# The Art of Blues and Bullets

## Dominating 256 Shades of Grey

**Daniel Candil**
Art Director | A Crowd of Monsters

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE March 14–18, 2016 · Expo: March 16–18, 2016 #GDC16

UBM

# Who am I? Daniel Candil

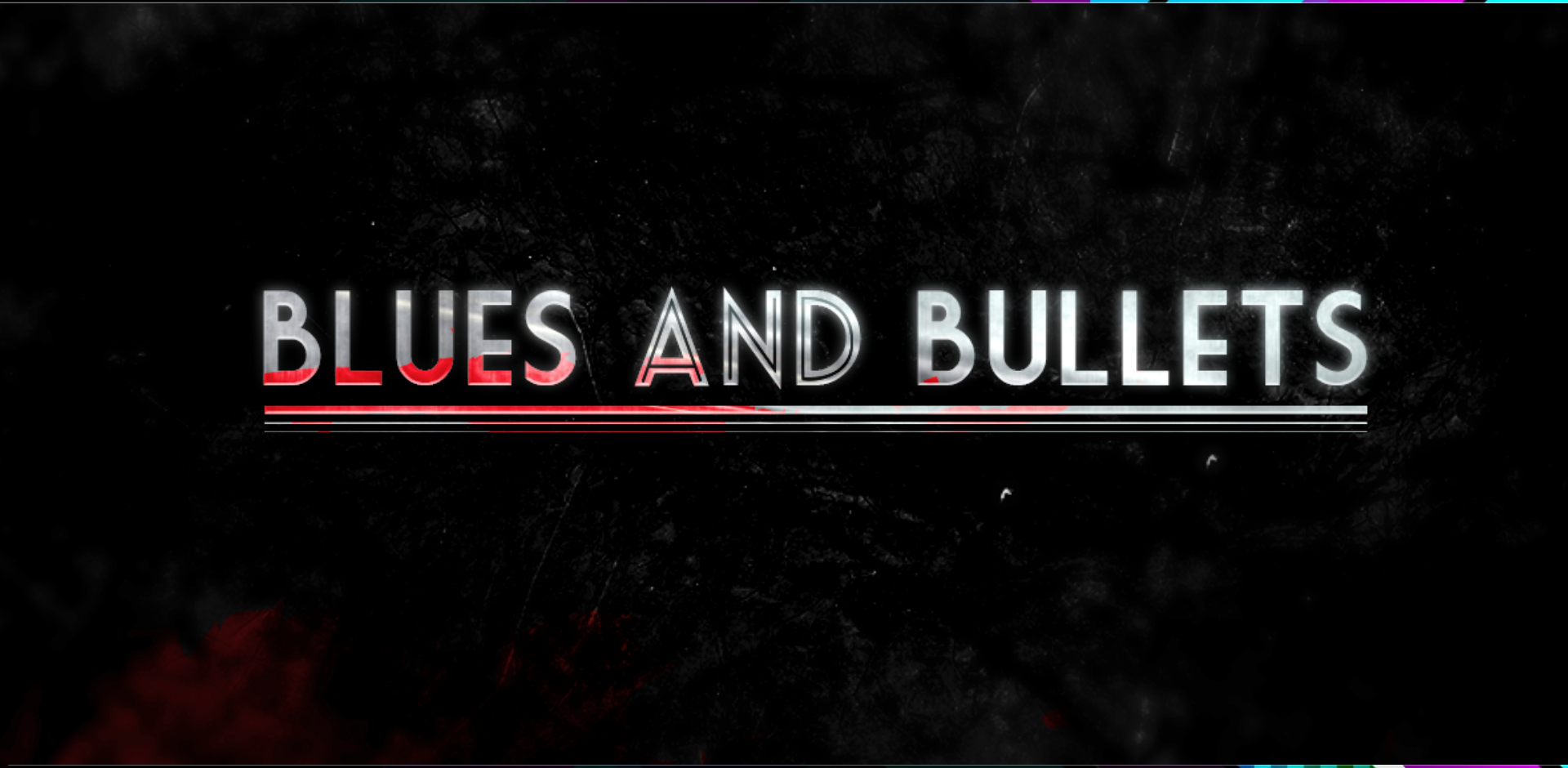
TecnoCampus
Construïm futur

# Who am I? Daniel Candil

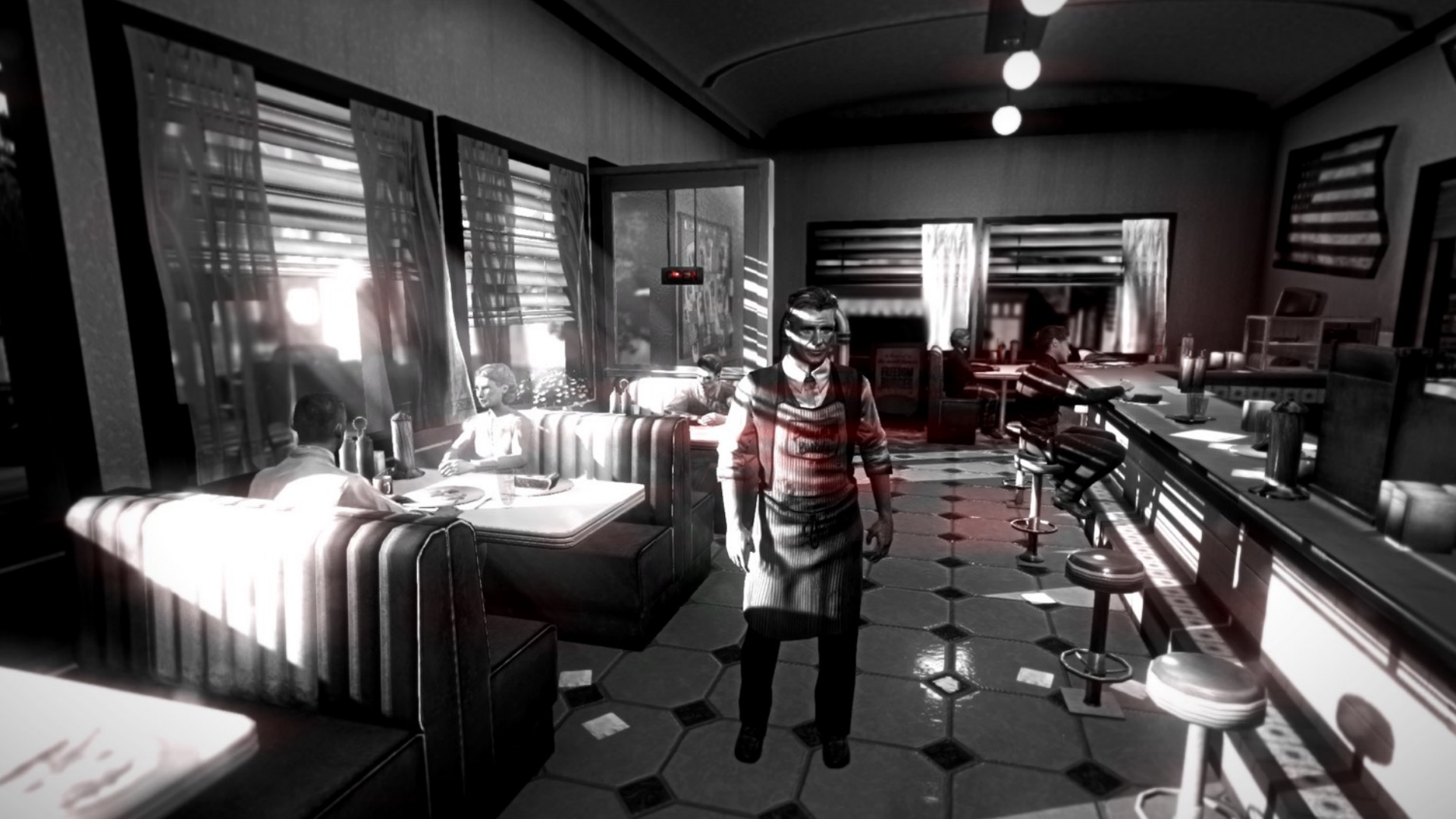
- The **Art** Director of A Crowd of Monsters
- **Art** Professor at the University *(Tecnocampus)* in Barcelona
- The responsible of a great team of talented **art**ists at ACOM

