

NARRATIVE MOMENTS ON A BUDGET

STRETCHING STORYTELLING
'DOLLARS' ACROSS THE
MOMENTS THAT MATTER

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STORY & STUDIO

Story



Casting, Writing, Cinematics, Narrative Design, and In-Game Sequences

Studio



The Coalition is home of the Gears of War franchise and a flagship first party studio for Xbox Games Studios.



First, the (near) impossible problem:


How do we tell great stories on a budget?

They can be big



I'm a game with a great story

Or small



I too, am
a game
with a
great
story

This is not a talk on how to write a great story.

This is a talk on how to **prioritize** your great story so that
it's told in the best way feasible.

Why is prioritization important?

The bar of a great story

GREAT END

GREAT
MIDDLE

GREAT
BEGINNING

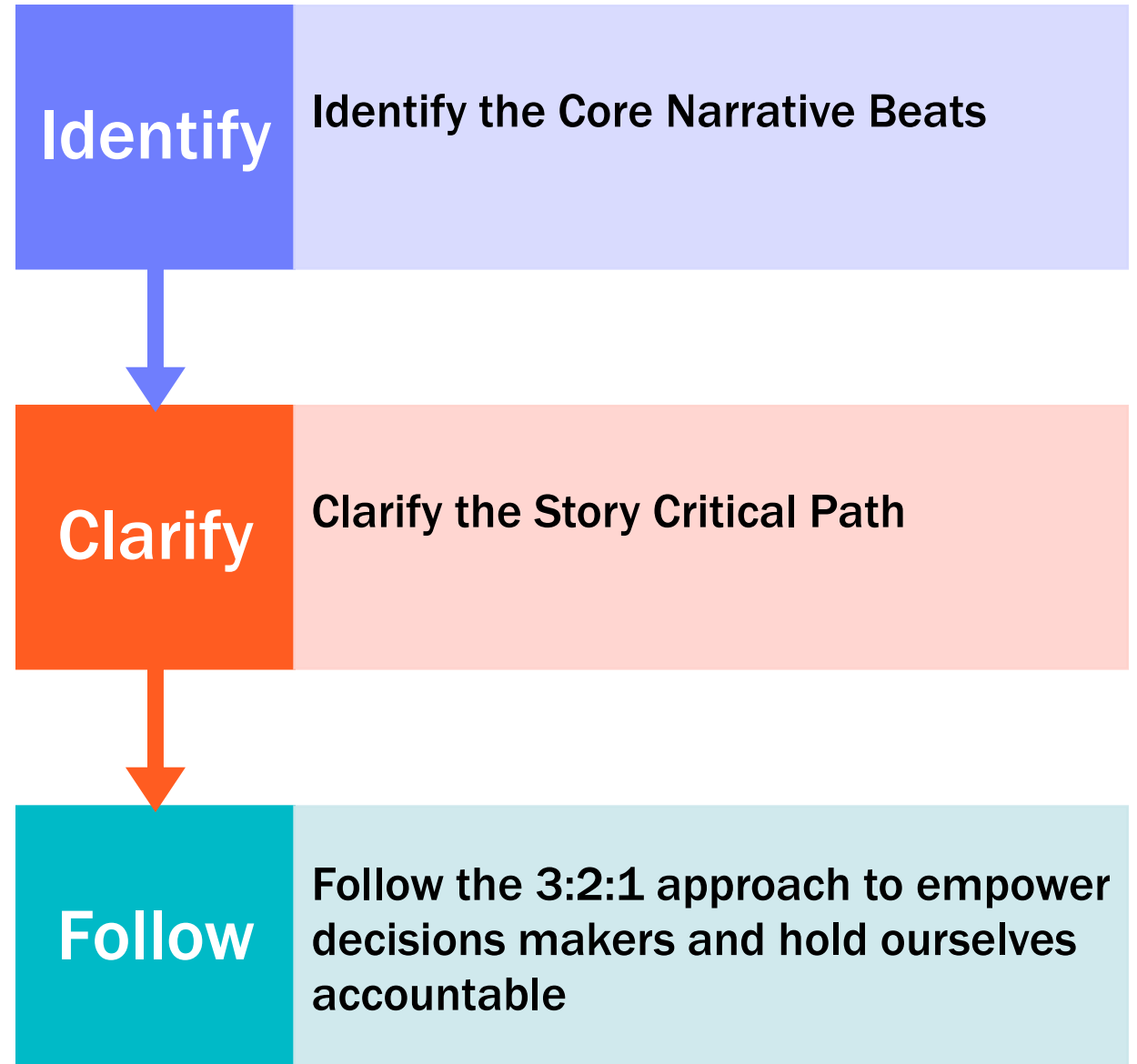
NO TIME FOR
GOOD END

LESS TIME
FOR A GREAT
MIDDLE

GREAT
BEGINNING

How do we tell great stories on a budget?

WE DEVELOP A FRAMEWORK



BECAUSE ALL GREAT STORIES START THE SAME



1. CLEAR CORE NARRATIVE BEATS



2. CLEAR STORY CRITICAL PATH

CORE NARRATIVE BEATS

The foundational tenets of the overall story through which the Story Critical Path is weaved.

