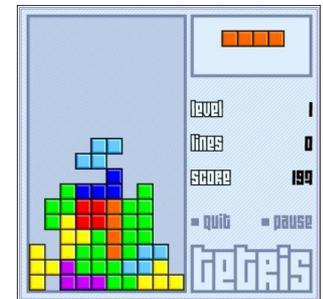
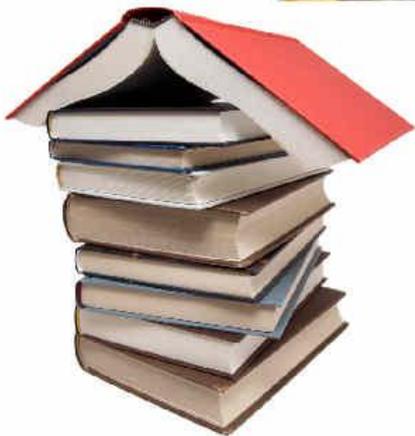


Narrative in Games

Games and Narrative: a continuum..



Storytelling

Interactivity

Or two different things

There's a conflict between interactivity and storytelling: Most people imagine there's a spectrum between conventional written stories on one side and total interactivity on the other. But I believe that what you really have are two safe havens separated by a pit of hell that can absorb endless amounts of time, skill, and resources.

-Walter Freitag, game designer.

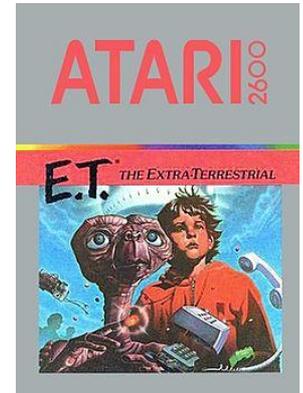
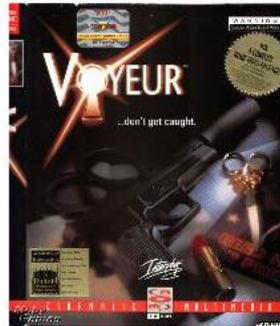
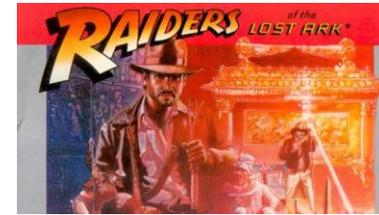
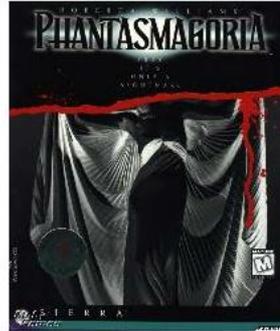
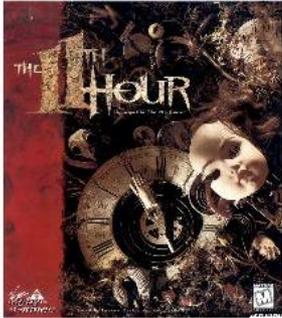
“Where gameplay is all about interactivity, narrative is about predestination. There is a pervasive feeling in the game design community that **narrative and interactivity are antithetical.**”

- Mateas and Stern, “Interaction and Narrative”

