



# The Narrative Innovation Showcase

**Clara Fernández-Vara  
& Matthew Weise**  
Fiction Control

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





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# Welcome!



# 5 talks, 10 minutes each

- Challenges in narrative design
- Focus on process
- No Q&A – if you have any questions or comments, please join us at the wrap-up room.



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PRY

# Player vs Author Control

Samantha Gorman



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PRY opens six years after James—a demolition consultant—returns from the First Gulf War.

Players explore James' mind as he confronts his failing vision and the loss of important relationships forged during war.



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# The Challenge

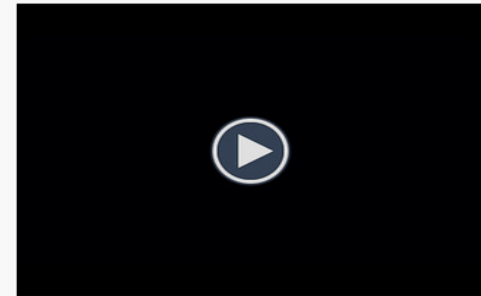
How to create a compelling balance between player and author control of story when integrating text and video.

# What We Saw

Point of View

## Chapter 1

### Point of View



**Point of view** is the perspective from which a story is told. The speaker can be first or third person. First person narration is when the narrator is part of the action. Third person narration is when the narrator is not part of the action.

#### First person example:







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Take the knife - Interactive video



**TAKE THE KNIFE AND GO  
TO YOUR FRIEND'S HOUSE**

**DON'T TAKE THE KNIFE AND  
GO TO YOUR FRIEND'S HOUSE**



7:37 / 11:48



YouTube







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# Our Process: Integration

- Find Prompts in the Narrative Itself
- Pay Attention to Form
- Think Outside the Box (discipline)



Braille text overlaid on the image, consisting of multiple lines of dots arranged in a grid-like pattern across the central area.

Jessie. We had our own kind of friendship, but her face belongs to a list of people with whom I've lost

That's dumb. People are not lost like rings down the drain. It is vague what you remember, images.

Her taillights low and flat across the plain. Dad, head down, against the kitchen window pane. Out of touch. There's the general impression of features. Jessie had a nice, toothy smile. Her eyes were empty don't go there. . . we fall through the door and she's suddenly near her hand smells like lilac as she rips into me

shelves fall cleaning supplies shatter blue slides around her body stains my fingers on her pulse I'm counting, calculating. Back in service, few women got to where she got. when she took charge, it was hot.

She knew what she was after. Her hand on mine as I reached for the chips "finders keepers," she said. Her nails digging into my knuckles longer than needed. Her fingers long on my palm,





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# Solution: Player Author Control

Create an Always Seen Author Defined Narrative Arc  
Over a Flexible Space where the Audience Can Explore.  
Make interaction possible at all times.

When will the attack happen?

When will the attack happen?

When the reader closes James's eyes  
PRY looks at the external video's timecode  
and can do any or all of the following:

1. Pause the external video.
2. Seek to a different time in the external video.
3. Add new thoughts to thought queue.





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external video

0:00:00

Thought Queue:

thought

thought

thought

thought

thought



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external video

0:00:00

Thought Queue:

thought

thought

thought

thought

Reader Progresses to next thought in queue by either:

1. opening James' eyes
2. going into James' subconscious space.



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external video

0:20:00

Thought Queue:

thought

thought

thought

thought

new thought

new thought

New thoughts are added to the queue based on the video's timecode when reader closes James's eyes.



damage



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How does this change game  
narrative as we know it?



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# Thanks!

[prynovella.com](http://prynovella.com) (PRY is available on iOS app store)

[samantha.gorman@tenderclaws.com](mailto:samantha.gorman@tenderclaws.com)

@TenderClaws



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# Sculpting Story

**Aaron A. Reed**

University of California Santa Cruz / Independent



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# Sculpting Story

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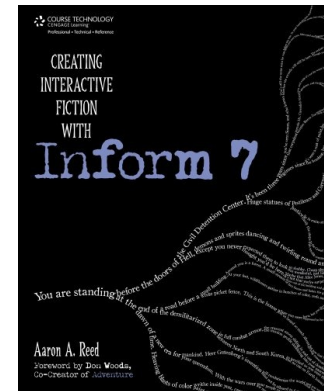
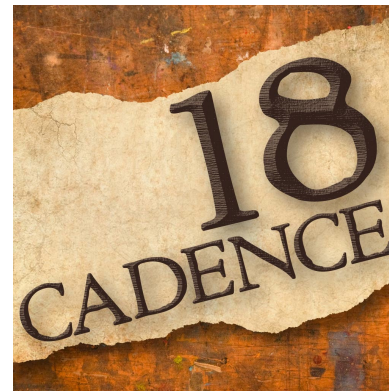
(soon extra employable!)





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## You Might Remember Me From Such Titles As...





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the  
**ICE-BOUND**  
c o n c o r d a n c e

Aaron A. Reed & Jacob Garbe





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the  
**ICE-BOUN**  
c o n c o r d a n

Aaron A. Reed & Jacob Garbe





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# The Ice-Bound Concordance

- What if exploring an interactive story could feel like sculpting with clay?

# The Ice-Bound Concordance

- What if exploring an interactive story could feel like sculpting with clay...
  - 1) ... instead of being lost in a maze?

# The Ice-Bound Concordance

- What if exploring an interactive story could feel like sculpting with clay...
  - 1) ... instead of being lost in a maze?



disorienting



# The Ice-Bound Concordance

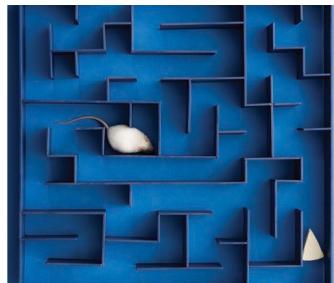
- What if exploring an interactive story could feel like sculpting with clay...
  - 1) ... instead of being lost in a maze?



disorienting  
stressful

# The Ice-Bound Concordance

- What if exploring an interactive story could feel like sculpting with clay...
  - 1) ... instead of being lost in a maze?



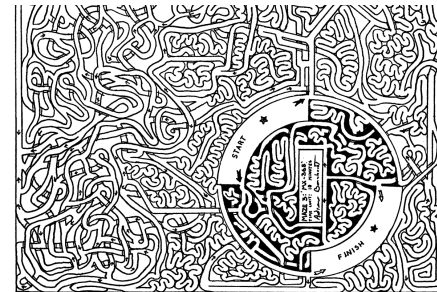
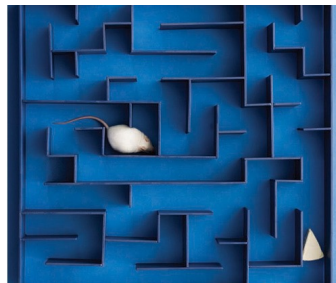
static



# The Ice-Bound Concordance

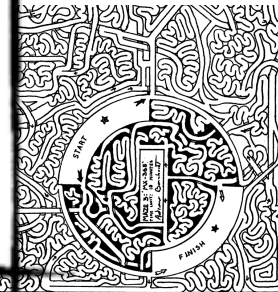
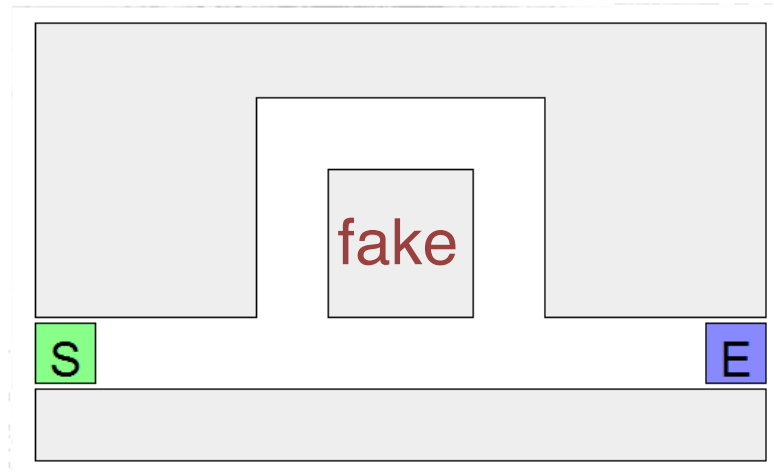
- What if exploring an interactive story could feel like sculpting with clay...
  - 1) ... instead of being lost in a maze?

hard



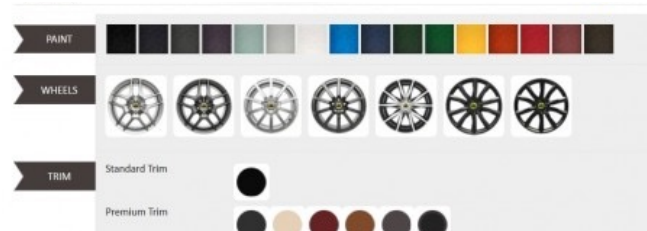
# The Ice-Bound Concordance

- What if e... story  
could fee... y...  
• 1) ... in e?



