GAME NARRATIVE
SUMMIT
The Shapes in Your Story
Narrative Mapping Frameworks
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Northeastern University
GDC
GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE
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UBM

# Who am I?

- Short answer: narrative design researcher

# Who am I?

- Long answer: Film student turned web designer turned art student turned comics/screenwriter turned programming teacher turned professional game designer turned creative writing student turned curriculum design specialist turned narrative design researcher

Who ARe
you?

# My Annual Challenge

- 60 new Digital Media graduate students, most with little experience:
  - Usually 12 weeks of Programming Foundations or 12 weeks of Visual Design Foundations
  - Usually ZERO Creative Writing courses
  - 50%-75% have used English as their primary language for less than a year

# Over the course of 12 weeks:

- Create an Interactive Multimedia Narrative
  - Must not be a simple “Choose Your Own Adventure”
  - Must not be “game-first”
  - Must be a good experience upon first play
  - Must invite replayability

# Oh, and also...

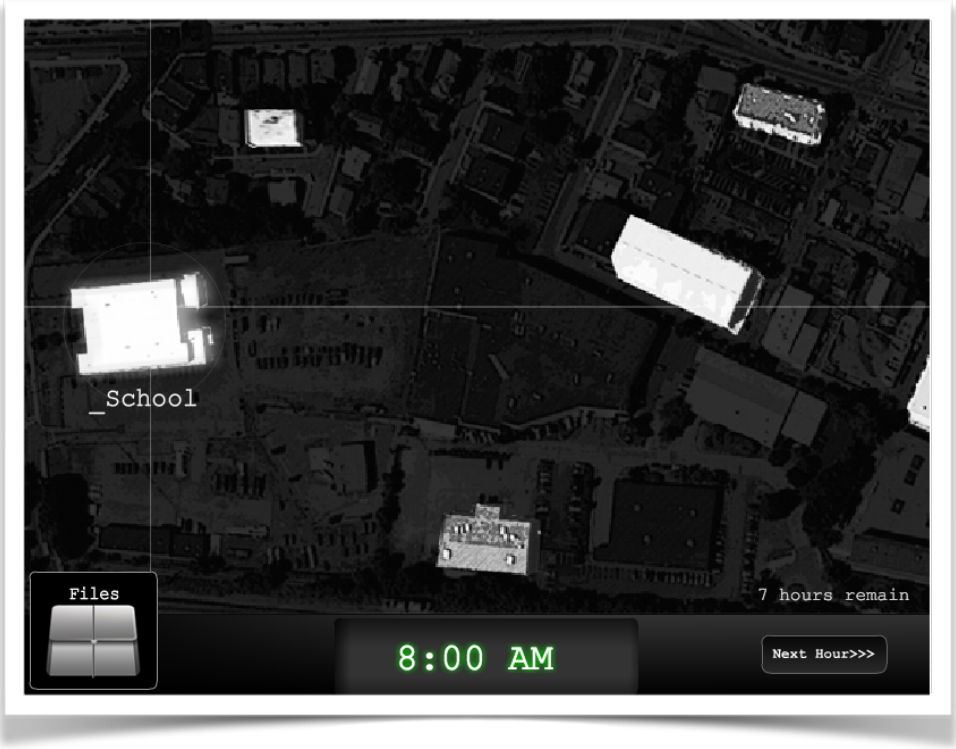
- Learn three-act dramatic structure
- Learn character archetypes
- Learn basic screenwriting / cinematography / editing / directing principles

NOT THE CYOA! PLEASE! TAKE ANYTHING BUT THE CYOA!

Torren Gardner has lived alone here for 3 years.
Finish...

THE FUGITIVE
That's where you come in. I need you to distract Louise while I steal his briefcase. Either that or lure the policeman away from the scene.
RELOAD
Pierre St-Germain

JIMMY COOGS


_School
Files
7 hours remain
8:00 AM
Next Hour>>>

# How do you give the user meaningful choices without it being CYOA?*

*choose your own adventure

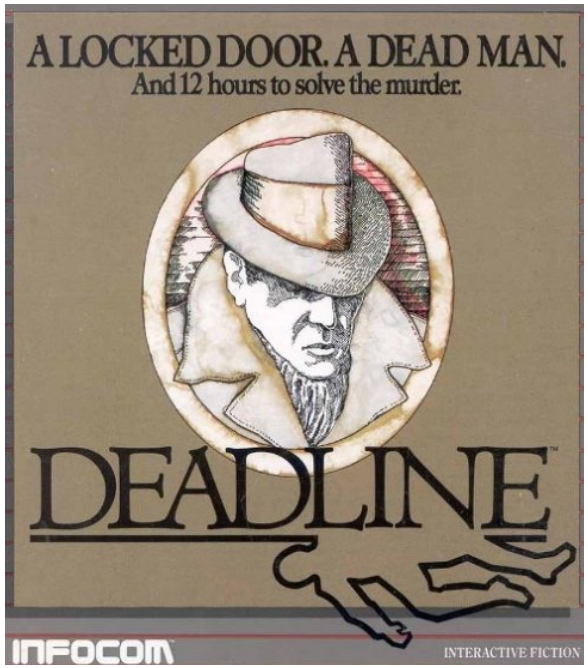
# “OH, SO WE JUST HAVE TO ADD SOME ACTION TO A CYOA?

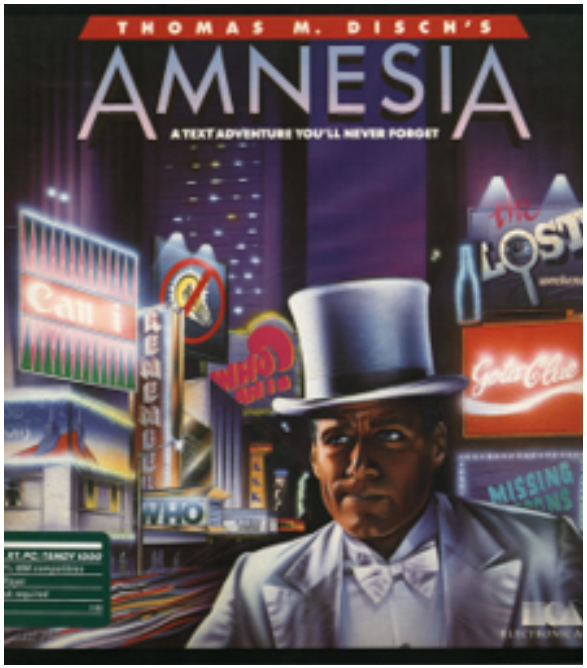
# maybe a mini-game?”

