

GDC[®]

Writing & Narrative Design: A Relationship

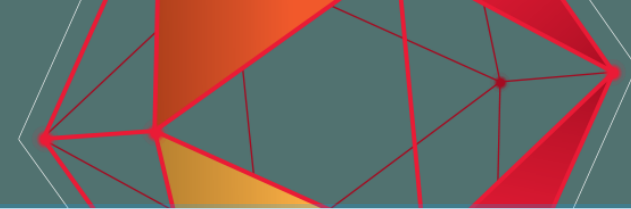
GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE[®] | MARCH 19-23, 2018 | EXPO: MARCH 21-23, 2018 #GDC18





“Writing? Narrative Design? **What’s the difference?**”





WRITING

is responsible for...

THE CHARACTERS

- Dialogue
- Character arcs
- Themes and tone

DESIGN

is responsible for...

THE PLAYER

- Choices/Consequences
- Branching
- Mechanics





Writing and Design Share a Deliverable: The Story



("Minecraft: Story Mode" Episode 5)





Easy: Just divide up the work, right?





Preproduction

- A lot of whiteboard time, spitballing together
- **Writing's** goal is to make a compelling story
- **Design's** goal is to make that story playable







BAD HABIT #1



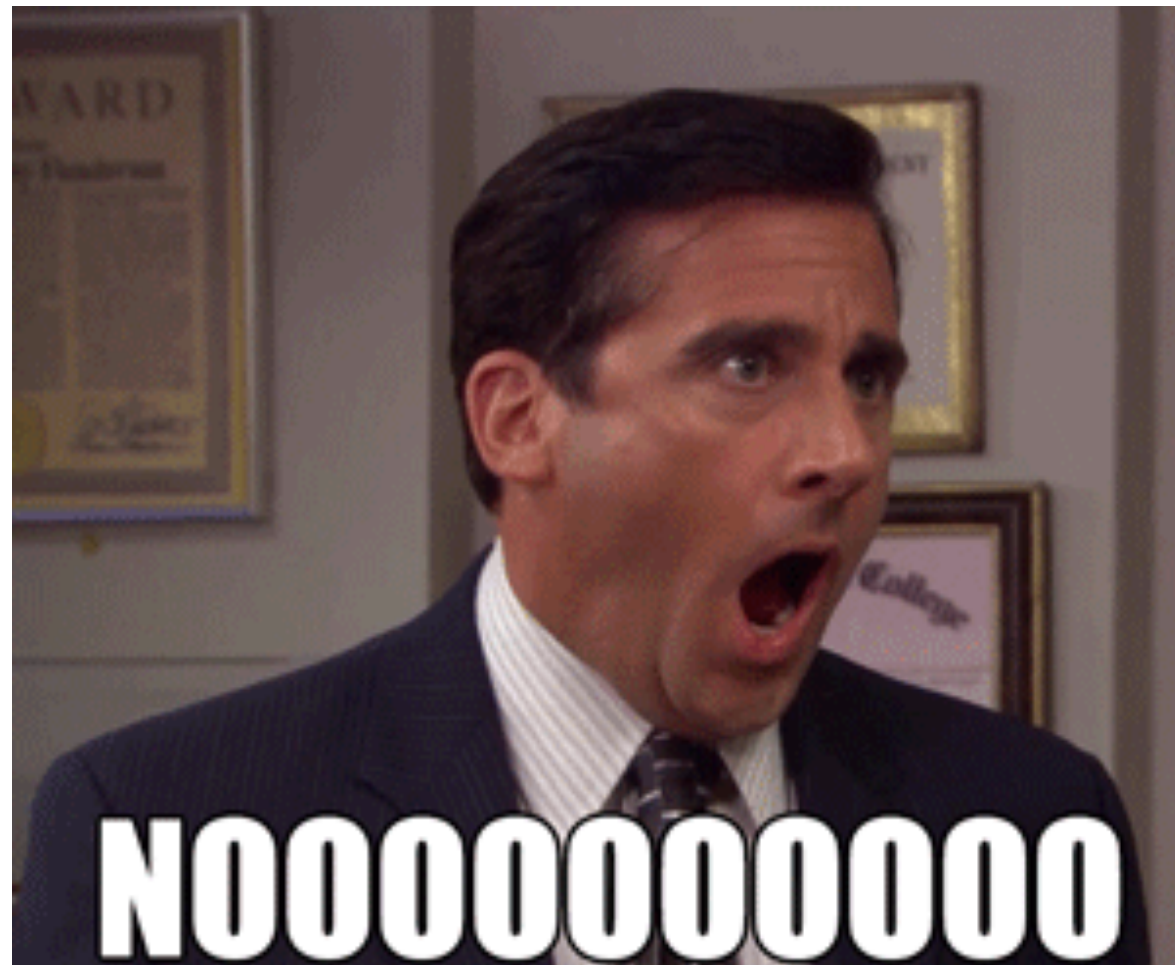
- **Speak up** when you dislike something.
- Waiting for something to fail hurts the team

