MARCH 5-9
2007
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Narrative Landscapes:

Shaping Player Experience Through World Geometry

Brian Upton

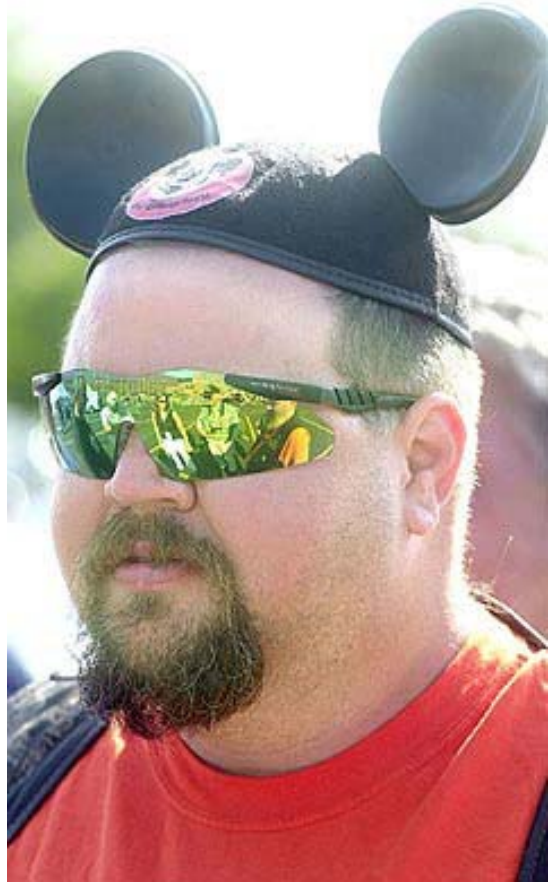
Senior Designer

SCEA – Santa Monica

APR 27 2006

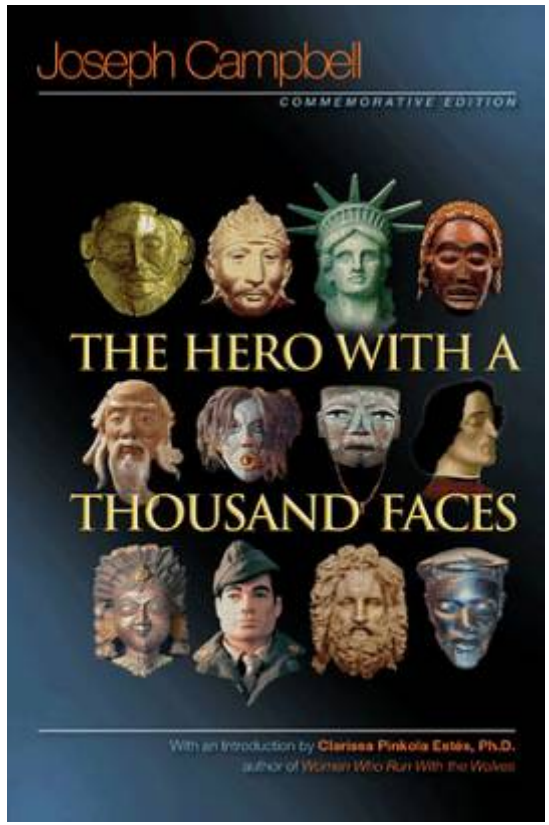
Put Away
224

The Hero With a Thousand Faces

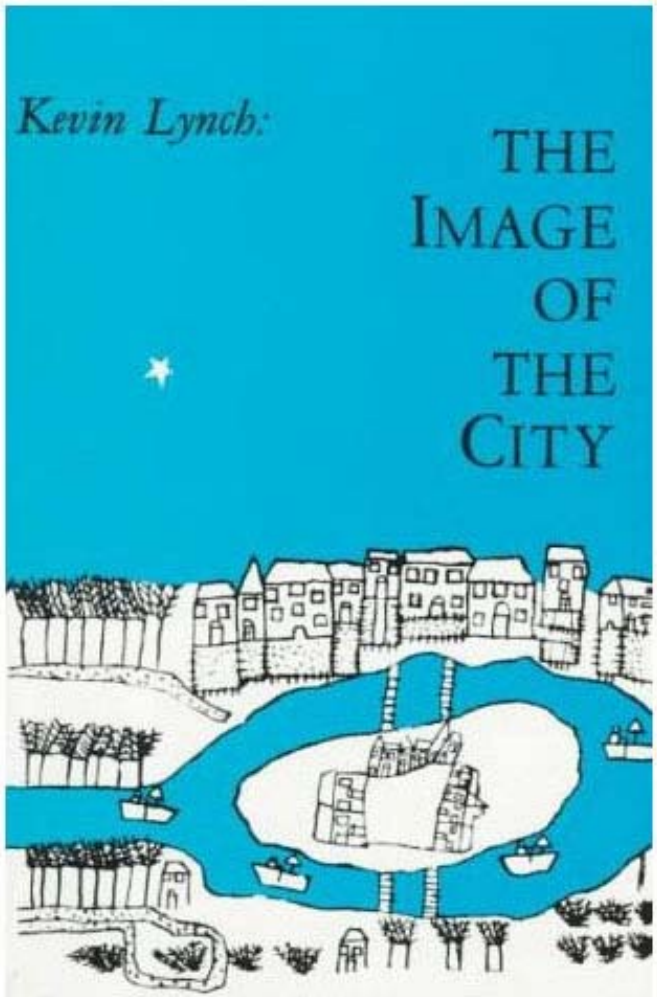


The Hero With a Thousand Faces

- The Call to Adventure
- Crossing the Threshold
- Heroic Adventures
- Return Home



The Image of the City



- Kevin Lynch
- 1960
- Urban planning

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The Image of the City

- Landmarks
- Paths
- Edges
- Nodes
- Districts

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Landmarks (“weenies”)

- Attraction
- Triangulation
- Uniqueness
- Large vs. small scale

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Paths

- Explicit
  - Trails
  - Corridors