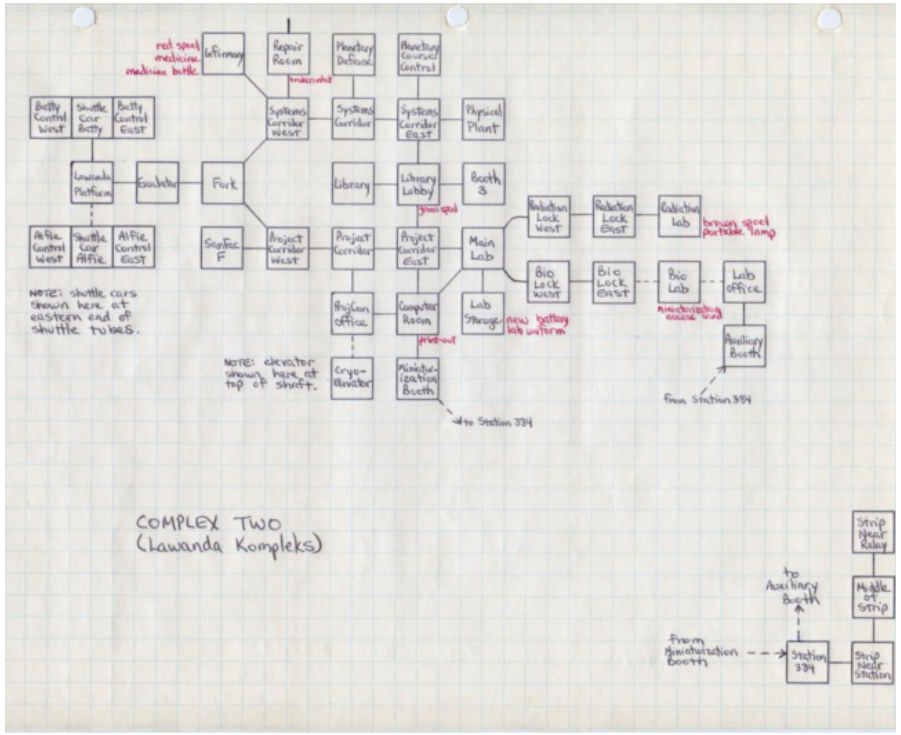
# Interactive Fiction F-G

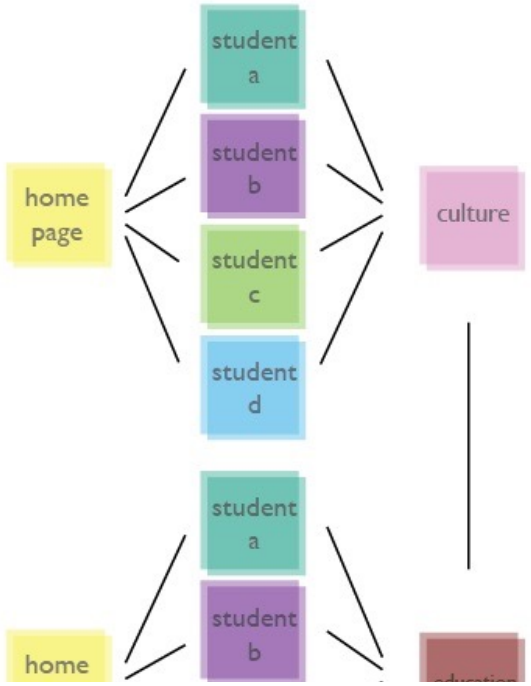
# Those who forget the past…

# ...would be lucky to repeat it!

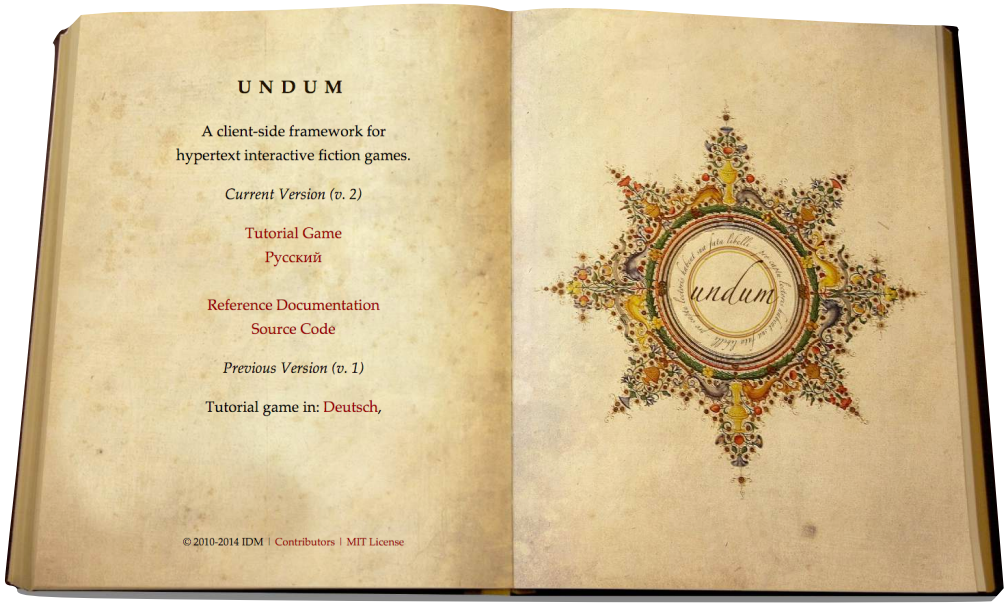


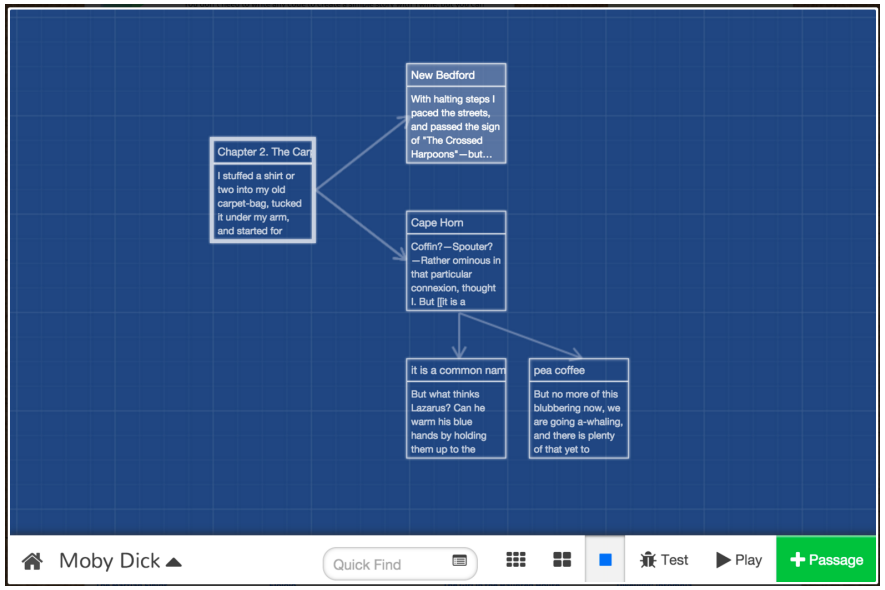



Infirmary
Repair Room
Planetary Defense
Planetary Course Control
Systems Corridor West
Systems Corridor
Systems Corridor East
Physical Plant
Betty Control West
Shuttle Car Betty
Betty Control East
Lawanda Platform
Escalator
Fork
Library
Library Lobby
Booth 3
Alfie Control West
Shuttle Car Alfie
Alfie Control East
Sanfac F
Project Corridor West
Project Corridor
Project Corridor East
Main Lab
Radiation Lock West
Radiation Lock East
Radiation Lab
Bio Lock West
Bio Lock East
Bio Lab
Lab office
Auxiliary Booth
Lab Storage
Computer Room
ProjCon Office
Cryo-Elevator
Miniaturization Booth
NOTE: shuttle cars shown here at eastern end of shuttle tubes.
NOTE: elevator shown here at top of shaft.
to Station 334
From Station 334
COMPLEX TWO
(Lawanda Kompleks)
Strip Near Relay
Middle of Strip
Strip Near Station
Station 334
to Auxiliary Booth
from Miniaturization Booth

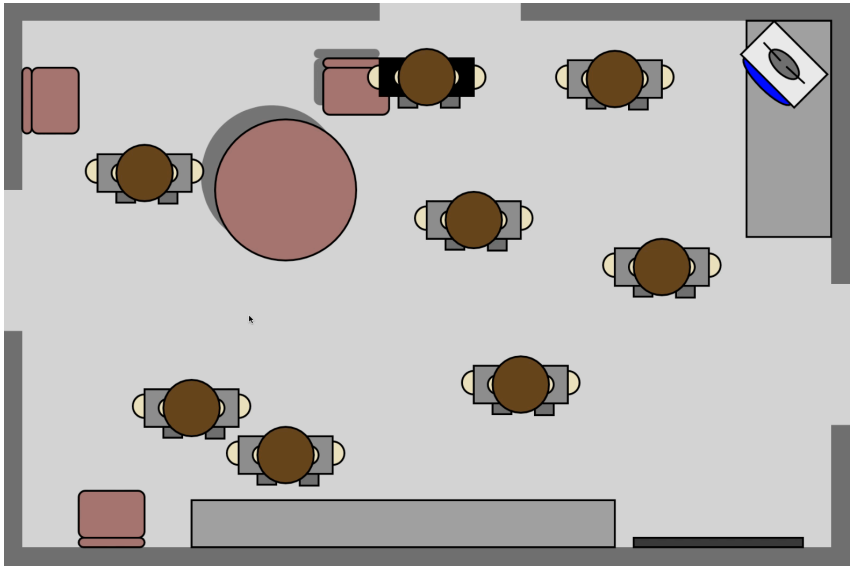

home page
student a
student b
student c
student d
culture
home
student a
student b