(aka the “I hope someone else hates this too”)





BAD HABIT #2



(Self-explanatory)

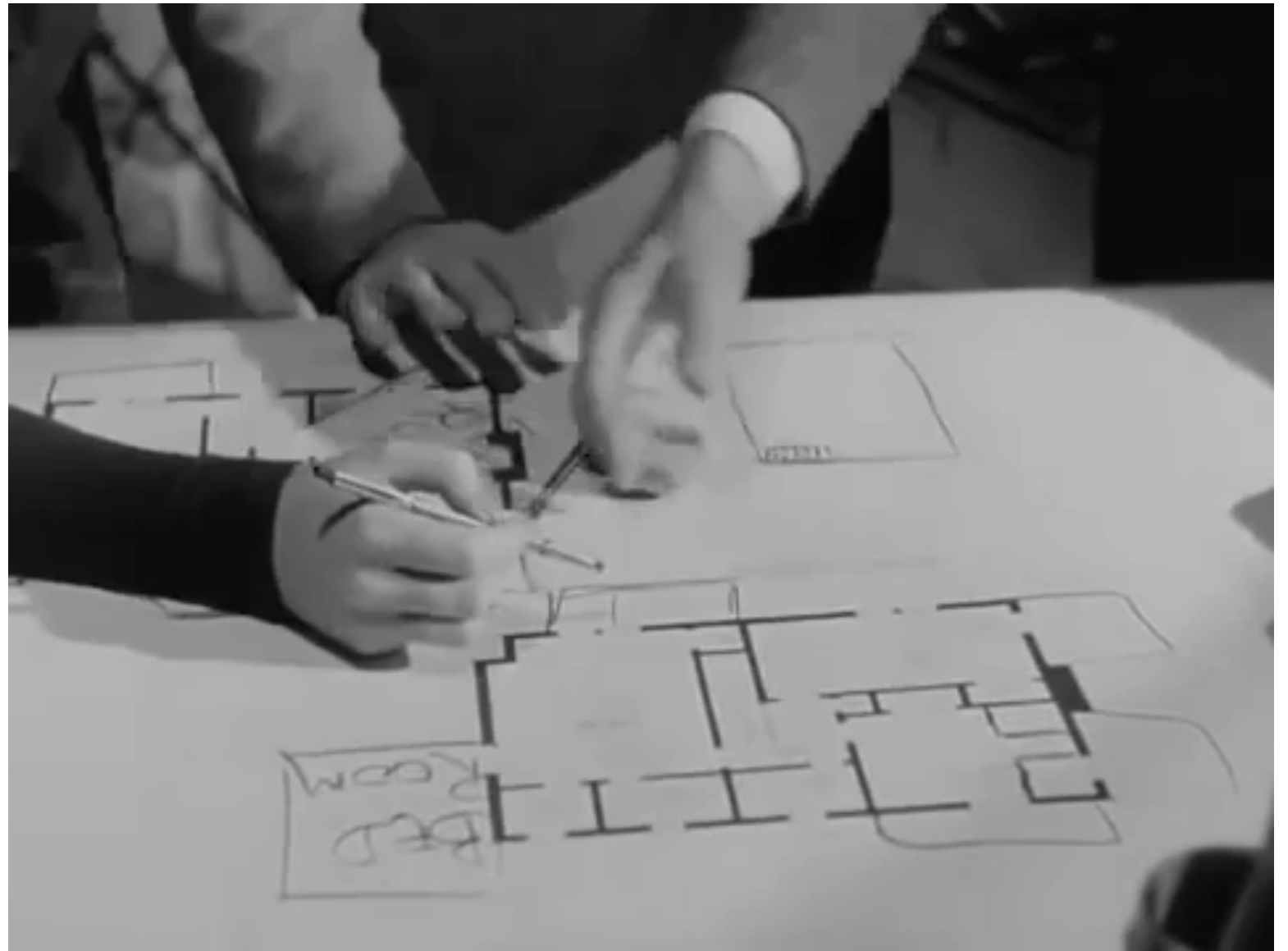
- **Listen.** See where it goes.
- Trust in the process/your team's ability