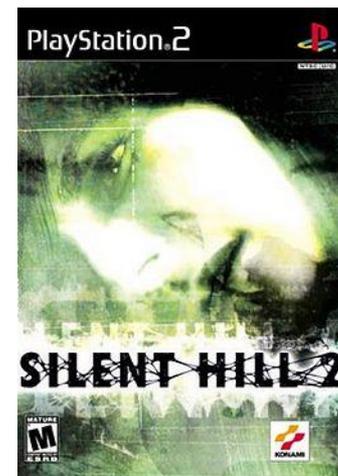
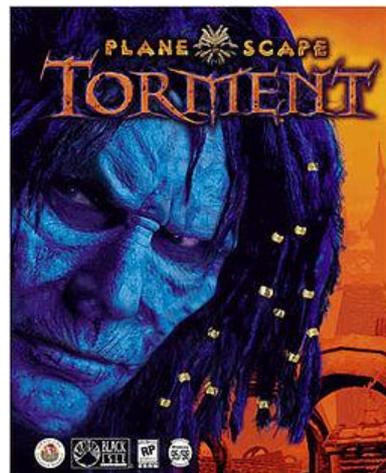
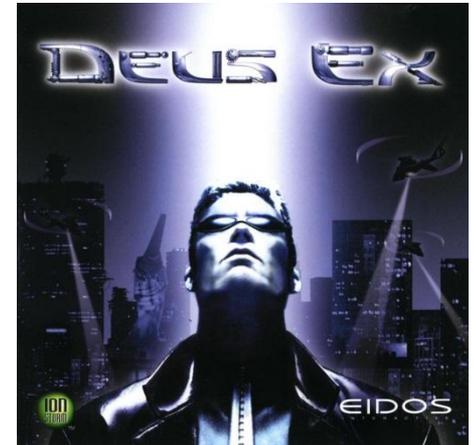
... the fundamental qualities that make a good game have remained unchanged and elusive. Consumers still flock to buy original, addictive, and fun games, leaving many flashy products with million-dollar budgets languishing in the \$9.99 bin. These costly failures demonstrate that the **consumer does not desire a cinematic experience, but rather a quality gaming experience.**

-Sid Meier, game designer.

Previous attempts



Recent successful attempts



Theory: Ludology vs. Narratology

- **Narratologist / Narrativist**
 - scholar who uses “narrative and literary theory as the foundation upon which to build a theory of interactive media.” –M. Matteas
- **Ludology**
 - most often defined as the study of game structure (or gameplay) as opposed to the study of games as narratives or games as a visual medium.” – Game-research.com

Plot vs. Narrative

- Plot and narrative are often used interchangeably, but they don't necessarily operate as such.
- Plot refers to the pattern of events in a narrative; the sequence of events: the causal chain of “what happened and why.”
 - Princess was kidnapped.-> Hero finds out. -> Hero must rescue the princess by completing these tasks. -> If hero completes task, princess is saved.
- Narrative is the larger narrated story. This can exist without a plot or as a larger system in which plot exists.
 - Narrative does not necessarily require a causal chain. Could be a history of events or sequence, technically the level progression in Tetris could be a narrative.

Winter: Games tell stories

- A game's **narrative** is the aspects of a game that contributes to it telling a story
 - Questions concerning whether games are narratives, or whether narrative provides just one way to look at games are still actively debated.
- **Narrative** is also used to describe the story itself
- Computer games stretch the notion of narrative
 - The interactivity of computer games, like the interactivity of hypertext, pushes hard against existing theories of linear narrative
 - No longer just one privileged story being told; many possible ways to experience a non-linear narrative (computer game, hypertext fiction)

Embedded vs Emergent Narratives

- **Embedded narrative**
 - Pre-generated narrative content that exists prior to a player's interaction with the game
 - Cut scenes, back story
 - Are often used to provide the fictional background for the game, motivation for actions in the game, and development of story arc
- **Emergent narrative**
 - Arises from the player's interaction with the gameworld, designed levels, rule structure
 - Moment-by-moment play in the game creates this emergent narrative
 - Varies from play session to play session, depending on user's actions
- Game design involves employing and balancing the use of these two elements

Narrative descriptors

- A **narrative descriptor** is an element of a game that communicates aspects of its story to the player
 - Broad concept, which encompasses most visual elements of a game and its surrounding context
 - Instructional text
 - Cut scenes
 - Interface elements (joystick, buttons, controller, and how they're used)
 - Visual elements comprising the field of view of the player

Instructional text

YOU ARE THE HERO, 'LINK'!



6



The hero of this game, Link, is a brave youth who must fight against the evil Ganon all alone. Link's adventure develops both in the Overworld, a beautiful natural place with woods, lakes and mountains, and in the Underworld, a place much more complex than that which lies above.