# A poor ~~craftsman~~ TEACHER blames his ~~tools~~ TUTORIALS...

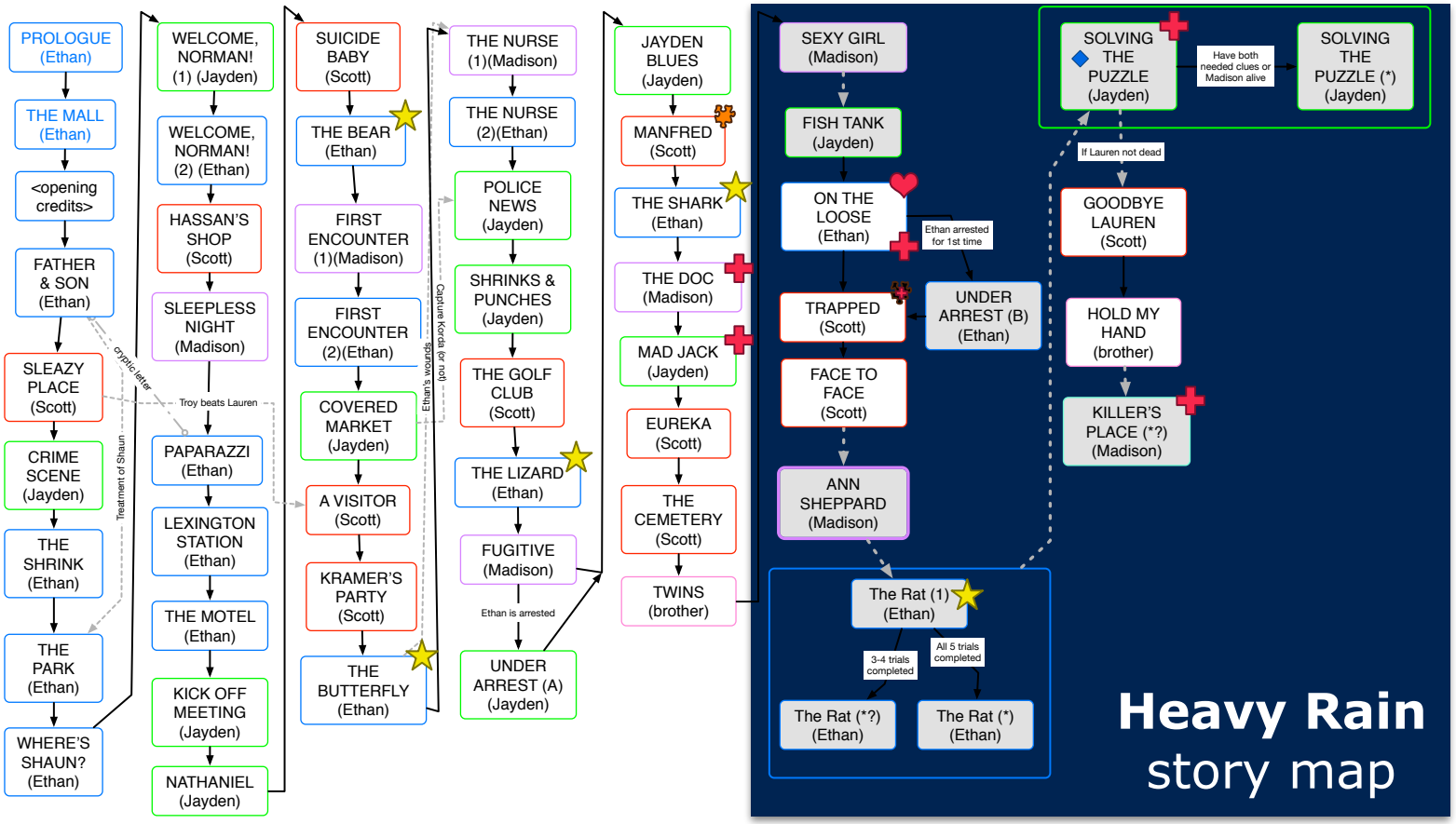


# And then we have our overachievers...



# ( copies owned: 3; times completed: 0 )




**86% linear**

**76% of it up front**

# Good Stories...

- ...have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

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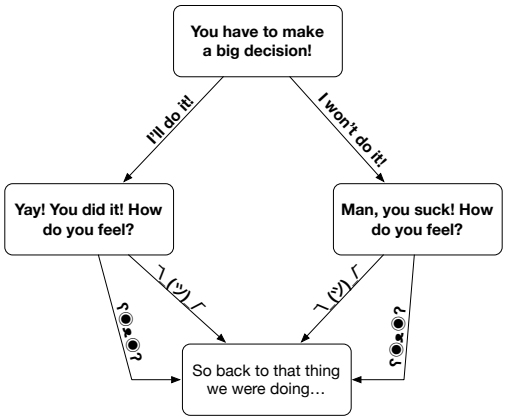
- ...have a beginning, a middle, and an end
- ...or at least a stopping point

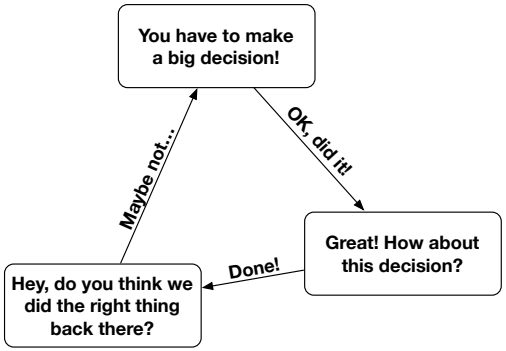
# Good Stories...

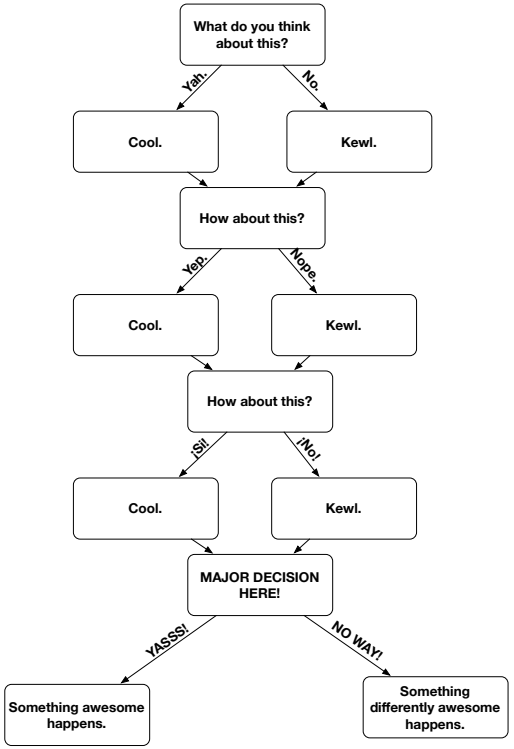
- ...have a beginning, a middle, and an end
- ...or at least a stopping point
- ...usually.