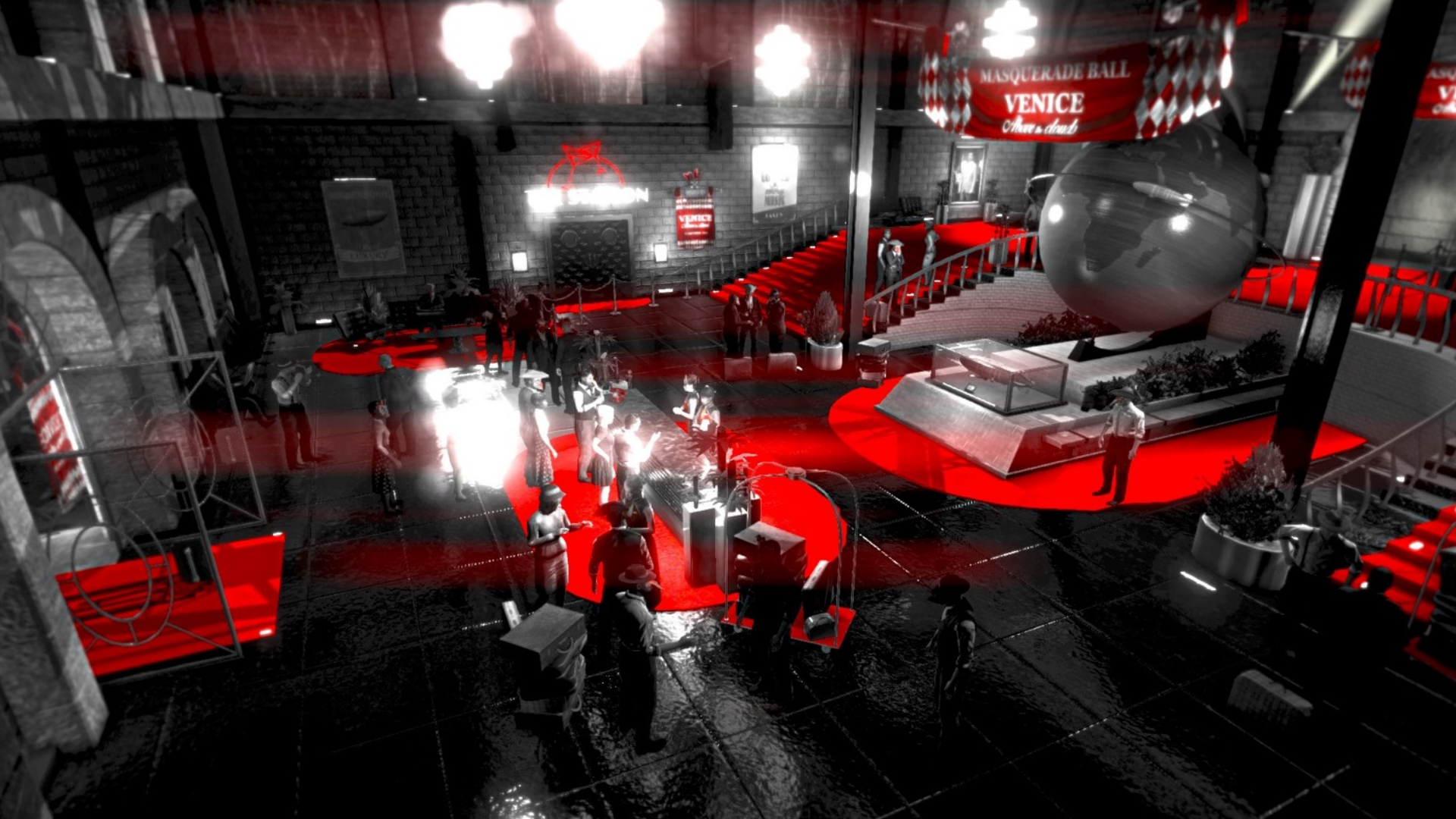
TecnoCampus
Construïm futur

We've been focused on creating the visual direction and the **art** of the game about we’re gonna talk today.


BLUES AND BULLETS

THIS
TOWN
HAS BECOME
A JUNGLE




MASQUERADE BALL
VENICE

# Development Key Points

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- Episodic Game (5 Chapters)

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BLUES AND BULLETS

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BLUES AND BULLETS

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BLUES AND BULLETS

# Artistic Key Points

BLUES AND BULLETS

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BLUES AND BULLETS

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- DANGER: Monotony of the grey color

**Blues and Bullets** it’s our tribute to the noir genre.

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**NARRATIVE**

**AESTHETICS**

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**NARRATIVE** **AESTHETICS**

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**NARRATIVE**
NARRATIVE RHYTHM

**AESTHETICS**
VISUAL RHYTHM

BLUES AND BULLETS

# NARRATIVE

## The Pacing of the Noir genre

# BLUES AND BULLETS

Slow start but end up with great climax

The characters are introduced calmly

BLUES AND BULLETS

The main character **carries all the weight of the world in his shoulders** progressively as the story advances until…

BLUES AND BULLETS

...SHIT HAPPENS...

… and the main character realizes that is **he/she against everything.**

# NARRATIVE

The Pacing of the Noir genre

BLUES AND BULLETS

**Noir implies slow pacing!**

# NARRATIVE

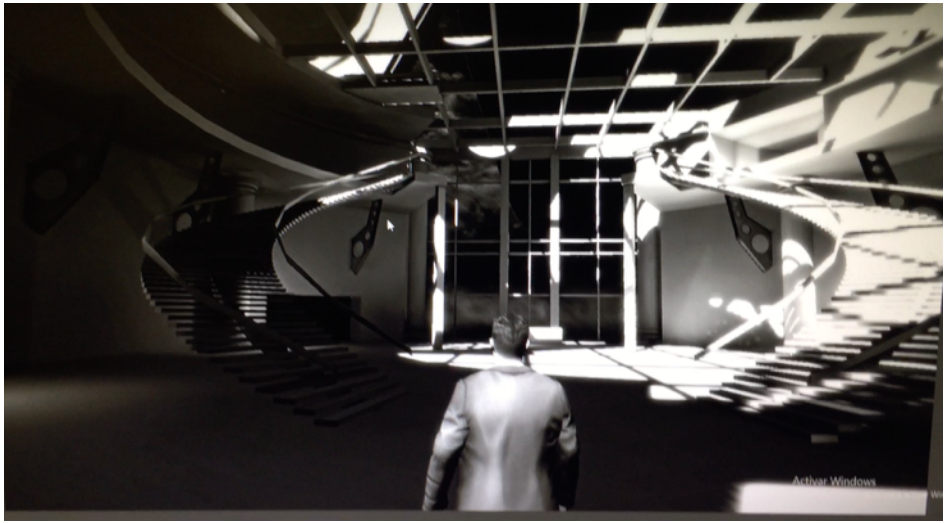
The Pacing of the Noir genre

BLUES AND BULLETS

**Noir implies slow pacing!**

**TOO SLOW FOR A VIDEO GAME?**

# Demo time!



# WE CONFIRMED SOME THINGS:

- The Narrative rhythm **was as slow as expected**.
- While this would have worked fine on a movie…

# The player took far too long to engage fully in the story for a video game!

# We needed to know exactly what kind of Narrative Rhythm our game had…

# THE ATTENTION PYRAMID

## NARRATIVE RHYTHM

# THE ATTENTION PYRAMID

## NARRATIVE RHYTHM

EPISODE 1

# THE ATTENTION PYRAMID

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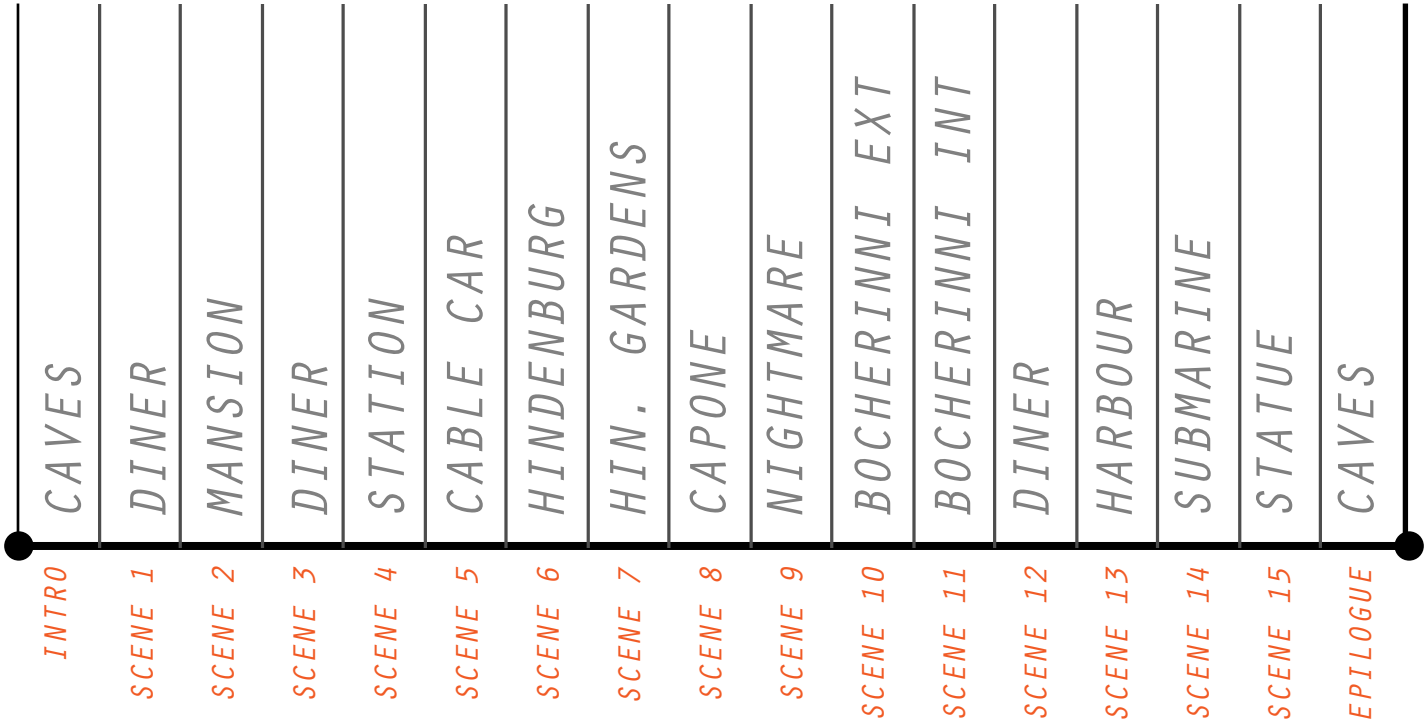
EPISODE 1