- Implicit
  - Gaps
  - Obstacles
- Momentum
  - Aimed exits

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Edges

- Game state transitions
- Dramatic & gameplay beats
- Reveals
  - Vistas
  - Overlooks
  - Ambushes

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Nodes

- Destinations
- Organized space
- “Conceptual walls”
- Dramatic weight

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Districts

- Localized atmosphere
- Theming, not geometry

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Pitfalls

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The Same Damn Corridor

- Lack of landmarks
- Over-use of paths
- Over-use of instanced geometry
- Symmetrical or repetitive layout

The Trackless Forest

- Lack of paths
- Too many features of equal weight
- No clear bounds

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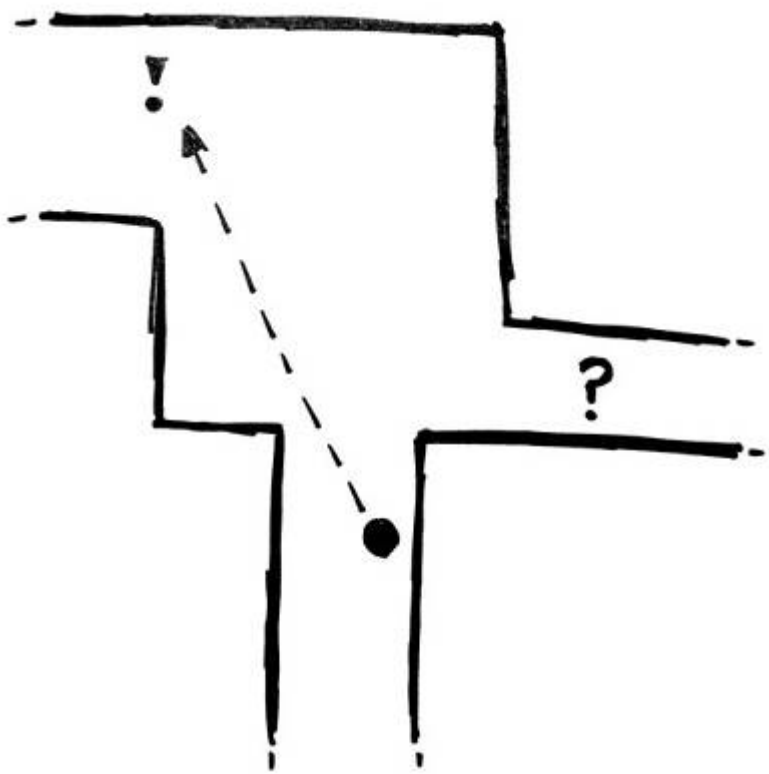
The Secret Passage

