
“Then they have Walkers in the barn; they find out at the end of the second season which blew my mind. That was crazy! I was super freaked out about that.”

When it came to games...

Three-Act Structure



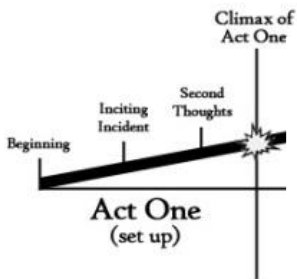
???



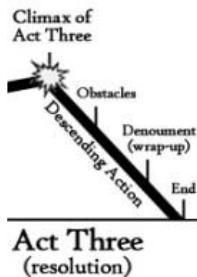
"I don't know if it's just me, but like I haven't been able to remember the midpoints and stuff."

When it came to games...

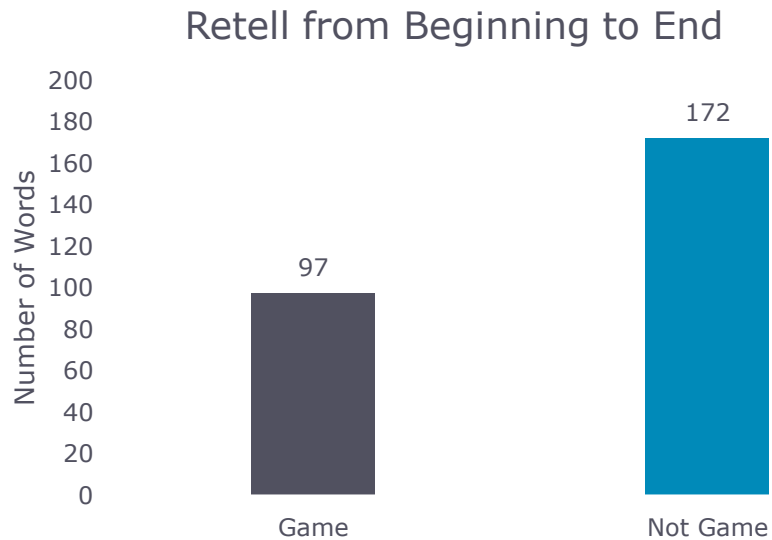
Three-Act Structure



???



"I dunno. My memory's starting to go, just like my hair. I'm 18 and I'm going bald."



Data is collapsed across games & participants, divided by media.