# THE ATTENTION PYRAMID

## NARRATIVE RHYTHM

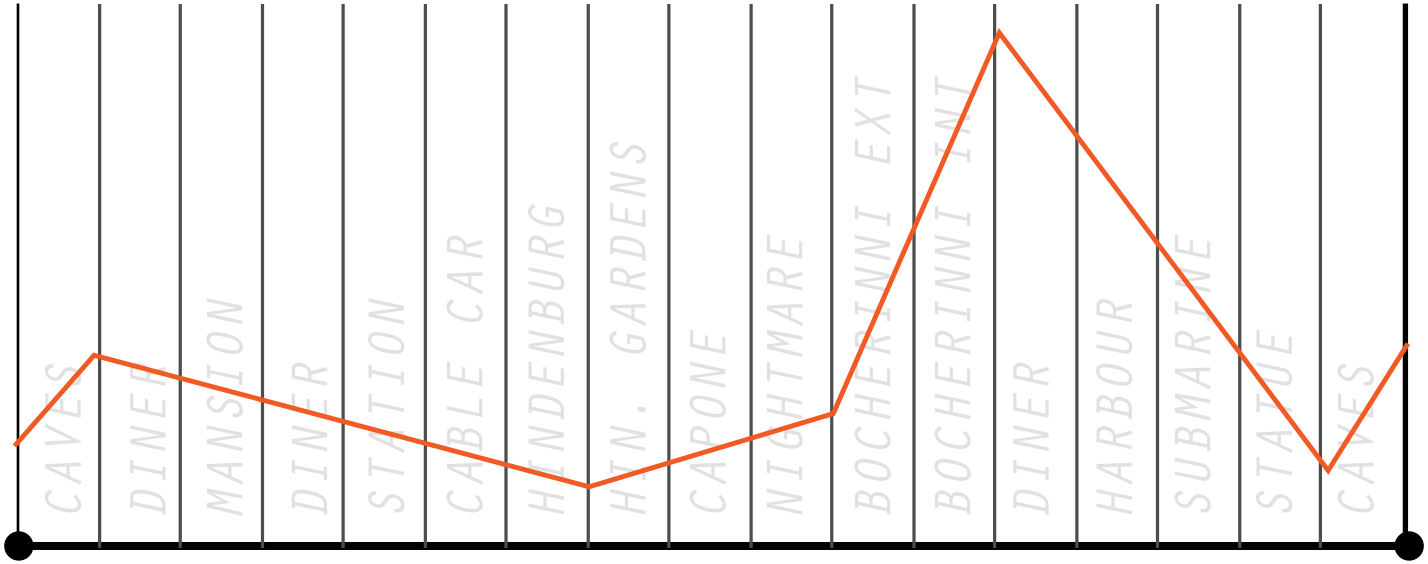
### EPISODE 1



# THE ATTENTION PYRAMID

## NARRATIVE RHYTHM

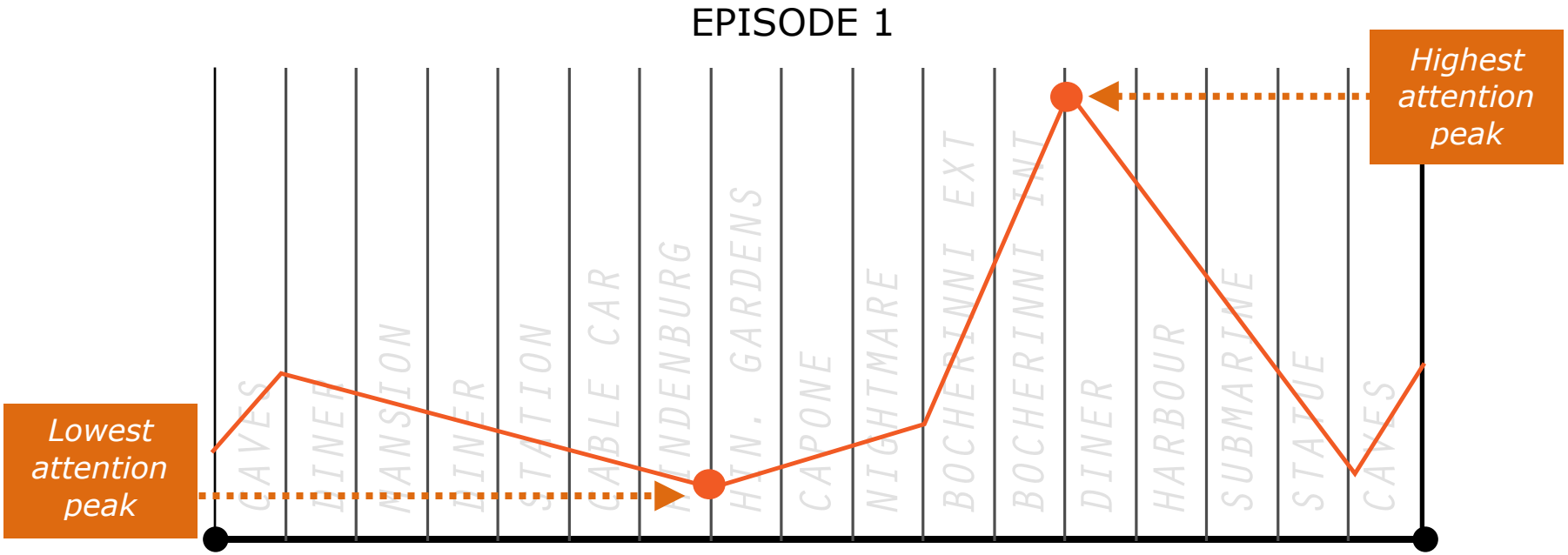
EPISODE 1




We analyzed the player’s attention progress throughout the game.

# THE ATTENTION PYRAMID

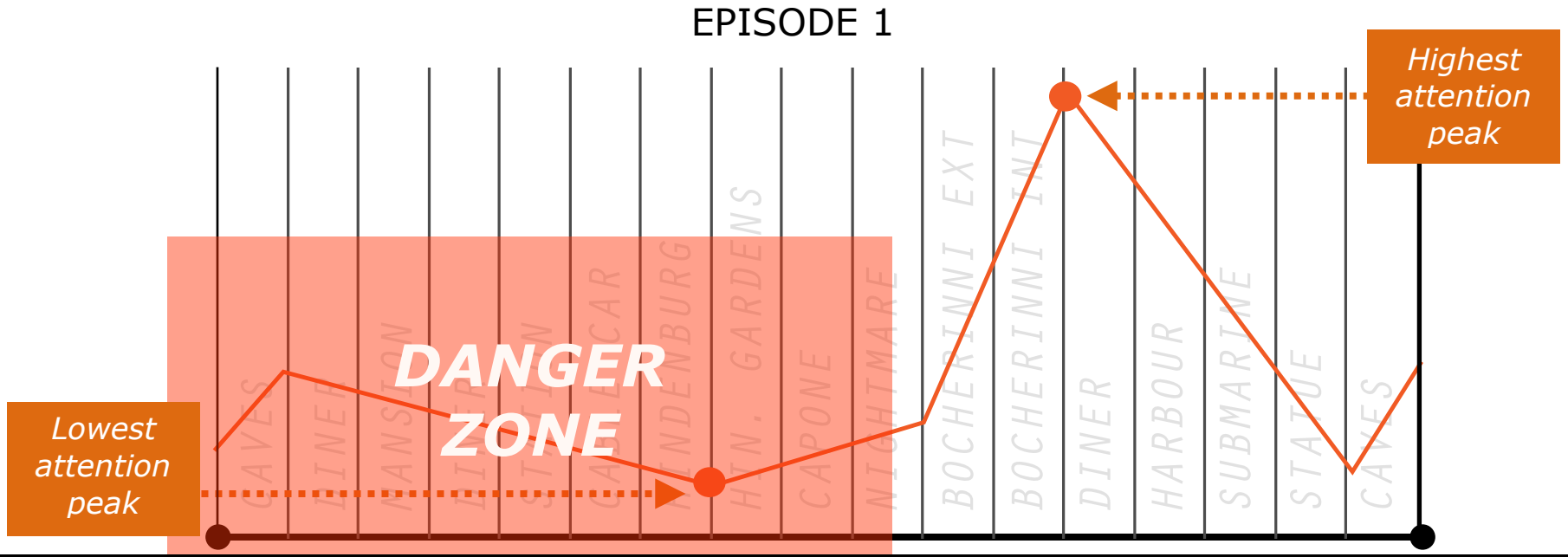
## NARRATIVE RHYTHM




This way we ended up visualizing the **narrative rhythm**.

# THE ATTENTION PYRAMID

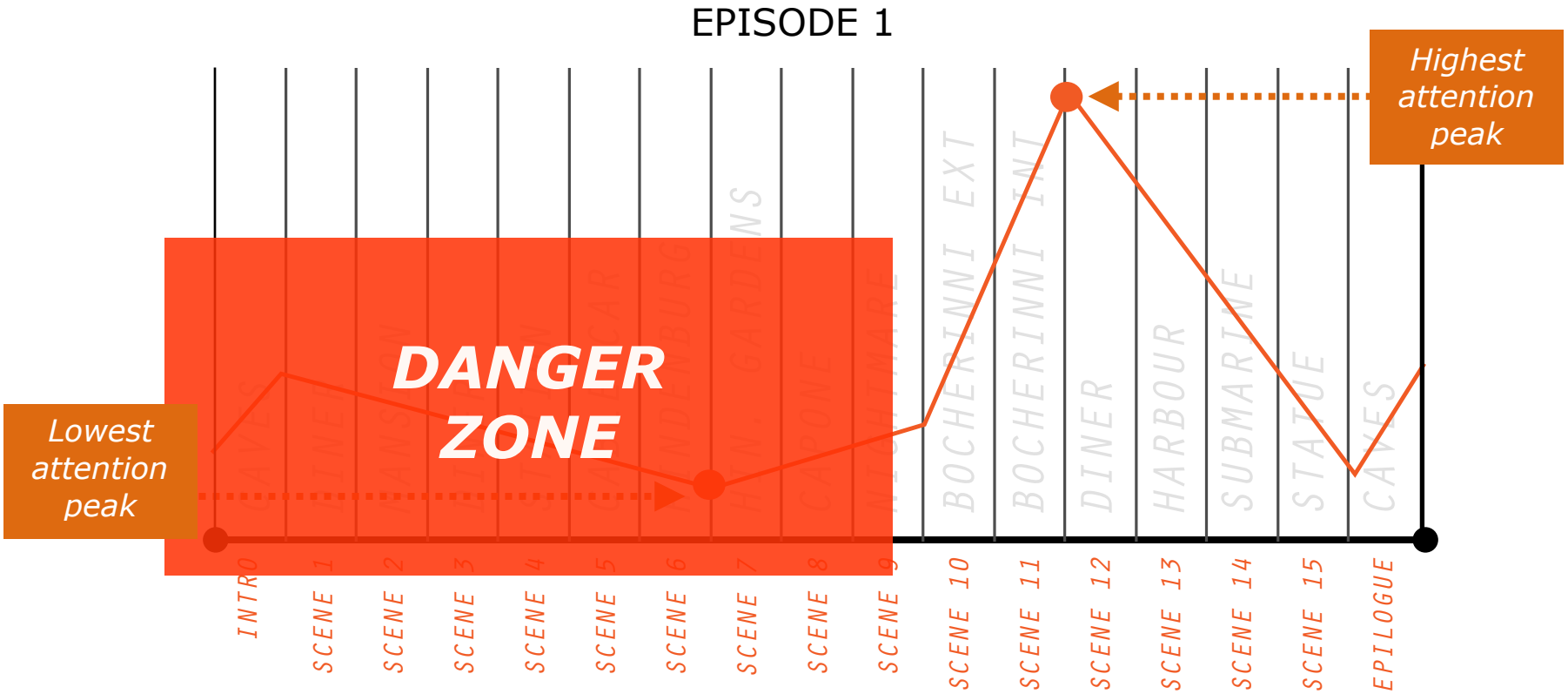
## NARRATIVE RHYTHM




We could locate **the danger zone** in which the player may end up losing his interest

# THE ATTENTION PYRAMID

## NARRATIVE RHYTHM



With this in mind we can start to develop our Visual Rhythm

BLUES AND BULLETS

# AESTHETICS

## Dominating 256 Shades of Grey

# Artistic Key Points

- Noire Aesthetic
- Settled into the american 20’s and 50’s
- Limited color palette (B,W, R)
- Expressionist approach in lighting
- DANGER: Monotony of the grey color

# BLACK AND WHITE

- When you are trying to make a Black and White video game in a modern engine you may end up fighting against the grey color.