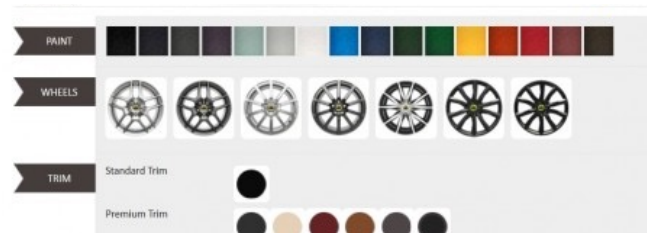
# The Ice-Bound Concordance

- What if exploring an interactive story could feel like sculpting with clay...
  - 2) ... instead of choosing options on your car.



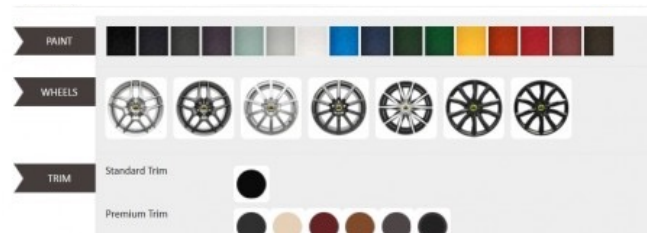
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# The Ice-Bound Concordance

- What if exploring an interactive story could feel like sculpting with clay...
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# The Ice-Bound Concordance

- What if **exploring** an interactive story could feel like sculpting with clay...

# The Ice-Bound Concordance

- What if **exploring** an interactive **story** could feel like sculpting with clay...

# The Ice-Bound Concordance

- What if **exploring** an interactive **story** could feel like sculpting with clay...
  - low cost, reversible decisions
  - the ability to make surprising things





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# (The Constraints!)



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# (The Constraints!)

- “Future of the Book”: Digital Game + Print Book



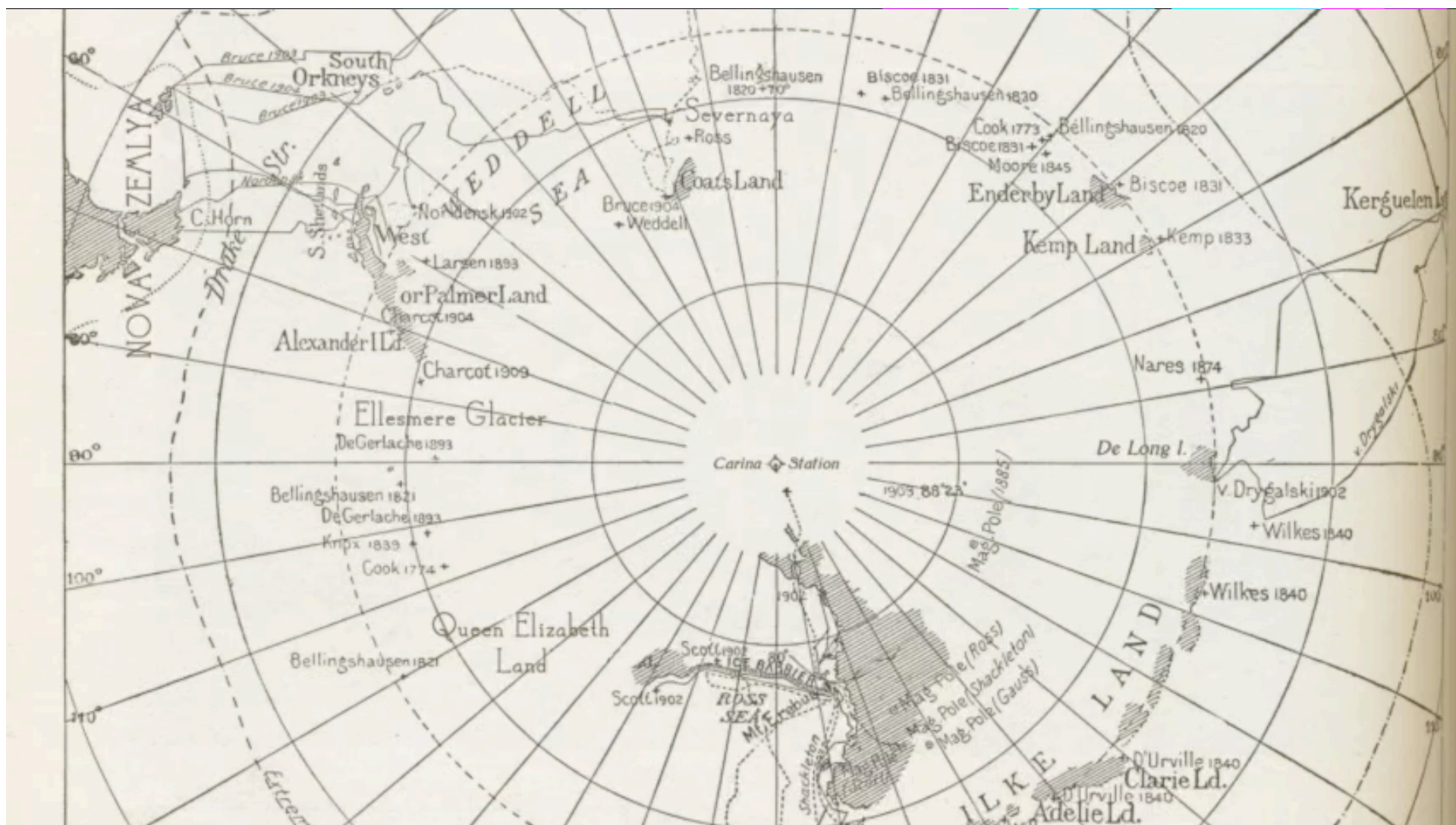
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# (The Constraints!)

- “Future of the Book”: Digital Game + Print Book
- Text-based

# (The Constraints!)

- “Future of the Book”: Digital Game + Print Book
- Text-based
- Two PhD students in spare time





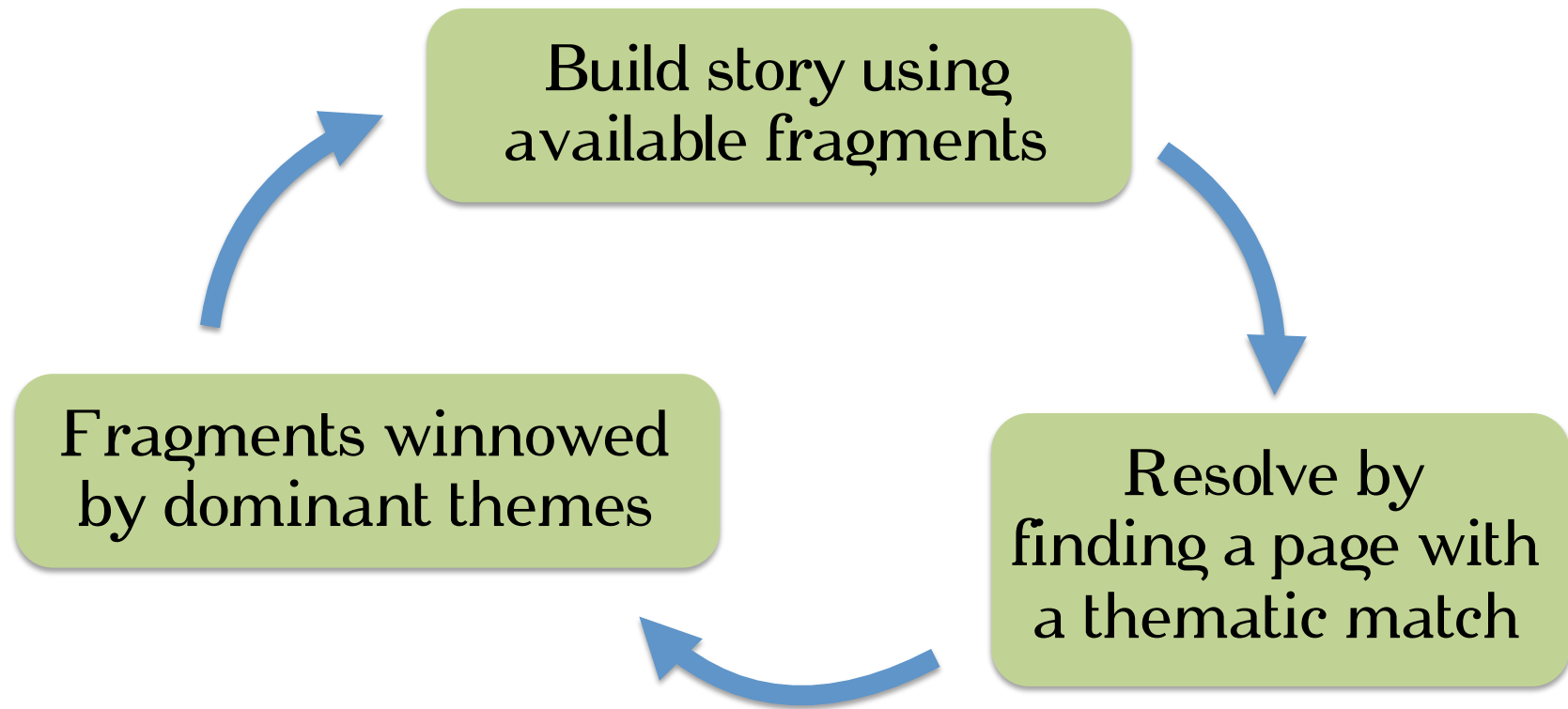
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Build story using  
available fragments

Build story using  
available fragments



Resolve by  
finding a page with  
a thematic match







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# The Solution to the Challenge



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# The Solution(s) to the Challenge



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# The Solutions to the Challenge

- Make the story dynamic in multiple ways.

