

Evocative Storytelling: Write Less, Reveal More

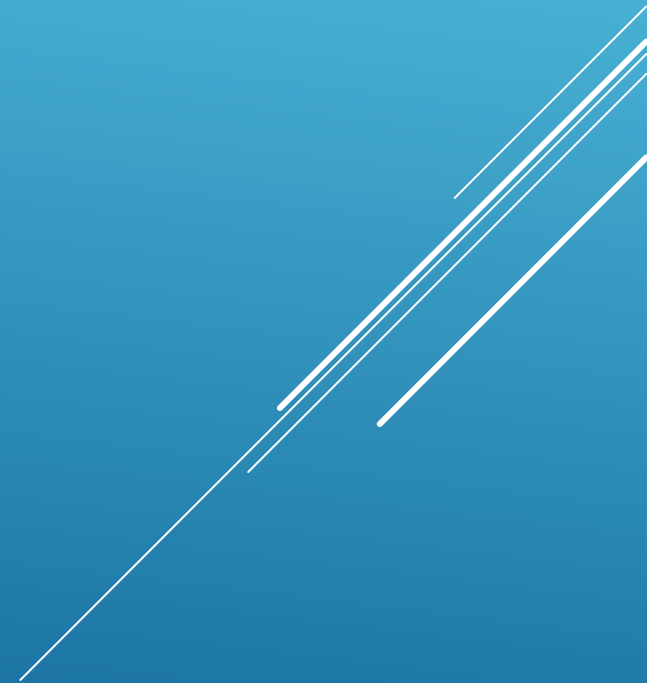
Daniel Greenberg
President, Media Rez

Evocative Storytelling

Write Less, Reveal More

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THE GAME WORLD DOES NOT EXIST ON THE SCREEN



THE GAME WORLD DOES NOT EXIST ON THE SCREEN

**The Game world exists
between the player's ears**

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Story elements

Often do too little to justify their existence

Often waste a player's time

Often are ignored by players

They have value when they evoke a response in players

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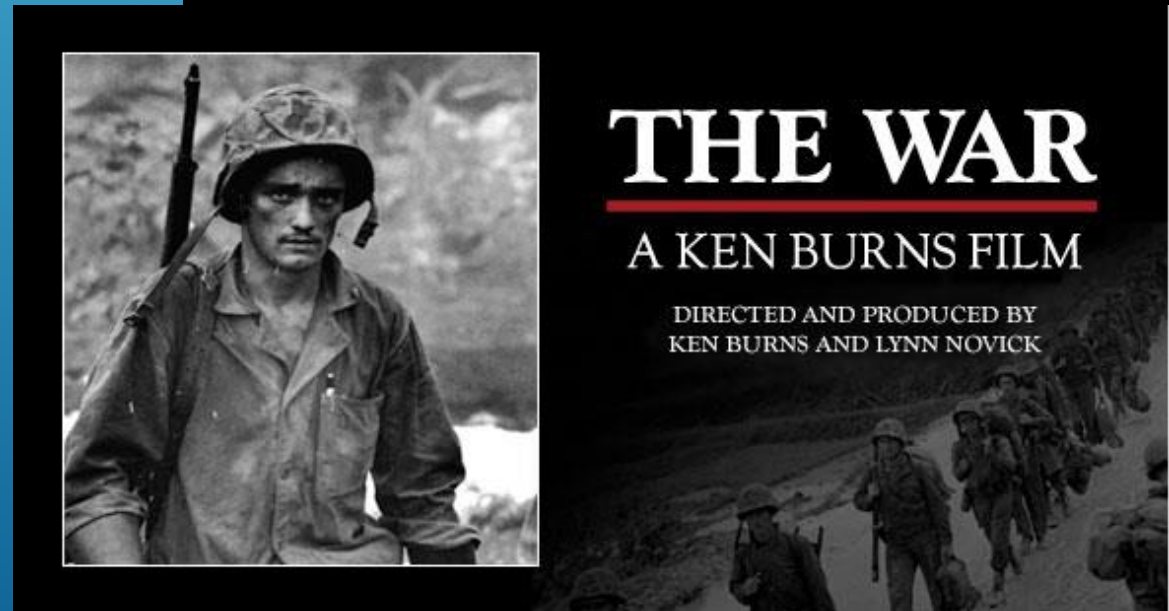
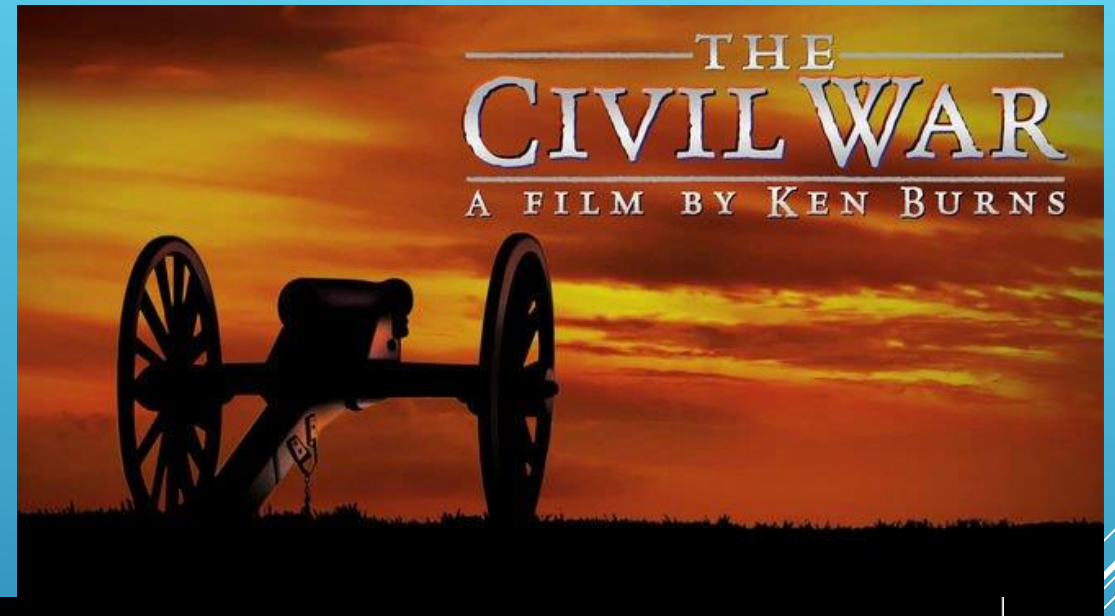
“1+1=3”

-Ken Burns

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“1+1=3”

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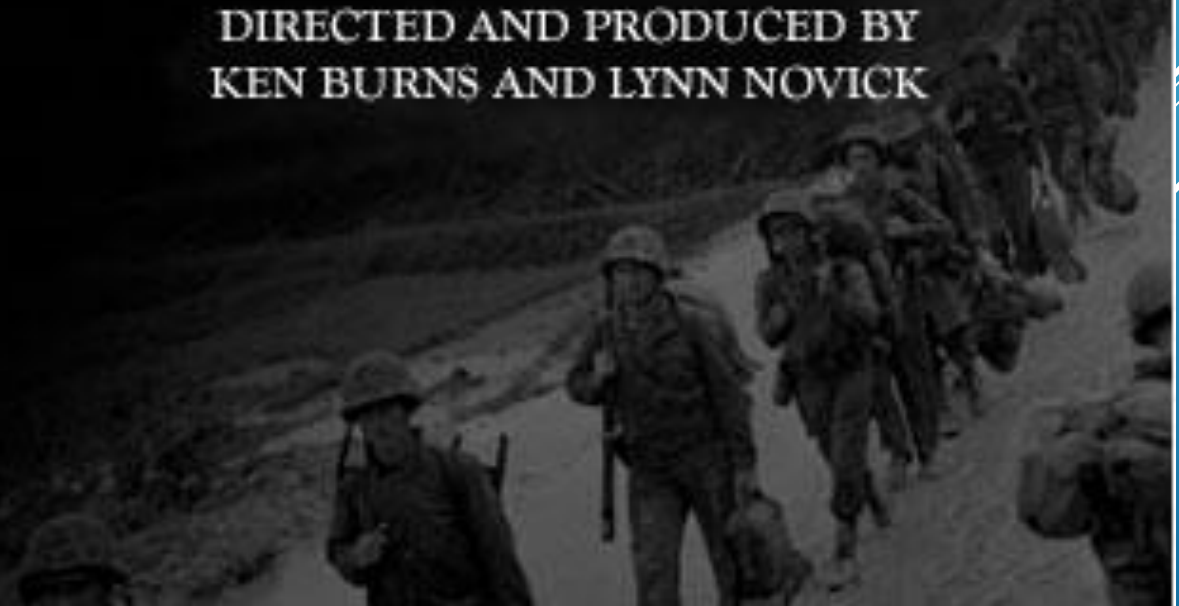