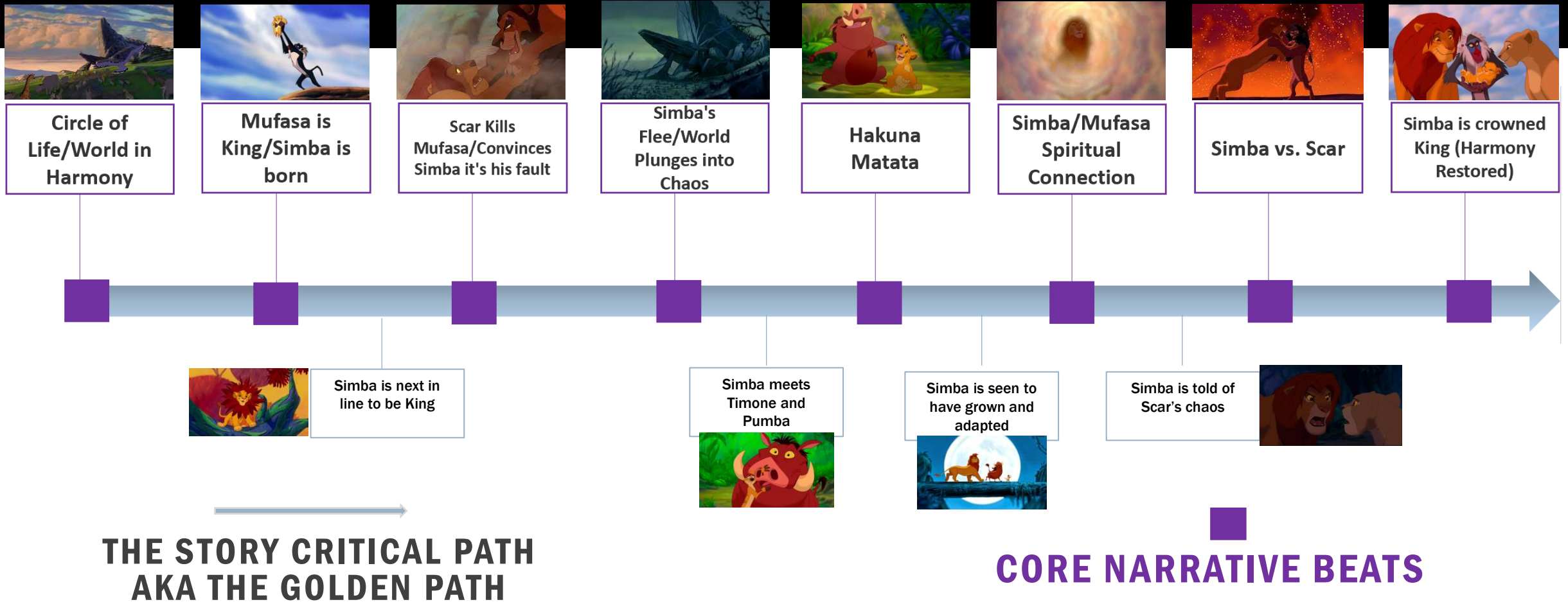


A close-up photograph of a blue pushpin and a yellow pushpin on a light blue surface with colorful lines. The blue pushpin is in the foreground, and the yellow pushpin is slightly behind it. There are several colorful lines (red, orange, yellow, green) on the surface, some of which are pinned down by the pushpins. The background is blurred.

THE STORY CRITICAL PATH

Moments of the game (represented by Gameplay, Missions, and/or Narrative Devices) that are **pivotal** to the narrative of the game and/or are character defining junctures.

EX.



HOW THIS HELPS



Generates high level discussion



Aligns teams



Keeps us focused on what's important



Holds us accountable for those decisions

So, we have our story critical path, and core narrative beats.
What's next?

THE

3:2:1

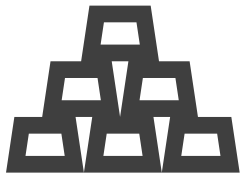
APPROACH

(Ideally) **3** tiers of investment

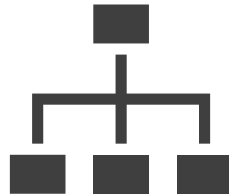
(at least) **2** methods of choosing what budget/investment a mission/narrative device should be

(ideally) **1** goal/north star that keeps decisions in context for tough calls

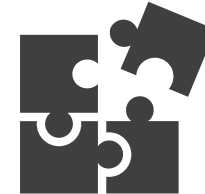
TIERS OF INVESTMENT



Clear categories (ie: high, medium, low or gold, silver, bronze)



Includes investment/ resource expectations



Are contextualized by how they fit into the Story Critical Path and Core Narrative Beats

GOLD TIER

Definition:

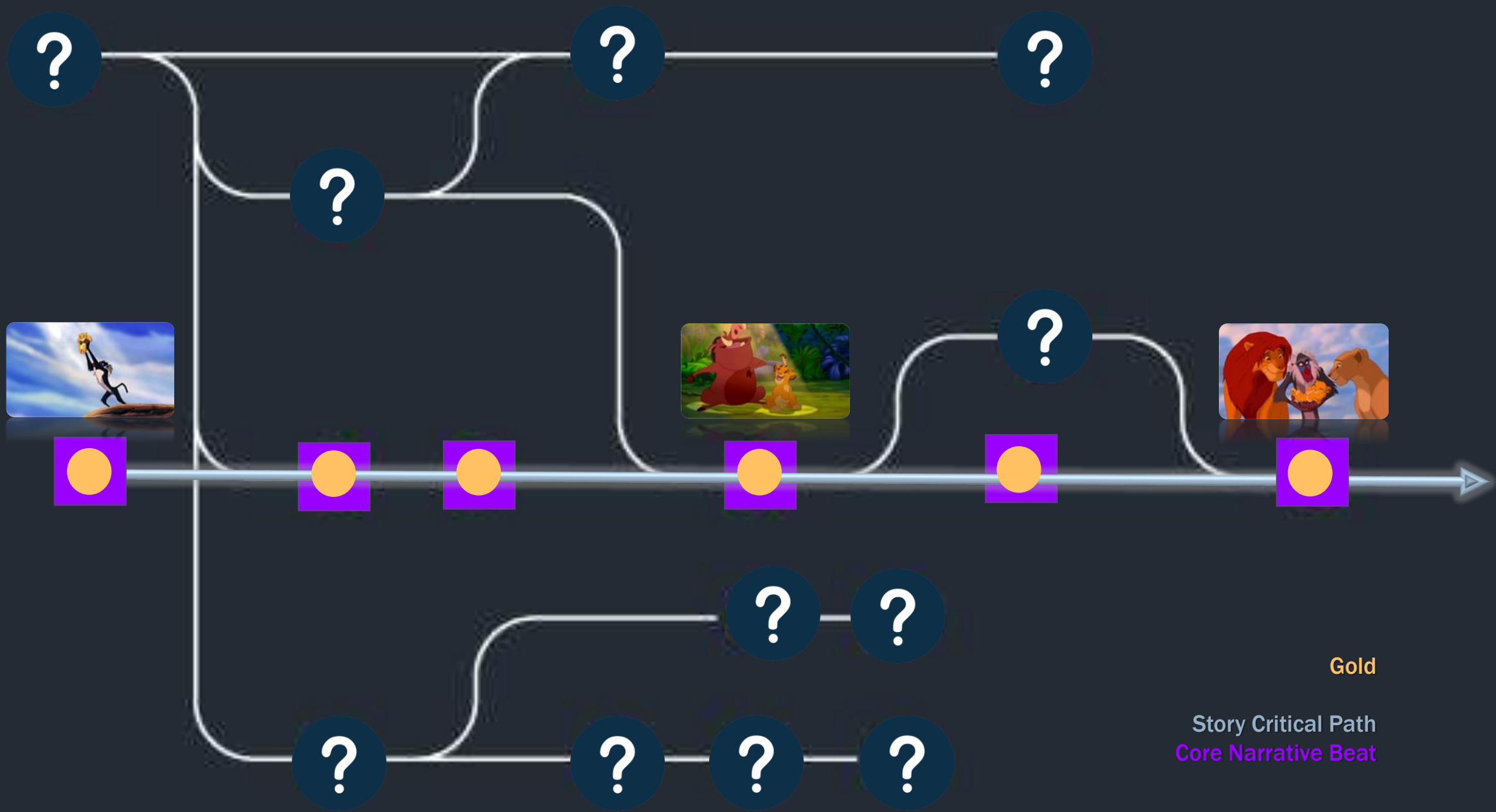
- High visibility
- High investment
- Your most unique assets

This means: Mission is on the Story Critical Path of the game and a part of the Core Narrative Beats of the game

Cut Impact: Cutting would remove a link in the narrative of the game

GOLD TIER DEVICES + CRITERIA

- High End Cinematics (highest character quality, highest polish of animation and highest-fidelity props and textures)