# Basic Shapes

- A re-introduction to the devils you (probably) already know

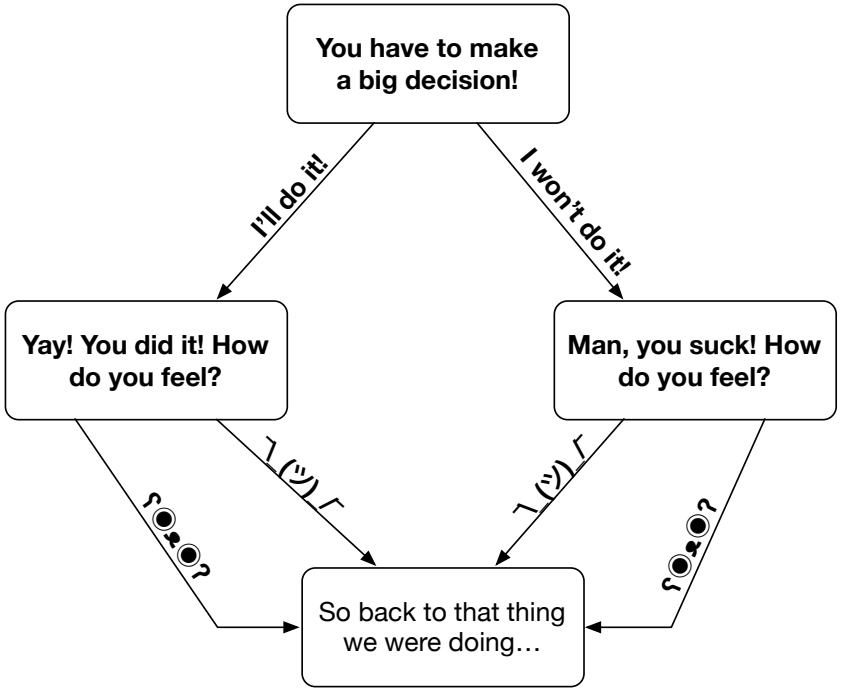


# The Diamond

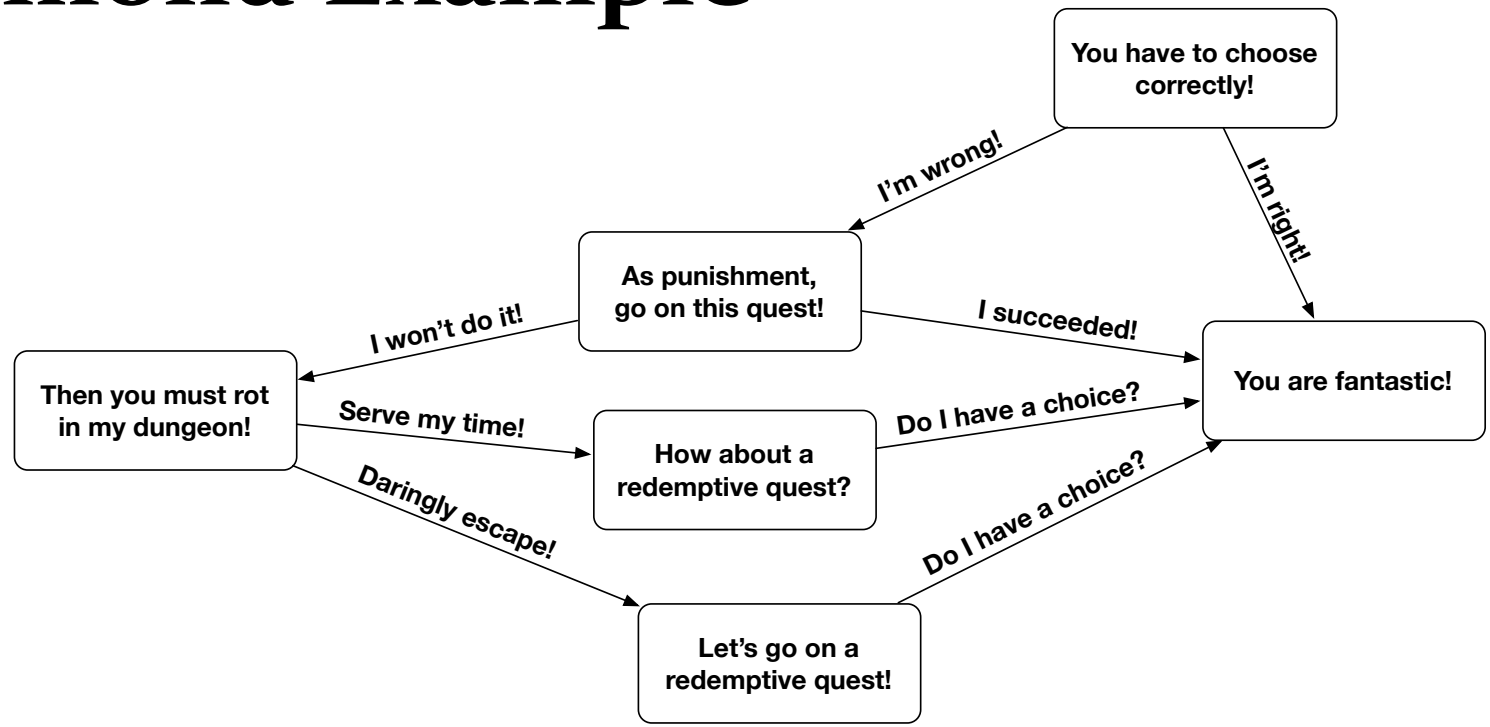
- Gives the feeling of a choice…
- …without letting the player stray too far from the main story.



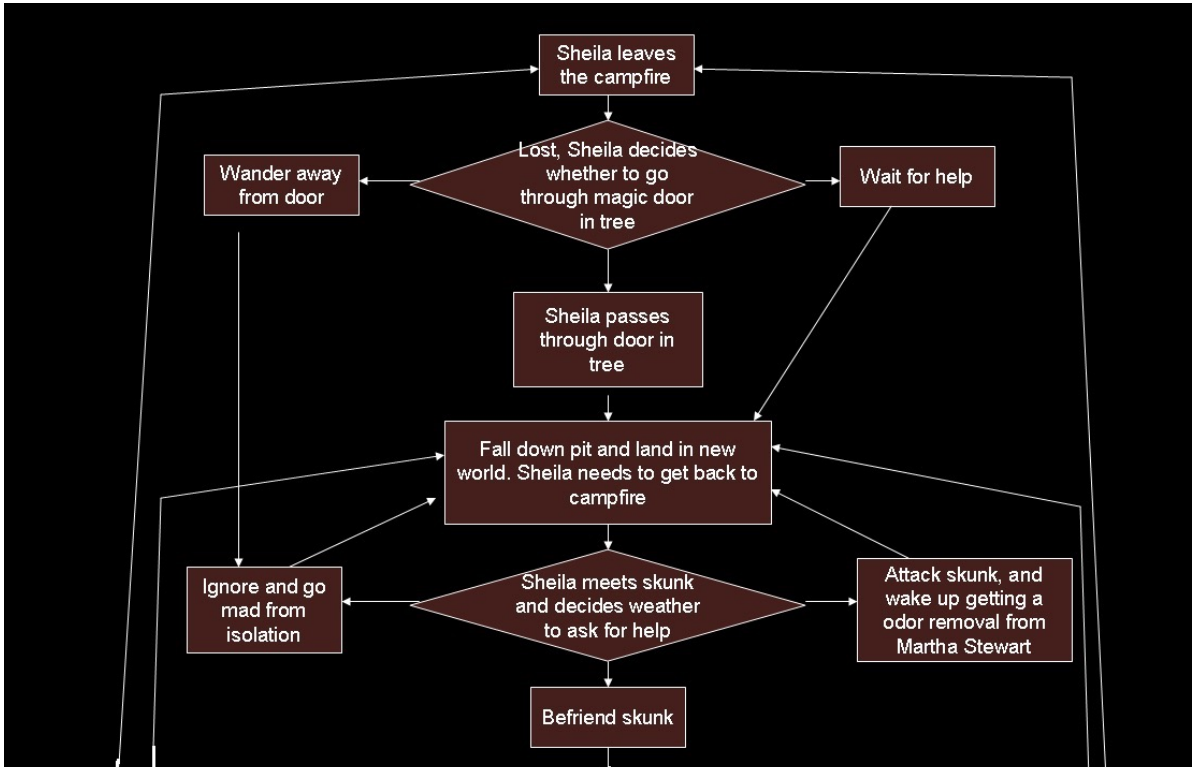
# The Diamond: Now More Useful!