# The Solutions to the Challenge

- Making story dynamic on more than one level.



Themes

# The Solutions to the Challenge

- Making story dynamic on more than one level.



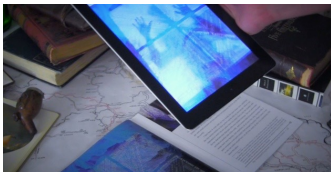
Themes



Major Story Beats

# The Solutions to the Challenge

- Making story dynamic on more than one level.



bit of three sisters

ld gaze squarely at the  
fore closing her eyes. In it  
x above her younger siste

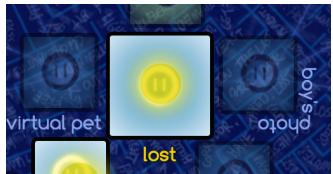
Themes

Major Story Beats

Words and phrases

# The Solutions to the Challenge

- Making story dynamic on more than one level.



bit of three sisters

ld gaze squarely at the  
fore closing her eyes. In it  
x above her younger siste

Themes

Major Story Beats

Words and phrases

Character State

Printed Book

“I’d feel some small but significant change ripple through the game from a choice I’d made... [The Ice-Bound Concordance] is a game that, more than anything else, captures this feeling of editing.”

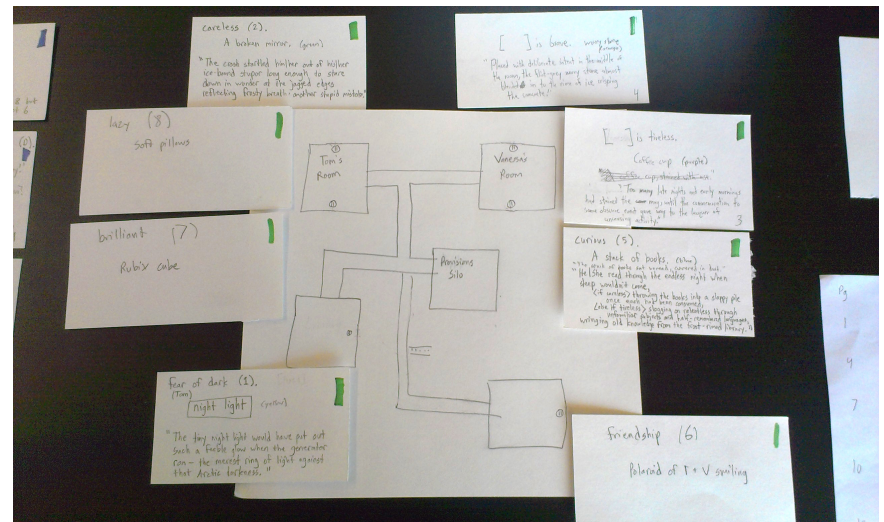
Rock Paper Shotgun





- Paper prototyping (of narrative mechanics!)

- Paper prototyping (of narrative mechanics!)





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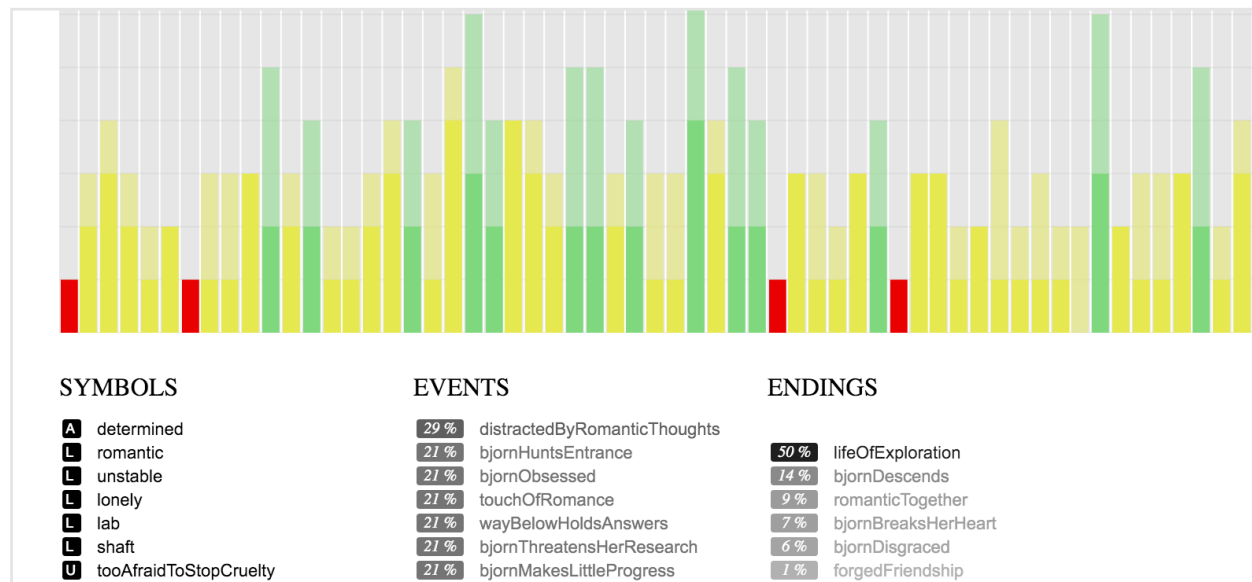
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# The Solutions to the Challenge

- When exploring, you need a map...

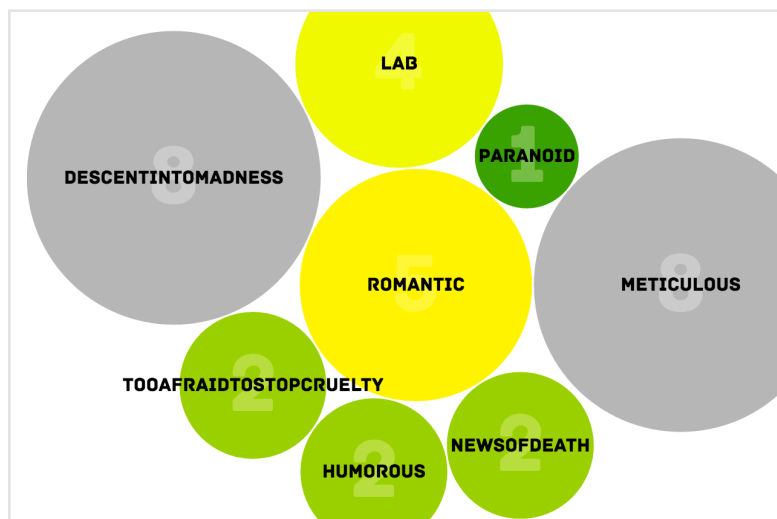
# The Solutions to the Challenge

- Authoring and visualization tools



# The Solutions to the Challenge

- Authoring and visualization tools



**3%** 66 problem combinations  
2455 total possible combinations

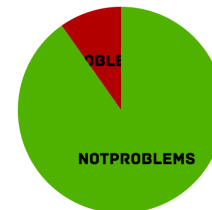
#### Currently selected

descentIntoMadness  
meticulous

#### 10% targeted

(8 of 82 total combos with these symbols need content)

Constitutes 12% of this level's combos needing content



#### 8 Combos Involving Selection ±

descentIntoMadness determined meticulous paranoid romantic



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# The Solutions to the Challenge

- Matching the narrative content to the narrative mechanic.