THE WAR

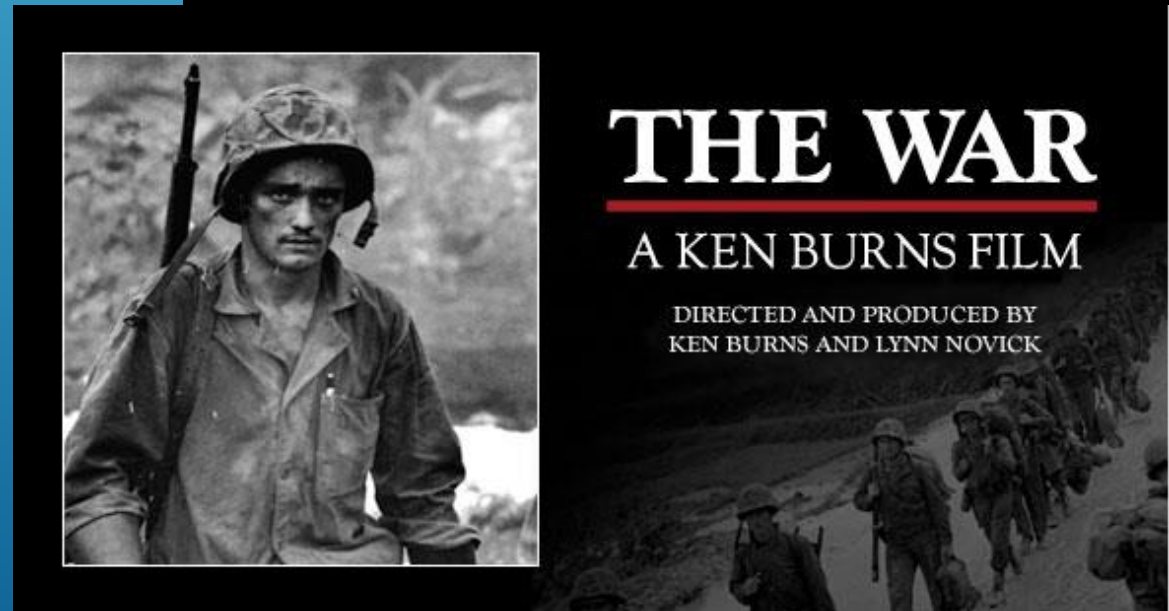
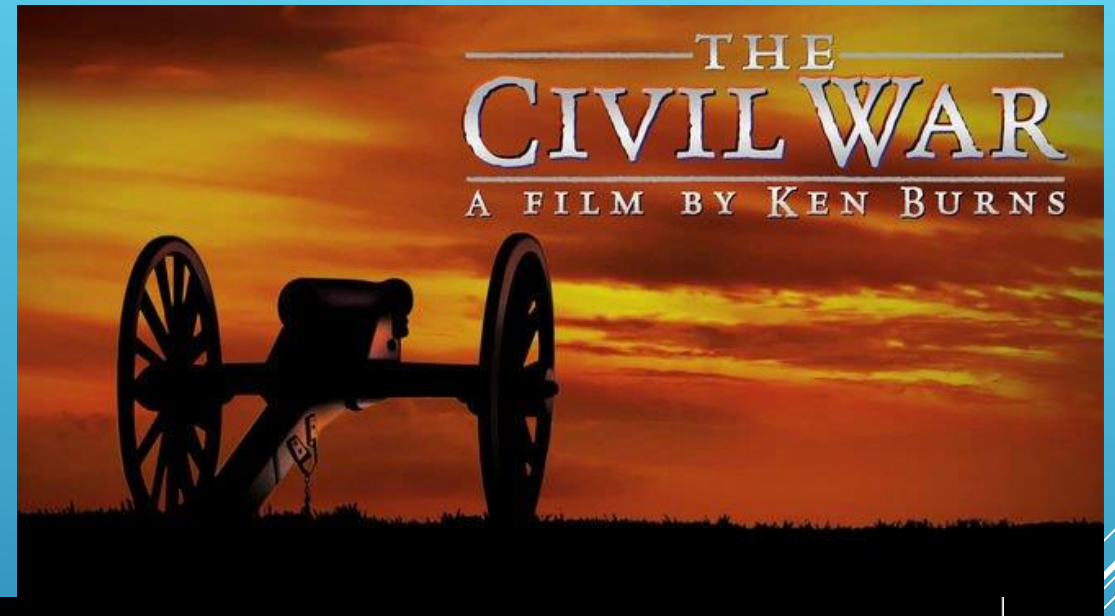
A KEN BURNS FILM

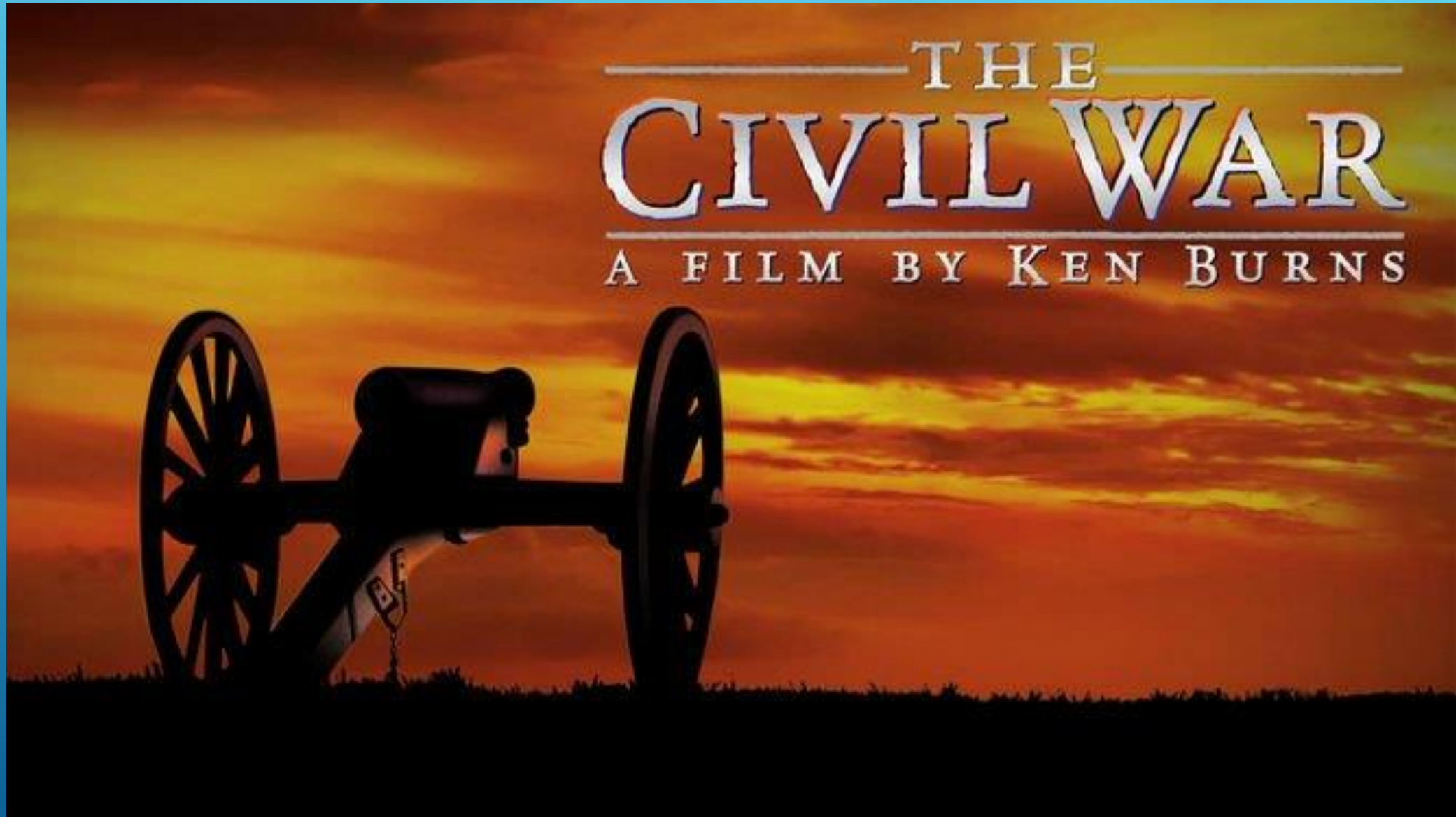
DIRECTED AND PRODUCED BY
KEN BURNS AND LYNN NOVICK