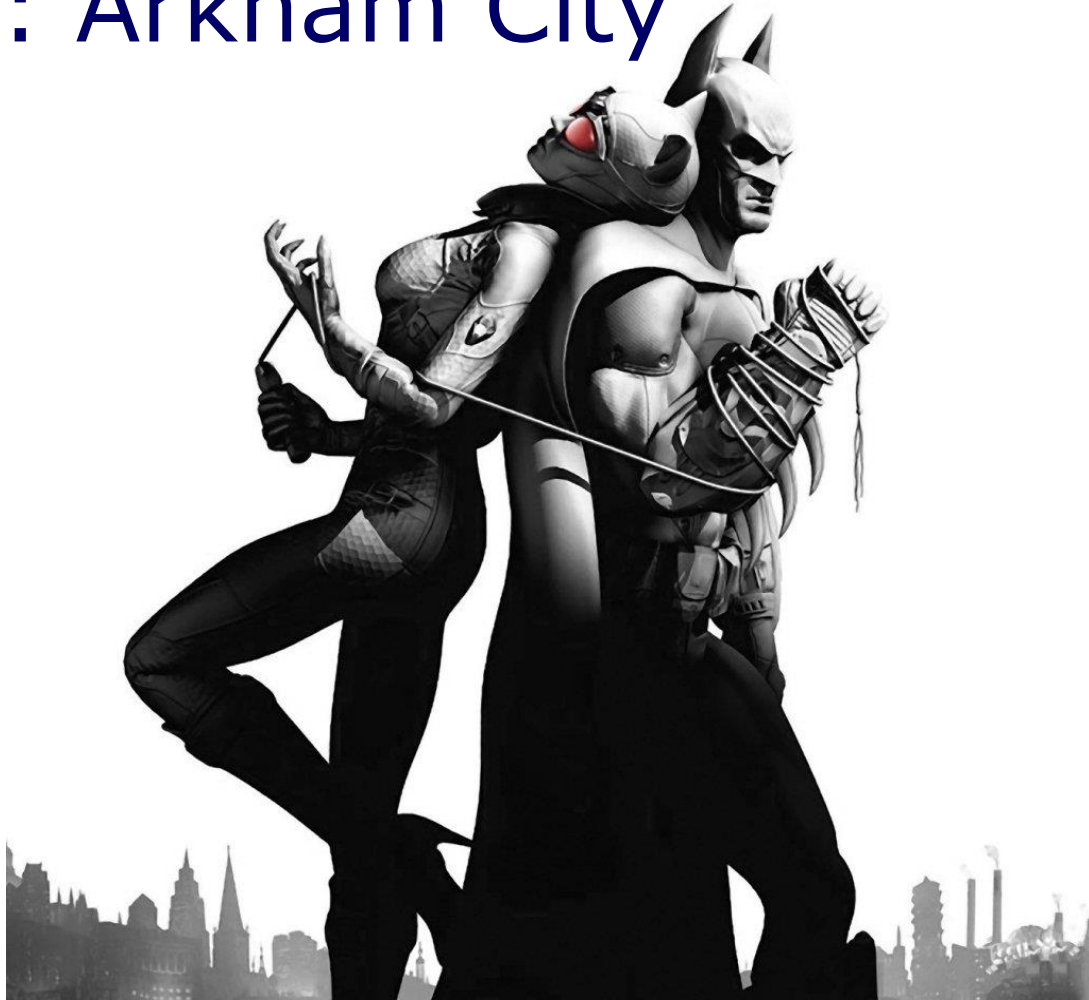
LEFT 4 DEAD™

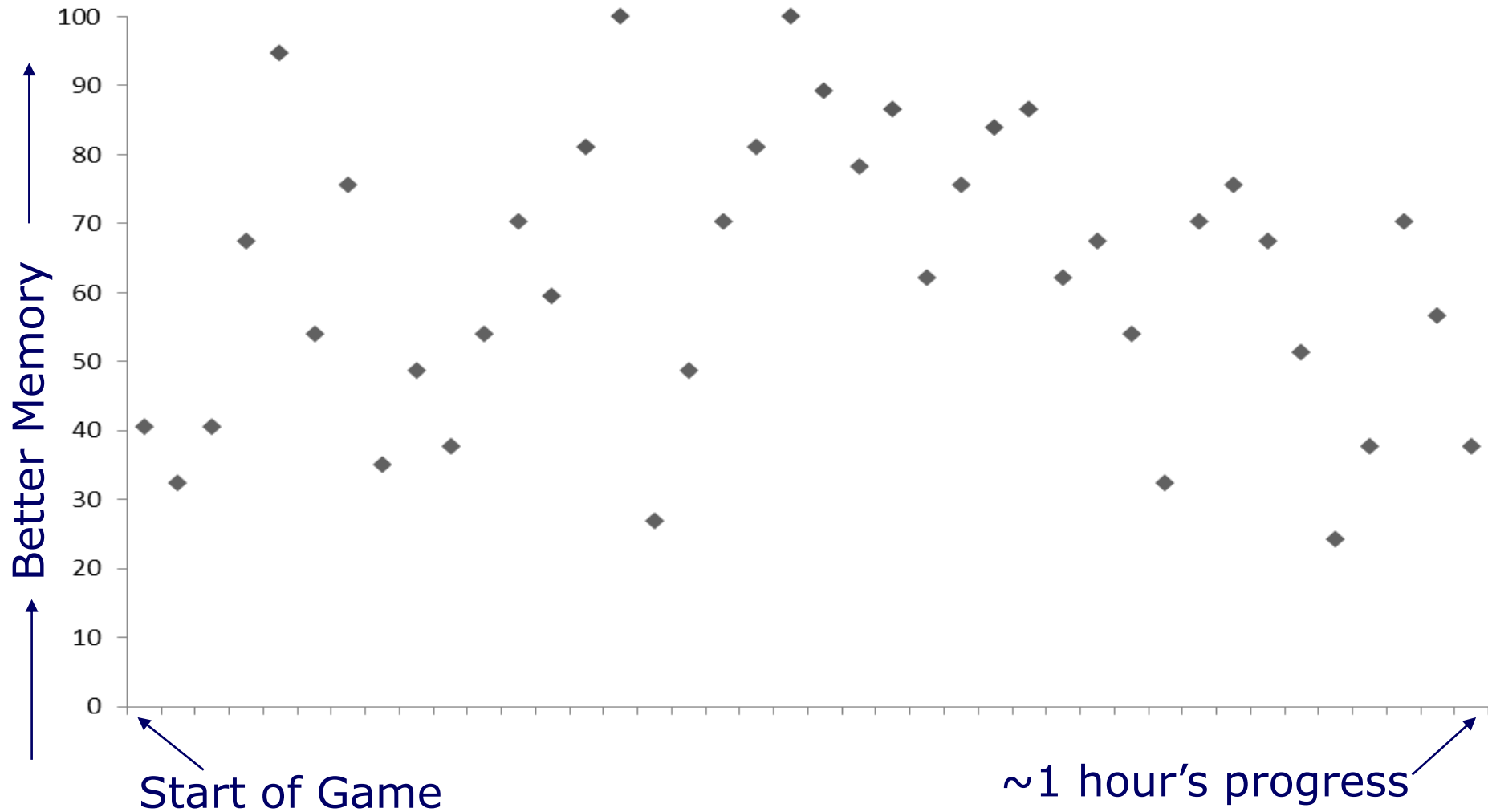


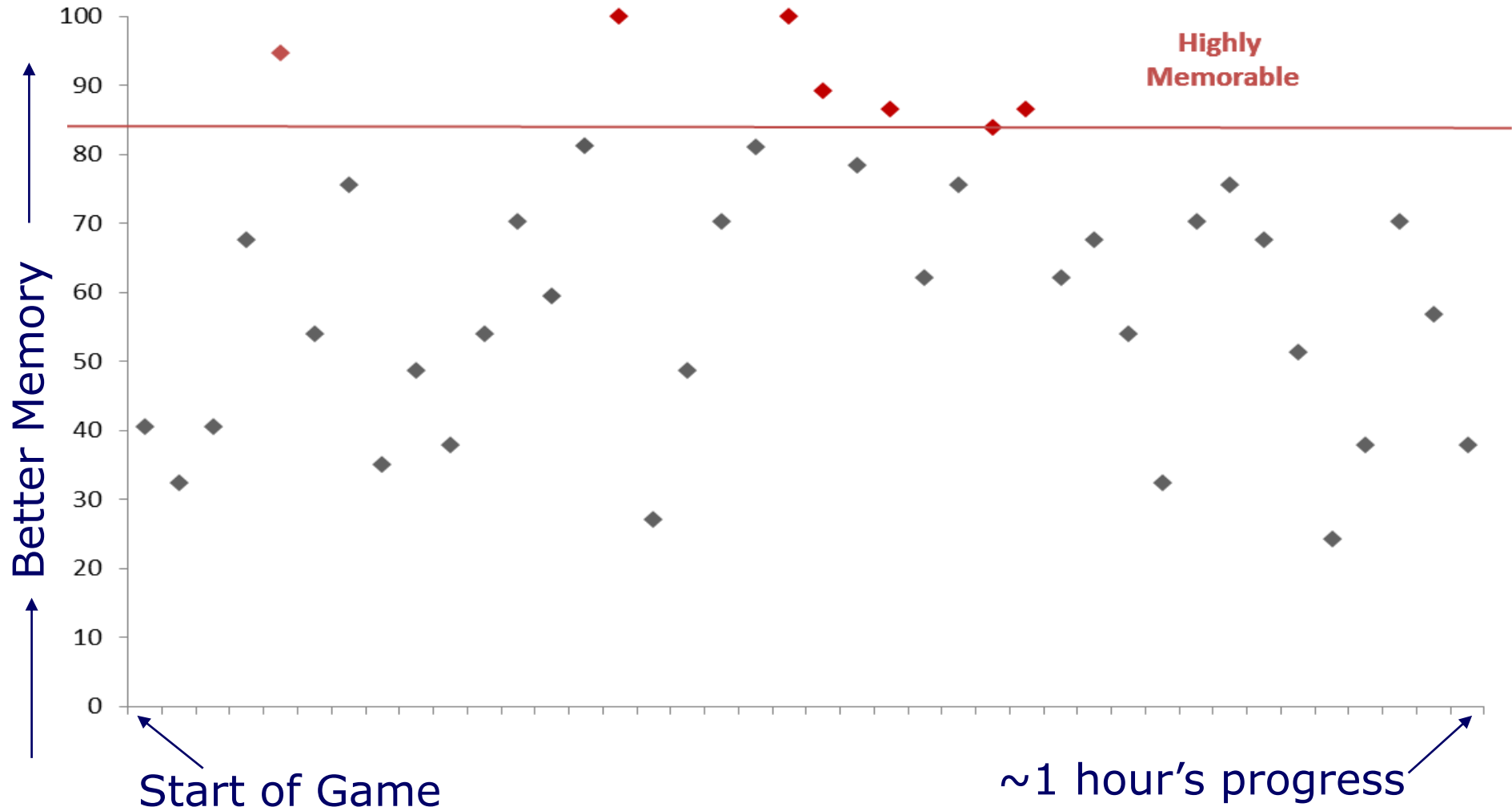


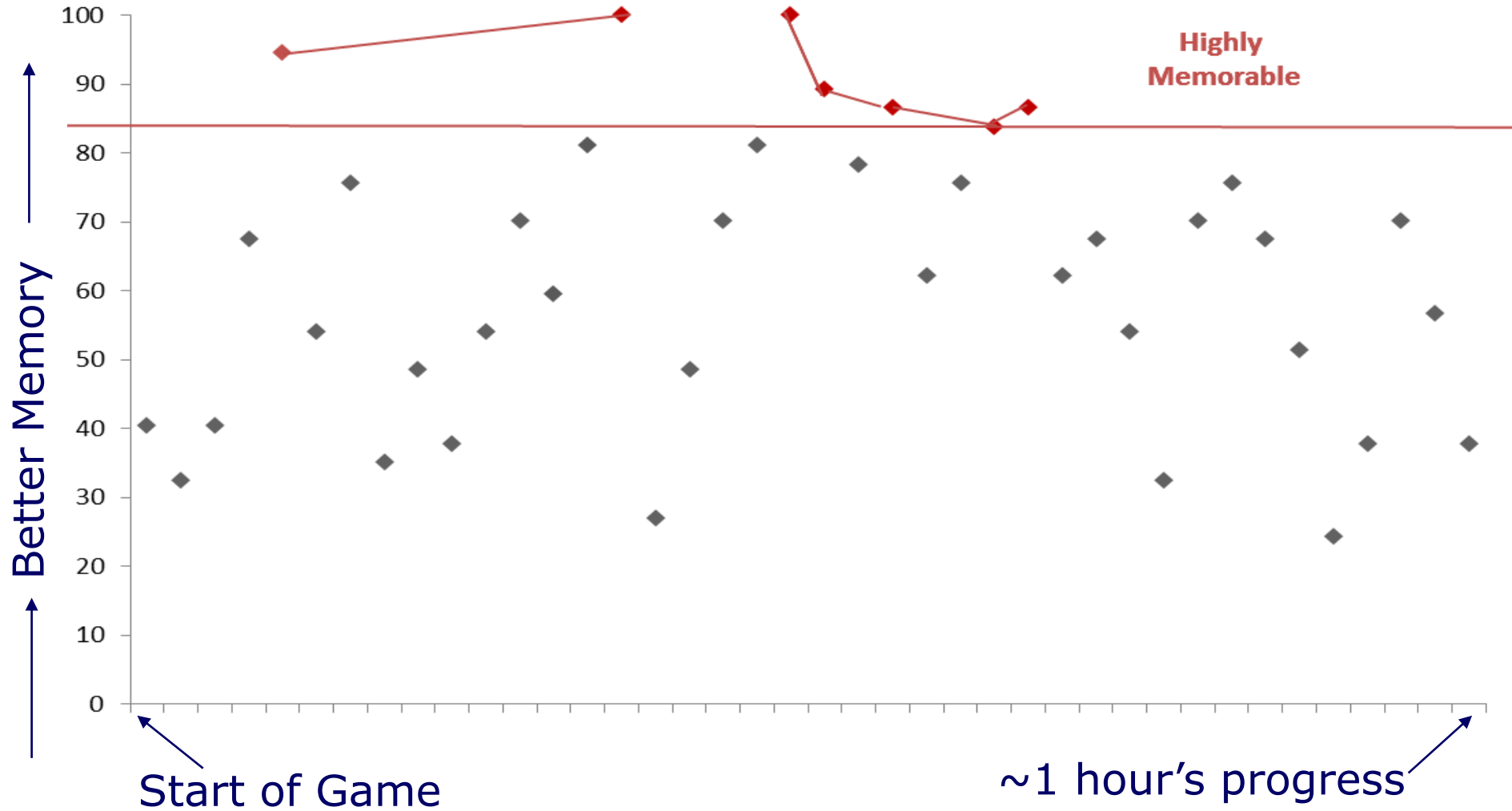


Batman: Arkham City