- Also good for:
  - giving players a different way of interpreting the same events
  - giving players a choice between “the right road” and “the hard road”

# Diamond Example

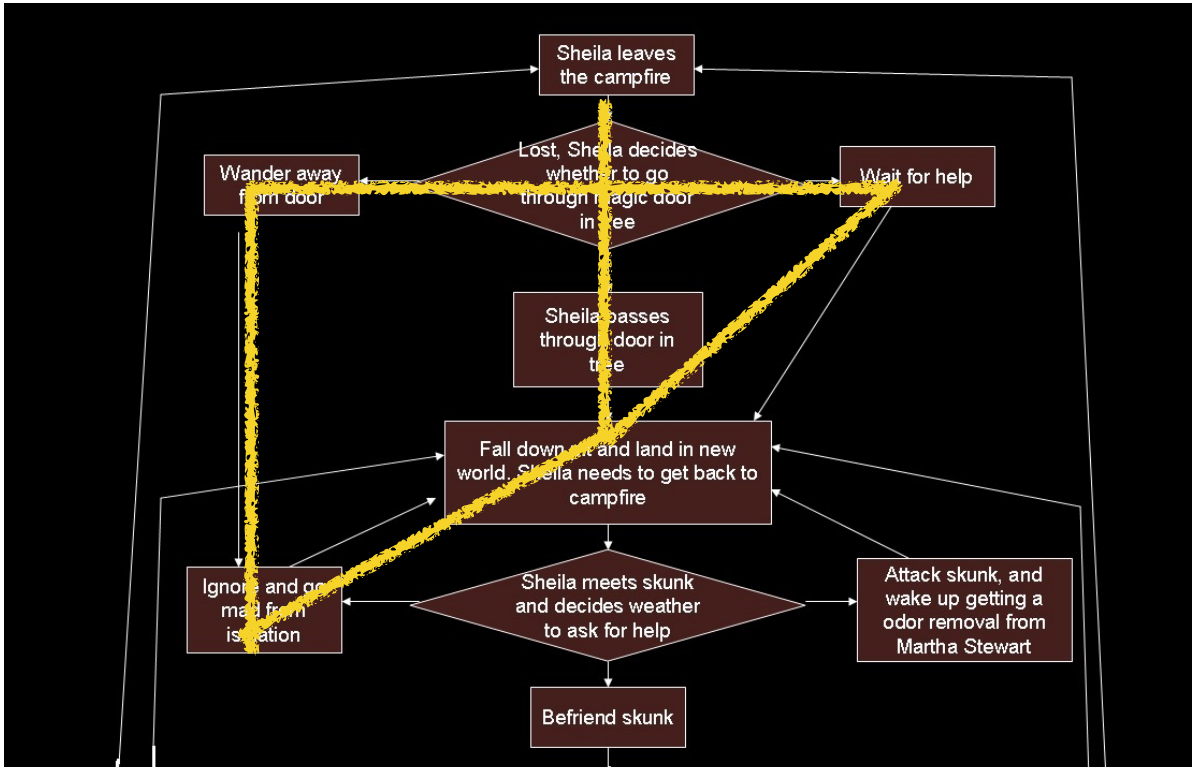


# Practice: Spot the diamond!



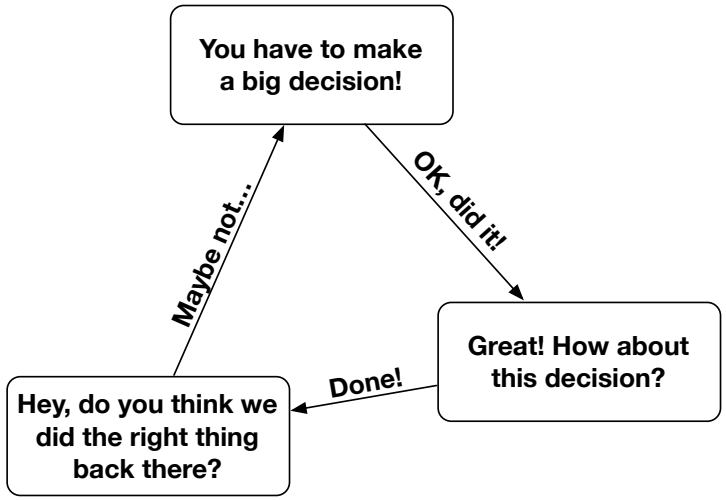
# Did you spot the diamond?