# The Solutions to the Challenge

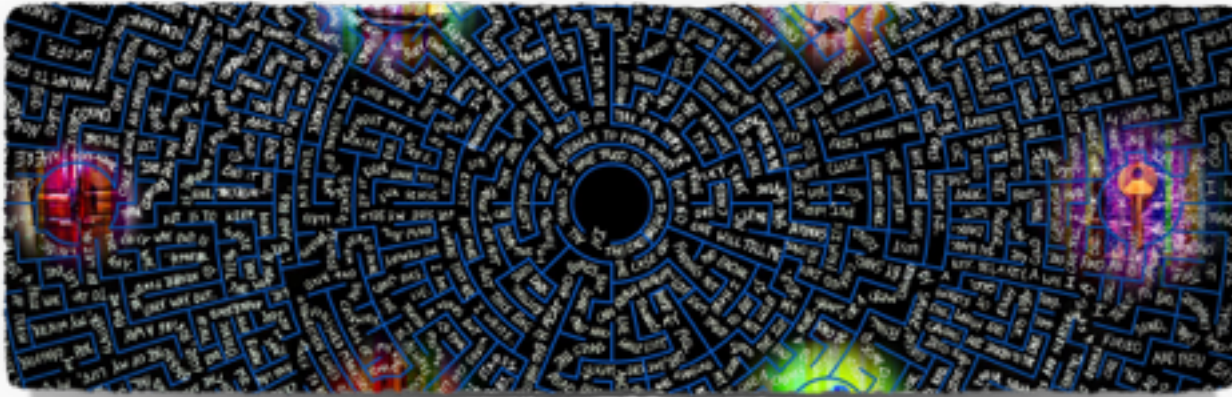
- Matching the narrative content to the narrative mechanic.





# The Solutions to the Challenge

- Matching the narrative content to the narrative mechanic.





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How does this change game narrative as we know it?



# How does this change game narrative as we know it?

“It’s game narrative, Jim, but not as we know it.”



# How does this change game narrative as we know it?

“It’s game narrative, Jim,  
but not as we know it.”



# How does this change game we know it?



How does this change game narrative as we know it?

- Players are more engaged if they can build story,  
➡ not just choose story.



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*The Ice-Bound Concordance*

**[ice-bound.com](http://ice-bound.com)**

(Get the book at the GDC store!)

Thank you!

Aaron A. Reed - @aaronareed - [aaronareed.net](http://aaronareed.net)



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*The Ice-Bound Concordance*

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(Get the book at the GDC store!)

Thank you!

reminder about pending  
employability



Aaron A. Reed - @aaronareed - **[aaronareed.net](http://aaronareed.net)**



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# But What If They All Just Hug It Out? Tragedy And Player Agency With *Elsinore*

**By Katie Chironis**

Team Lead & Writer, Golden Glitch Studios



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# Elsinore





# Elsinore is...



+



+



=







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"My uncle killed my dad and  
slept with my mom! I want revenge!"



"Have you considered therapy instead?"





# Queen Gertrude

## Act I

\*Is Queen\*

## Act II

\*Is Still The Queen\*

## Act III

\*Is sad that her son killed her husband's advisor\*

## Act IV

\*Sees Ophelia commit suicide\*

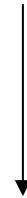
## Act V

\*Gets poisoned, dies\*



## Act V

\*Gets  
poisoned,  
dies\*



?



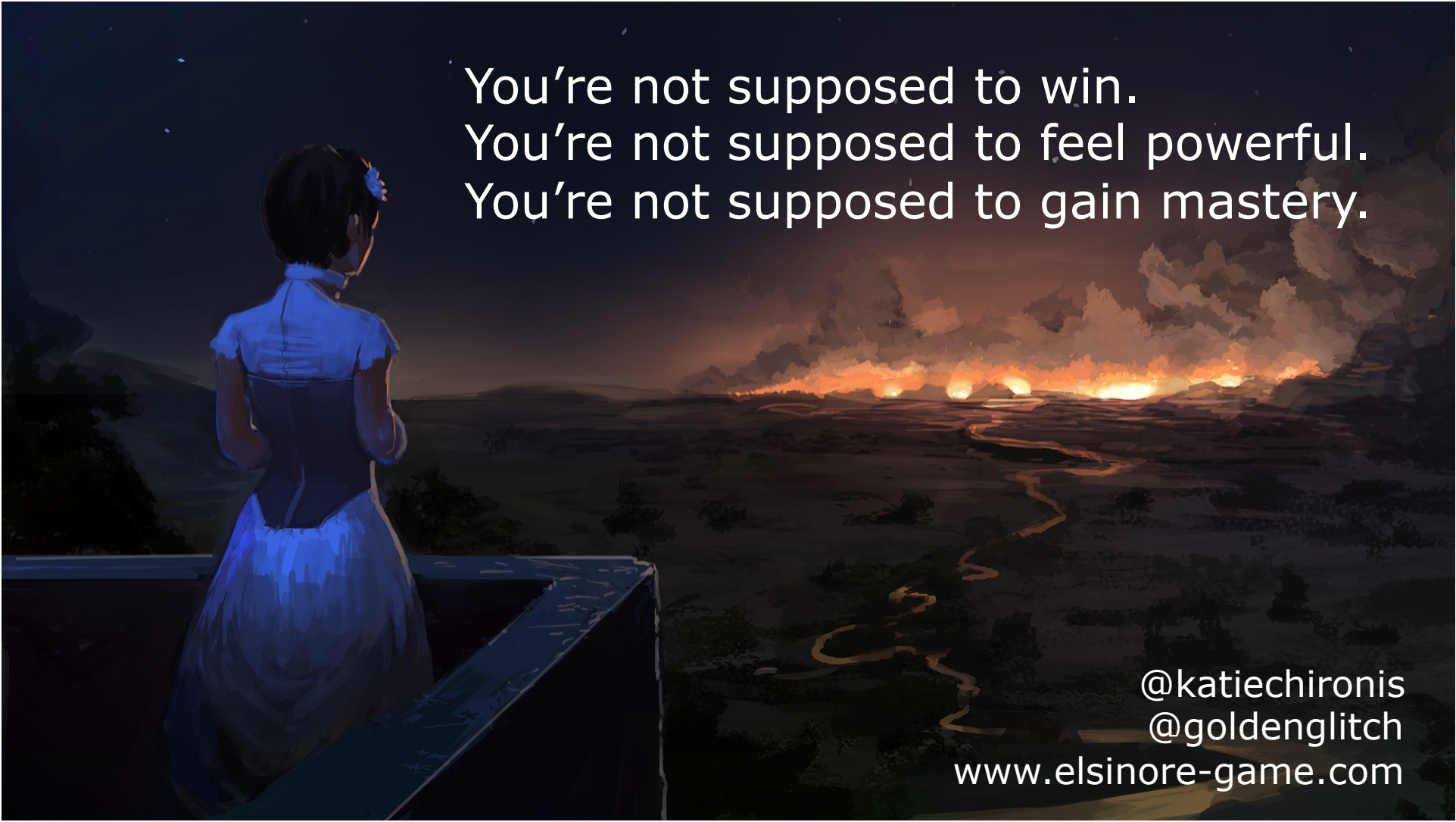
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“How can I turn this situation back onto the player in a negative way?”





A digital illustration of a woman with short dark hair, seen from behind, wearing a blue dress with a white collar and a small blue flower in her hair. She is standing on a dark ledge, looking out over a vast, dark landscape. In the distance, a bright, fiery orange and yellow glow, resembling a sunset or a fire, illuminates the horizon and casts a long, winding path of light across the dark ground. The sky is dark with some light clouds.

You're not supposed to win.  
You're not supposed to feel powerful.  
You're not supposed to gain mastery.

@katiechironis  
@goldenglitch  
[www.elsinore-game.com](http://www.elsinore-game.com)



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# Cibele: A Vignette Game

**Nina Freeman**

Star Maid Games, Designer

# What's a vignette?

"In literature, poetry, and film, a vignette is a brief, indefinite, evocative description or account of a person or situation. Vignettes are usually meant to give a sense of a character rather than to advance a narrative."

-Ian Bogost, "Videogame Vignette"



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## SONG

Did you see me walking by the Buick Repairs?  
I was thinking of you  
having a Coke in the heat it was your face  
I saw on the movie magazine, no it was Fabian's  
I was thinking of you  
and down at the railroad tracks where the station  
has mysteriously disappeared  
I was thinking of you  
as the bus pulled away in the twilight  
I was thinking of you  
and right now

by Frank O'Hara



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# The Challenge

Romantic relationships are full of complexity and nuance.