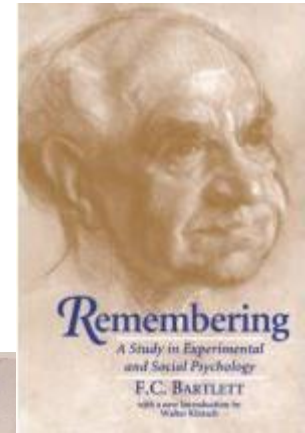
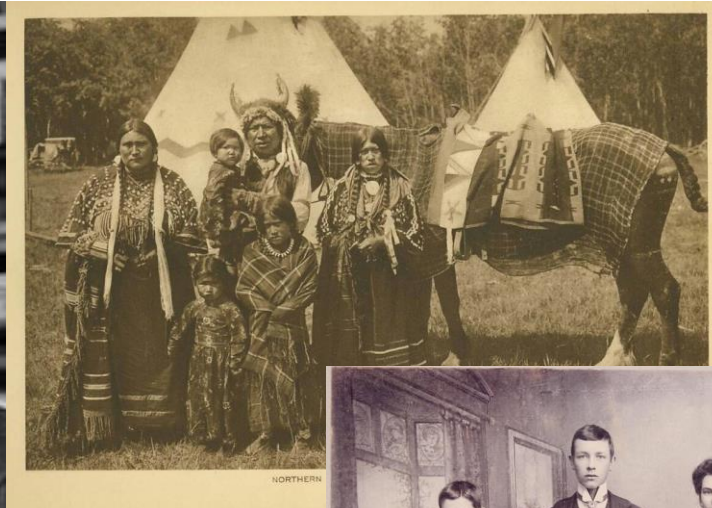
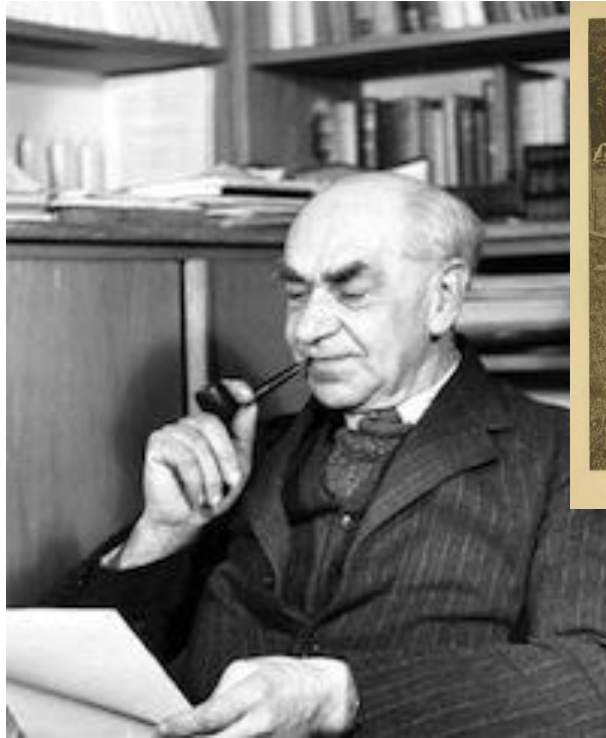






"It's a prison city but Dent has a safe. And a random vat