## (and something else?)

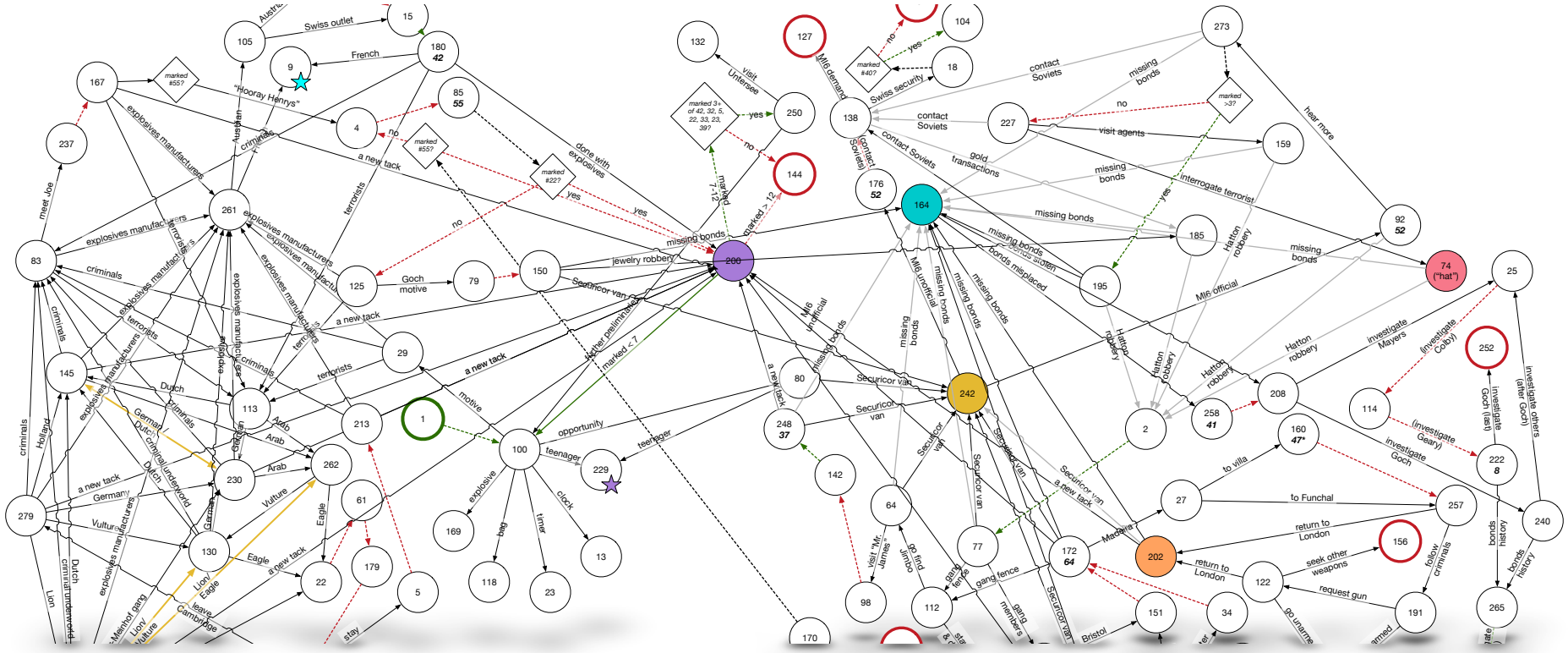


# The Loop (Circle)

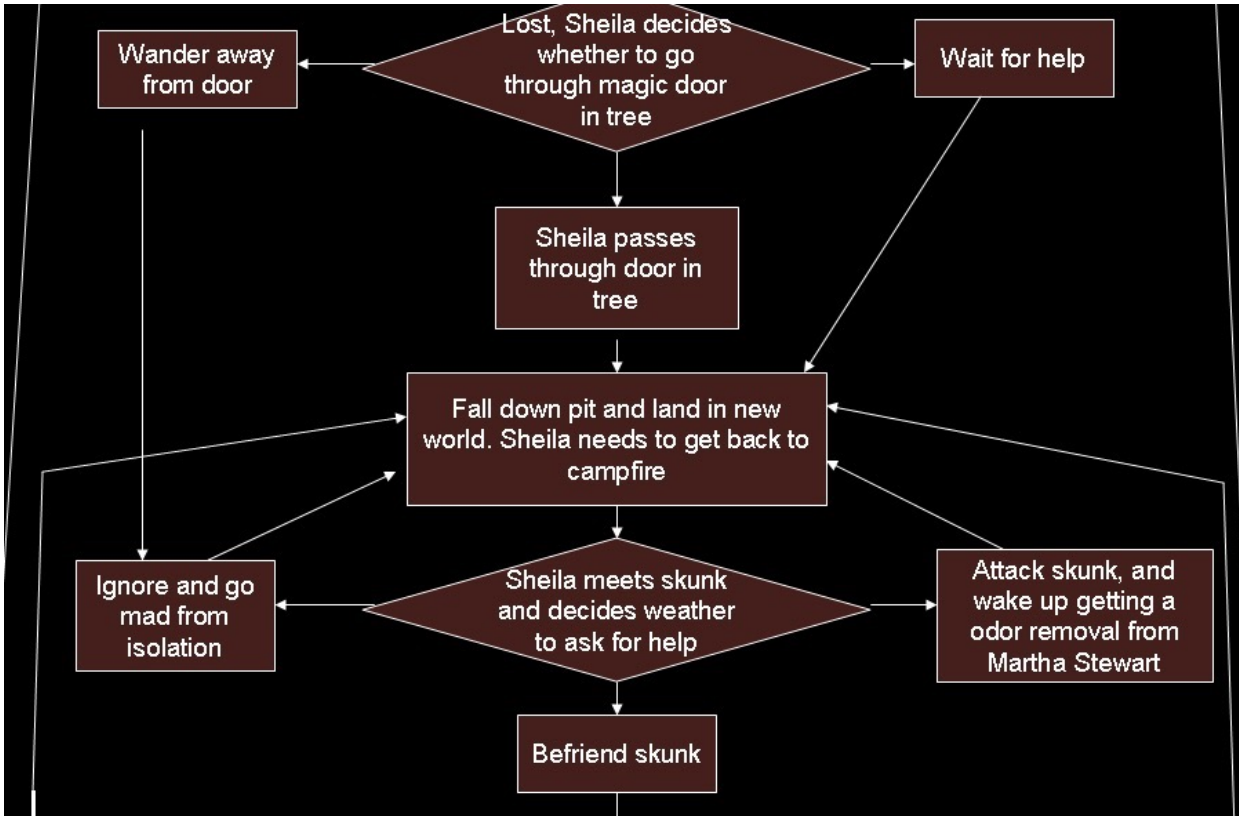
- Good for:
  - hitting every branch in that conversation tree
  - making NPCs sound like dimwits
  - causing the player to realize he isn't making a difference in the world at all!



# Spot the Loop(s)?

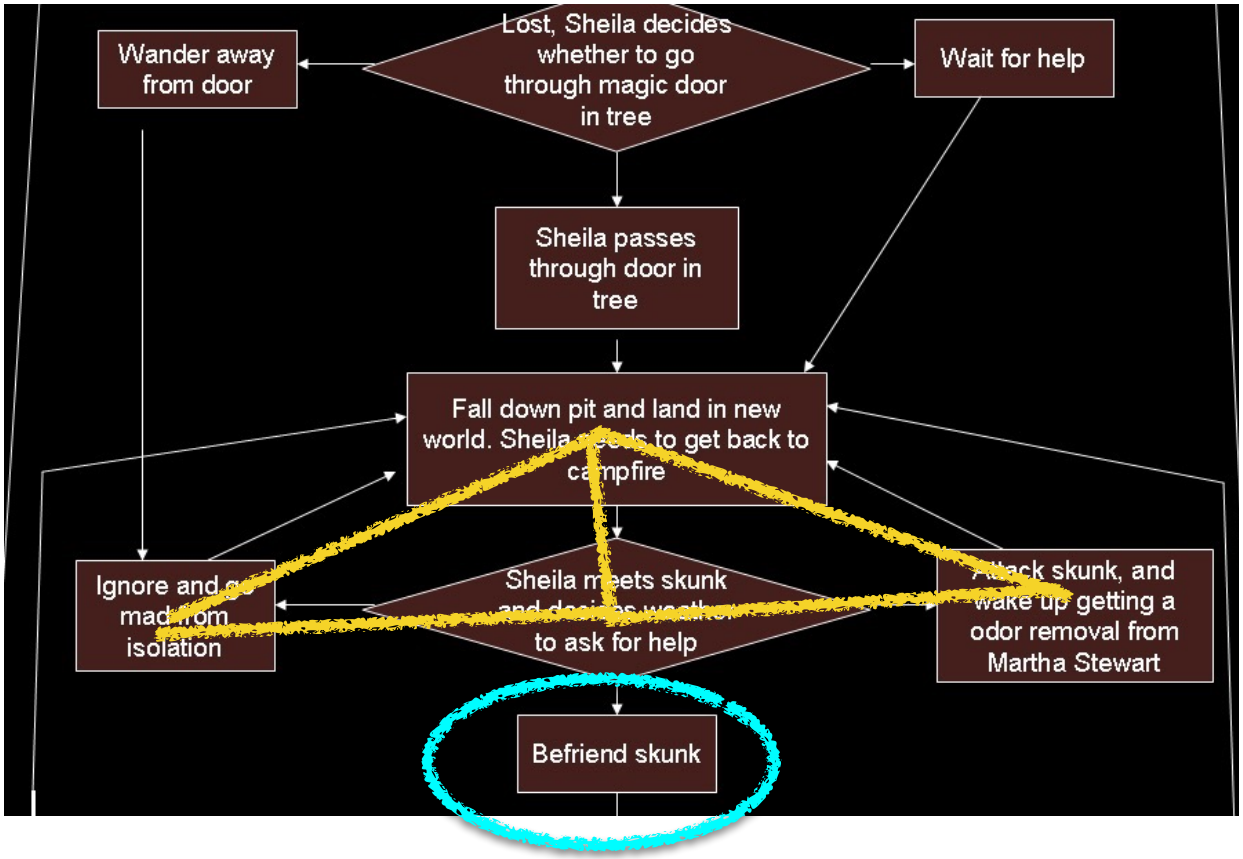


# Practice: Spot the Loop!



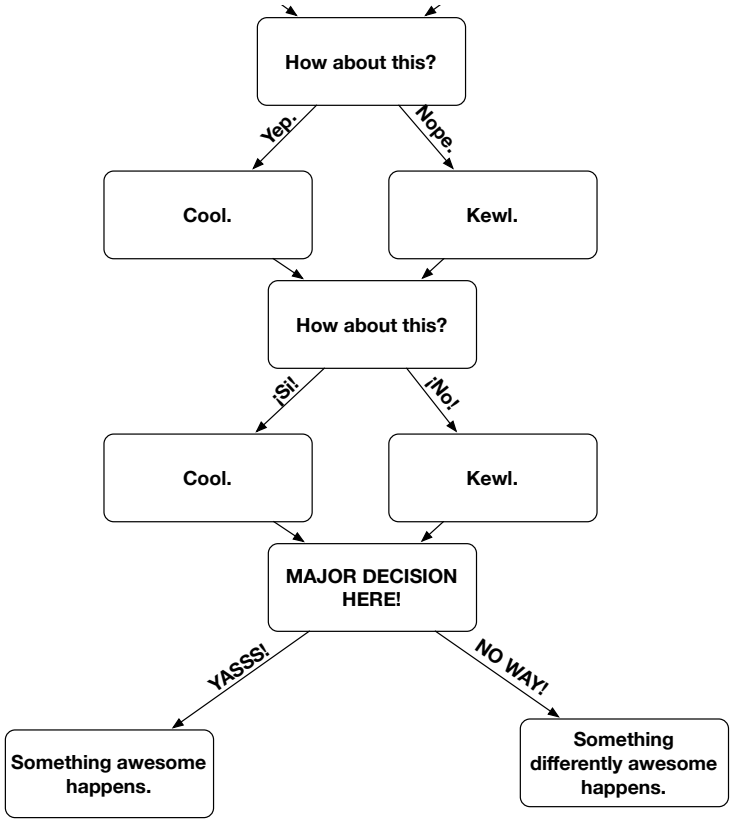
# OK, we get it! We must befriend the skunk!

(well <u>that</u> stinks....)