“1+1=3”

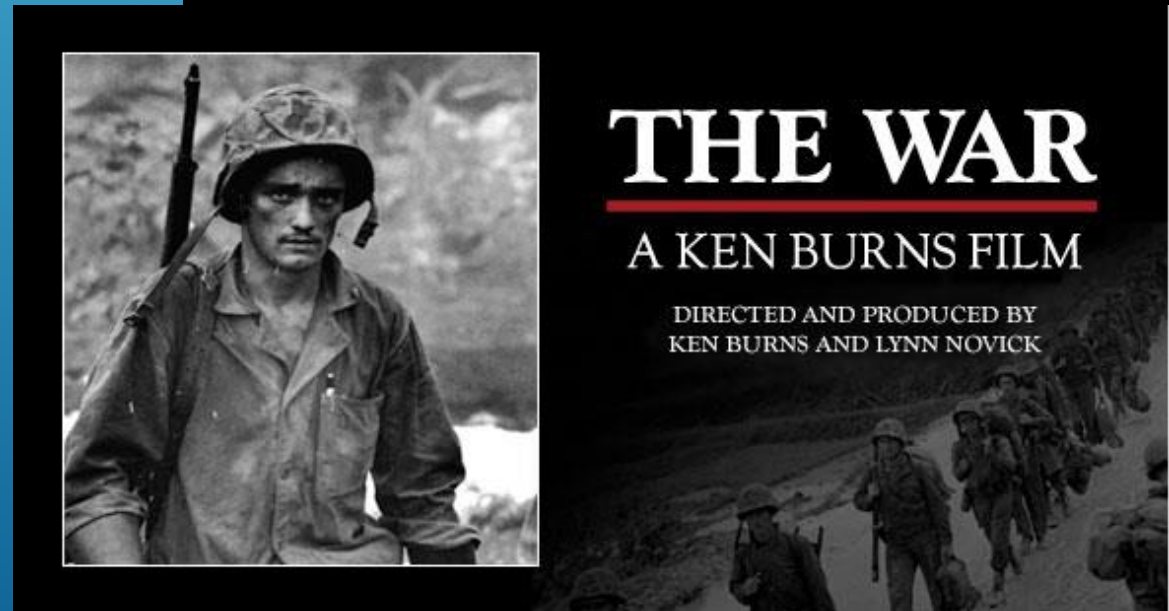
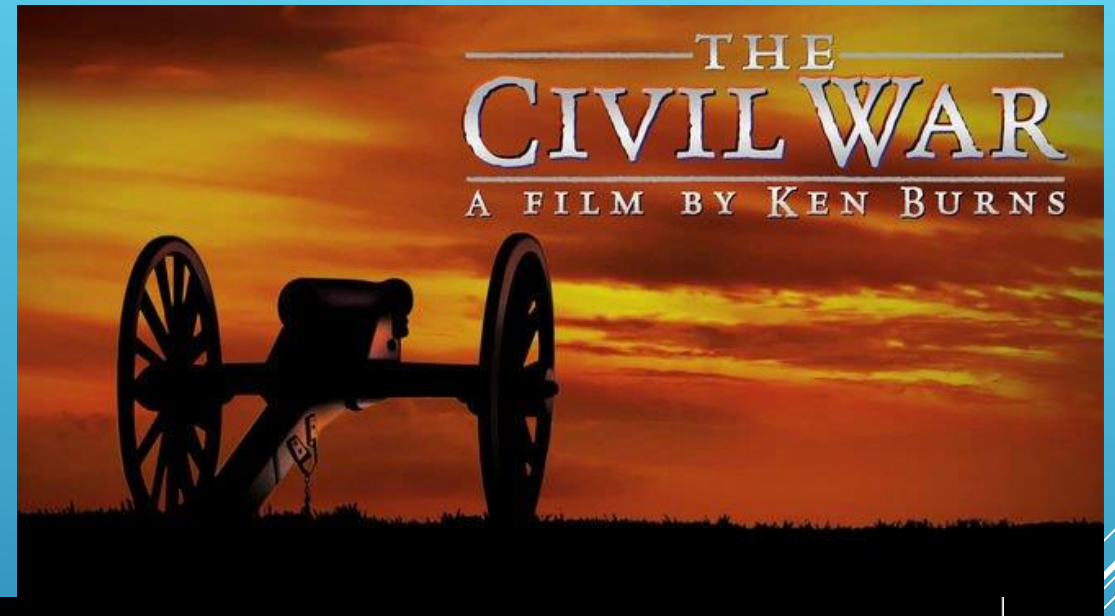
-Ken Burns





“1+1=3”

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Video Game techniques for evoking:

We are great at symbolic evocation:



Percent of the Game Script Doctor jobs I've Gotten because:

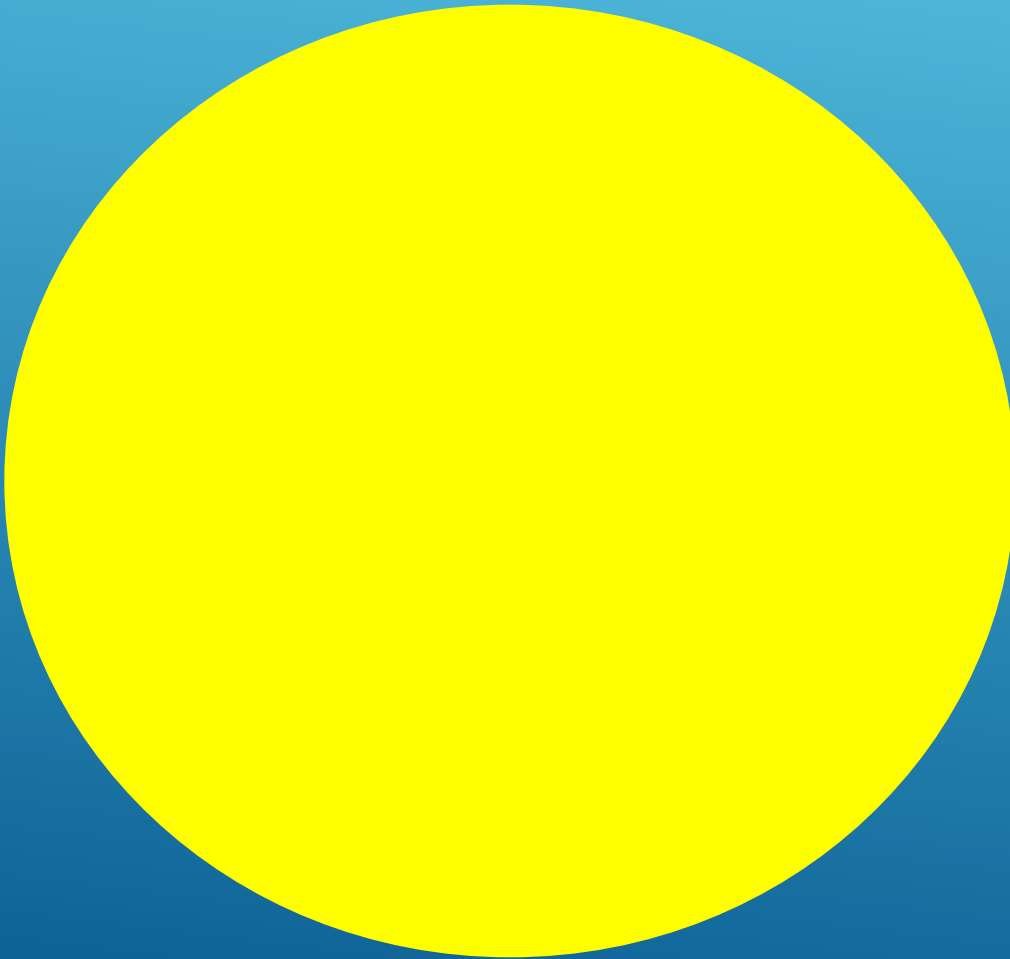


the team wrote
way too **little**



the team wrote
way too **much**

Percent of the Game Script Doctor jobs I've Gotten because:



the team wrote
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the team wrote
way too **much**

Common errors in game writing:



Common errors in game writing:

Thinking of it as writing.

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When this is your only tool....






GOLDEN HAMMER

Stand back! I have just the tool to solve this.

Common errors of game writing

When your only tool is a hammer...

Using word processors tends to make game writers focus on in-game words instead of in-game action, nuance, and the player's entire experience.

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Trust your players.

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Trust your players.

*Unless you are developing an MMO.

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e·voke

i'vōk/

verb

1. bring to mind strong images, memories, or feelings

synonyms: conjure up, summon (up), invoke, elicit, induce, kindle, stimulate, stir up, awaken, arouse, call forth

2. invoke (a spirit or deity).

Evoke

Resonate with player imagination

Leave enough empty space

Suggest

Trust players to fill in details

Deliver a small payload that unpacks into a larger idea

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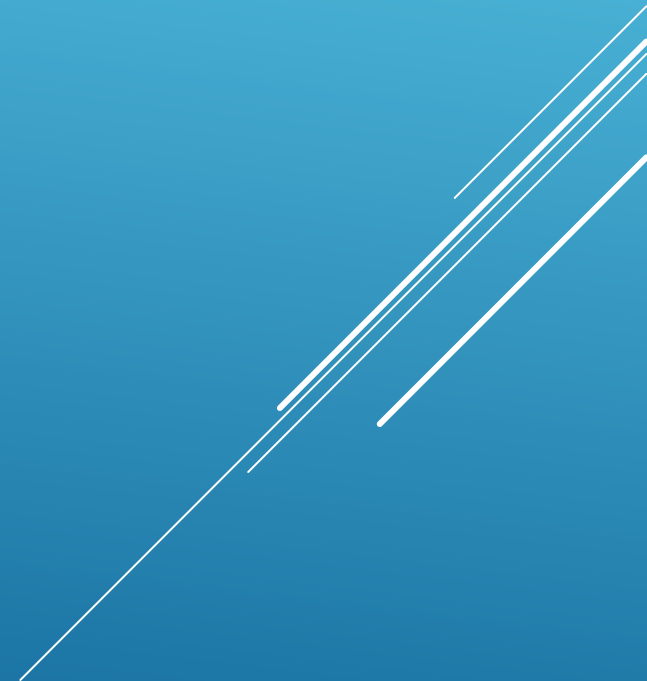
Pattern Seeking Animals

Humans are pattern-seeking story-telling animals, and we are quite adept at telling stories about patterns, whether they exist or not.

-Michael Shermer

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Moon



Man in the Moon



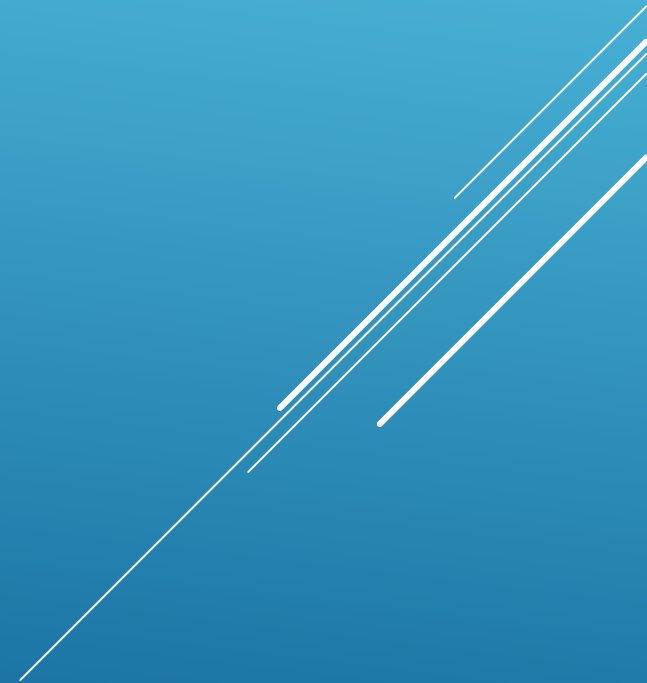
Moon



Dragon in the Moon



Bride of Frankenstein in the moon



Bride of Frankenstein in the moon



Evoke

Humans respond to evocative stimuli so readily that we can easily be led to see patterns that are not there.

This is one of the strongest tools in a storyteller's bag of tricks, and one of the most underused – except by intuition and feeling.

Learn to do it on purpose.

...and hopefully not in a contrived or obvious manner.

Historical techniques for evoking:

Let Player Figure It Out:

Raise suspicion

Misdirection

Invite questions

Detective genre

Oedipus

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EVOCATIVE Story elements

Advantages:

Richer Story

More deeply felt moments

More resonant characters

CHEAPER! MORE EFFICIENT!

Evocative use of assets scheduled to be built =
More bang per asset dollar

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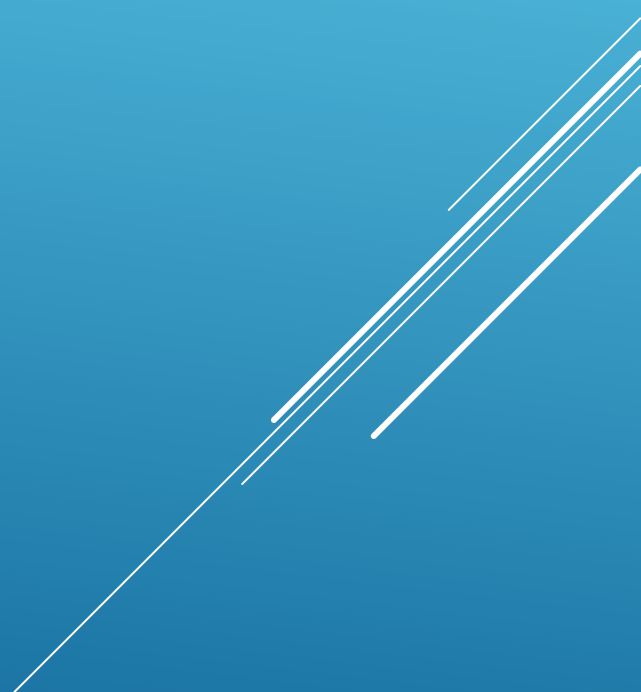
Historical techniques for evoking:

In Medias Res:

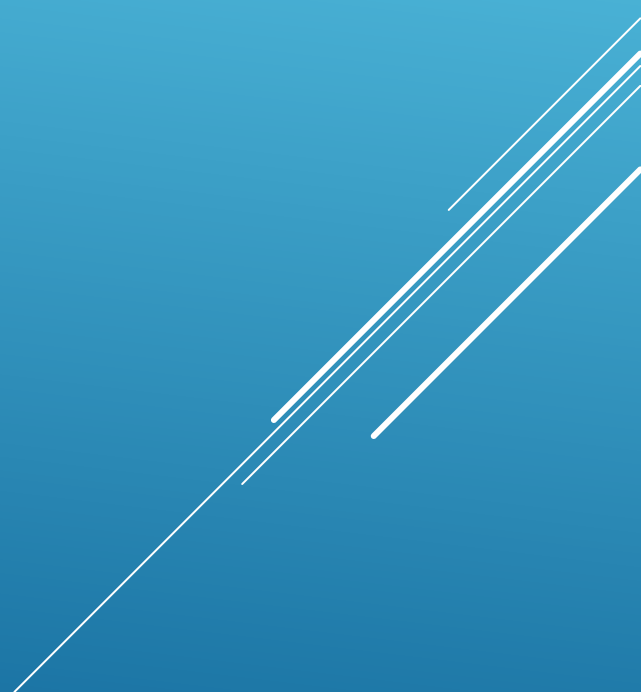
Start in the middle of the action

Prevents temptation of tedious exposition

Trusts the player to fill in earlier details



Convey IDEA: Big enemy vs. tiny hero



Convey IDEA: Big enemy vs. tiny hero

Option 1: Walls of text



Convey IDEA: Big enemy vs. tiny hero

Option 2: Evoke



Historical techniques for evoking:

Build Framework

Leave space for player imagination

Understatement

Pare back details

Teach player through direct experience

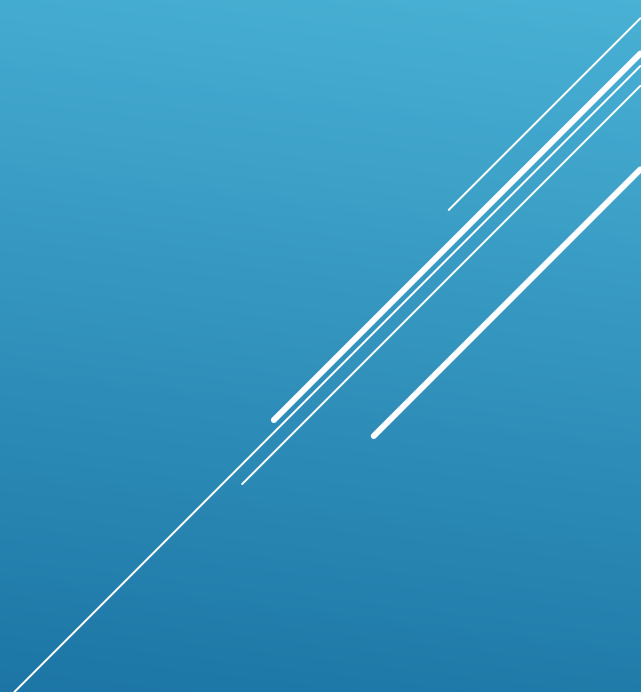
Artists, musicians, architects excel at evoking--
sometimes by intuition.

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Historical techniques for evoking:

Let Player Figure It Out:

Write so the player gets what you meant without you having to tell him



Historical techniques for evoking: Learning through direct experience: Zero



Evoke

Universal response:

Music, color, shadow, light, expansive/confined space

Cultural response:

Flags, religious icons, (also color), etc.

Contextual response:

Defined by you

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Tools for evoking:

This is your output:

CHARACTER	CUE	TRIGGER	LOCATION	AREA	EFFECT	FILENAME
King Arthur	Hey, Lancelot. I was looking for you.	He sees Lancelot.	Throne room, Camelot	1.2	None	m01-a02-art01
Lancelot	What's up?	King Arthur is greeting him, and Lancelot isn't sure what Arthur wants.	Throne room, Camelot	1.2	None	m01-a02-lan01
King Arthur	Well, I found these panties in your saddlebags, and I was thinking. You know, they look kind of familiar.	He sees the guilty look on Lancelot's face.	Throne room, Camelot	1.2	None	m01-a02-art02
Guenevere	Oh, hell no.	Arthur is getting up in Lancelot's grill.	Throne room, Camelot	1.2	None	m01-a02-gue01
King Arthur	Yeah. No, I'm sure there's a great explanation. Go ahead, I'm listening.	Guenevere's all but admitted her infidelity.	Throne room, Camelot	1.2	None	m01-a02-art03
Mordred	Aw, snaps! Busted!	Arthur is all in Lancelot's face.	Throne room, Camelot	1.2	None	m01-a02-mor01
King Arthur	Shut up. Come on, Lancelot. Let's hear it.	Mordred's such a damn clown.	Throne room, Camelot	1.2	None	m01-a02-art04

Tools for evoking:

But this is not your instrument:



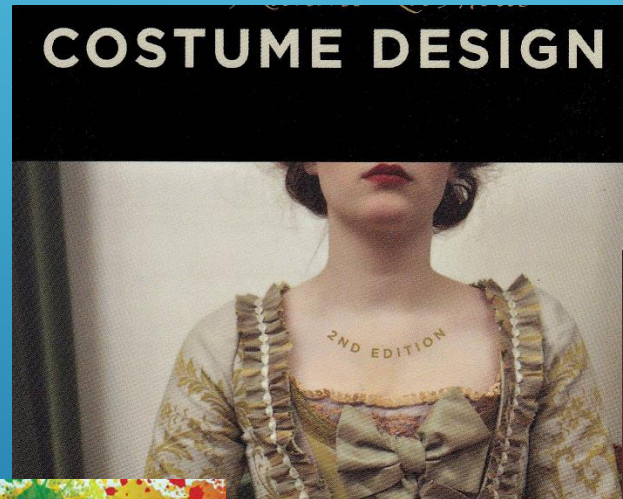
Tools for evoking:

These are your instruments:



Tools for evoking:

These are your instruments:



Tools for evoking:

All these elements are already under construction in the game as art and audio assets —

but without inherent meaning to the progression of the narrative.



Tools for evoking:

You can add a rich layer of meaning and evocative power to all the assets that are already in the budget –

but only if you get buy-in from all levels of production, starting with the producer.



Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA

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Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA

Costume Design

Color

Reveal character

Evoke mood

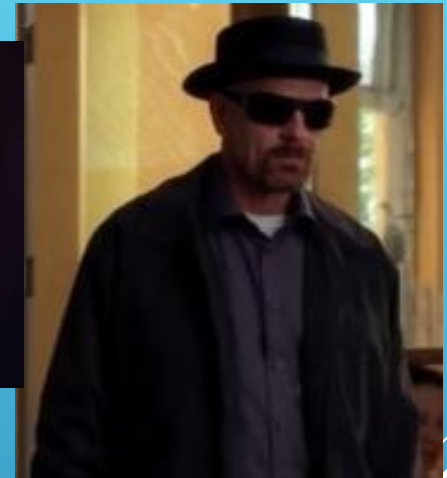
Foreshadow



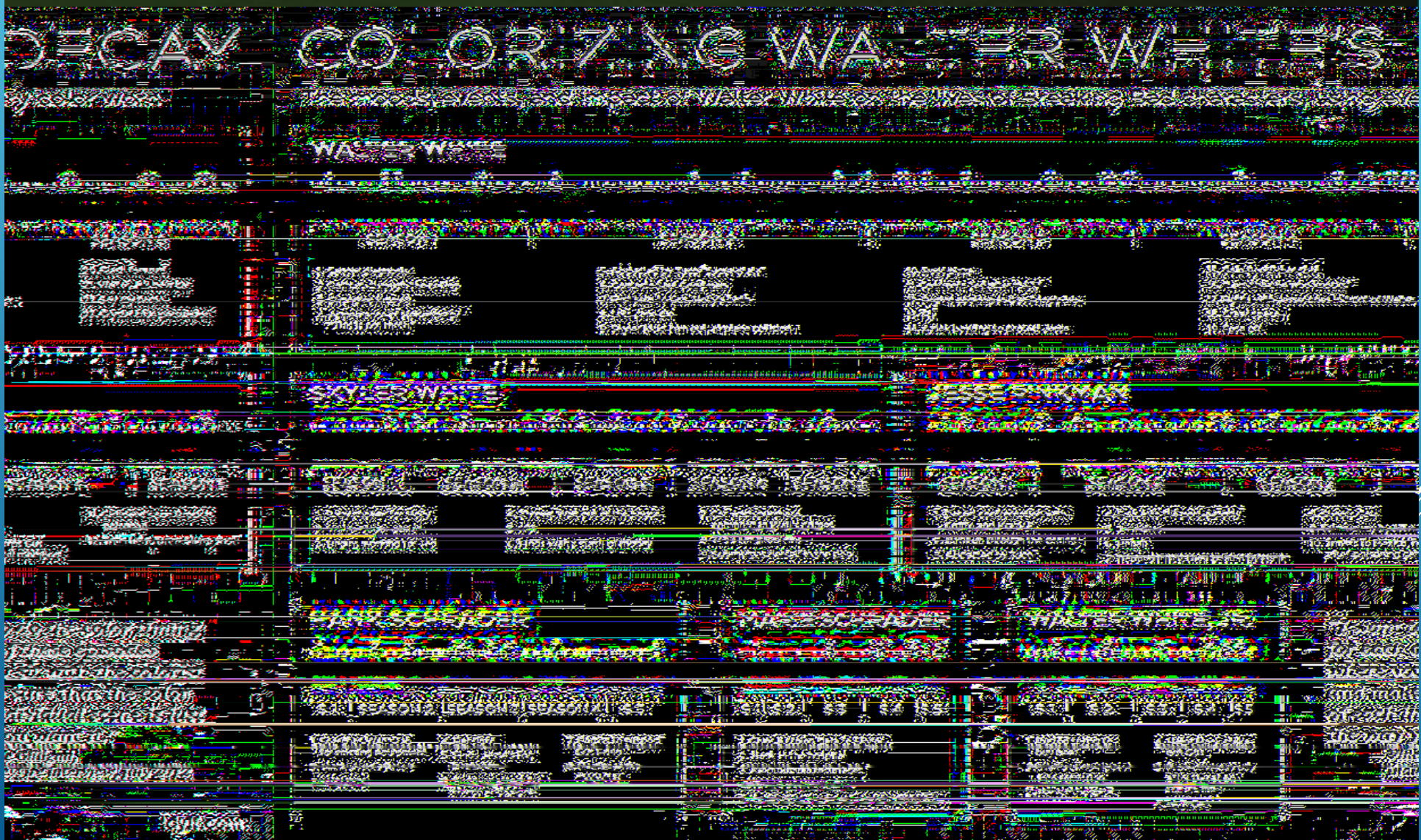
Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA



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Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA



Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA



Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA

Shape

Form

Structure

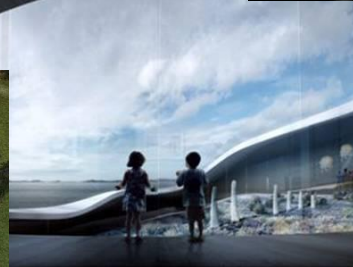
Architecture

Interior and Exterior spaces

Consult with art director and level designer

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Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA



Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA



Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA

Expression

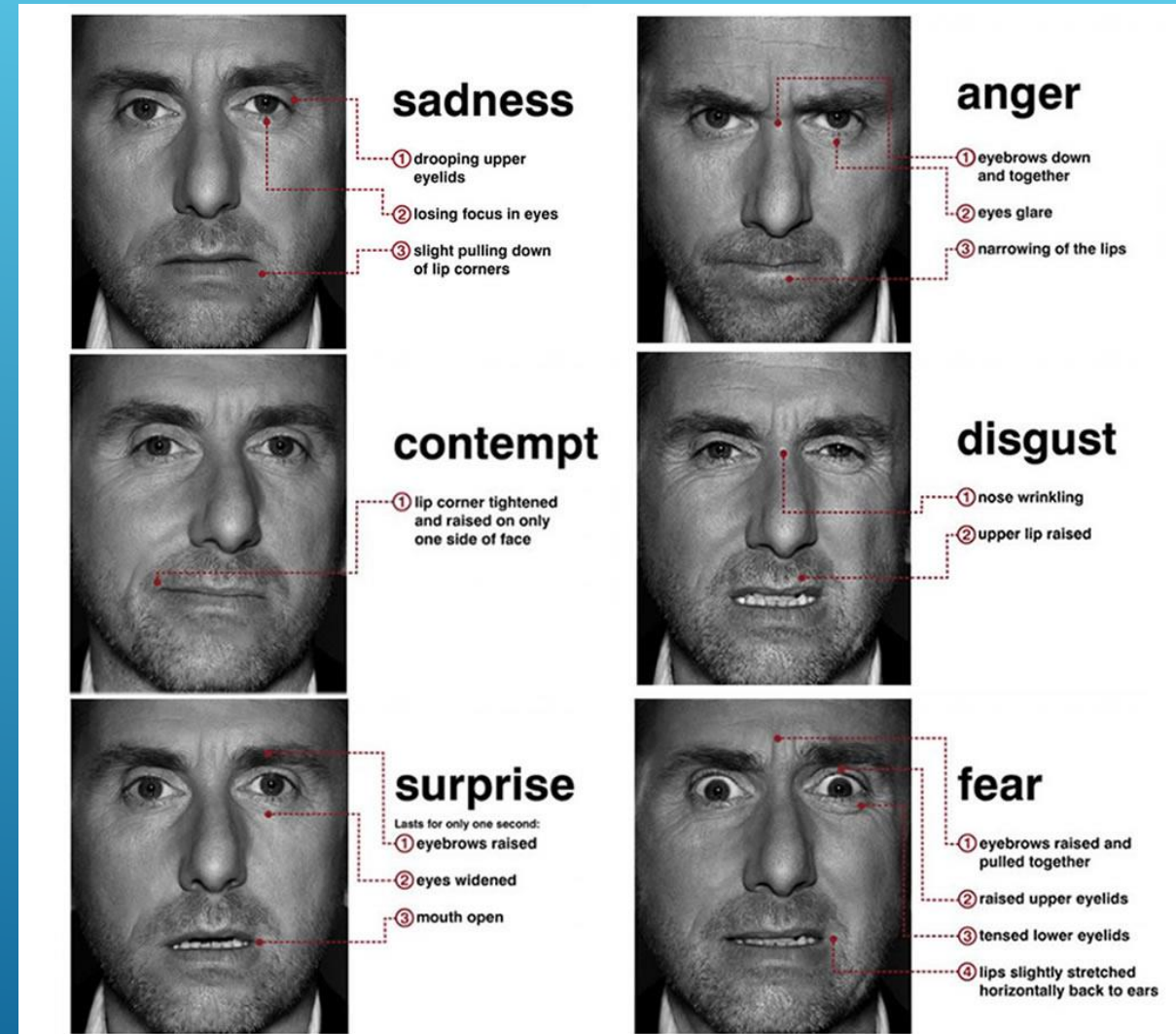
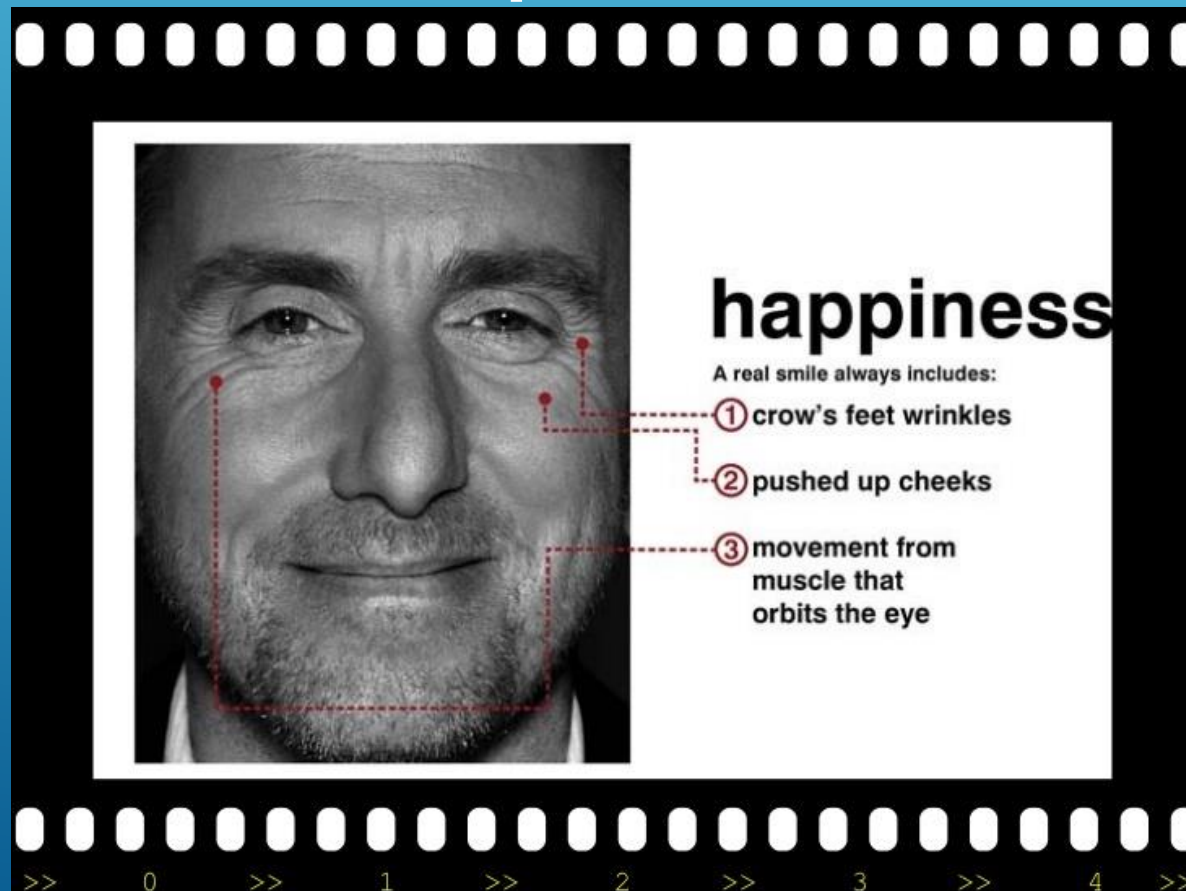
Micro expression