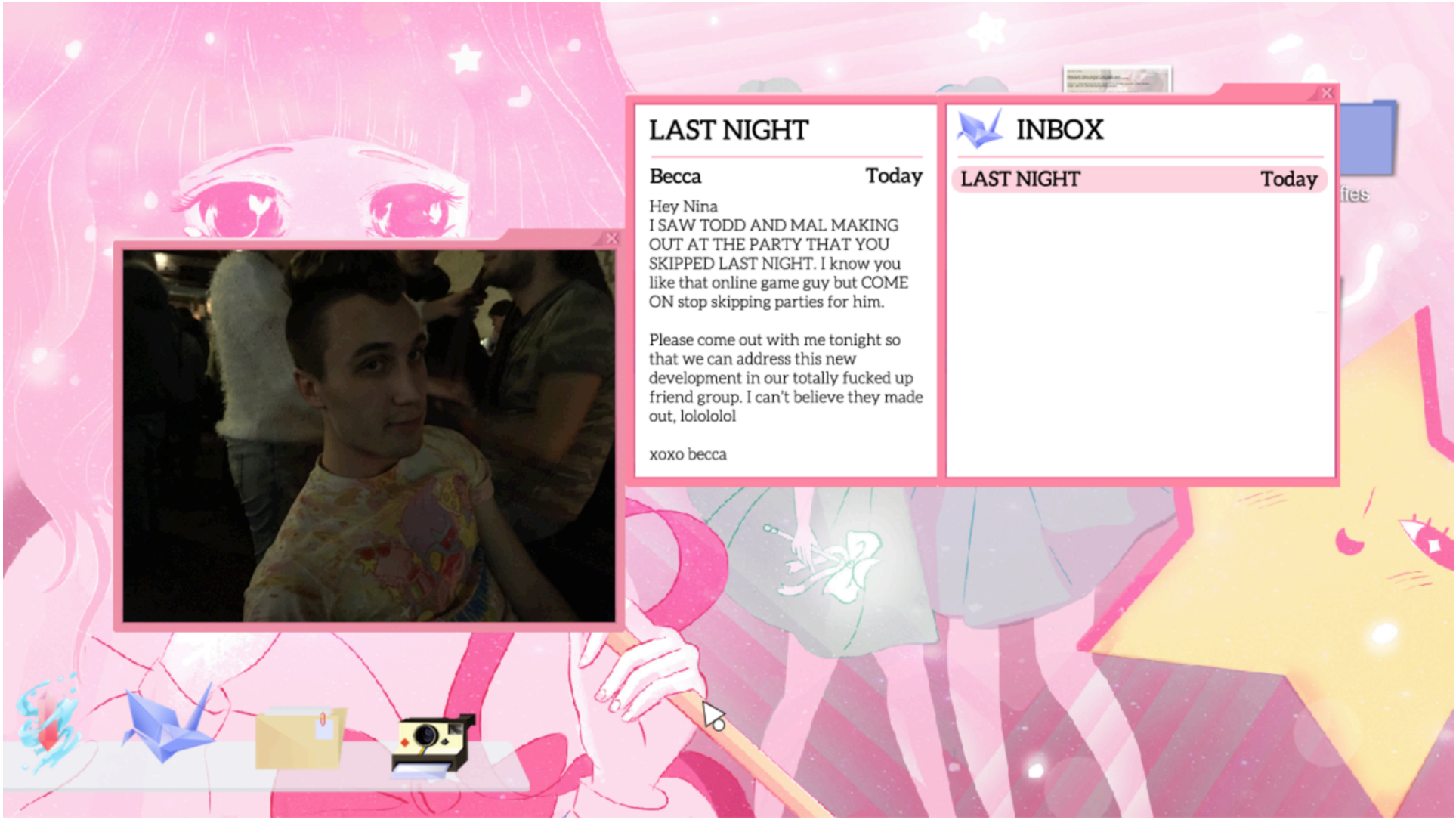
- How do I tell the story of a relationship without overwhelming the player with information?

# The Solution to the Challenge

A **vignette** that explores one aspect of the relationship.

- Focus on how and why the couple met up to have sex.





## LAST NIGHT

Becca

Today

Hey Nina  
I SAW TODD AND MAL MAKING  
OUT AT THE PARTY THAT YOU  
SKIPPED LAST NIGHT. I know you  
like that online game guy but COME  
ON stop skipping parties for him.

Please come out with me tonight so  
that we can address this new  
development in our totally fucked up  
friend group. I can't believe they made  
out, lolololol

xoxo becca

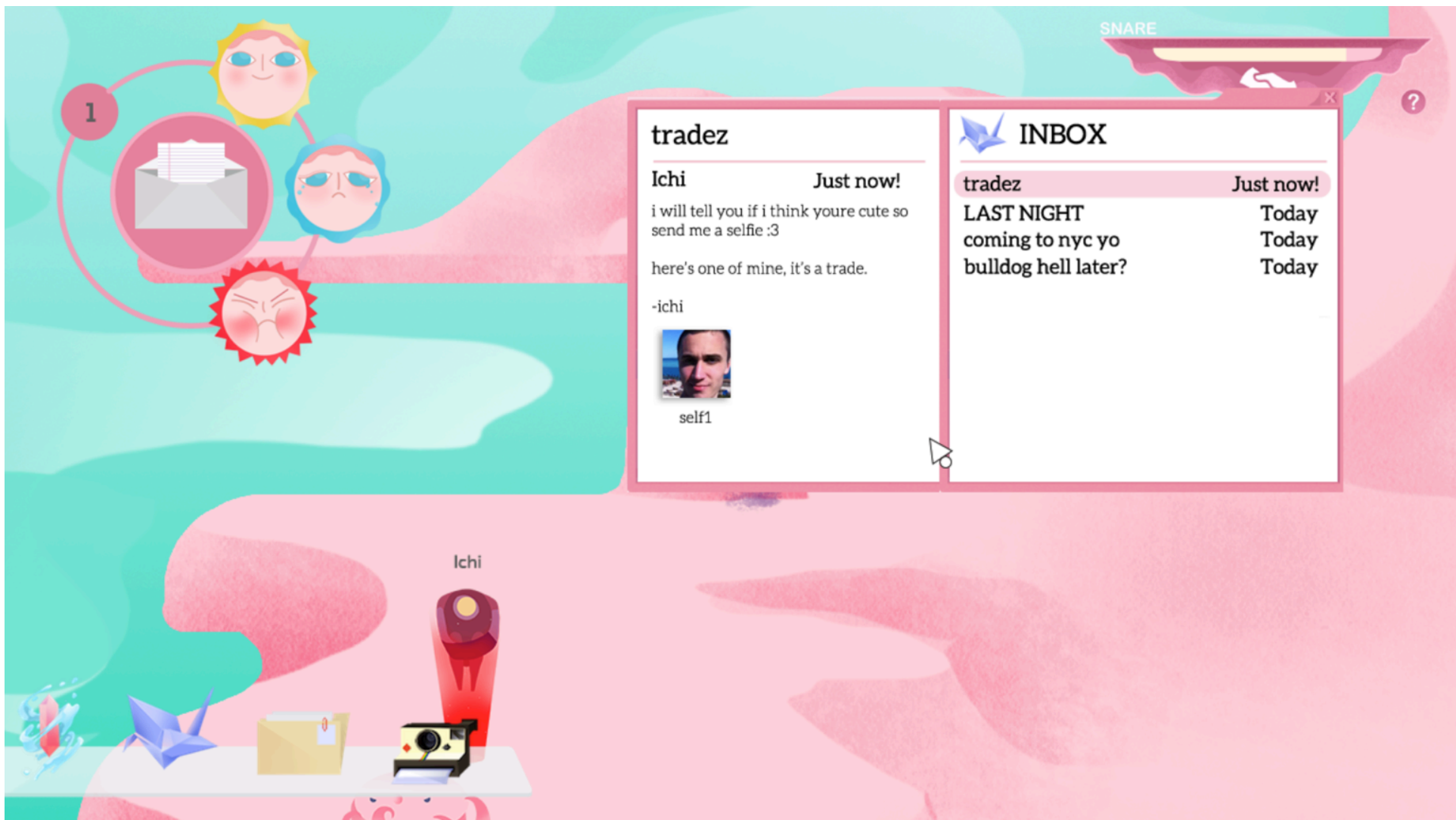


## INBOX

LAST NIGHT

Today





tradez

Ichi

Just now!

i will tell you if i think youre cute so  
send me a selfie :3

here's one of mine, it's a trade.