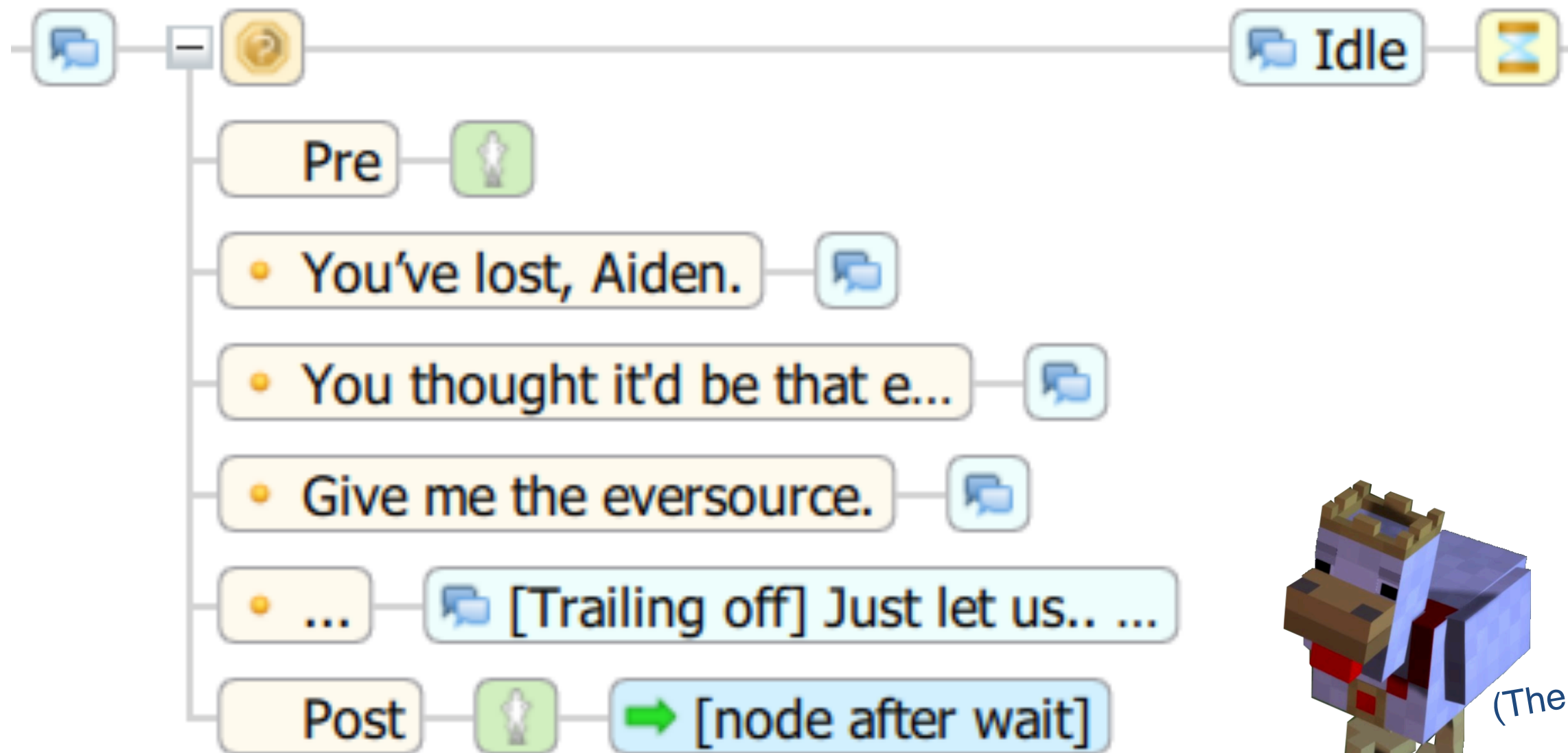
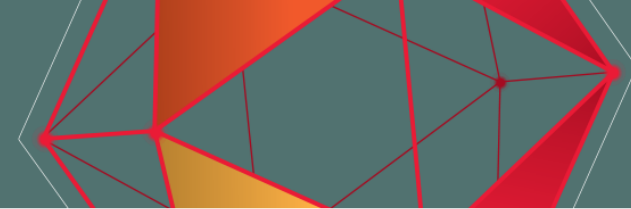