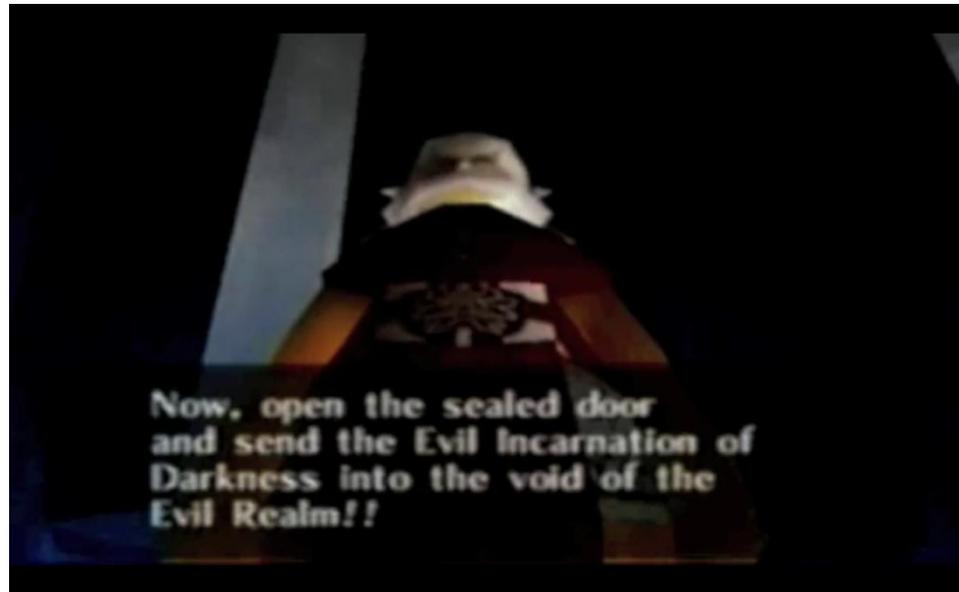
Ganon possesses the Power of Triforce. In order to overthrow Ganon, you have to complete the "Wisdom" of Triforce with the eight hidden pieces. These pieces have been hidden somewhere in the Underworld mazes. Can Link possibly invade Death Mountain to overthrow Ganon with the help of the completed "Wisdom" of Triforce.

Princess Zelda's fate is unknown.

In this game you are the hero, Link. You must enter the world of Link. Let the fabulous adventure begin. Many enemies stand between you and a successful rescue. Put aside your fears and march on. As you go forward, you will solve many mysteries. You are the one who can conquer the Evil Ganon.

7

Cutscenes



Interface elements



Visual elements



- So do the visual elements of the game places you in space
- Wrap-around space also contributes to this feeling
- UFO ties into cultural understandings

Narrative through mechanics



<http://penny-arcade.com/patv/episode/narrative-mechanics>

Embedded Narratives

Barry Ip: Narrative interventions

1. narrative presented as passive game screen;
2. narrative presented as on-screen text;
3. narrative presented as cut scene;
4. narrative presented as cut scene combined with on-screen text;
5. narrative presented as combination of gameplay, cut scene, and on-screen text;
6. narrative presented as combination of gameplay, sound, and textual cues;
7. short game prompts (mission hints or pointers) presented as on-screen text;
8. short game prompts (mission hints or pointers) presented as a cut scene;
9. short game prompts (mission hints or pointers) presented simultaneously as cut scene and on-screen text;
10. short game prompts (mission hints or pointers) presented as an integral part of gameplay;
11. short game prompts (mission hints or pointers) presented as gameplay, sound, and textual cues;
12. credit roll and/or ending sequence.