- Misleading weenies
- Improper path weights
- Edges outside of view cone



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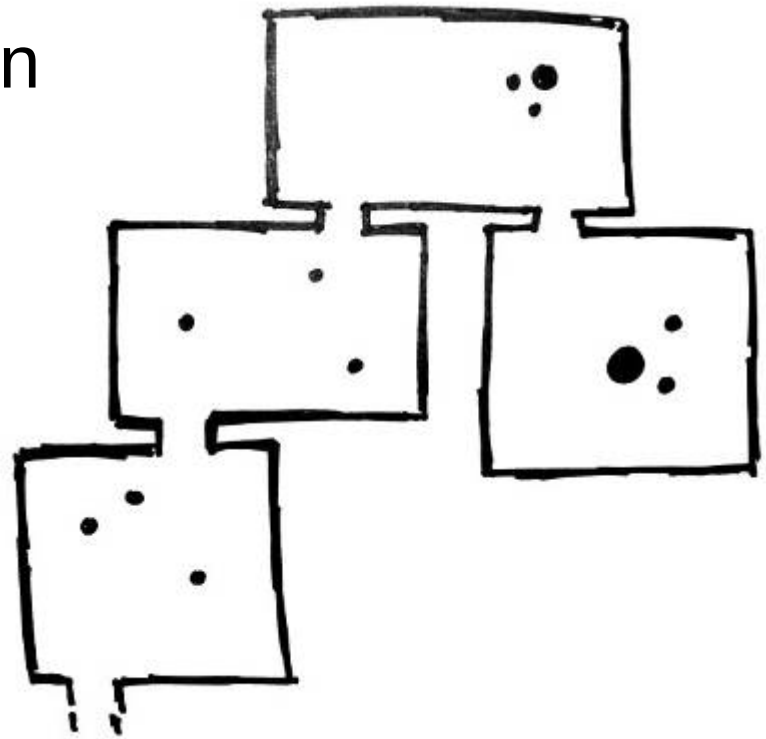
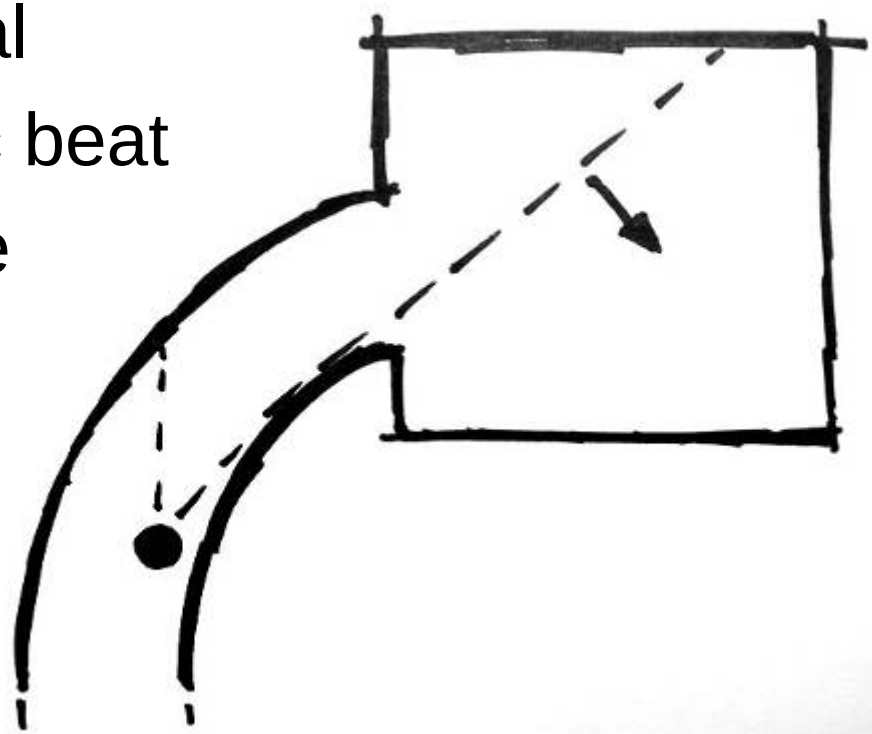
The Shotgun Shack