of acid. The acid I get as a comic book thing but I have more trouble with the idea that an incarcerated person has a safe."

(original spelling)

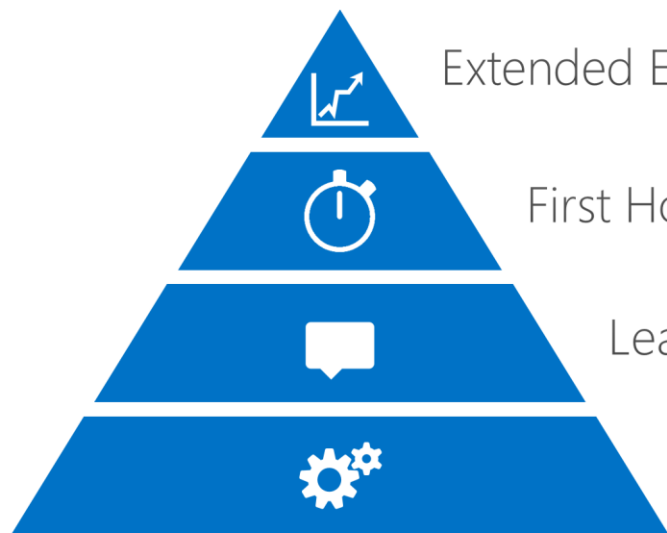


Sir Frederic Bartlett



"It's a prison city but Dent has a safe. And a random vat of acid. The acid I get as a comic book thing but I have more trouble with the idea that an incarcerated person has a safe."