Embedded Narratives: analysis (1)

Table 3. Summary Statistics for the Chosen Games

Game	Total Game Time	Types of Narrative Delivery	Total Length of Prescribed Narrative Components (Including Cut Scenes, Prompts, On-Screen Text, etc.)	Percentage of Prescribed Narrative as a Proportion of Total Game Time
The Legend of Zelda	6 hr 30 min	Simple level completion screens, on-screen text	2 min	1%
The Secret of Monkey Island	6 hr 35 min	Cut scene, on-screen text	1 hr 49 min	28%
Flashback	6 hr 40 min	Cut scene, on-screen text	13 min	3%
Shenmue 2	18 hr 50 min	Cut scene, on-screen text, quick-time events (QTE)	4 hr 52 min	26%
Resident Evil Code Veronica X	9 hr 5 min	Cut scene, on-screen text	1 hr 37 min	18%
Final Fantasy X	46 hr	Cut scene, on-screen text	9 hr 14 min	20%
Half-Life 2	12 hr 5 min	Cut scene, audio and textual cues	5 min	1%
Fable	8 hr 55 min	Cut scene	1 hr 31 min	17%
The Godfather	11 hr 45 min	Cut scene, audio and textual cues	1 hr 9 min	10%
Halo 3	10 hr	Cut scene, audio and textual cues	43 min	7%

Embedded Narratives: analysis (2)

Table A1. Summary of Information Given in Back Stories

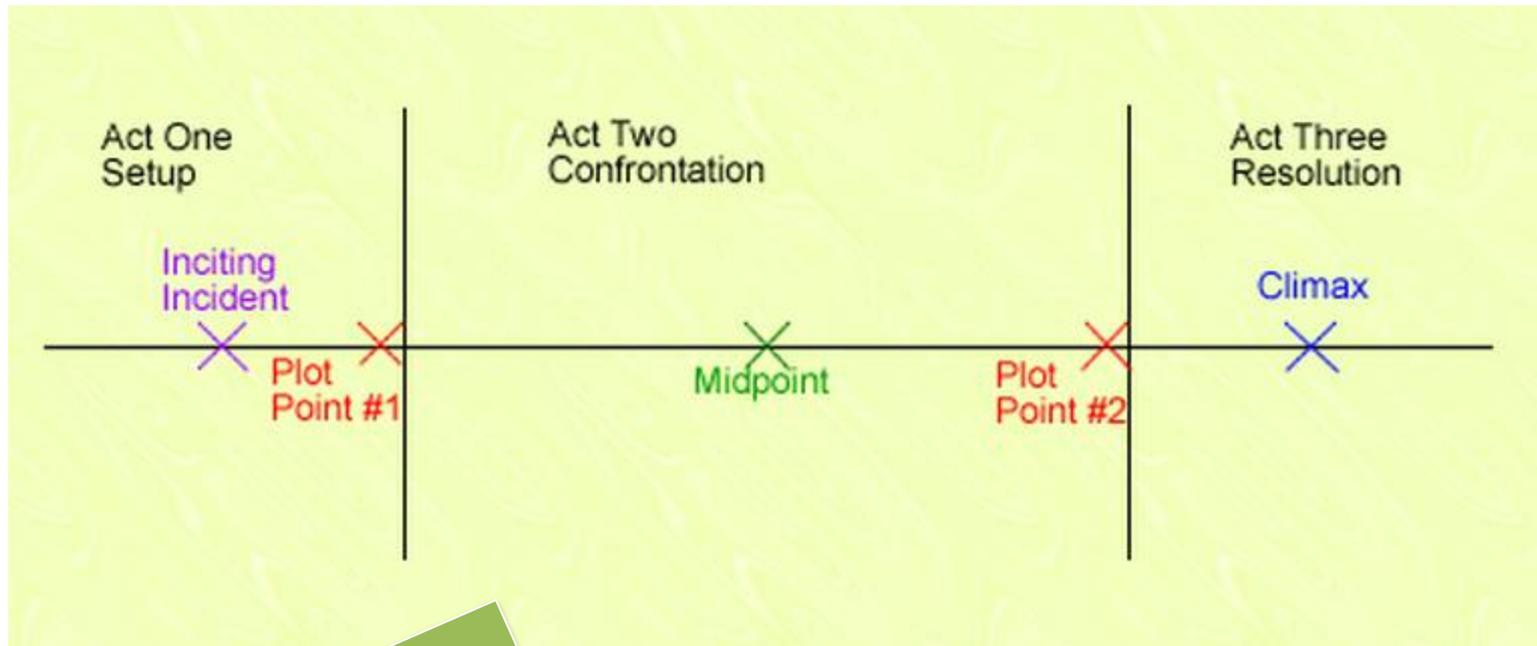
Game Title	Method of Delivery	Location	Content	
			(See section on Archetypes in next article for more details.)	Objectives
The Legend of Zelda	Written in instruction booklet; a shorter version is shown on title sequence before game start (text format)	A long time ago, in a fictional place called Hyrule	Link—hero Princess Zelda—herald Impa—ally Ganon—shadow	The world of Hyrule is in chaos. A Triforce of Power has been seized by Ganon's army. Ganon has also captured princess Zelda of Hyrule, the guardian of the Triforce. Link hears this story, and seeks to find the Triforce and rescue the princess
The Secret of Monkey Island	Written on game packaging	Monkey Island, in the Caribbean	Guybrush Threepwood—hero Beautiful woman—amima, herald Dead, jealous suitor—shadow	Objectives are implied: three trials; meeting a beautiful woman and her dead, jealous suitor; finding a way to get to the ghost
Flashback	Written on game packaging	Bizarre alien planet	Conrad Hart—hero Mutant forces—shadow	A hero with amnesia needs to get back to planet Earth and stop invading mutant forces
Shenmue 2	Written in instruction booklet; short introduction is also provided on game start (see the section on Cut Scenes, Text, and Prompts)	Yokusuka, Japan, 1986; Hong Kong	Ryo Hazuki—hero Iwao—hero's father Lan Di—shadow Master Chen—herald, ally Guizhang—ally Mad Angels—threshold guardians Lishao Tao—mentor, ally, herald Yuanda Zhu—mentor, ally, herald	The hero witnesses the murder of his father by a mysterious man called Lan Di. Di is in search of a sacred artifact called the Phoenix Mirror, which the hero's father was in possession of. Assisted by friends and allies, the hero embarks on a journey to find Lan Di and to discover the secret of the Phoenix Mirror