Making the Script - Stubbing

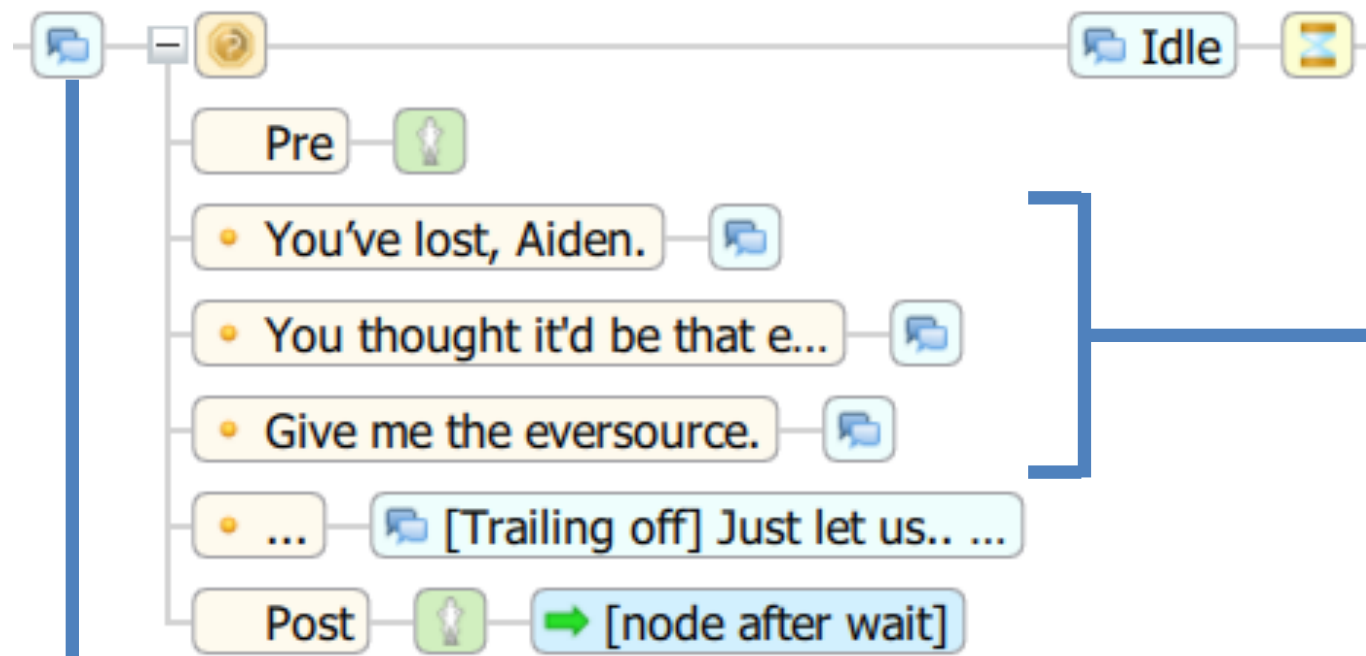
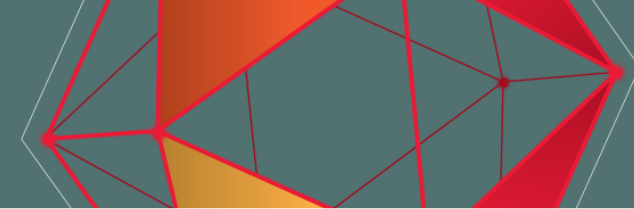
- **Design** roughs in scenes first, like a blueprint.
- **Writing** comes in after to write the dialogue over top.





(The Eversource)





Exchange:

STUB: (Molly Maloney) Reggie is surprised to see Jesse.

STUB: (Molly Maloney) Aiden doesn't like being ignored

DIR: (Molly Maloney) Aiden spawns a creeper near Reggie.

DIR: (Molly Maloney) The creeper explodes, incapacitating Reggie.

STUB: (Molly Maloney) Reggie - owowowow ker-BLAM

DIR: (Molly Maloney) Aiden turns his attention to Jesse.

STUB: (Molly Maloney) Aiden can't believe Jesse's still alive, how many times does have to kill you?

Choice:

Display: You've lost, Aiden.

Exchange:

STUB: (Molly Maloney) Badass choice. It's over, dude.

Choice:

Display: You thought it'd be easy?

Exchange:

STUB: (Molly Maloney) Snarky choice. The hero of Beacontown doesn't die easy. Duh.