-ichi



self1



INBOX

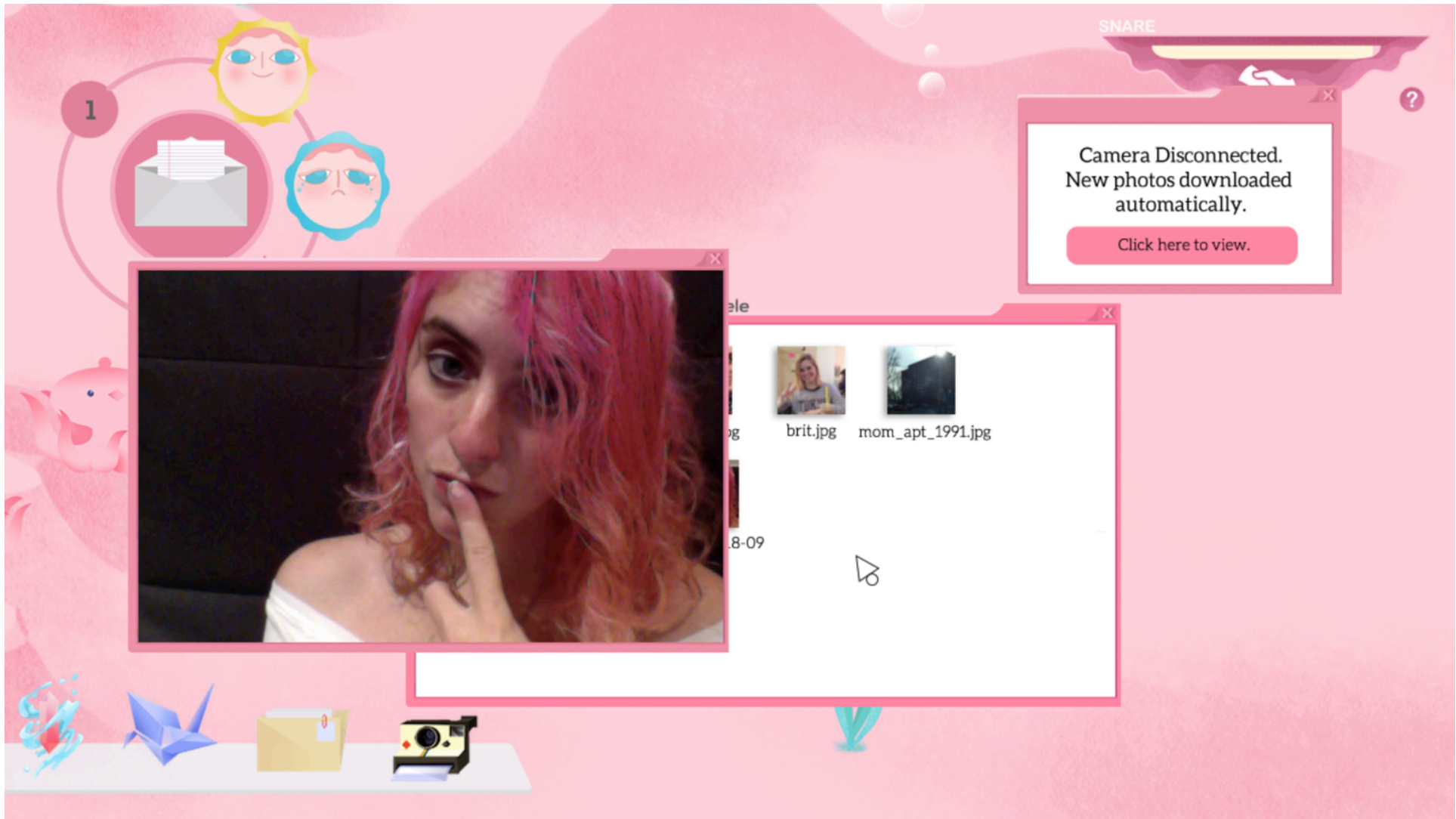
tradez

Just now!

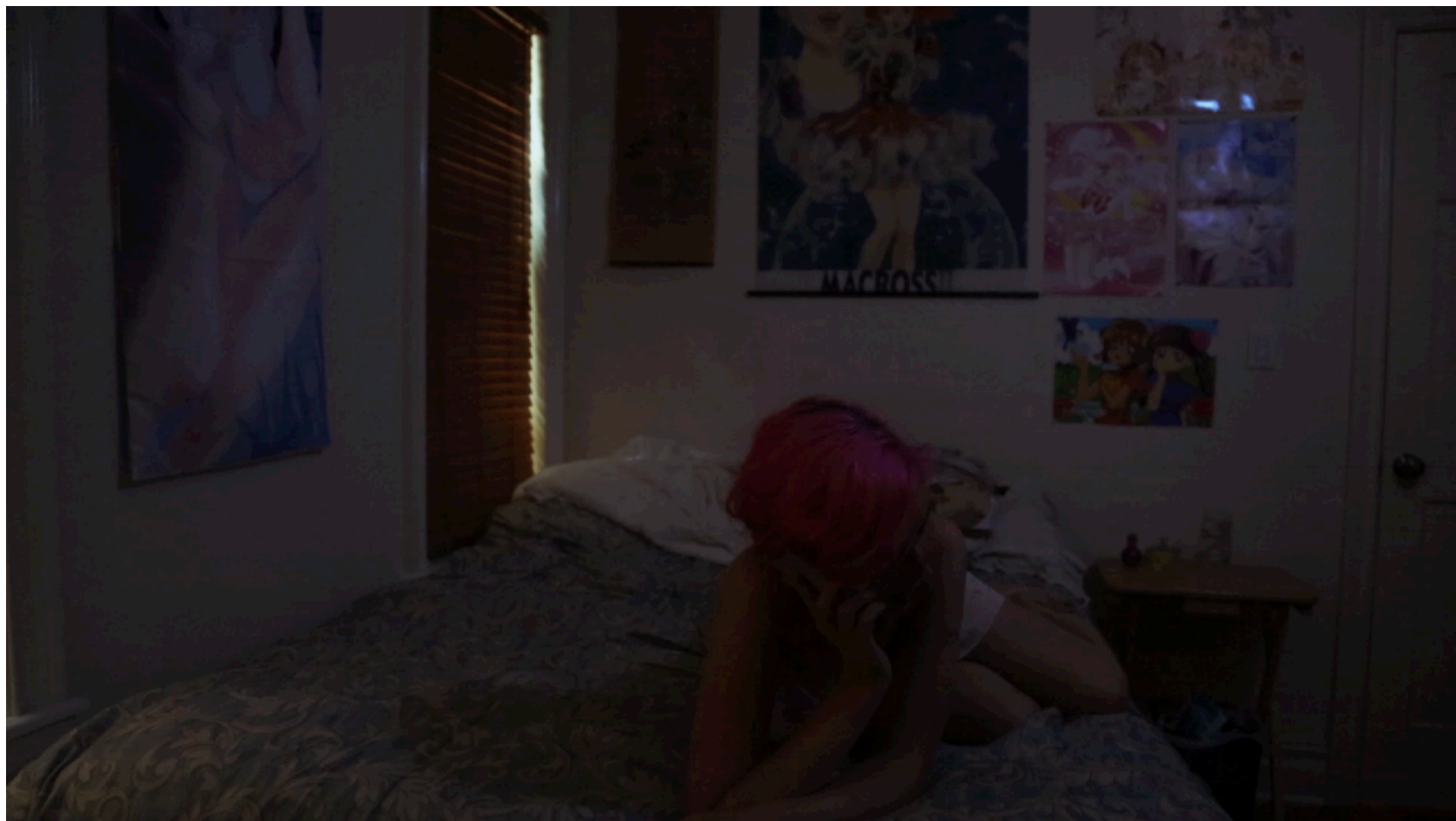
LAST NIGHT  
coming to nyc yo  
bulldog hell later?

Today  
Today  
Today

Ichi











round trip  
JFK, LAX  
Maybe at start of summer break?

virgin \$443  
jetblue \$387  
delta \$443  
united \$387  
us airways \$387

\$500 ish for flight + ??? for food? cab?

ask becca if you can tell your mom that you're staying with her for a week  
ask blake if you can stay with him.....!?