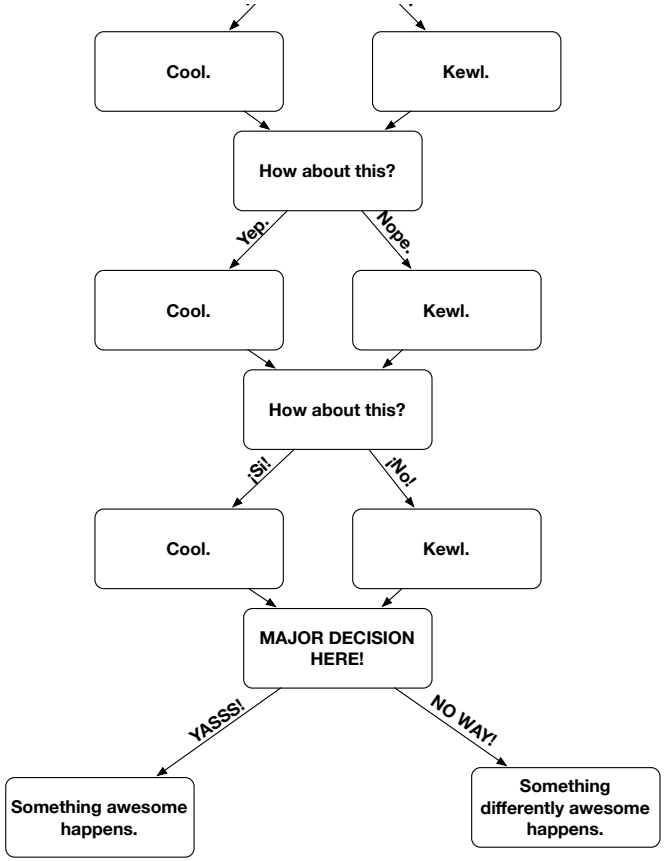
# The Zipper

- Lets players make minor, non-story-breaking choices until you're ready to deal with some major chaos!



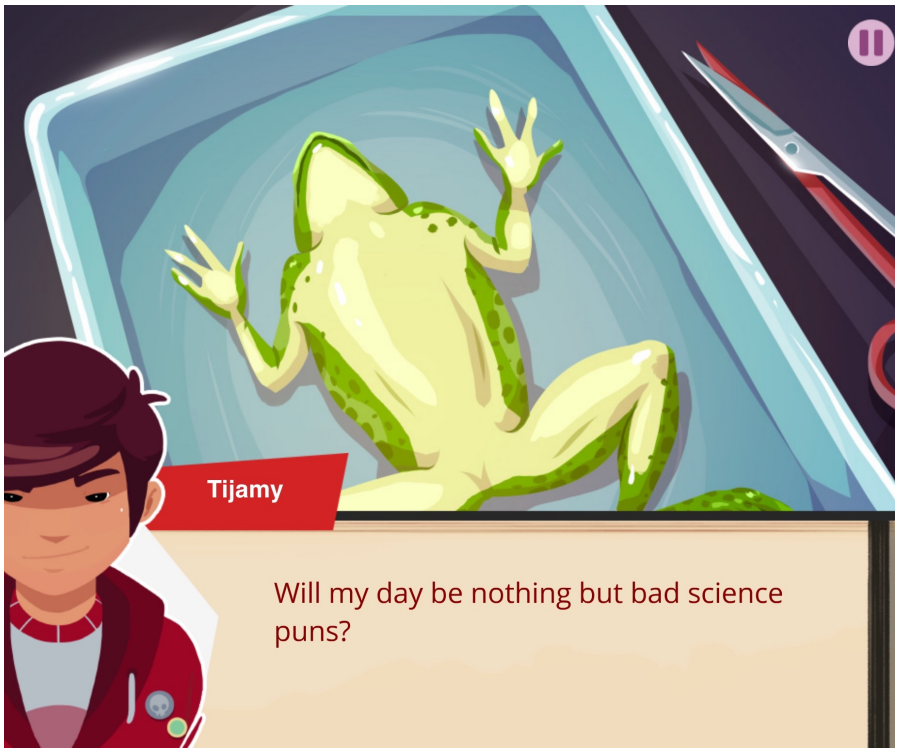
# Using The Zipper

- Extend as far as you want, using diamonds to get back on track.
- Branch only when you need to!

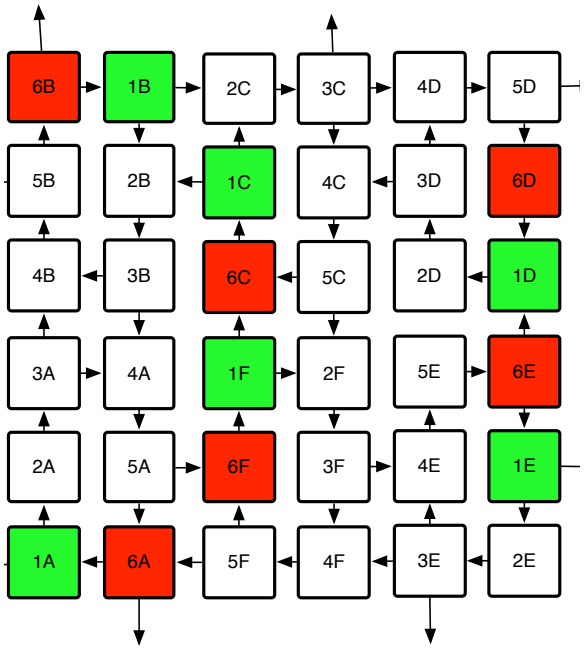


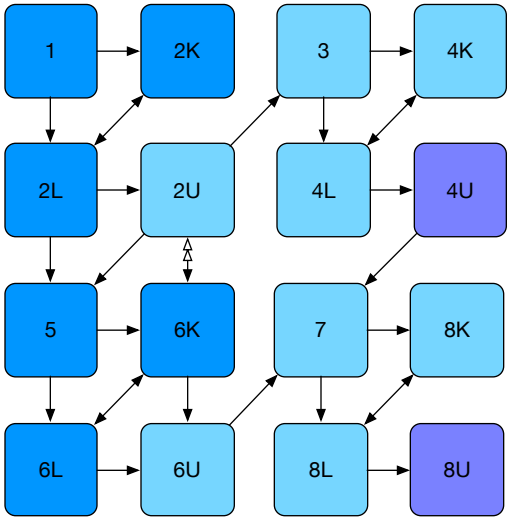
# LongStory

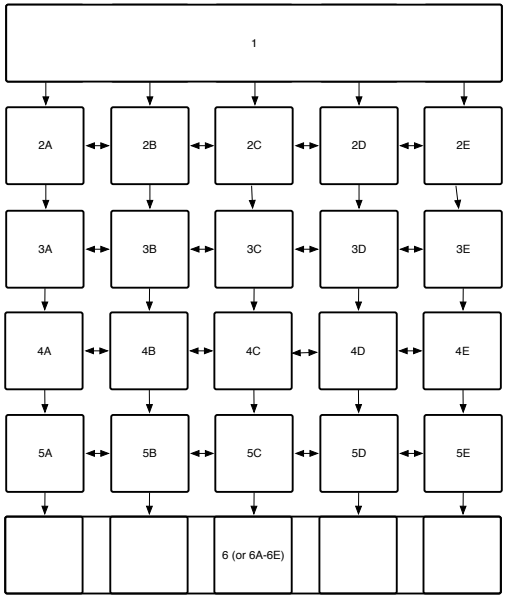
Marcel
Are you made of copper and tellurium? Because you're CuTe.


Tijamy
Will my day be nothing but bad science puns?

# Narrative Mapping Frameworks



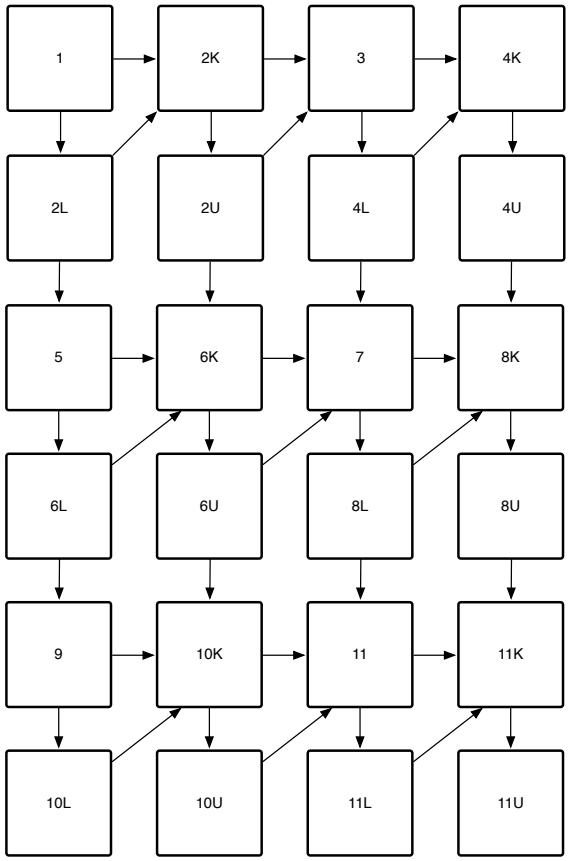



# Narrative Mapping Frameworks

- A starting point for projects, made to be broken
- Don't think about programming constraints
- Emphasis on what can be made visible
  - ...for better communication with your team (directly)
  - ...for better communication of options and outcomes to your player (indirectly - they won't see the map!)