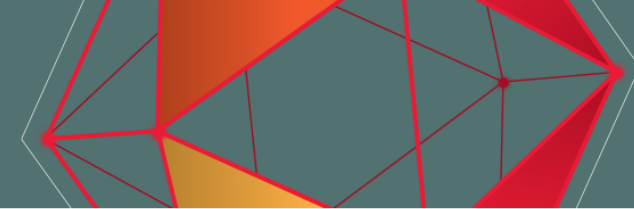
Choice:

Display: Give me the eversource.

Exchange:

STUB: (Molly Maloney) Cut the crap. Give me the chicken!!



**Exchange:**

STUB: (Molly Maloney) Reggie is surprised to see Jesse.

STUB: (Molly Maloney) Aiden doesn't like being ignored

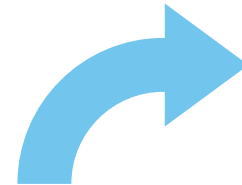
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DIR: (Molly Maloney) Aiden turns his attention to Jesse.

STUB: (Molly Maloney) Aiden can't believe Jesse's still alive, how many times does he have to kill you?

**Exchange:**

DIR: (Eric Stirpe) Aiden's eyes widen, looking over Reggie's shoulder. Reggie turns.

~~**REGGIE:** Oh my good gosh.~~

REGGIE: You're alive! You're ALIVE!

WRI: (Eric Stirpe) Reggie's whole purpose is serving the Founder. Thought it would be nice to get in a line about her too.

REGGIE: Then that must mean... is the Founder alive too? Is she with you?

~~**AIDEN:** Hey! I'm not done talking to you!~~

DIR: (Molly Maloney) Aiden spawns a creeper near Reggie.

REGGIE: What-?

DIR: (Molly Maloney) The creeper explodes, incapacitating Reggie.

REGGIE: [Being blown backwards] Augh!

JESSE: Reggie!

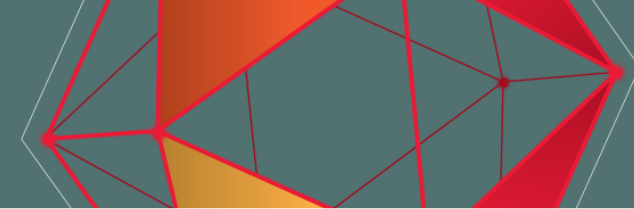
AIDEN: [threatening, to Jesse] Not one more step!

DIR: (Eric Stirpe) Jesse halts as Aiden stands, getting angry.

AIDEN: [dark] I killed you once. I can do it again.

AIDEN: You were a fool to come back here, Jesse.





Choice:

Display: You've lost, Aiden.

Exchange:

STUB: (Molly Maloney) Badass choice. It's over, dude.

Choice:

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Exchange:

STUB: (Molly Maloney) Snarky choice. The hero of Beacontown doesn't die easy. Duh.

Choice:

Display: Give me the eversource.

Exchange:

STUB: (Molly Maloney) Cut the crap. Give me the chicken!!



Choice:

Display: You've lost, Aiden.

Exchange:

JESSE: [Grim] Just you and me, Aiden.

JESSE: Just you and me now.

Choice:

Display: You thought it'd be easy?

Exchange:

JESSE: [snarky] Give me some credit, Aiden.

JESSE: I'm a lot harder to kill than THAT.

Choice:

Display: Give me the Eversource.

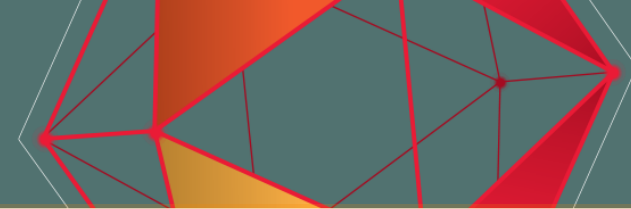
Exchange:

JESSE: We don't need to fight, Aiden. All I want is the chicken.

JESSE: [firmer] So hand it over.