Story Graphs

Table 5. Summaries of Observed Game Structures

Game	Observed Structure
The Legend of Zelda	Branch and linear—branching is observed during free roaming (i.e., exploration of world map), but reverts to linear structure when specific level is selected
The Secret of Monkey Island	Linear, but branching is evident within level confines. Player may explore subsections and side quests before embarking on main objective
Flashback	Linear—evidence of branching is observed only within specific levels (e.g., alternative routes toward the same end)
Shenmue 2	Linear, but branching is evident within level confines. Player may often explore a range of subsections and side quests before embarking on main objective
Resident Evil Code Veronica X	Linear—largely dictated by predefined routes with limited opportunity for branching beyond confined sections
Final Fantasy X	Linear, but branching is evident within confines of story progression. Player may often explore a range of subsections and side quests before embarking on main objective
Half-Life 2	Linear—largely dictated by predefined routes with limited opportunity for branching beyond confined sections
Fable	Linear, but branching is evident within level confines. Player may often explore a range of subsections and side quests before embarking on main objective
The Godfather	Linear, but branching is evident within level confines. Player may often explore a range of subsections and side quests before embarking on main objective
Halo 3	Linear—largely dictated by predefined routes with limited opportunity for branching beyond confined sections

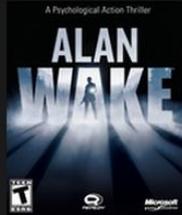
Three act structure



In medias res

The Amnesia problem

Amnesia is a concept that appears in 139 games



Alan Wake

When famous novelist Alan Wake goes on vacation with his wife Alice, he has no idea that the idyllic town of Bright Falls will soon be the site of a terrible battle between good and evil that could threaten everything, even Wake's own sanity.