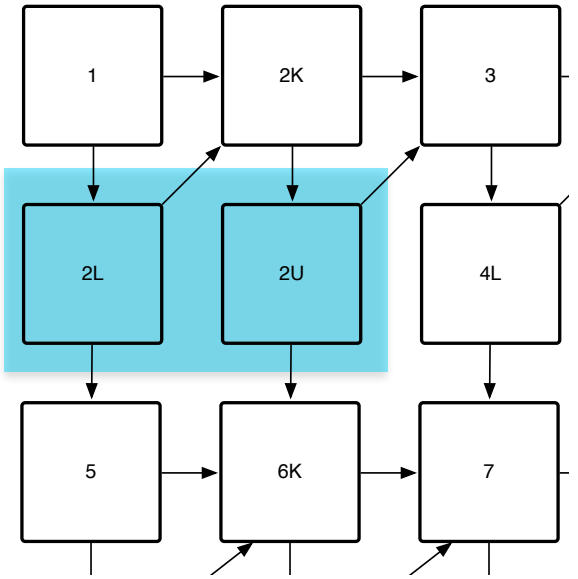
# “Lock and Key” Template

- Needs a new name; implies puzzle
- Based on idea that player needs to do X before Y can happen
- Boolean logic for people who have trouble visualizing flowcharts

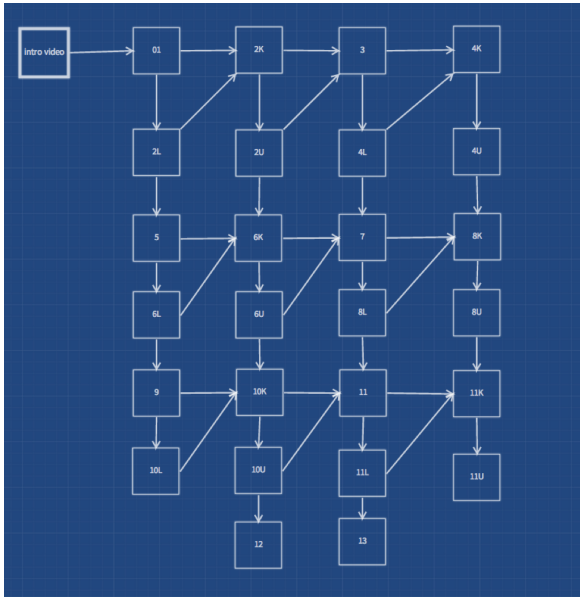


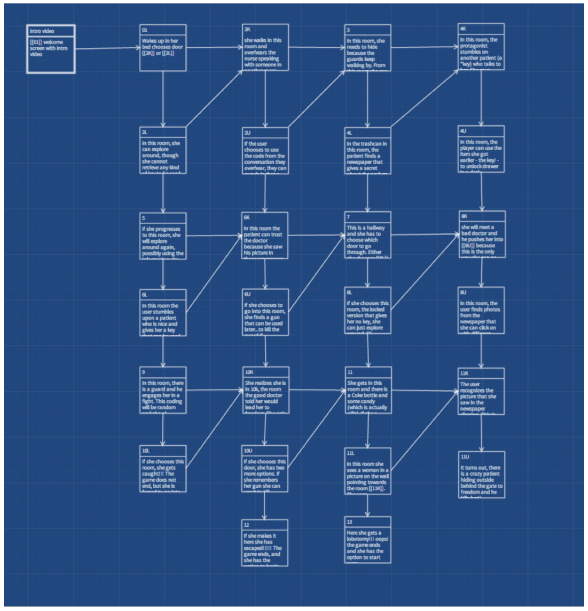
# Key to "Lock and Key"

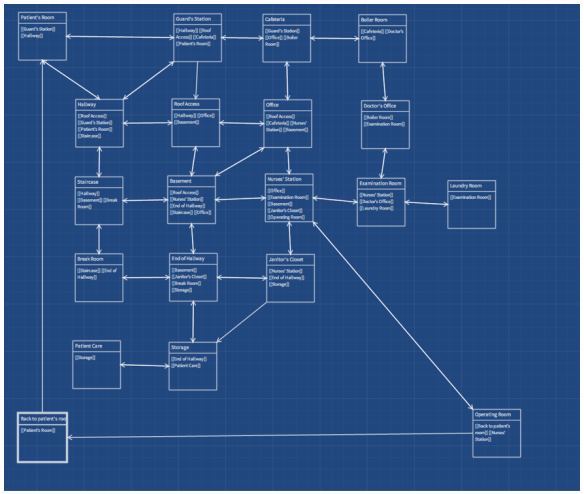
- Nodes with same number are a lock/key set
- "L" and "U" are the same node (in locked and unlocked state)
- "K" is the story node where the player gets the item or information to open the lock.



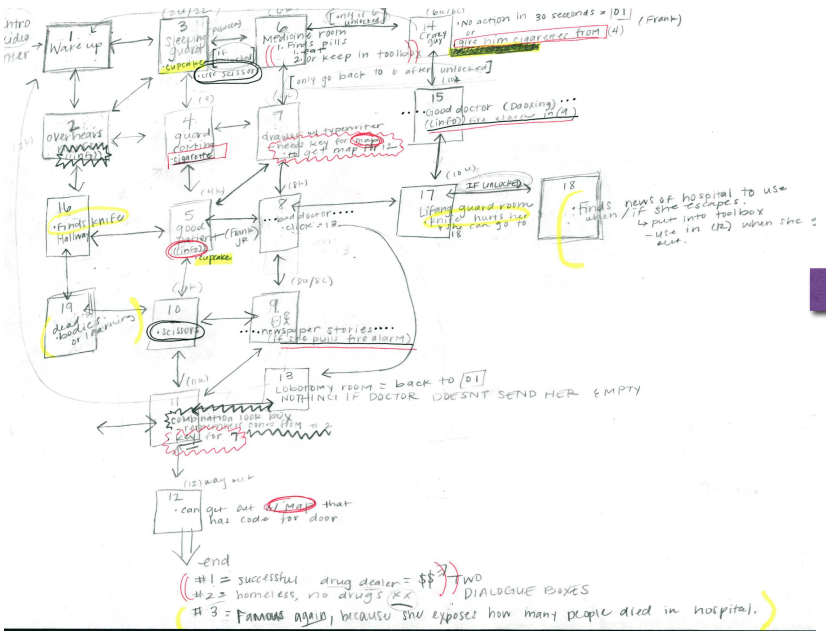
# “Lock and Key” applied





# “The Dark Woman” Game Map



# The Game

- Let's play!

# More to see!

- Map templates for a variety of projects
- Student game experiments
- Analysis of the shape of commercial games
- New experimental analyses
  - "narrative effort mapping"—predicting player effort
- Writer-friendly mapping tools!

# The Reductive Version

- Mapping user behavior = Good user testing
- Guiding user behavior = Good level design

- Controlling user behavior = Directing a movie

# The future

- Interactive Narrative?
- Walking Simulator?
- Game?
- Challenging Text?

# Good Stories...

- ...leave the player wanting more

# Good Stories…

- …leave the player wanting more
- …because they relished the experience, not because it felt incomplete

# Good Stories...

- ...leave the player wanting more
- ...because they relished the experience, not because it felt incomplete
- ...unless the ending was supposed to make them feel that way

# Good Stories…

- …leave the player wanting more
- …because they relished the experience, not because it felt incomplete
- …unless the ending was supposed to make them feel that way
- …like this talk, which is perpetually “to be continued”…

# Thank You!

- Lowell Institute Innovation Incubator (Li3) for supporting my research and getting me to GDC
- My students and co-teachers who put up with being my guinea pigs year after year
- Everyone here for listening! I want to hear what you have to say!

# Contact Me!

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- web: digitalmedia.neu.edu/linked/GDC