downloads

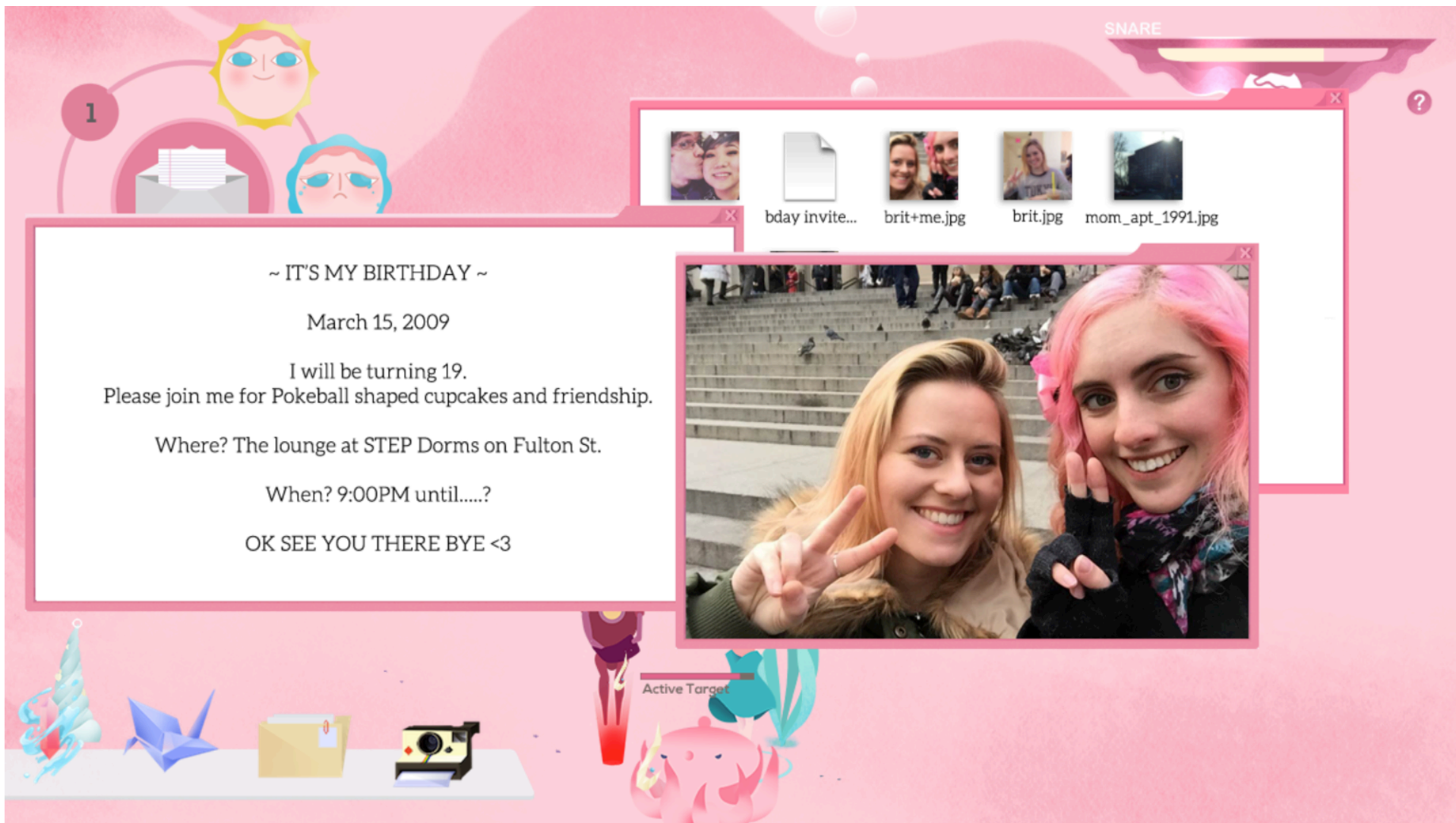
blog\_site

hw\_tuesday

travelnotes









- No formal plot structure
  - Every aspect of the game is designed to illustrate how and why the couple decided to meet up.
  - It's not about the whole arc of their relationship. It begins and ends within the confines of the vignette focus.



# How can the vignette game form influence your writing?

- Experiment with or remove the “beginning, middle and end”.
- Write something plausible, but avoid excessive exposition.
- Evocative details are your best friend.
- Embrace stories with unusual shapes.

# WHAT IF



Richard Rouse III  
Director/Designer/Writer  
Paranoid Productions  
@richardrouseiii

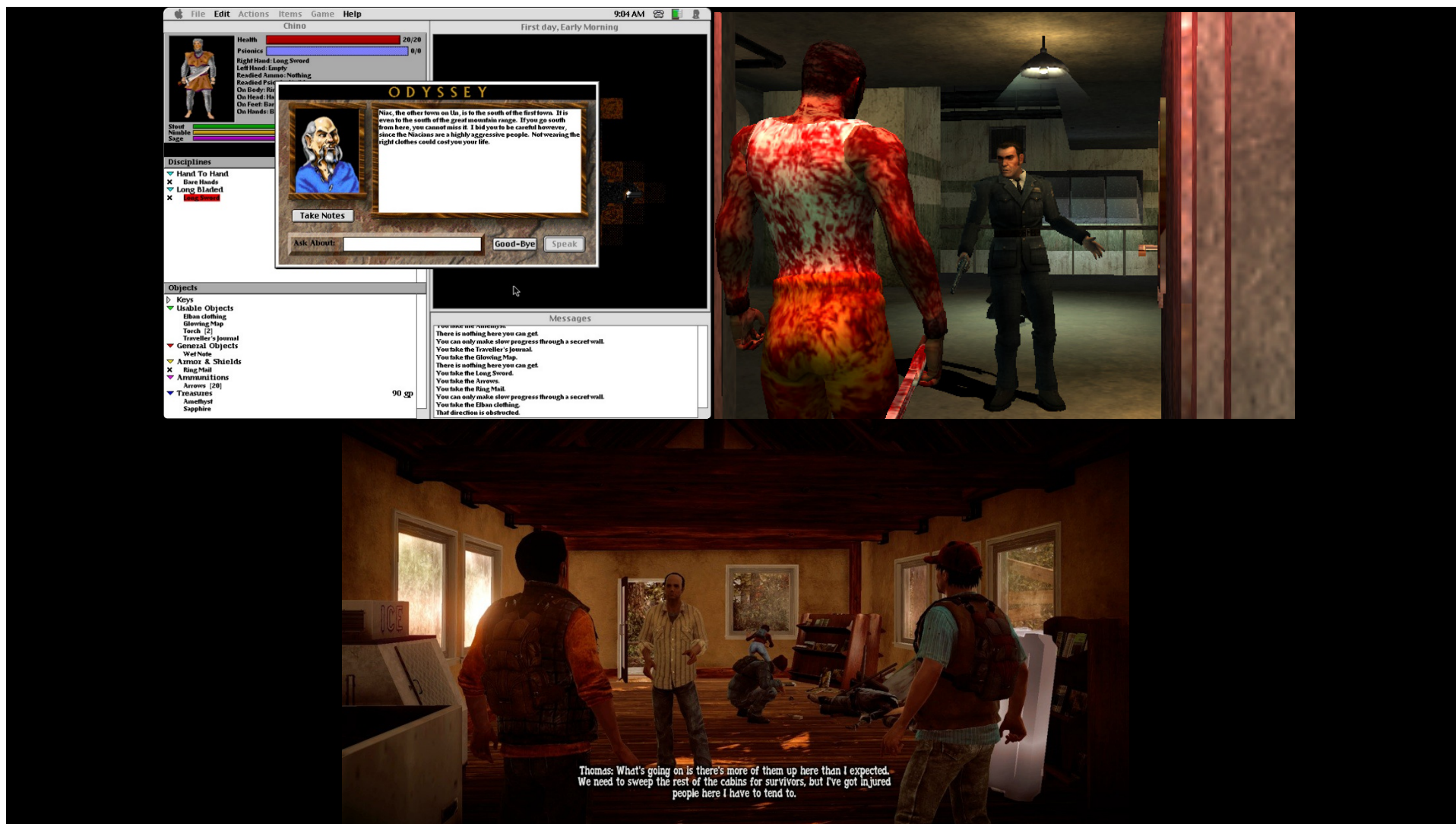
GDC Narrative Innovation Showcase 2016

Slides available at: [www.paranoidproductions.com](http://www.paranoidproductions.com)