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# GLOBAL ILLUMINATION

BLUES AND BULLETS

# GLOBAL ILLUMINATION ISN'T SOMETHING AS NEW AS IT SOUNDS….

Humanity needed almost 19 centuries to learn that the shadow is not "**Black**". It has a lot of colors.

*The Calling of St. Matthew. Caravaggio.*

***Baroque***
***XVII Century***

***Dramatic lighting***

***Shadow is almost black***

***It's an unified tone in the lighting (yellow in this case)***

# Impressionism (S.XIX)

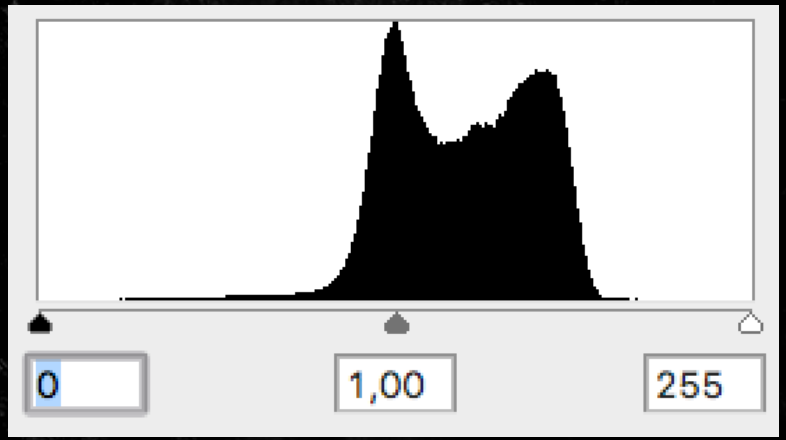
Claude Monet 1840 - 1929 Paris

The houses of Parliament 1903

*A lot of different hues of blue in the shadow, the silhouette of the buildings*

*The orange hues of the sky in the water*

*It's a powerful image*
*The contrast works but…*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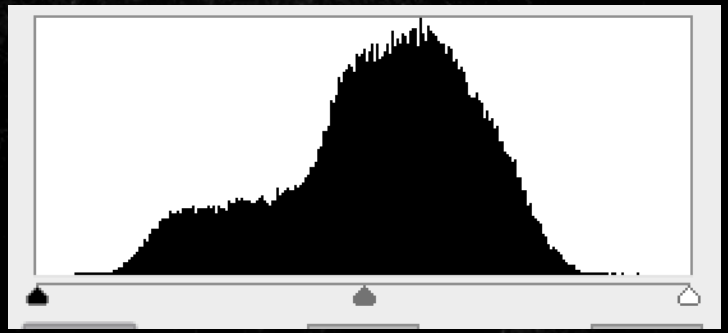
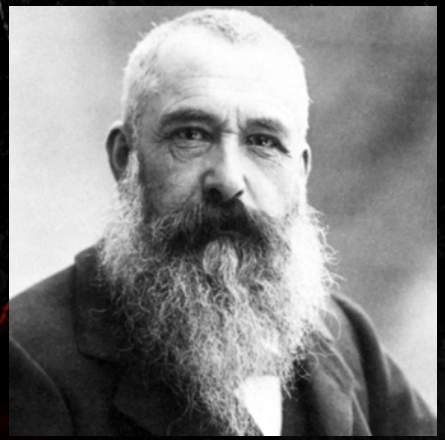
Rouen Cathedral 1894



Falaises près de Pourville 1882

In fact, we could say they were applying…

**“Global Illumination”…**



Claude Monet

BLUES AND BULLETS

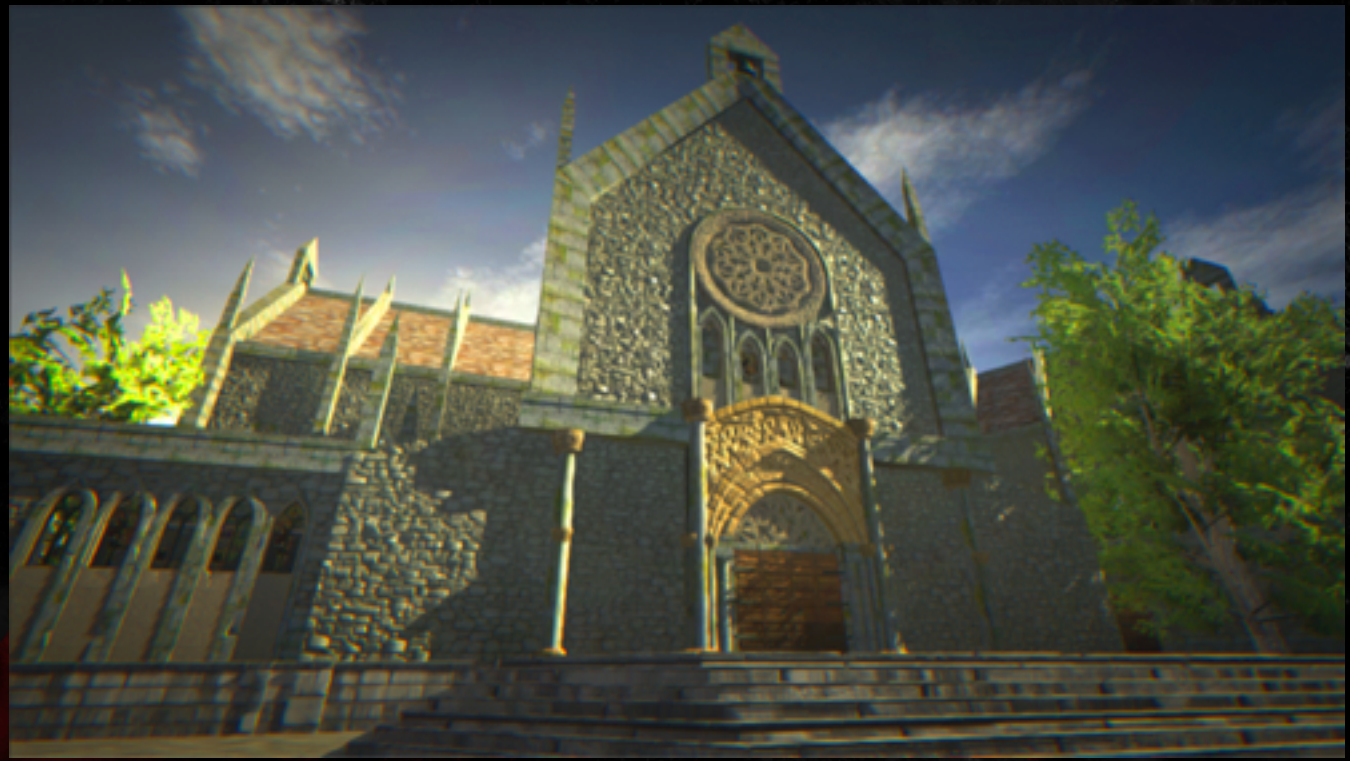
… in 1880 (the 19th Century).

Claude Monet

BLUES AND BULLETS

Let’s see what happens in a modern engine with a realistic lighting approach.

# BLUES AND BULLETS



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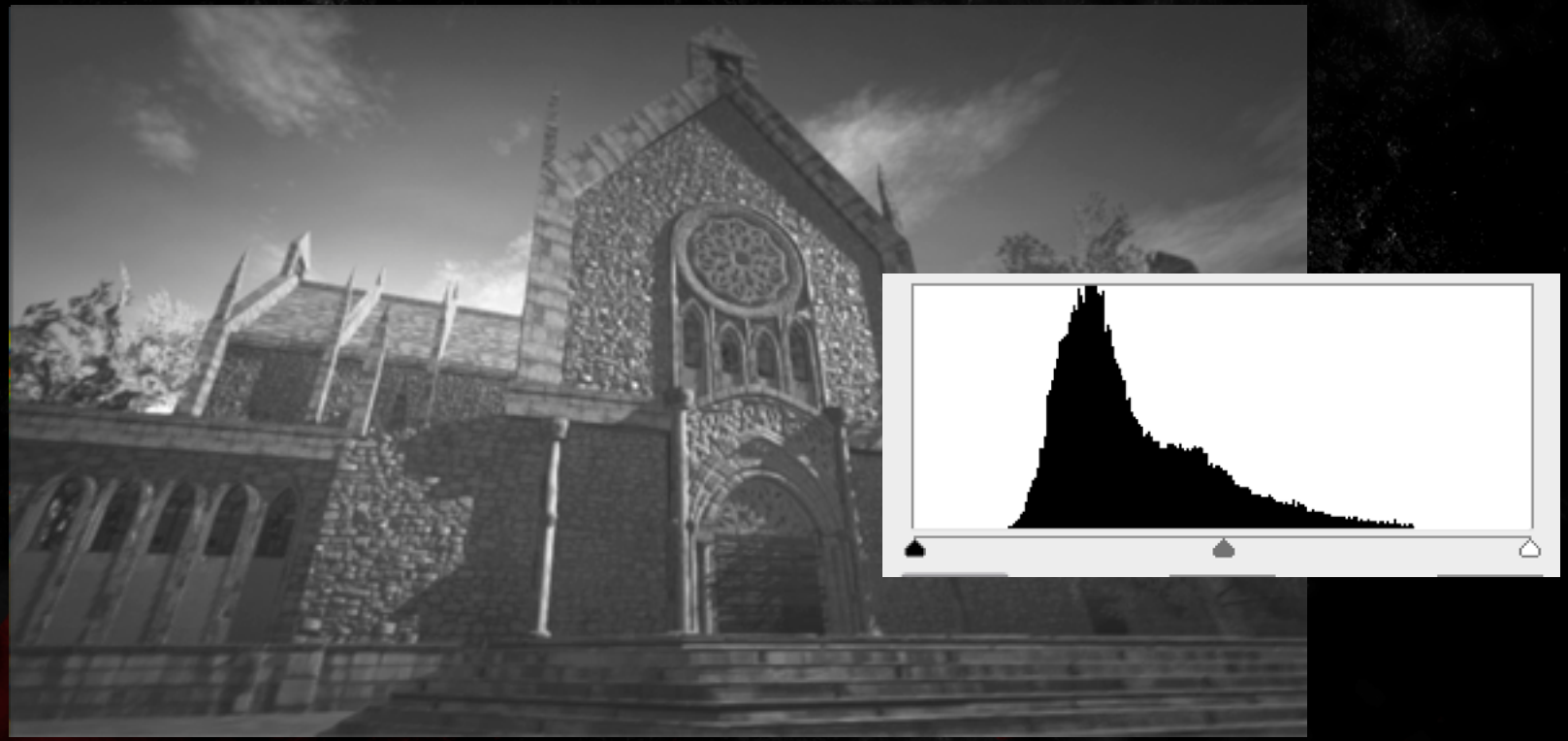