- Highly polished/authored narrative sequences + Reuse of already existing narrative systems/sequences + dynamic/systemic narrative system
- Highly polished authored camera/animation sequences



SILVER TIER

Definition:

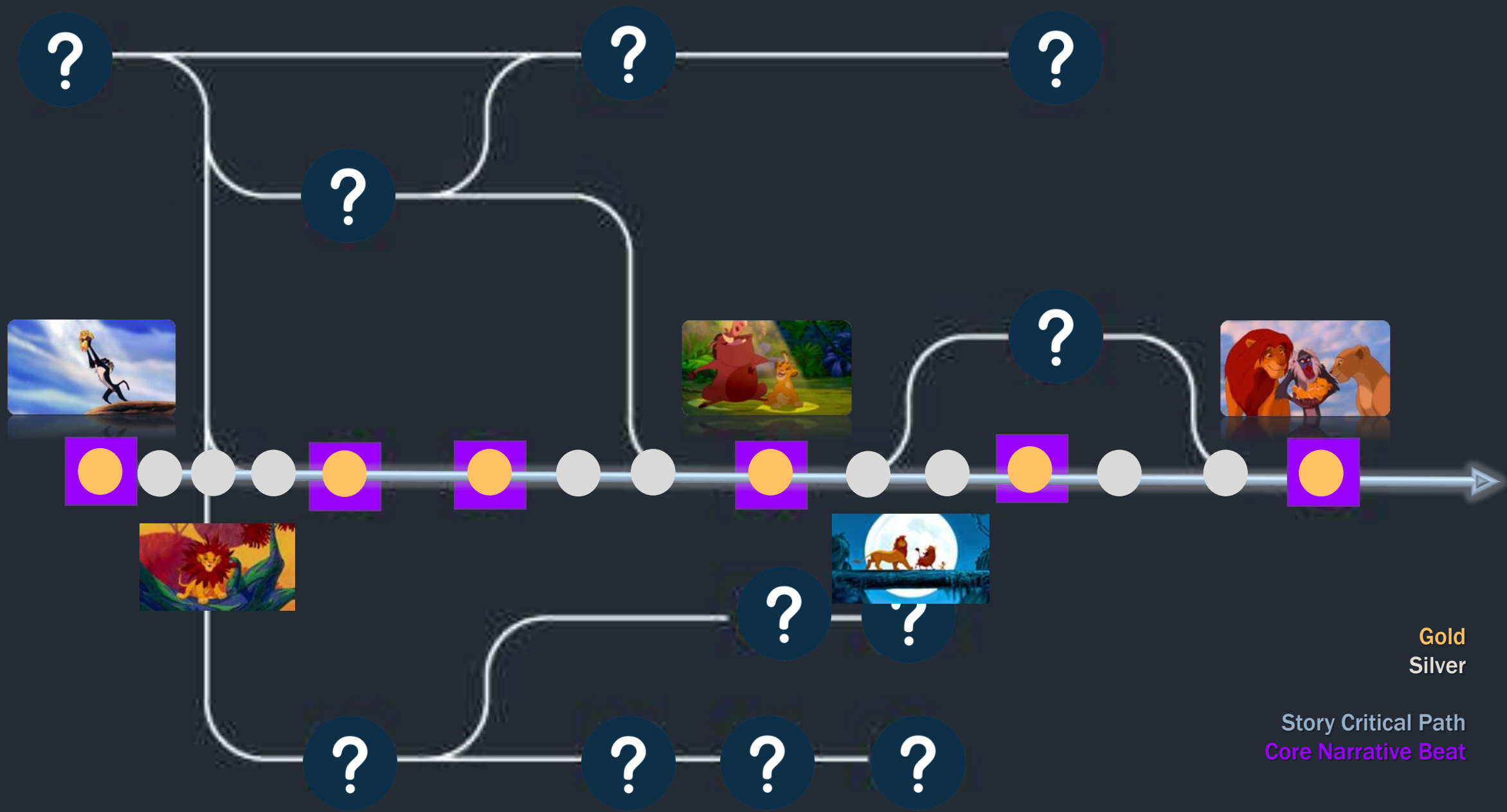
- Medium-high visibility experiences
- Medium-high cost assets
- Variations of previously-made/generic assets curated to the experience.