- Node-heavy levels
- Lack of anticipation
- Flat cadence



The Weak Corner

- Weak edges
- Piecemeal reveal
- Lack of dramatic beat
- Ambiguous state



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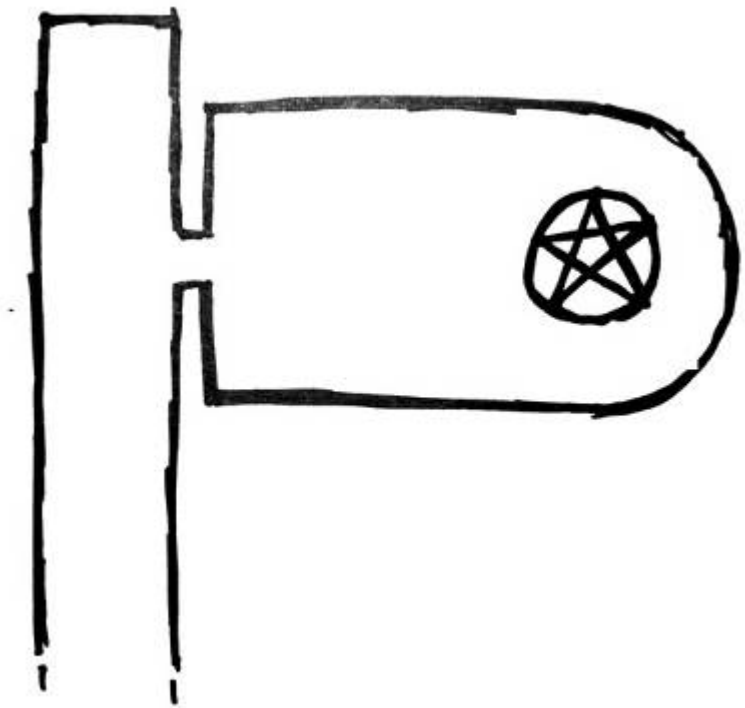
The Wrong Doorway

- Scale mismatch between edge/path and node
- Failure to foreshadow



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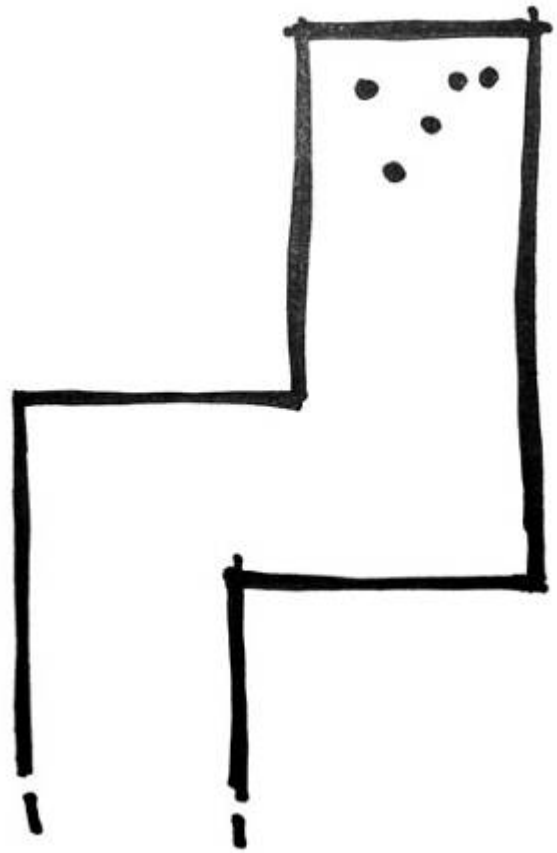
The Road to Nowhere