The modern engines with Global Illumination help us to create great images, and they are perfect for realistic color approaches… but in our case they created our worst enemy…

# THE GREY COLOR

- Kills the brightness and the darks
- Gives everything the same visual magnitude
- Produces visual **monotony**

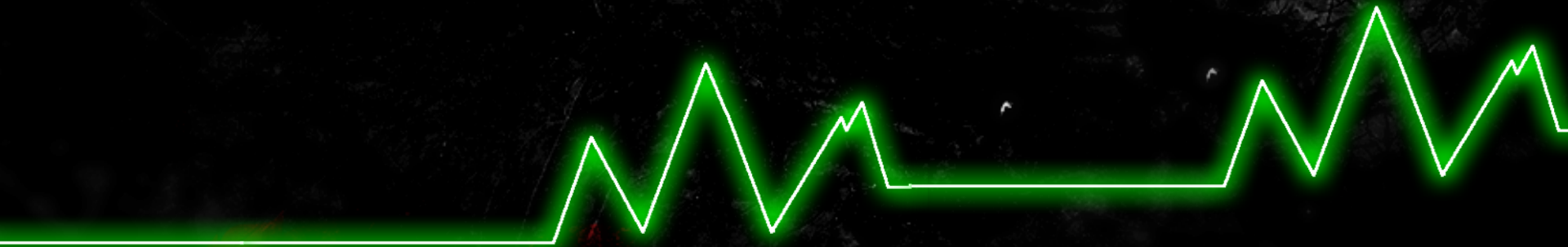
BLUES AND BULLETS

How can we **fight against the monotony and the grey color?**

BLUES AND BULLETS

Going back to the fundamentals of visual design
and creating a good…

# VISUAL RHYTHM

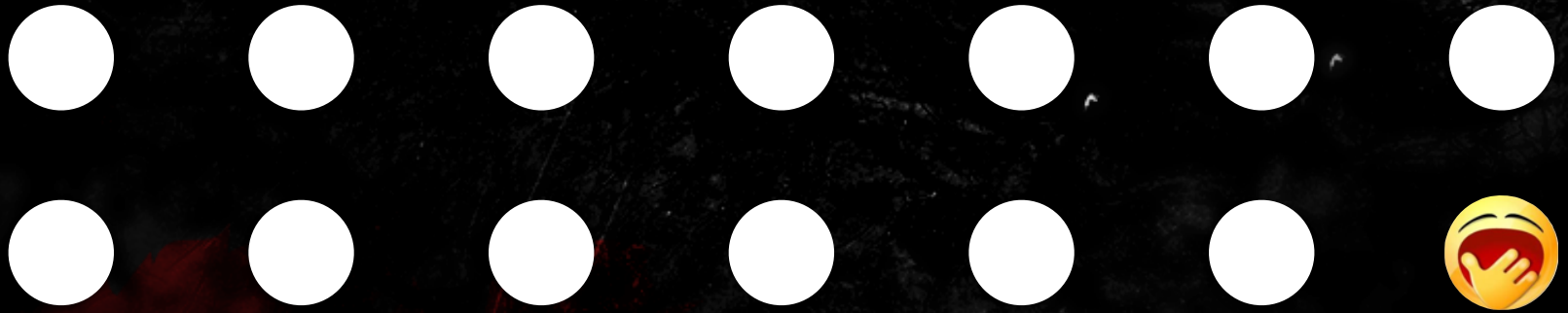


We create rhythm almost immediately **when we put elements on screen**, but you can plan how they appear and behave.

For example, the repetition of similar shapes, colors… sets up a rhythm **that makes seeing easier and more enjoyable.**

PD

To be effective, rhythm also requires variability - **rhythm that is too** similar is boring.



PD

# BLUES AND BULLETS

We need to adjust the visual impacts, the pattern that the user is seeing. We can create a most suitable visual rhythm introducing variations at the right moments.

PD

Ok, we know we need to boost the visual rhythm but…

# HOW DO WE DO IT?

# **How?** (we have some tools to help)

- Using the Red Color.

# RED IS PASSION

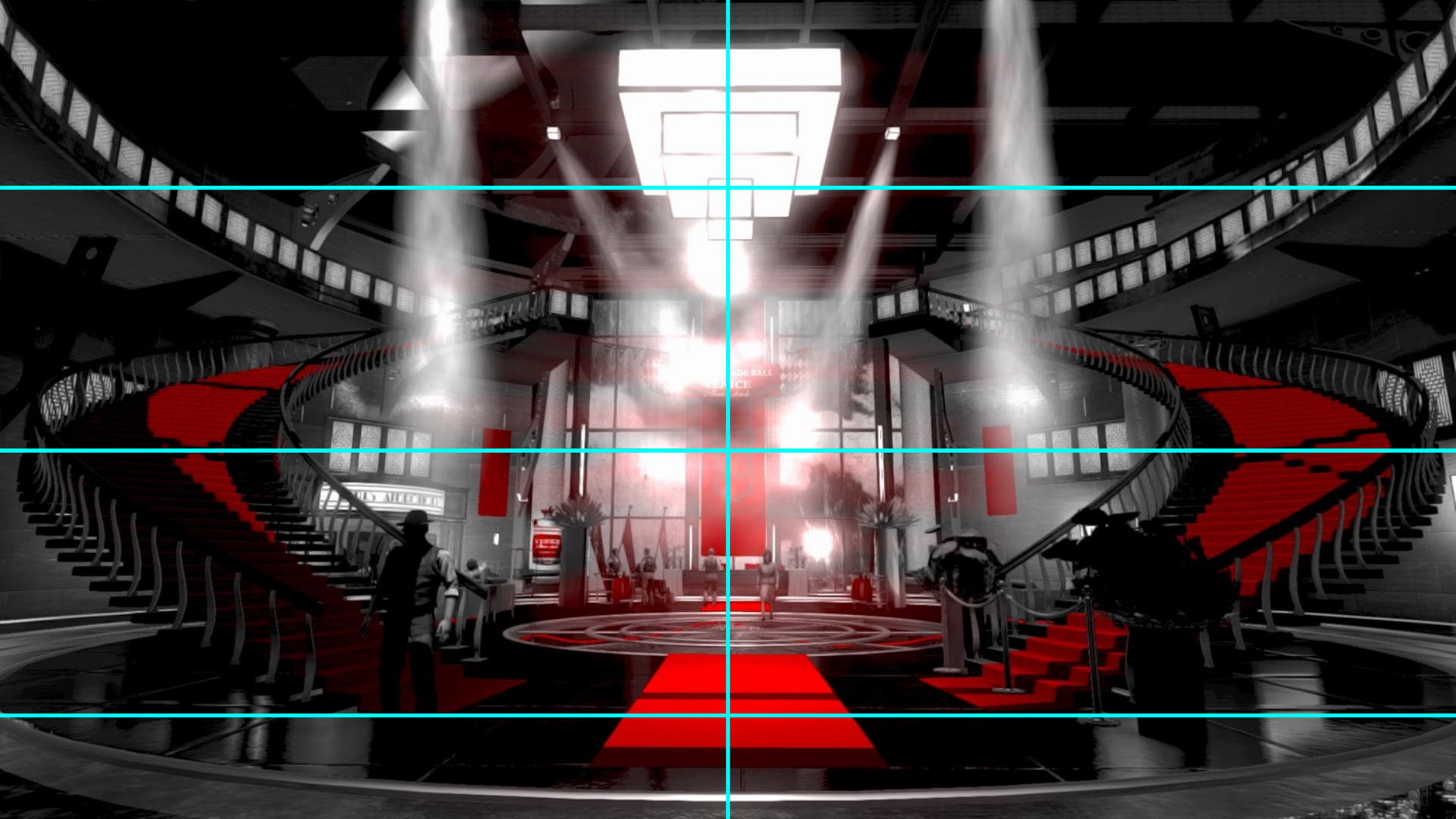
- Red is the color of passion, the most emotional color of all.
- Red elements appear only to enhance the visual rhythm.
- It’s the only color we use besides black and white.
- Stimulates us in a physical way even raising the pulse rate.

# How? (we have some tools to help)

- Using the Red Color. ✔
- Symmetrical environment design on key scenes.

# Gestalt Law of Symmetry
## 1920-1930

- We prefer symmetric appearances over asymmetric ones.
- Symmetric objects or arrangements are associated with positive aspects such as stability, consistency and structure.
- A symmetric and grandiloquent environment (in comparison at other environments) at some key scenes helps us to boost the visual rhythm.



# How? (we have some tools to help)

- Using the Red Color. ✓
- Symmetrical environment design on key scenes. ✓
- The light has to be designed shot by shot.

# Lightning in German Expressionism cinema

- A reaction **against the Realism** in the 20's
- Artistic control over the placement of scenery and **light to enhance the mood**.
- Master directors like **Fritz Lang** emigrated to USA where they became the pillars of Noir Film Aesthetic.