This means: Campaign/Mission is on the Story Critical Path but off the Core Narrative Beats.

Cut Impact: Cutting would not remove a narrative link from the game but would tangibly lower the narrative experience

SILVER TIER DEVICES + CRITERIA

- Variations of previously-made Narrative systems/sequences + reuse of already existing narrative systems/sequences + dynamic/systemic narrative system
- New + polished cameras and possibly new animation sequences
- New Cinematics discouraged. Should be rare. If needed, should be small in scope



BRONZE TIER

Definition:

- Low visibility
- Low cost
- reuse of already existing assets/systems
- no additional polish required.

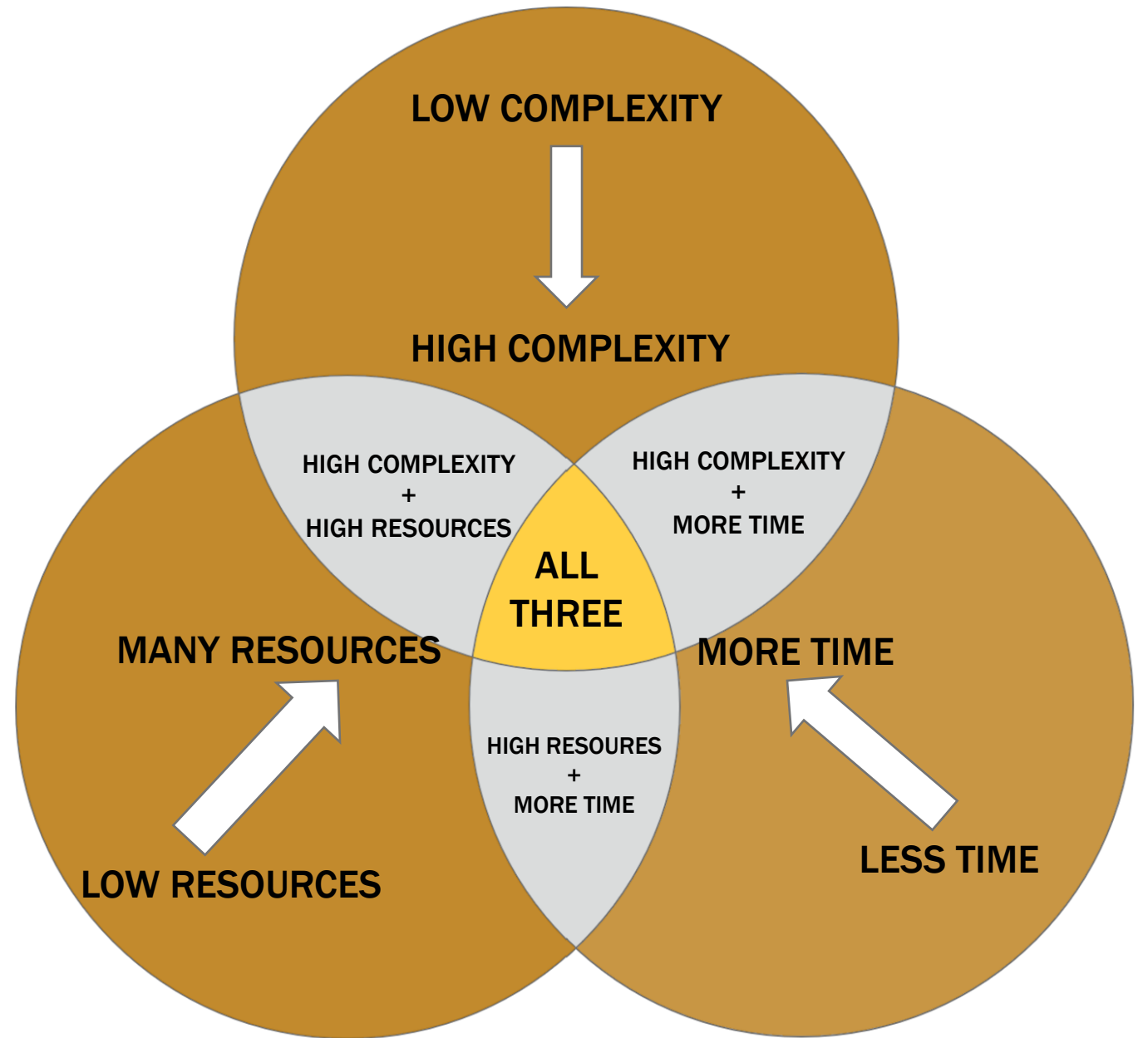
This means: Campaign/Mission off both the Core Narrative Beats and off the Story Critical Path of the game