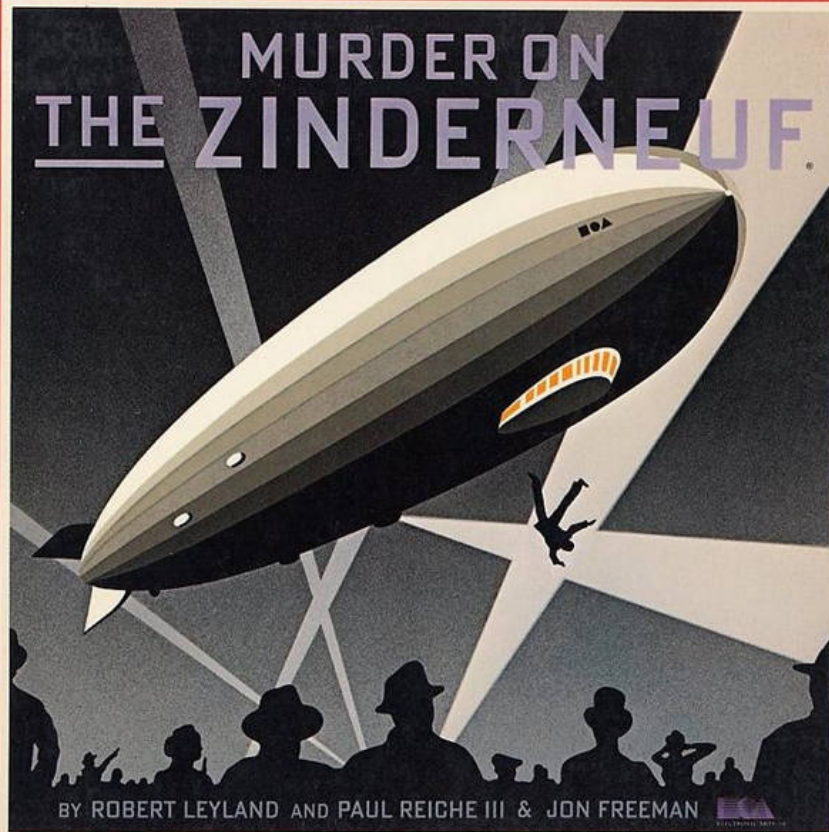
# THE CHALLENGE

**THE CHALLENGES**

**Challenge #1**  
**Make an**  
**Action Game**  
**with a Changing**  
**Narrative**

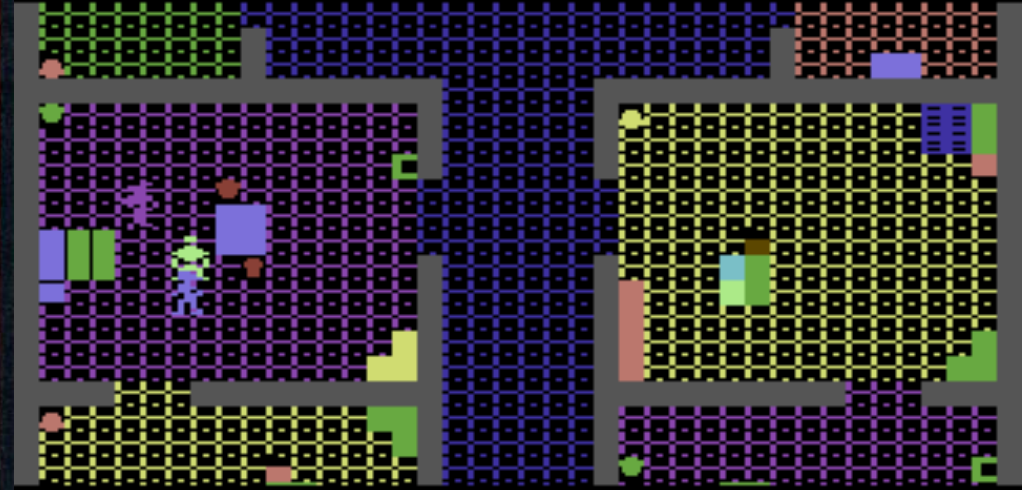


# MURDER ON THE ZINDERNEUF



BY ROBERT LEYLAND AND PAUL REICHE III & JON FREEMAN

Suspect: Vincent Van Wente  
Hard Seductive Warm **COOL** Helpless





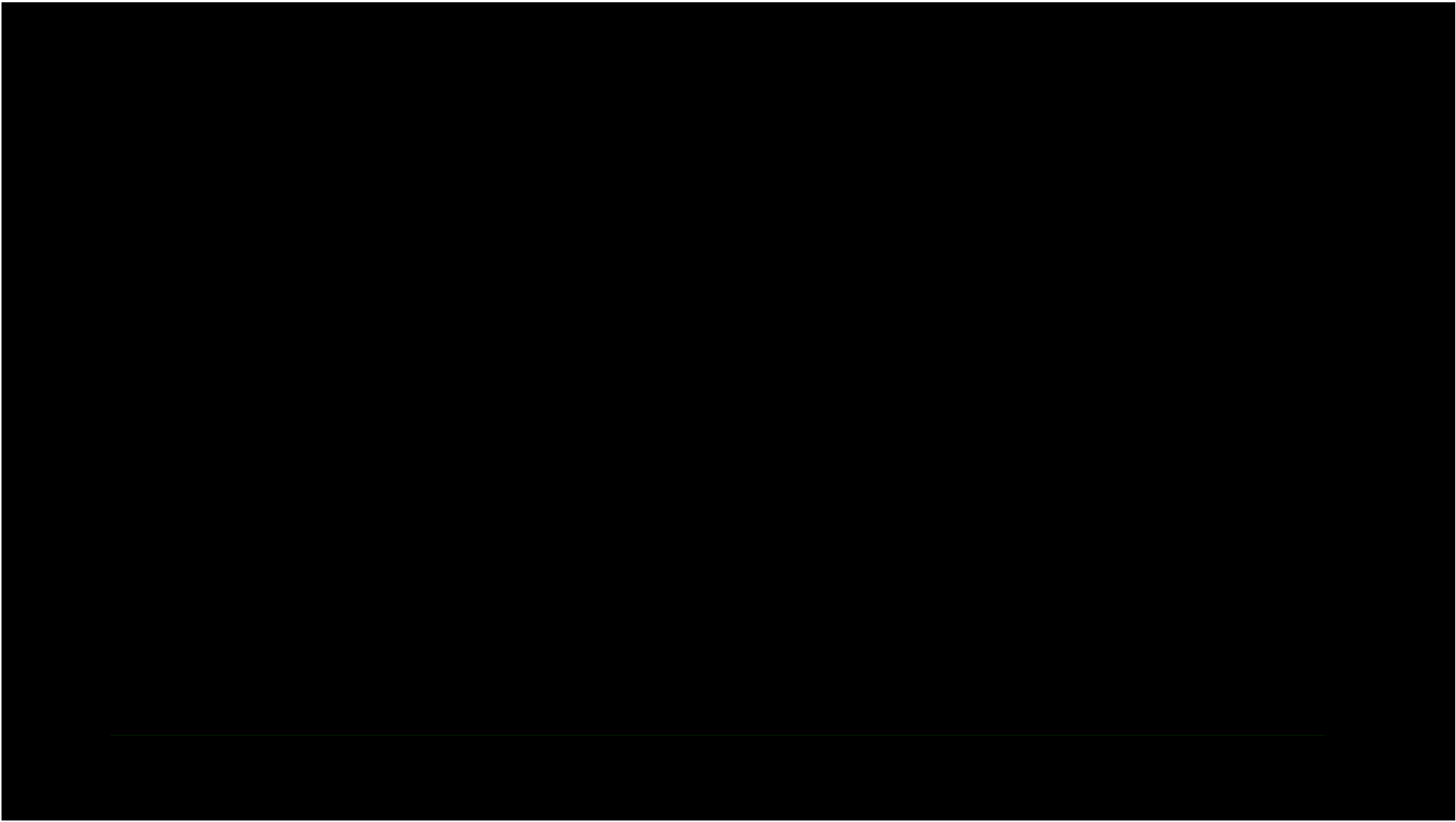




**Challenge #2**  
**Explore the**  
**Nature of Cults**



**THE SOLUTION**





THE  
CHURCH  
IN THE DARKNESS



















**COLLECTIVE  
JUSTICE  
MISSION**



Freedom Town is an agricultural community built and run by the Collective Justice Mission for the good of its people and our humanitarian goals, working hand in hand with the government and people of Battuela.

Dear Mom,

Things are going great down here! I knew it would be hard working with the Mission to build a town in the jungle but it's what we have to do. It stays hot and humid year-round here, but I love seeing all the bugs & birds from South Amer. Food's Great particularly because we grow it all ourselves. I know you worry about me but please don't!

Love, Alex



Mom!

1319 Scott Street

San Francisco, California

94115

USA

**NARRATIVE**

+

**PLAYER  
CHOICES**

=

**POSSIBLE  
STORIES**

**NARRATIVE  
STATES**

**x**

**PLAYER  
CHOICES**

**=**

**MORE  
POSSIBLE  
STORIES**

**HOW DOES THIS  
EVOLVE GAME  
NARRATIVE?**

with our hands out and a book on our heads in gym class I always fell over. I couldn't ride a horse or ski, the two things I wanted to do most, because they cost too much money. I couldn't speak German or read Hebrew or write Chinese. I didn't even know where most of the odd out-of-the-way countries the UN men in front of me represented fitted in on the map.

For the first time in my life, sitting there in the sound-proof heart of the UN building between Constantin who could play tennis as well as simultaneously interpret and the Russian girl who knew so many idioms, I felt dreadfully inadequate. The trouble was, I had been inadequate all along, I simply hadn't thought about it.

The one thing I was good at was winning scholarships and prizes, and that era was coming to an end.

I felt like a racehorse in a world without race-tracks or a

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**WHAT IF?**





# COLLECTIVE JUSTICE MISSION



**"The freedom  
to start again..."**

**Where all are equal**



# THE CHURCH IN THE DARKNESS

**@richardrouseiii**  
**@churchdarkness**

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

# What we learned today

Going beyond genre fiction shows us the way to other ways of telling videogame stories.



Fragmented, modular narratives can encourage players to explore their possibilities and generate stories of their own.



Lego Sculpture  
By Nathan Sawaya

# Well-placed gaps encourage players to explore and interpret



Don't discard FMV just because it's was done badly in the past.







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# See you in the wrap-up room!

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