# Lightning in Noir Cinema

- Constant use of the "*chiaroscuro*" *(low key light)*

# Lightning in Noir Cinema

- Constant use of the "*chiaroscuro*" (low key light)
- Use of **cookies, gobos** to remark the intensity and the mood of the scene.
- 3 lights setup (main, fill and back) **studied and adjusted shot by shot.**

**Out of the Past**
Jacques Tourneur

Robert Mitchum

Jane Greer

**Out of the Past**
Jacques Tourneur

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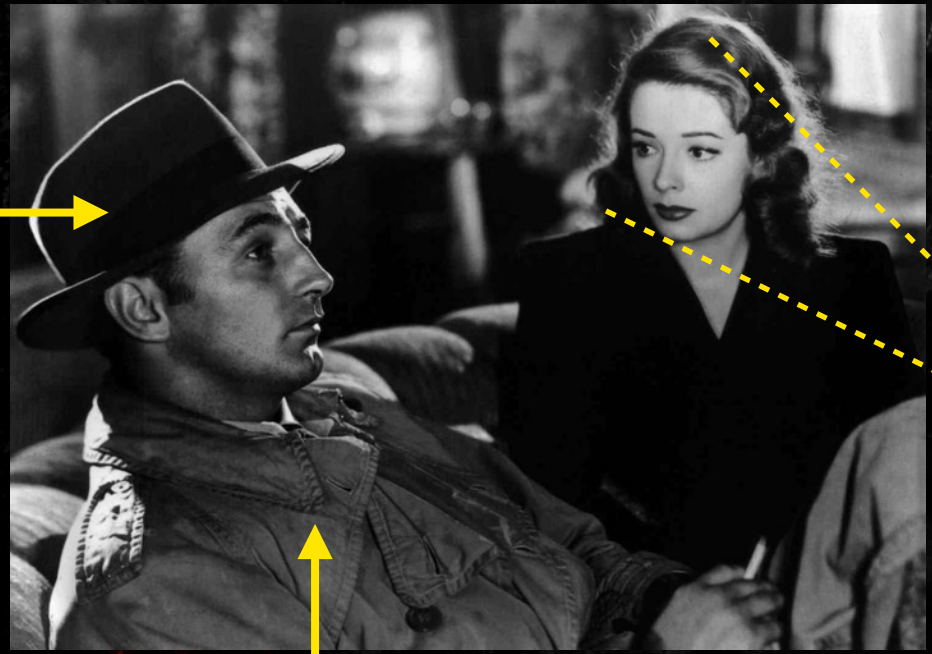

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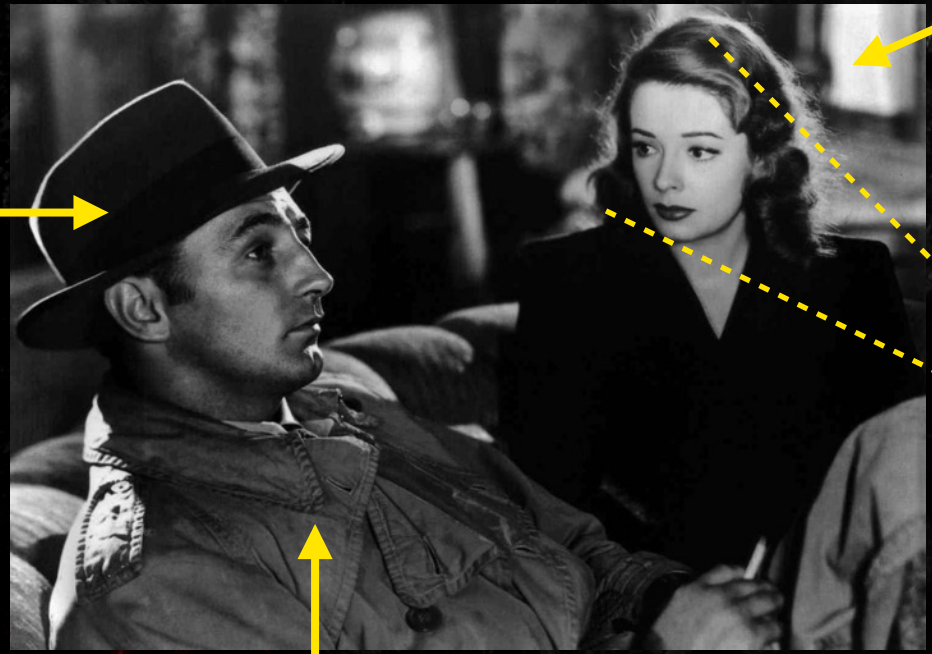

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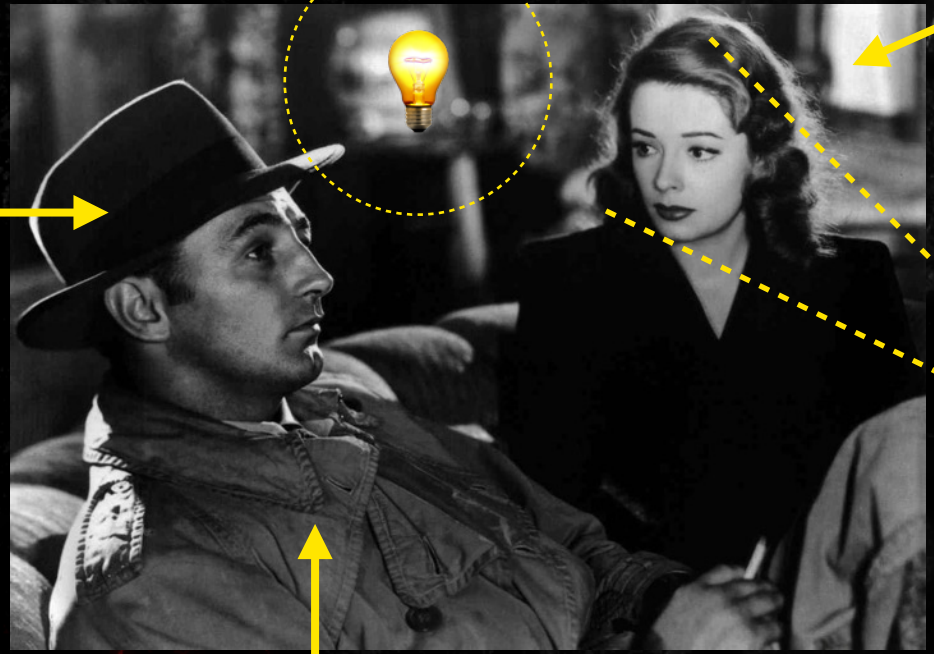
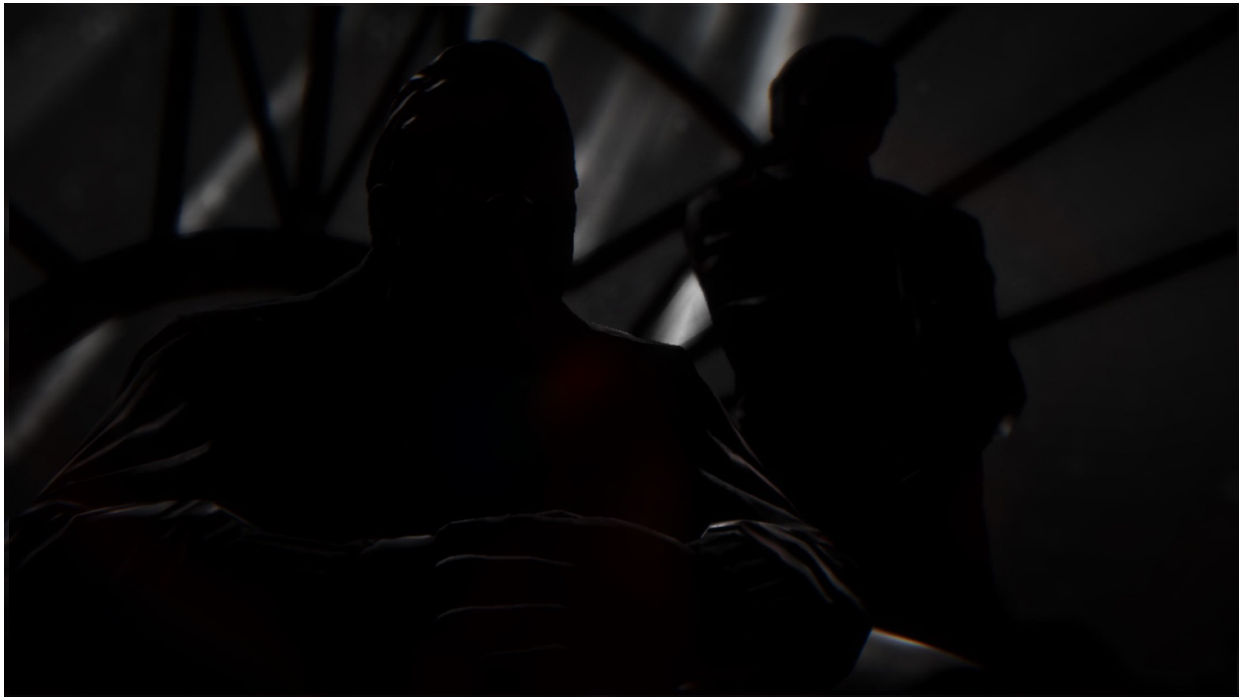


**Out of the Past**
Jacques Tourneur

**Don’t try to mimic reality… the light has to create an emotional impact.**

***Regular light***

**It’s OK, a neutral lightning**



***Light OFF***

**We turn the lights off in this shot.**

***Rim Light***

**We add a rim light to empathize the shapes.**

***Rim Light***

***Side Light Left***

**We add a side projected light to enlighten the face**

***Rim Light***

***Side Light Left***

***Gobo + Light***

**We add a gobo with a pattern to add more contrast**

***Rim Light***

***Side Light Left***

***Gobo + Light***

***Fill Light***

**We add a fill light to enlighten the darkest zones.**

- ***Rim Light***
- ***Side Light Left***
- ***Gobo + Light***
- ***Fill Light***
- ***Secondary Light***

**Finally we add a secondary light to enlighten the character in the background.**

- We ended up with a shot **illuminated by 5 lights.**

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- Every shot in the game needs **to be illuminated with care by hand** trying to maximize the visual impact and creating the right mood..

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# How? (we have some tools to help)

- Using the Red Color. ✓
- Symmetrical environment design on key scenes. ✓
- The light has to be designed shot by shot. ✓
- Variable contrast, bloom and dirtiness according to the scene's dramatic weight.

Clear render in game.

## Clear render in game.

- Boost the contrast

## Clear render in game.

- Boost the contrast
- Add Bloom
- Add Dirtiness

# How? (we have some tools to help)

- Using the Red Color. ✓
- Symmetrical environment design on key scenes. ✓
- The light has to be designed shot by shot. ✓
- Variable contrast, bloom and dirtiness according to the scene's dramatic weight. ✓
- A red halo is present in different intensities.