Cut Impact: Cutting would have minimal effects on the overall core narrative beats of the game or remove a narrative link from the game nor would tangibly lower the narrative experience

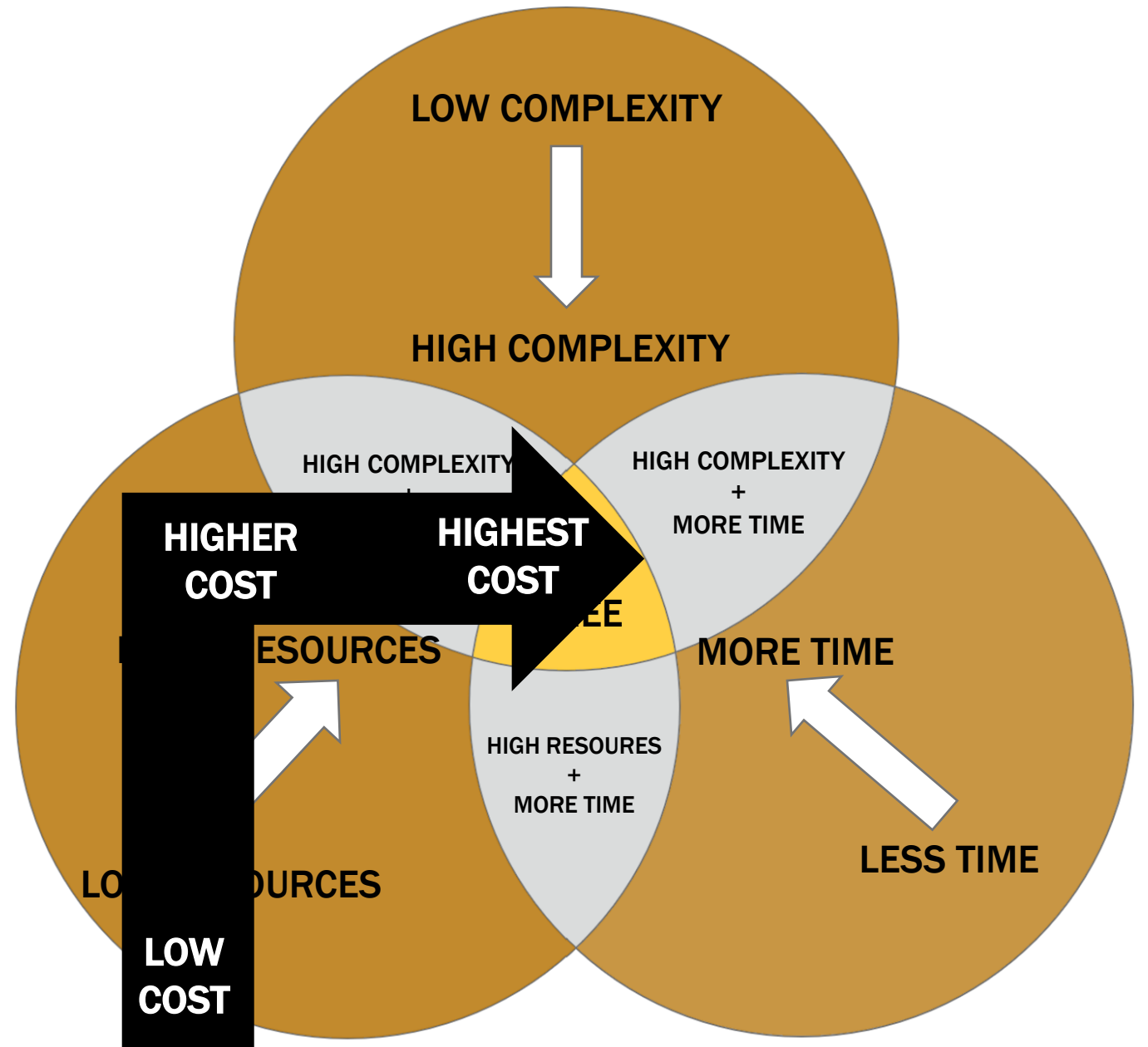
BRONZE TIER DEVICES + CRITERIA

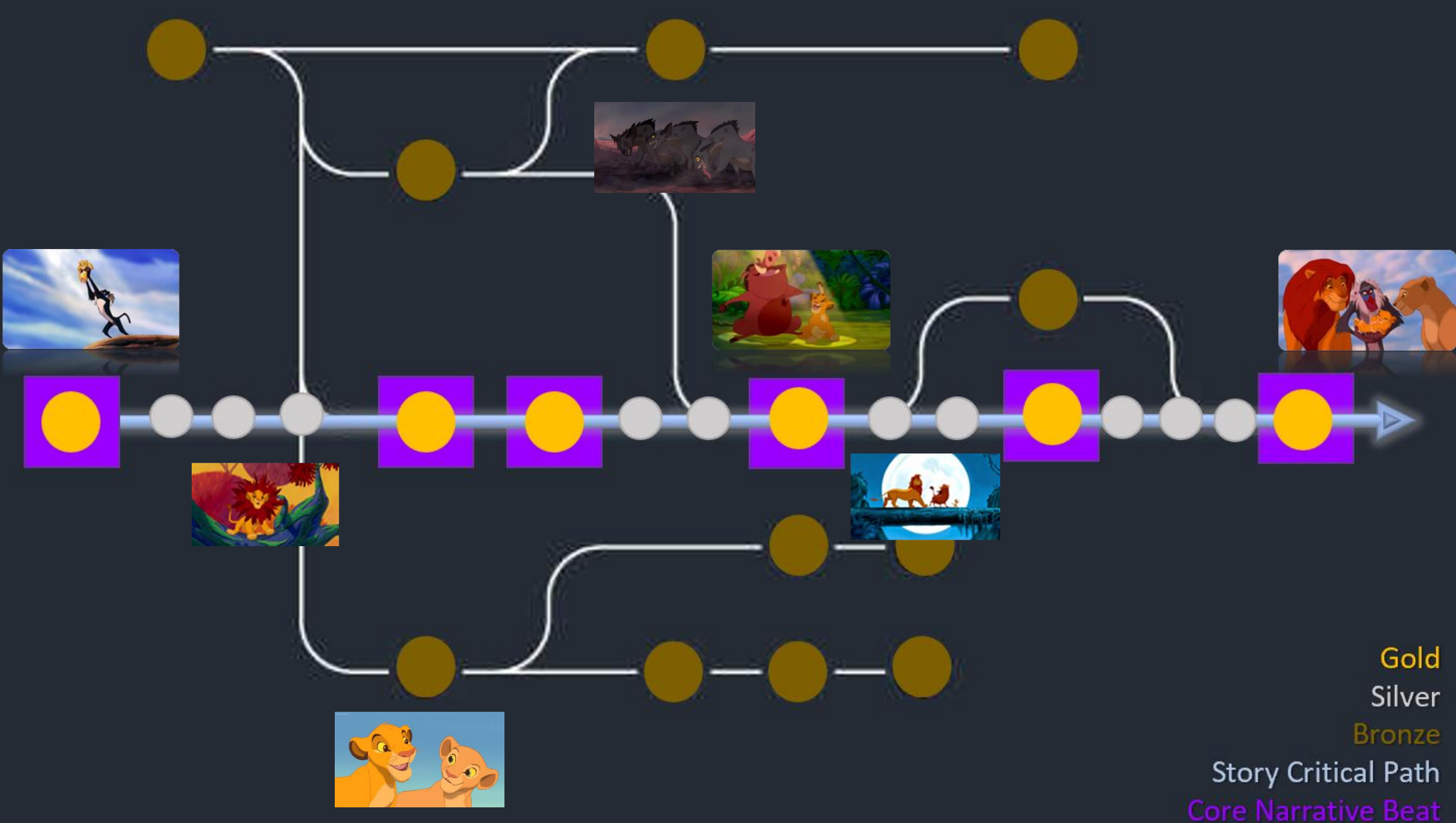
- No Cinematics
- Reuse of already existing narrative systems/sequences + dynamic/systemic narrative system
- Minimally altered camera/animation sequences