(original spelling)



Extended Experience

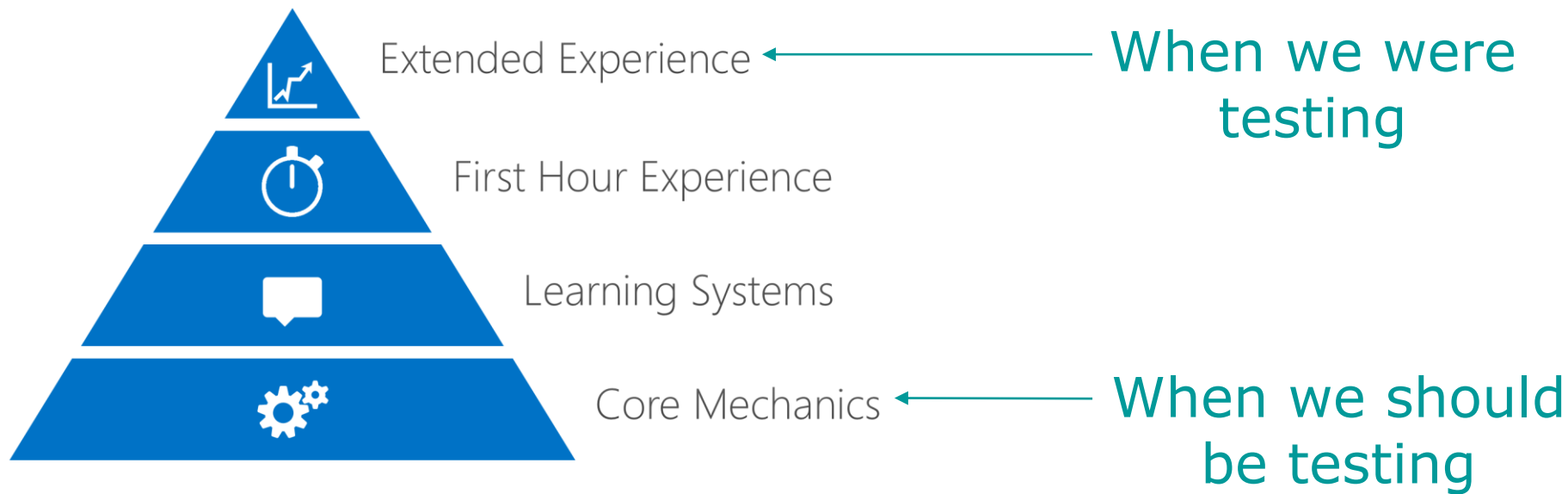
First Hour Experience

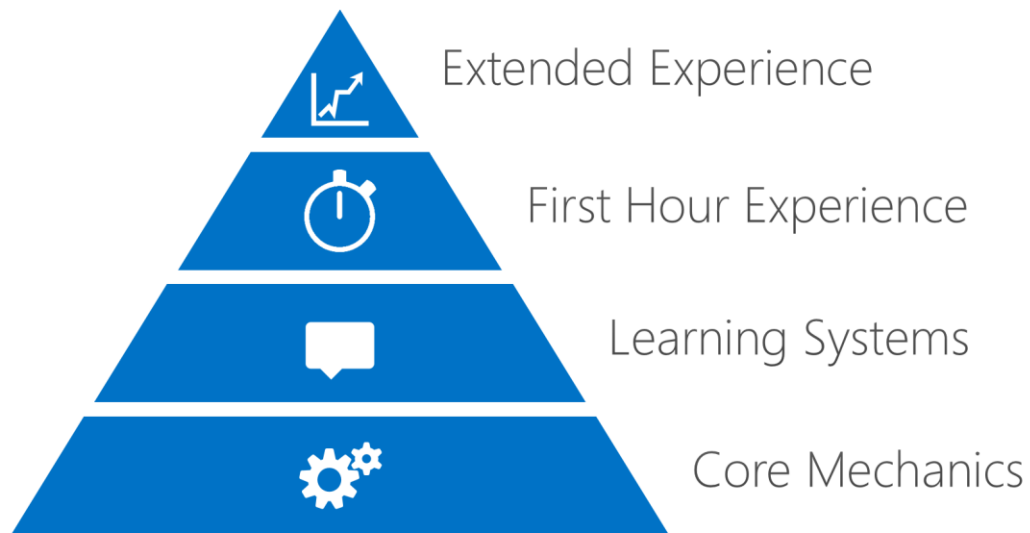
Learning Systems

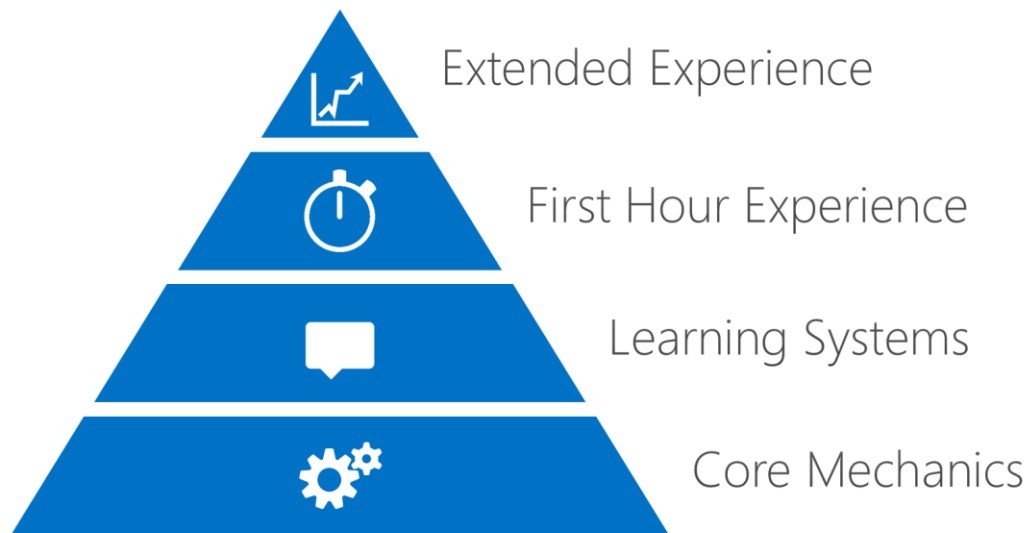
Core Mechanics

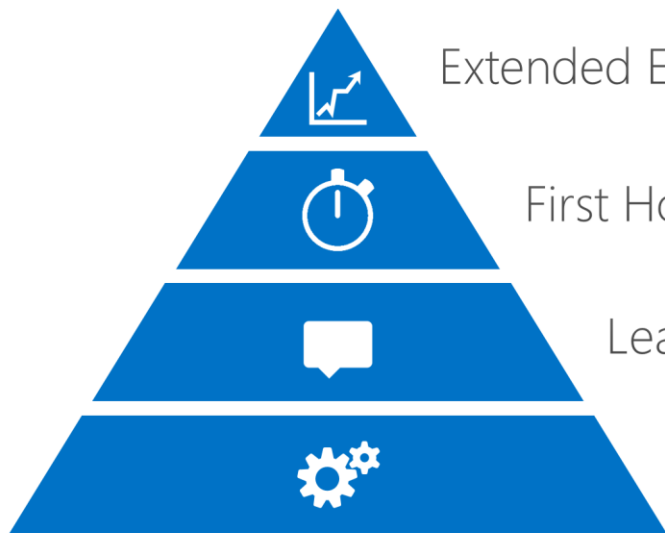
About fun & liking

About comprehension









Extended Experience

First Hour Experience

Learning Systems

Core Mechanics



Rules for building stimuli

1. Tell the story in the order you intend to present it.
2. Only include the information you will give the player.