Uncanny Valley problems

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Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA

Micro expressions



Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA

Body Language

Posture

Gesture

Contrast

Juxtaposition



Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA

In-game/cut-scene character actions:

Flail randomly

Generic gestures

Let a mocap actor intuit motions

Direct it

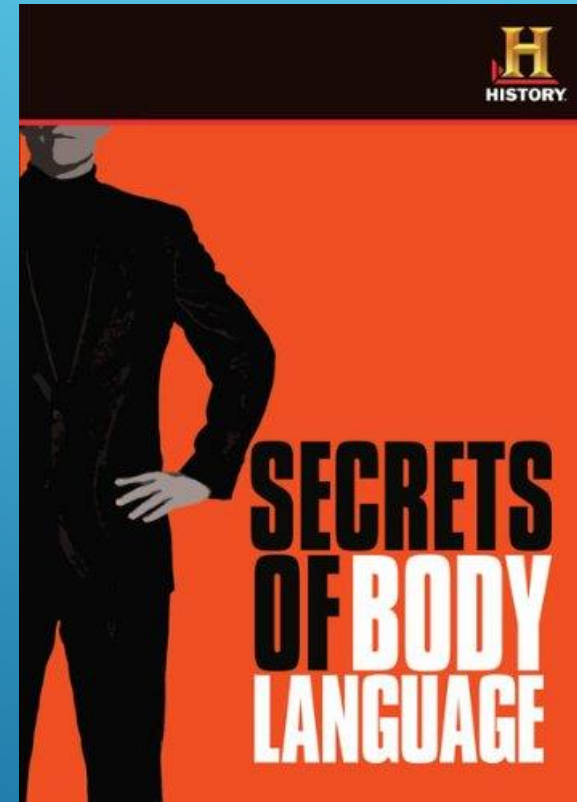
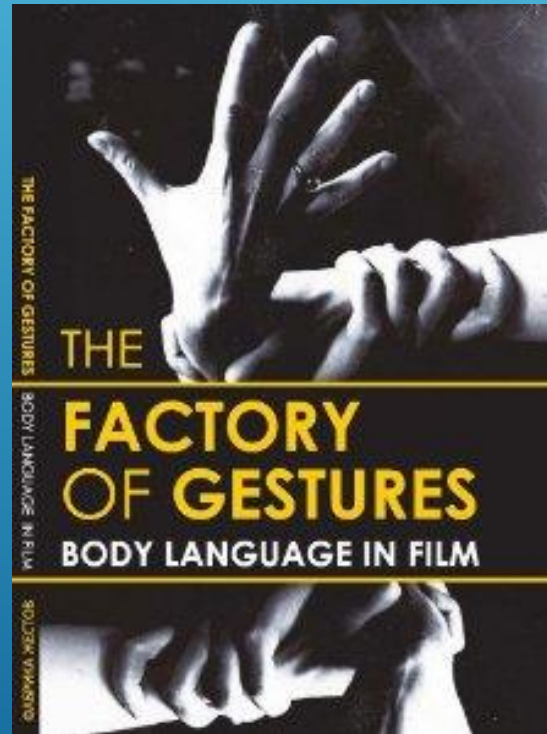
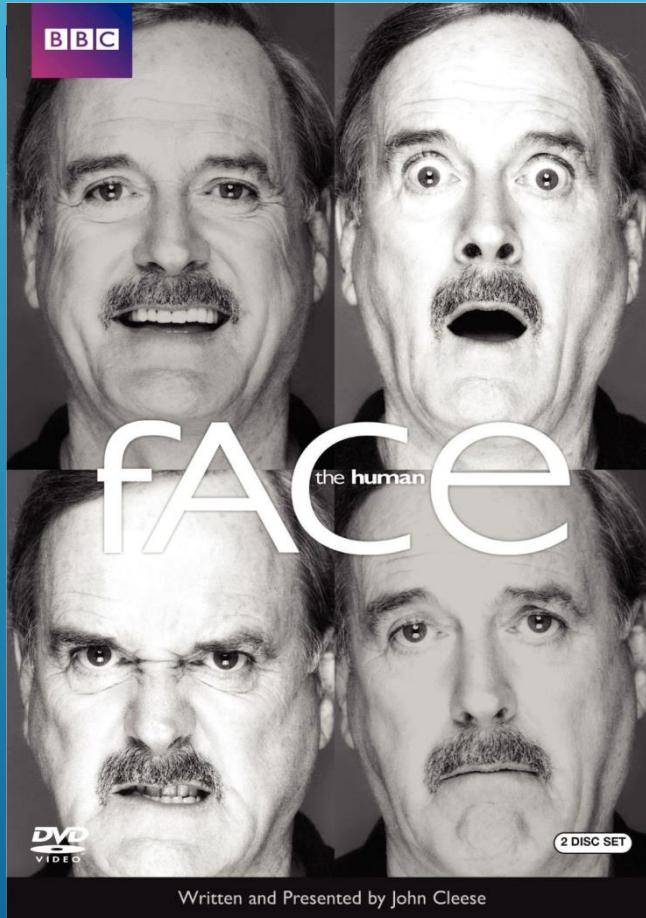
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Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA

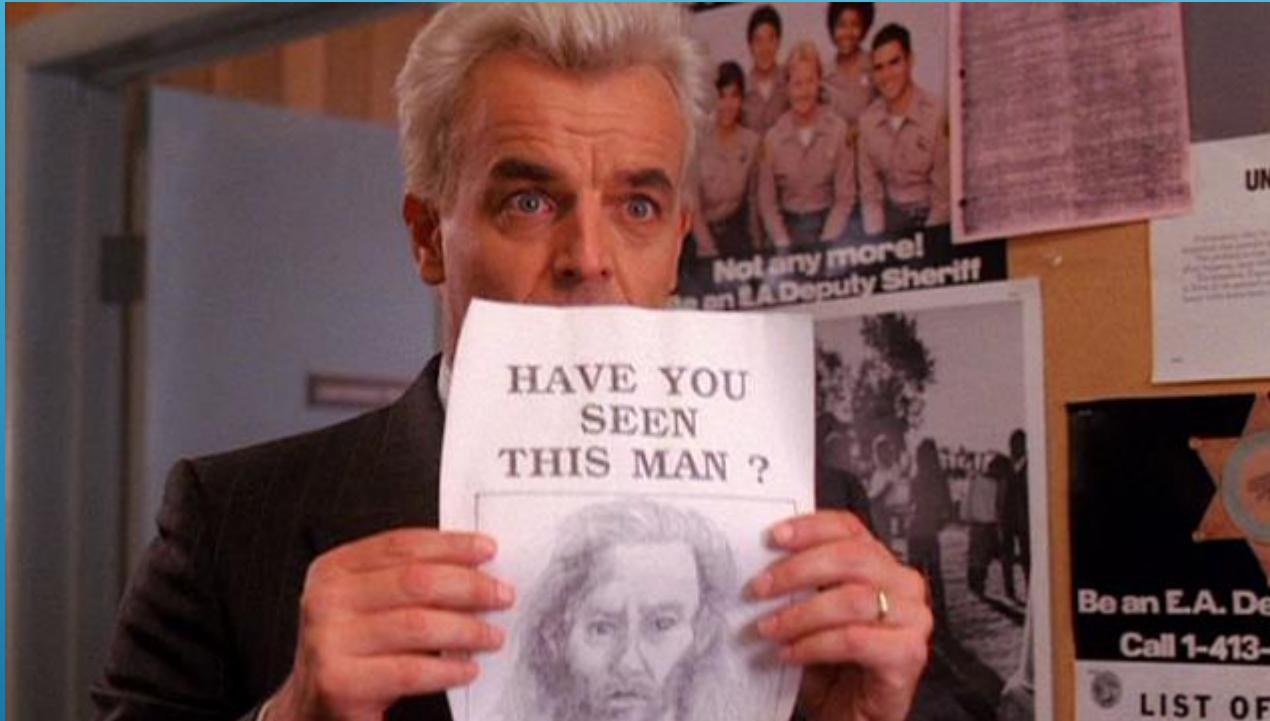
Body language evokes response:



Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA



Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA



Juxtaposition

Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA



Gesture

Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA



Body
Language

Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA

Twin Peaks uses exposition in the best sense of the term: “to expose”

Secrets are constantly exposed through Twin Peaks, but only after they are evoked.

After evocation, the exposition is not boring, because we are eager to know.

Evocative storytelling in other MEDIA

Here is the secret to non-boring exposition:

FIRST make your audience care about what you are exposing

A vital way to do that is by evoking first.

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Evoke

Universal response:

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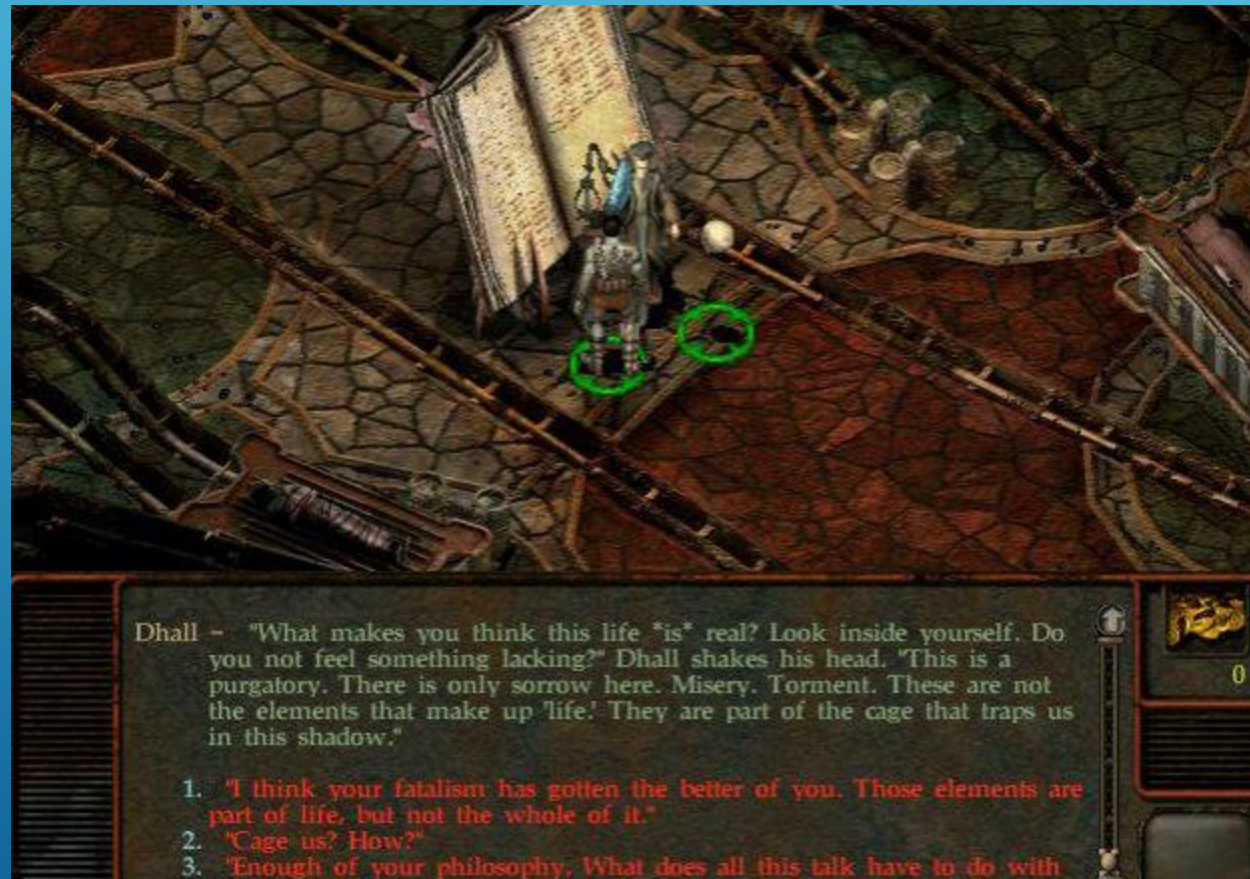
Defined by you

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Video Game techniques for evoking: Costuming/set design evokes human sacrifice Broken Age: Names: “Sugar Bunting” “Vella Tartine”



Video Game techniques for evoking: Dialogue as an path to player discovery:



New WAY TO THINK OF GAME WRITING

Dramaturgy

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New WAY TO THINK OF GAME WRITING

Dramaturgy

Composing the elements of story into a form that may be acted.

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New WAY TO THINK OF GAME WRITING

Ludoturgy

Composing the elements of game into a form that may be played.

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New WAY TO THINK OF GAME WRITING

Dramaturgy

“...the name given to that set of elements necessary to the working of a play at any moment in its passage from imagination to embodiment...”

--Geoffrey Proehl

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New WAY TO THINK OF GAME WRITING

Ludoturgy

Screenwriters and playwrights seldom have input into a film or play. Their work ends with the page.

Dramaturgs are essential to the ongoing production. Narrative designers should be, too.

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Ways to stomp on player imagination

Over-explaining

Hints before the player wants them

Stop enjoying yourself and get on with my plot.

Uncharted: “Hey Nate, what if we move the statues?”

Marvel Heroes: “What are we just standing around for?”

Evocative Storytelling:

Write Less, Reveal More

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