- Missing node
- Lack of feeling of accomplishment
- Poor level flow



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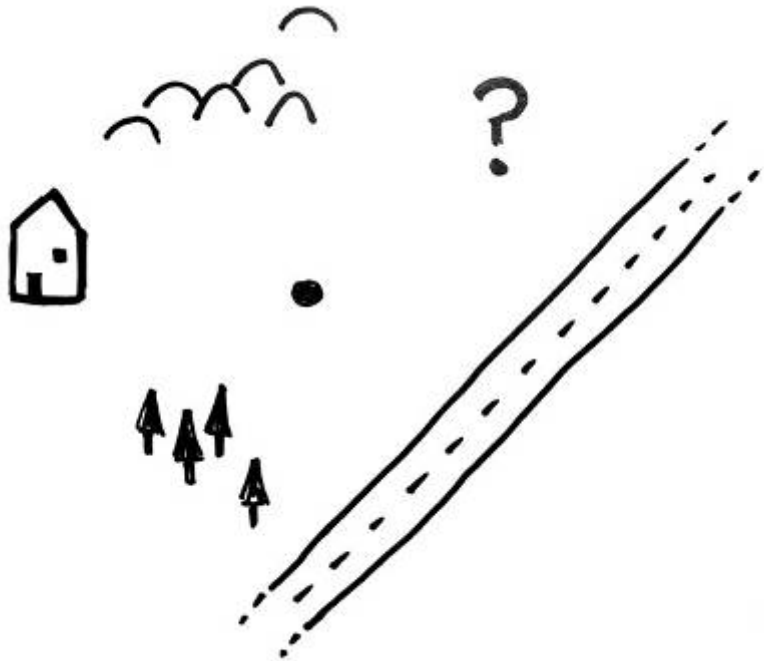
The Missing Wall

- Poorly defined node
- Ambiguous state
- Unintended path



Cadence

PlayStation.2
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FRESH GAMES
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E
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Path-Dominant Cadence

- *Amped*
- Long linear levels
- Few nodes
- Few edges
- Emphasis on continuous motion

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Edge-Dominant Cadence

- *Resident Evil*
- Short sight lines
- Many corridors & doorways
- Continual dramatic reveals

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Node-Dominant Cadence

- *Ico*
- Open spaces
- Many elements to interact with
- No time pressure

Emotion

Creating Tension

- Safety vs. danger
- Establishing expectations
- Consistent threat cues

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Rainbow 6: Claustrophobia

- Short sight lines
- Many corners & doorways
- Safety on paths
- Danger at edges

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Ghost Recon: Agoraphobia

- Long sight lines
- Few buildings
- Safety at edges
- Danger on paths

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Creating Wonder

- Long paths
- Scale transitions
- Imposing landmark
- Upward slopes

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Creating Triumph

- Terminal nodes
- Foreshadowing
- Level-long approach

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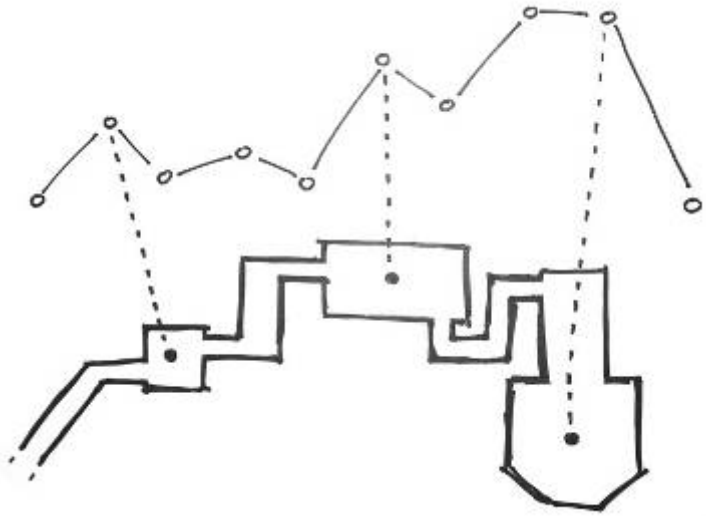
Mapping Plot to Geometry

- Emotional narrative
- Analogous to a musical score
- Embedded arcs



Disneyland Again!

Everybody Has a Laughing Place … .

Discussion

bbupton@gmail.com