"Rhythm is a state of equilibrium which proceeds either from symmetries, simple or complex, or from **delicate balancing**…"

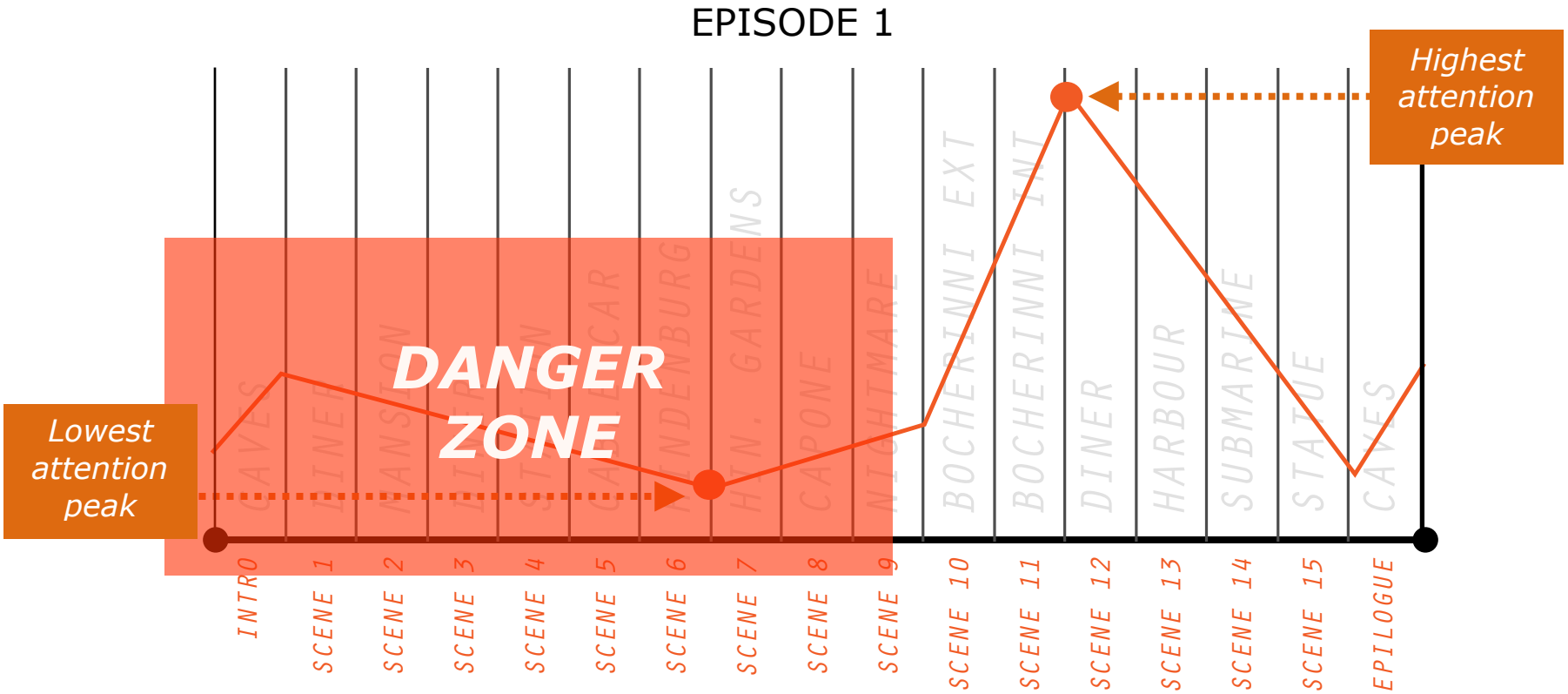
*Three Reminders to Architects. Le Corbusier*

We have the tools to make a good Visual Rhythm but…

- **CAN WE KNOW THE RIGHT MOMENT TO BALANCE IT?**
  **DECREASING IT OR INCREASING IT??**

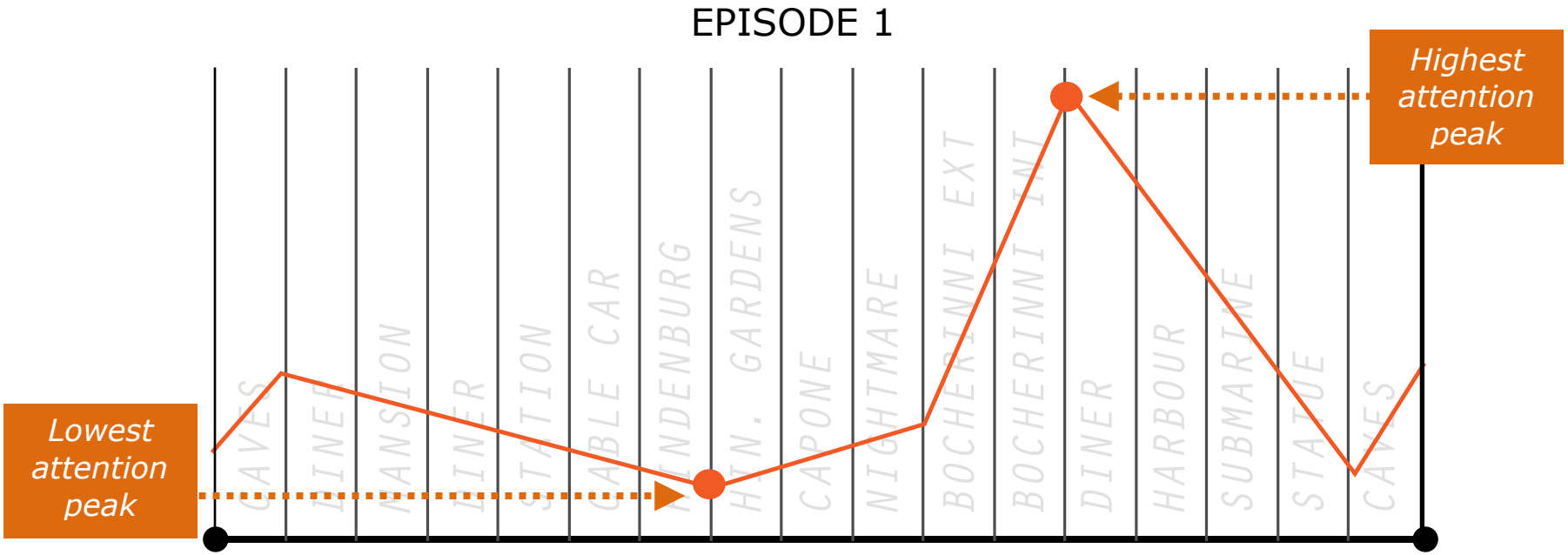
# THE ATTENTION PYRAMID

## NARRATIVE RHYTHM



# THE ATTENTION PYRAMID

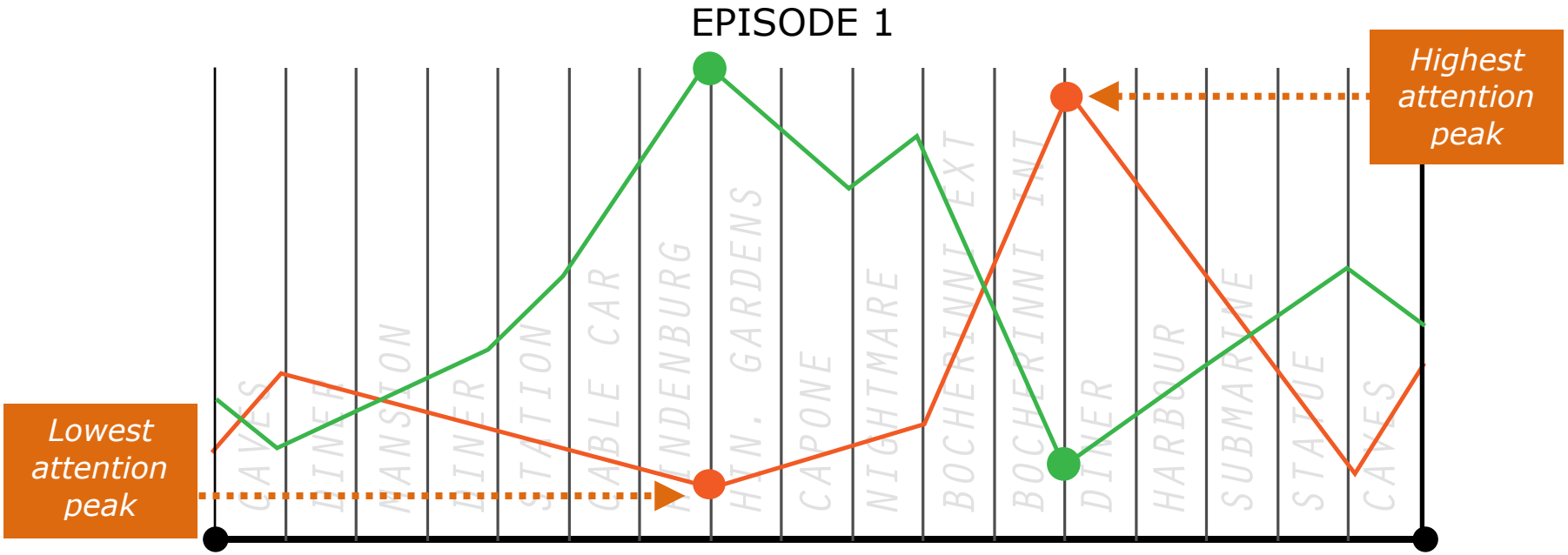
## NARRATIVE RHYTHM




Thanks to the **Attention Pyramid** we're able to pinpoint when the player becomes more disconnected.