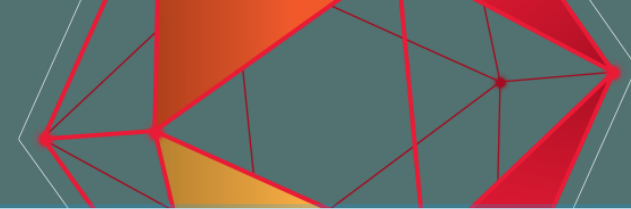




Symptoms of **WRITING DOMINATION**

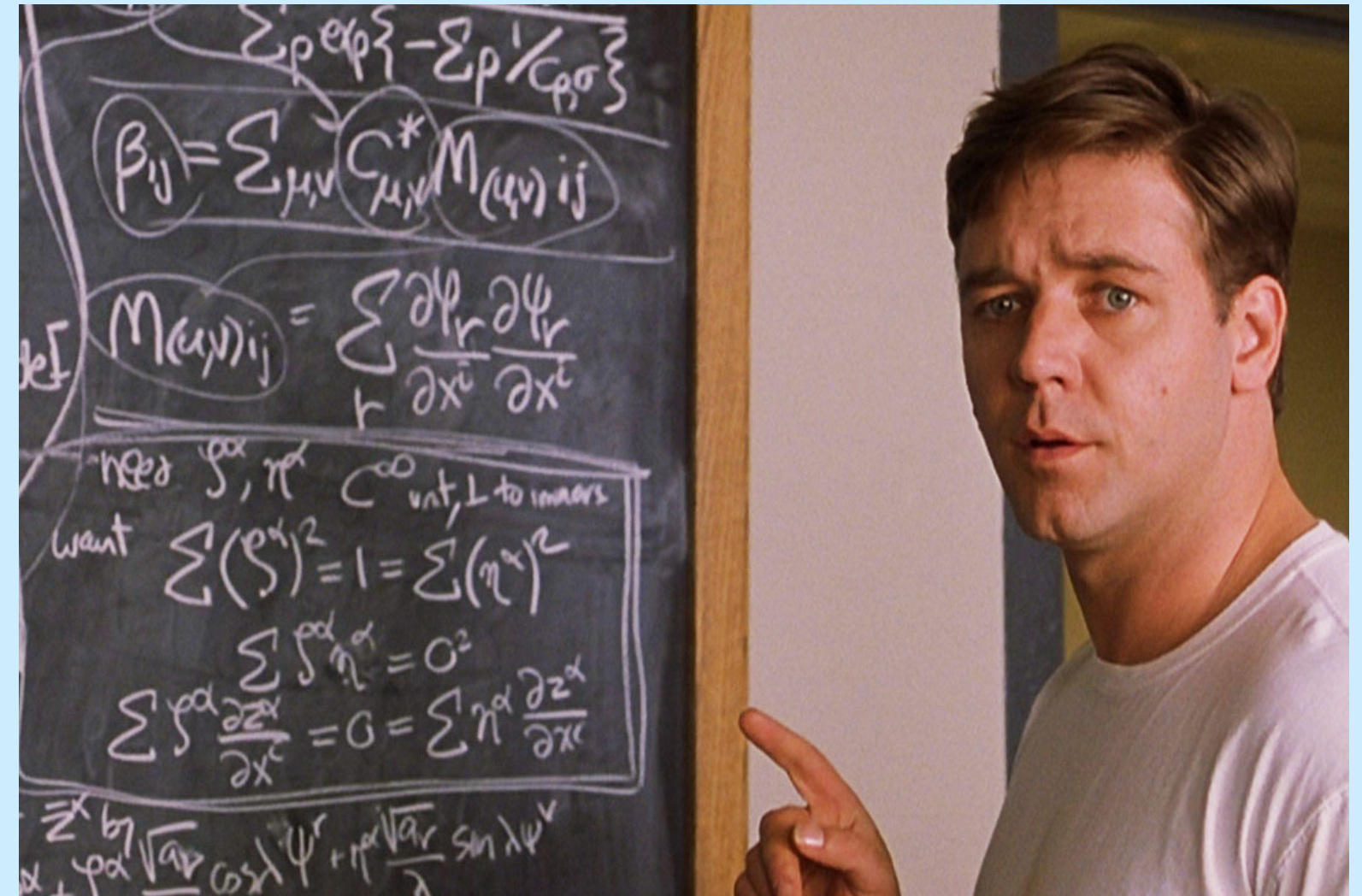
- Beautiful cutscenes that inform the player how they feel
- Limited range of choices
- Player character is least interesting part of the story





Symptoms of DESIGN DOMINATION

- Overly instructional dialogue
- Mechanics that don't tie into the narrative
- The player is the only interesting character. Ever.





To wrap it up ...

- Writing is responsible for the **characters** and Design is responsible for the **player**, but both share responsibility for the **story**.
- Writing doesn't have a monopoly on the story, Design doesn't have a monopoly on gameplay. Making a game is a team effort.
- The game is a reflection of the relationship between writing and design, so make it as strong as possible.



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Thank you!

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