Rules for building stimuli

3. Show don't tell

Rules for building stimuli

3. Show don't tell



Rules for building stimuli

3. Show don't tell

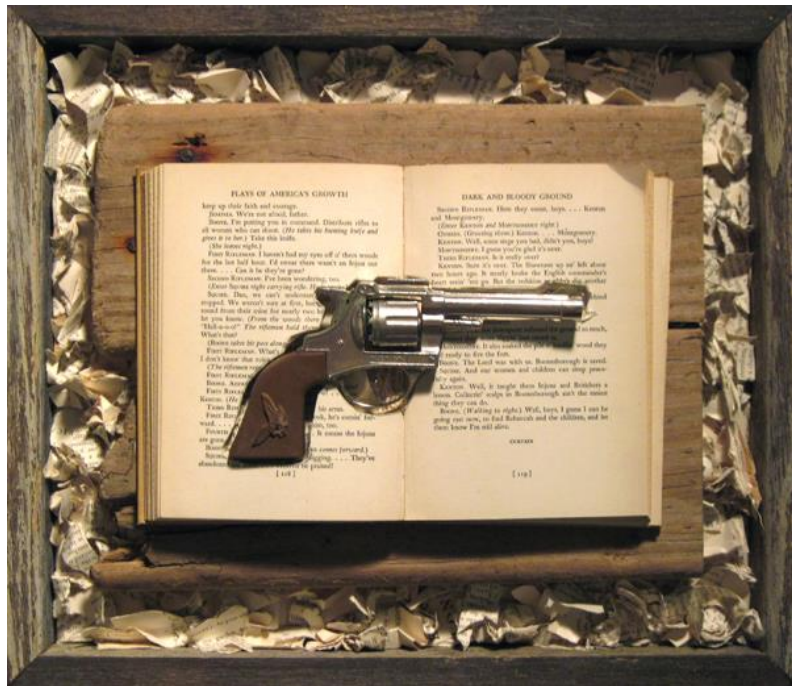


"What a Dummy"

Rules for building stimuli

4. Break before conclusions or big twists.

5. Ask for predictions.



Rules for building stimuli

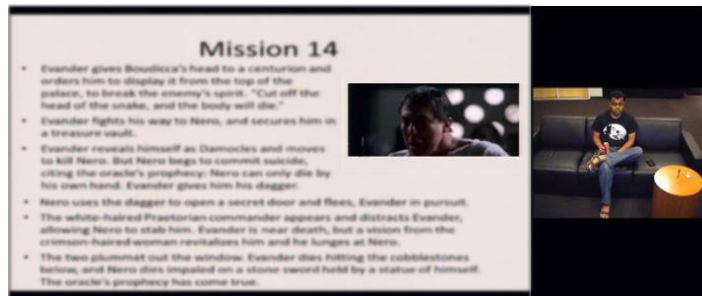
4. Break before conclusions or big twists.

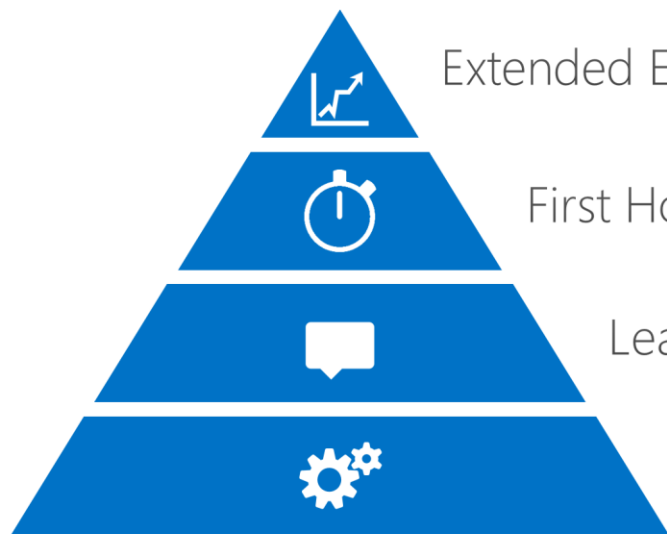
"Why would I be interested in them if they weren't somehow bad?"

5. Ask for predictions.

Rules for building stimuli

1. Tell the story in the order you intend to present it.
2. Only include the information you will give the player
3. Show don't tell.
4. Break before conclusions or big twists.
5. Ask for predictions.





Extended Experience

First Hour Experience

Learning Systems

Core Mechanics

What can we
test here?

If we get rid of
comprehension
issues here...

- ☐ Admirable
- ☐ Annoying
- ☐ Boring
- ☐ Brooding
- ☐ Charming
- ☐ Cliché
- ☐ Etc.





✓ Scary





✓ Scary