# THE ATTENTION PYRAMID

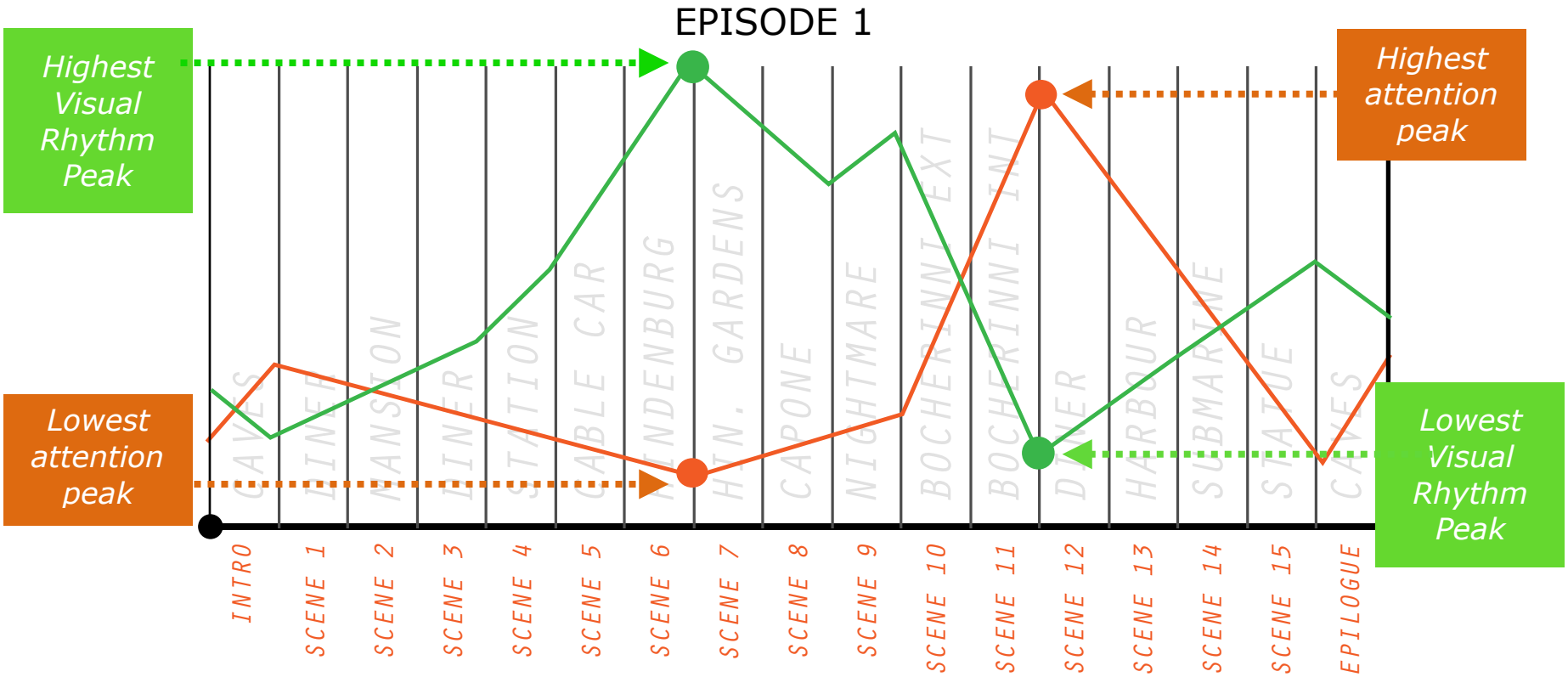
## NARRATIVE RHYTHM + VISUAL RHYTHM



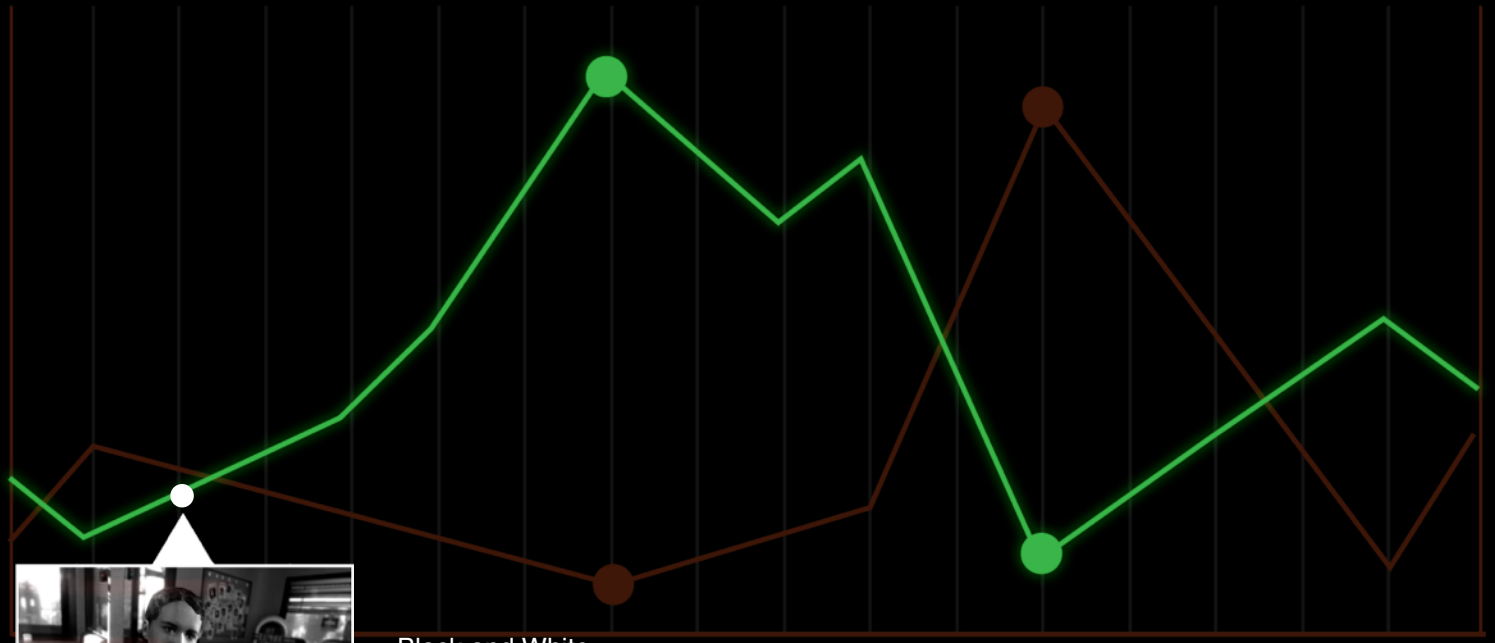

At those moments **we progressively boost the visual rhythm** in order to counteract that disconnection, so we create the suitable visual rhythm the game needs.

# THE ATTENTION PYRAMID

NARRATIVE RHYTHM + VISUAL RHYTHM



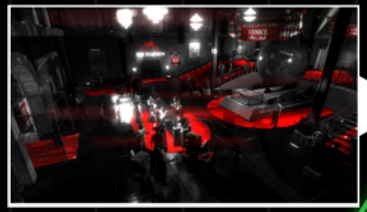
# VISUAL RHYTHM



- Black and White
- Low contrast.
- No red presence.

# VISUAL RHYTHM

B/W and Bloom •
High contrast •
Dramatic lighting •
Red elements •



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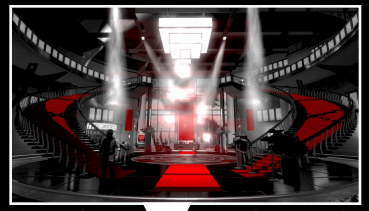
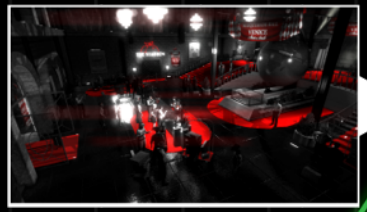


- B/W , Bloom, Dirtiness
- High contrast
- Dramatic lighting
- Red elements / Halo
- Symmetric Environment Design



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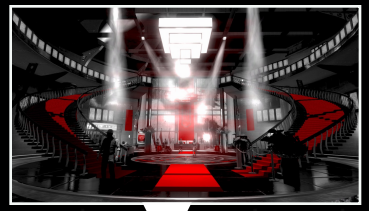

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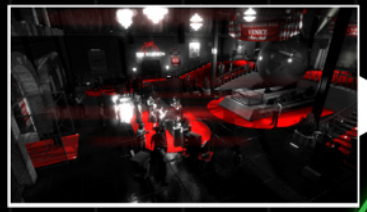
- Red elements / Halo
- Symmetric Environment Design

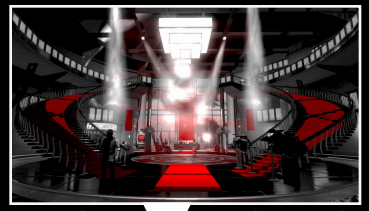


B/W and Bloom •
High contrast •
Dramatic lighting •
Red elements •

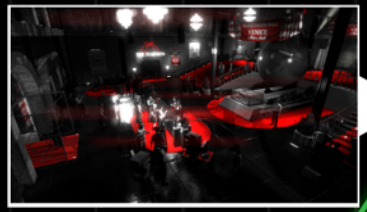
B/W, Bloom •
Medium contrast •
Red Halo very subtle •

- Black and White
- Low contrast.
- No red presence.

# VISUAL RHYTHM



- B/W , Bloom, Dirtiness
- High contrast
- Dramatic lighting
- Red elements / Halo
- Symmetric Environment Design



B/W and Bloom •
High contrast •
Dramatic lighting •
Red elements •

B/W, Bloom •
Medium contrast •
Red Halo very subtle •

- Black and White
- Low contrast.
- No red presence.

- Black and White
- Low contrast.
- No red presence.

# Benefits of this approach

We can know **when to increase and decrease** the visual rhythm

We optimize the art team's workload by **knowing which scenes require a WOW factor** (more modeling work, lighting, details...) and which do not.

It aids us in **managing smartly our resources** (something very important if they are restricted... as they really are!)

# and more important...

We keep the player interested with the help of **Narrative and Aesthetics working hand by hand**.

**NARRATIVE** **AESTHETICS**

# ¡One last thing!

This is the last I promise.

# ¡One last thing!

This is the last I promise.

**IF YOU HAVE PROBLEMS TRYING TO FIND THE BEST VISUALS FOR YOUR GAME...**

# ¡One last thing!

This is the last I promise.

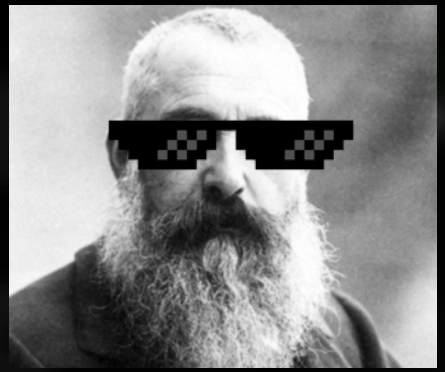
**ALWAYS GO BACK TO THE FUNDAMENTALS OF VISUAL ART AND DESIGN.**

**THEY PROBABLY FACED BACK THEN THE SAME ISSUES YOU ARE FACING RIGHT NOW…**

# ¡One last thing!

This is the last I promise.

**THEY ALWAYS HAVE THE ANSWERS**



# Thank you!!

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Elena Candil

And thanks to Elena and Maria for their help with the creative process of Blues and Bullets and for the help with this talk.

**You’re the best!**

María Cabezuelo