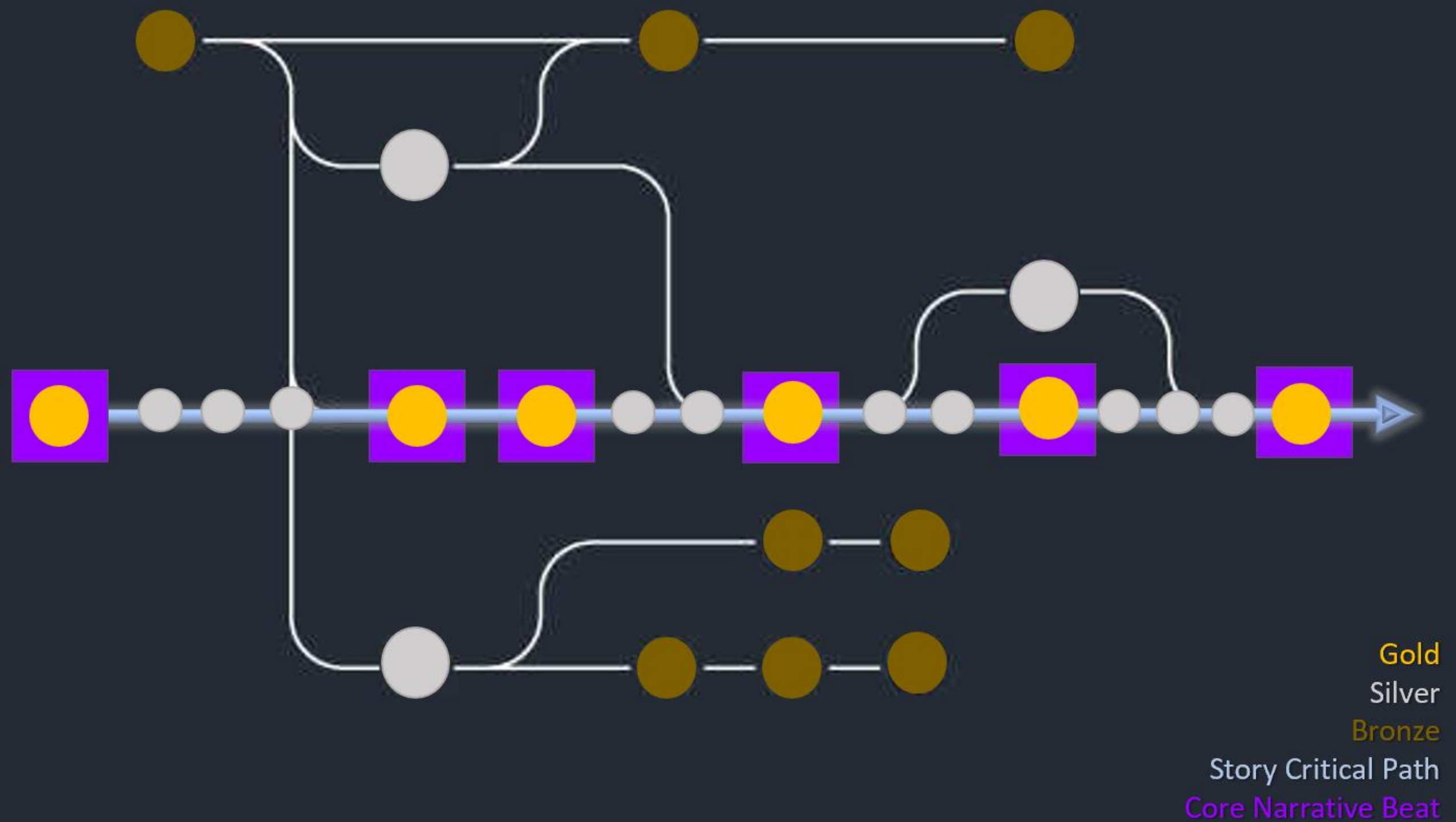
HOW TO CALCULATE COST



HOW TO CALCULATE COST







**SO, WE'VE
GOT OUR
THREE TIERS.
NOW WHAT?**

3 tiers of investment

2 methods of choosing what level of investment a mission/narrative device should be

1 goal/north star that keeps decisions in context for tough calls

METHODS FOR DECISION MAKING



Simplifies complex decisions by bringing it back to your defined tier



Provides a common language across teams



Ensures consistency and accountability



Empowers devs to work together by providing common references and shared resources