Alan Wake's American Nightmare

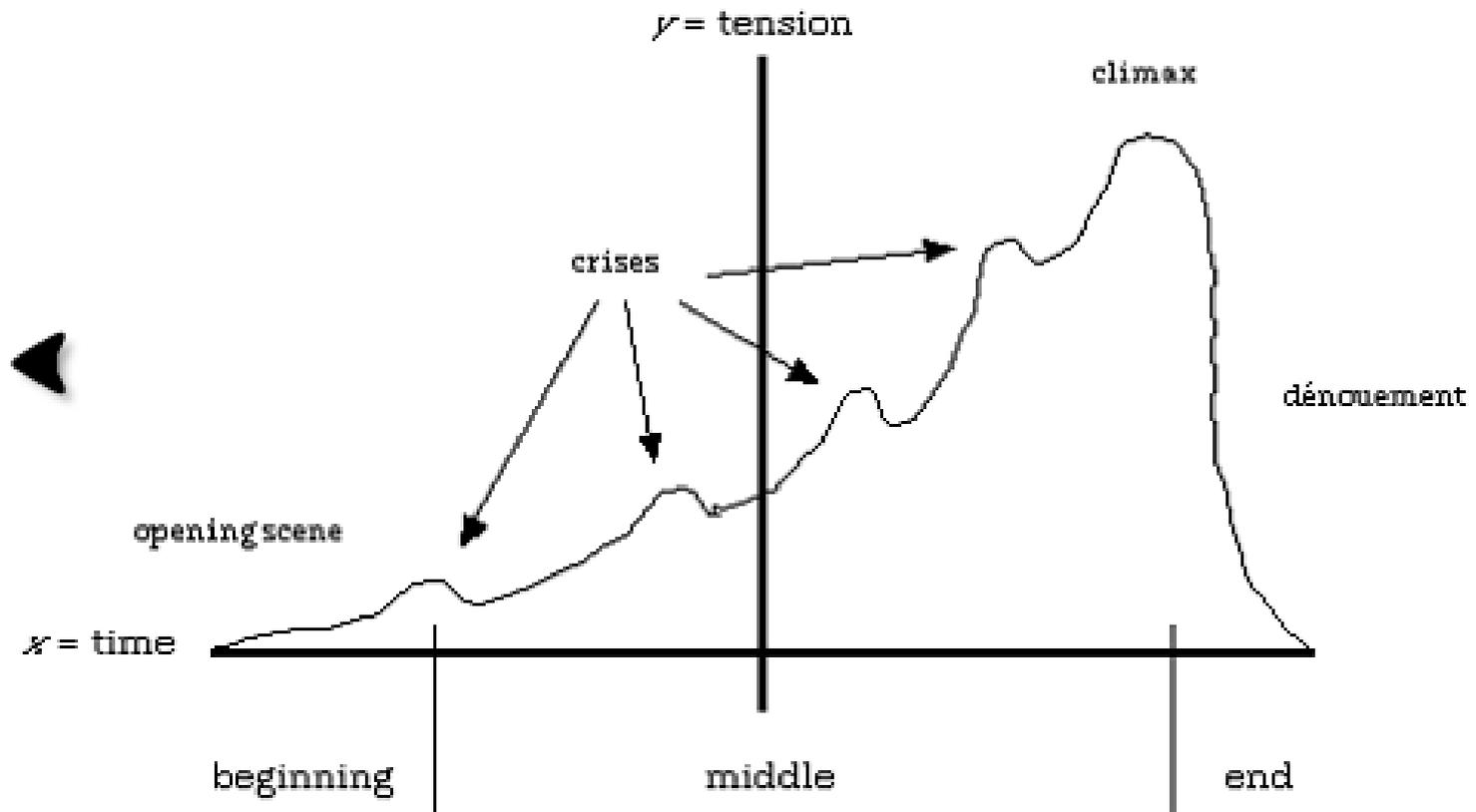
The story of Alan Wake continues as he faces his twisted doppelganger, Mr. Scratch, in this downloadable installment of the Alan Wake franchise.



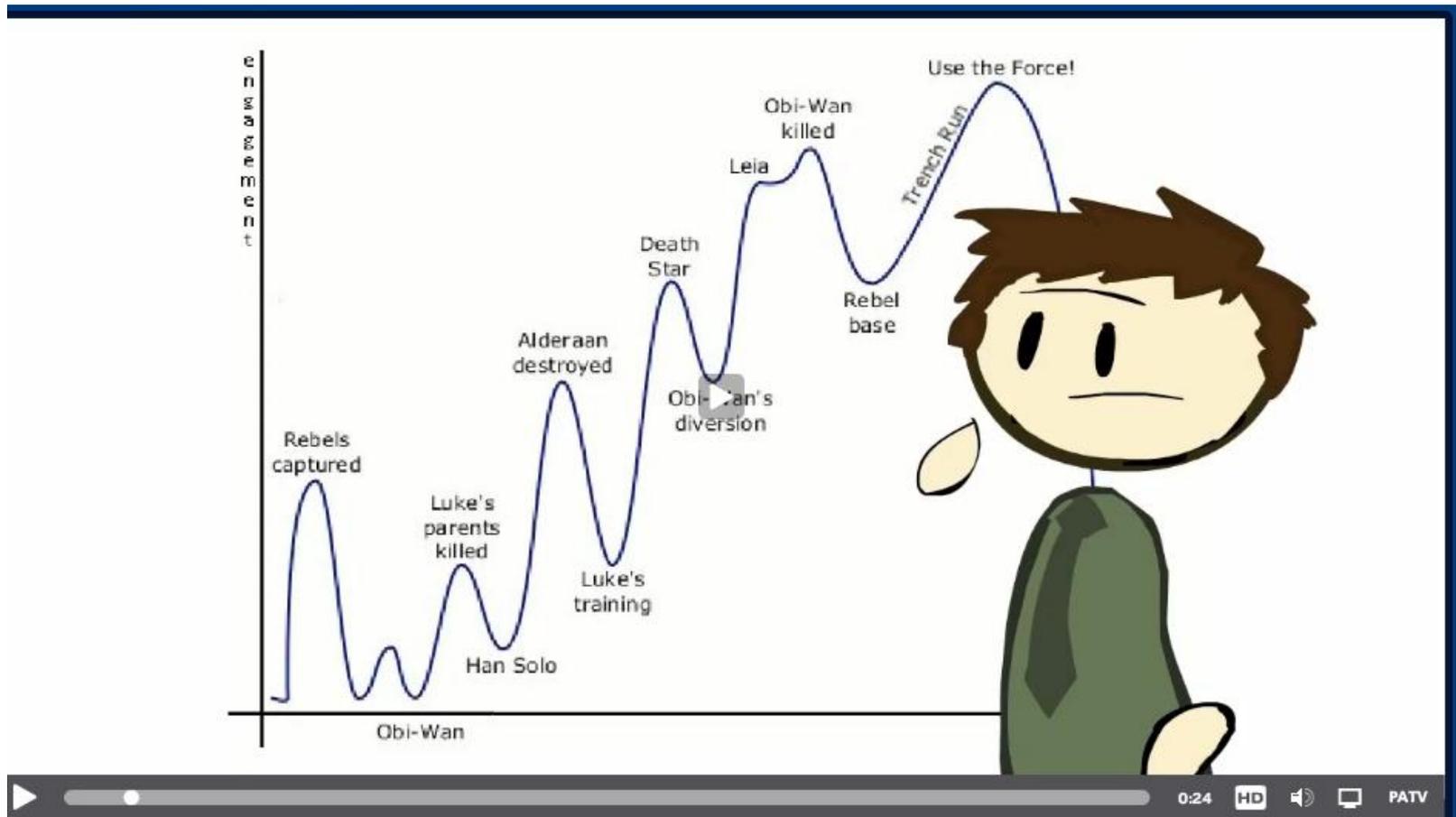
Alone in the Dark

What happens when you cross the granddaddy of

“Emotional rollercoaster”



Pacing



Take home (Ximplification)

- Everything contributes to the narrative
 - Intro screen
 - Framing
 - Interaction
 - Cut scenes / videos
- Structure and Pacing