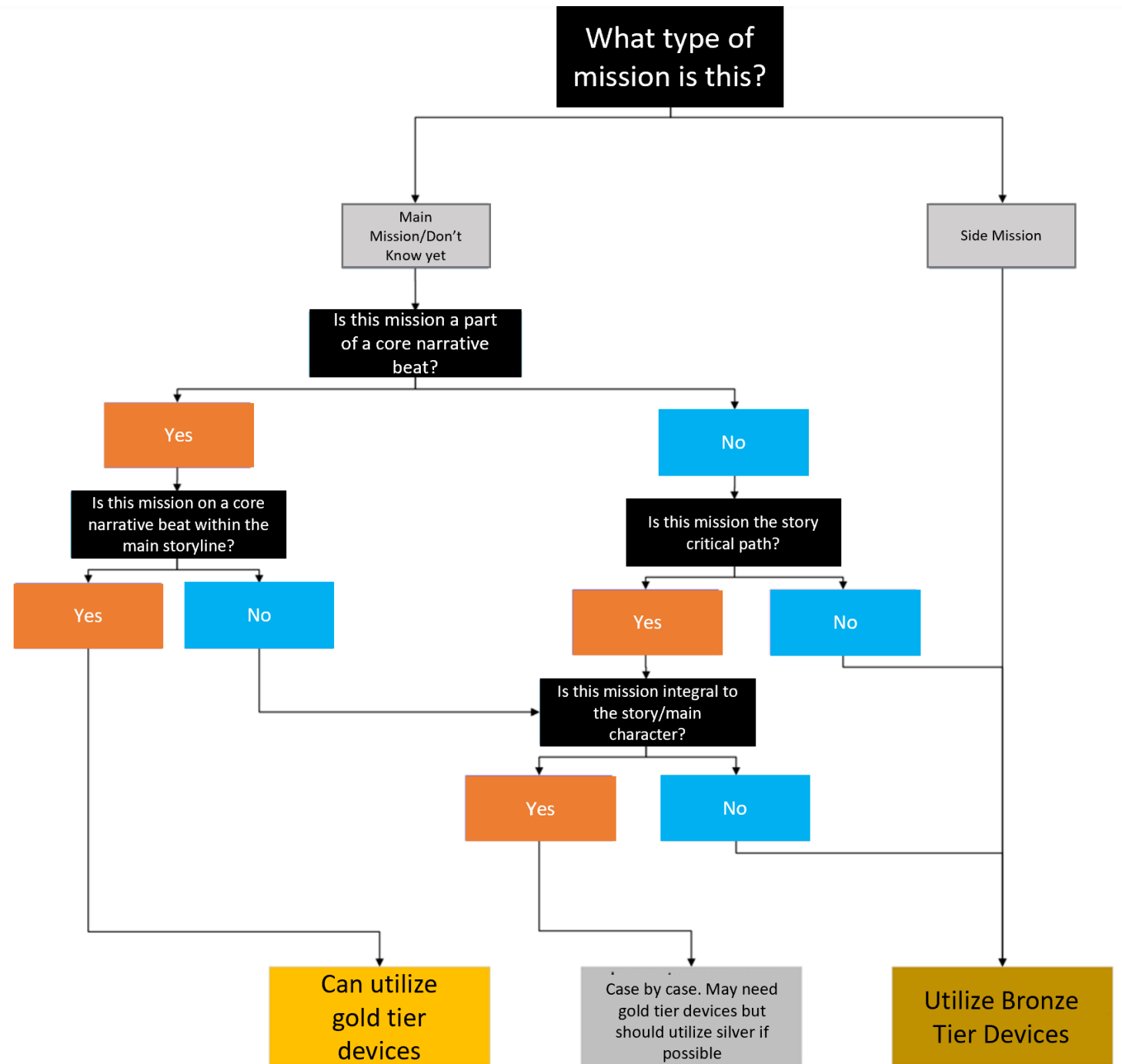
METHODS FOR DECISION MAKING

Can use for non-mission narrative devices such as:

- Cinematics
- Sequences
- Narrative systems
- Mission Givers
- And more!

	Cinematics	Narrative Device 2	Narrative Device 3
ON the Core Narrative Beats + ON the Story Critical Path	Gold	Silver or Gold (case by case)	Gold
OFF the Core Narrative Beats + ON the Story Critical Path	Silver or none (case by case)	Silver	Silver or Gold (case by case)
OFF the Core Narrative Beats + OFF Story Critical Path	None (Bronze Cins should be Moments)	Bronze	Bronze

METHODS FOR DECISION MAKING



3 tiers of budget/investment

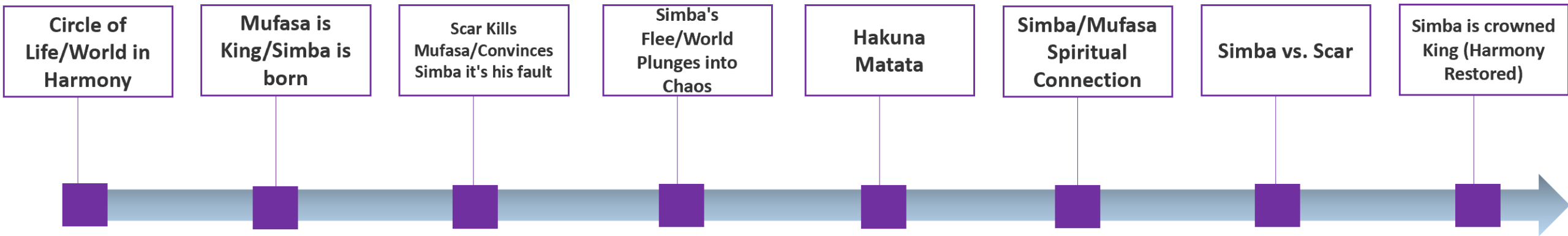
2 methods of choosing what budget/investment a mission/narrative device should be

1 goal/north star that keeps decisions in context for tough calls

THE ONE GOAL: THE NORTH STAR

1. What pillar(s) is/are unshakable?
2. If all else fails, what must be true?
3. What is the narrative's purpose?

LET'S GO BACK TO THE BEGINNING



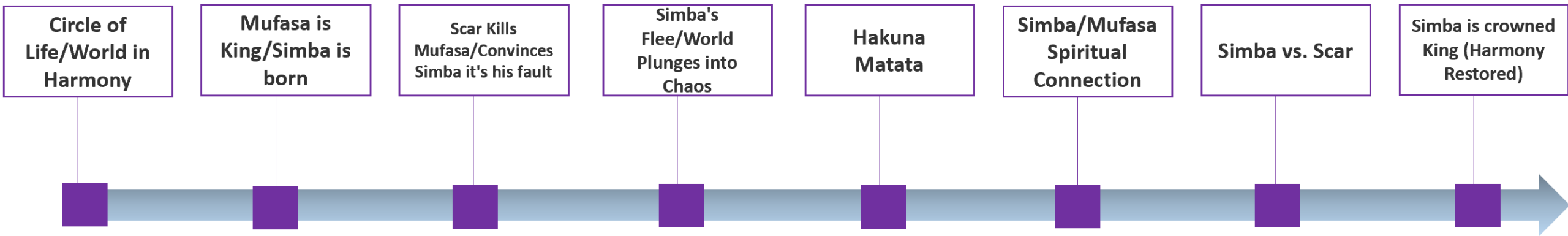
**THE AUDIENCE NEEDED TO SEE THE
CHANGE FROM UTOPIA TO DYSTOPIA**

**SIMBA NEEDS TO MEET OTHERS TO
HELP HIM ADOPT A NEW MINDSET**

SCAR MUST BE DEFEATED

**SIMBA MUST GROW INTO KING AT THE
END**

THE NORTH STAR



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How do we tell great stories on a budget?

What is the **1** goal/north star of this story must be true?

What are the **2** methods of choosing what investment of a mission/narrative device should be?

What are the **3** tiers of investment?

How do we tell great stories on a budget?

How do we stay true to the purpose of our story
and how can we budget to truly service it?



THANK YOU

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QUESTIONS?