Narratives and Interactive Storytelling

Lecture 01 – Introduction to Narratives and Interactive Storytelling

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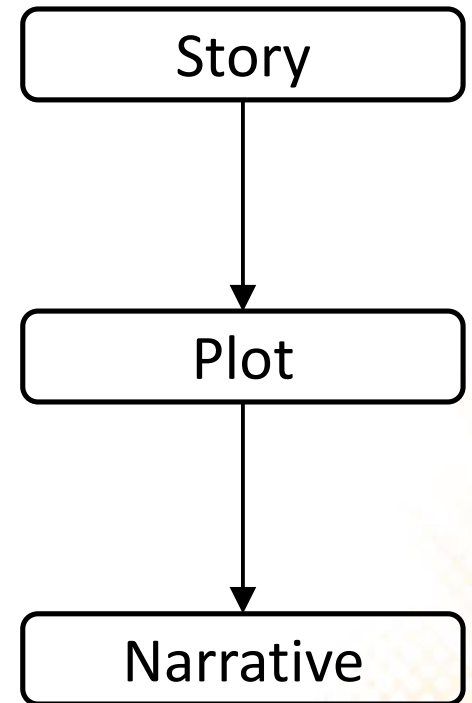<edirlei.lima@universidadeeuropeia.pt>

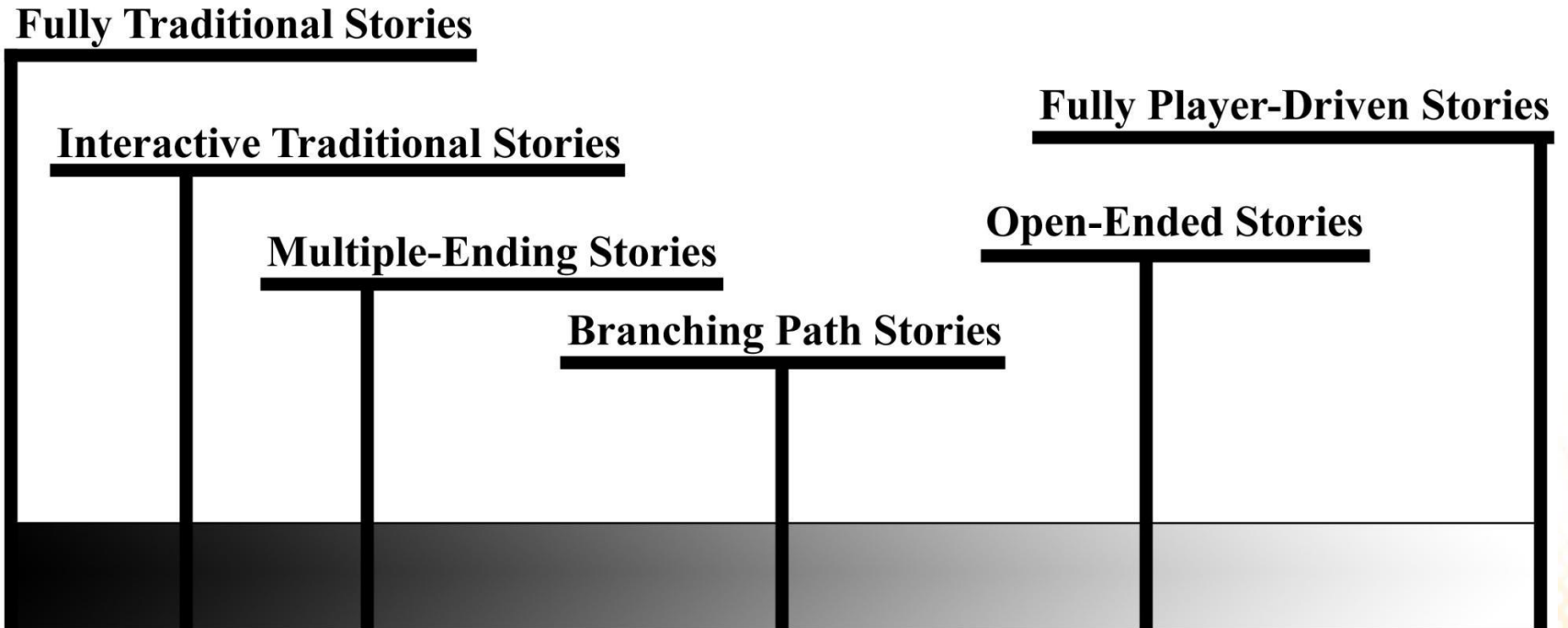# What is Interactive Storytelling?

- Interactive storytelling is a form of digital entertainment based on the combination of <u>interactivity</u> and <u>storytelling</u>.
    - Objective: create dramatic and engaging narrative experiences for users, while allowing them to intervene with ongoing plots and change the way that the story unfolds.

- <u>Key challenge</u>: balance the level of interactivity with the consistency of the generated stories.

- Interactive storytelling is not just a game with a story.

Story, Narrative, Plot

- <u>Story</u>: all events referenced both explicitly and inferred in a narrative.

- <u>Plot</u>: refers to the sequence of events inside of a story which affect other events through the principle of cause and effect.

- <u>Narrative</u>: the choice of which events to tell and in what order to tell them. Thus, it is a representation or a specific manifestation of the story.

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┌─────────────┐
│    Story    │
└─────────────┘
       │
       ▼
┌─────────────┐
│    Plot     │
└─────────────┘
       │
       ▼
┌─────────────┐
│  Narrative  │
└─────────────┘
```

Narratives and Interactive Storytelling

Fully Traditional Stories

Interactive Traditional Stories

Fully Player-Driven Stories

Multiple-Ending Stories

Open-Ended Stories

Branching Path Stories

Fully Traditional Stories

- Fully traditional stories are the classic form of storytelling, which has been used for centuries.
  - Examples: films, books, plays, cave paintings, …

Event

Beginning ◯——◯——◯——◯——◯ End
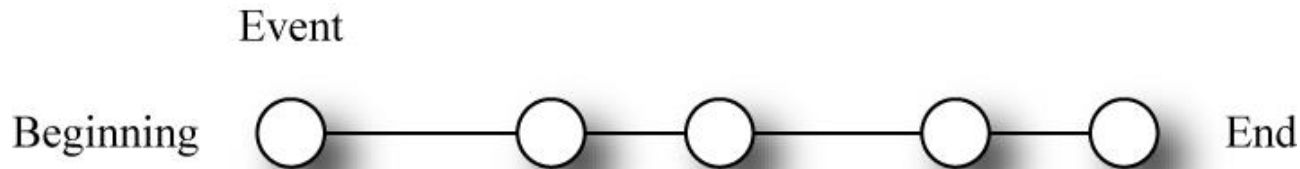
Interactive Traditional Stories

- Interactive traditional stories combine the tightly controlled narratives of fully traditional stories with a degree of interactivity.
    - The main plot itself can't be changed, or at the very least can't be changed in any significant way.
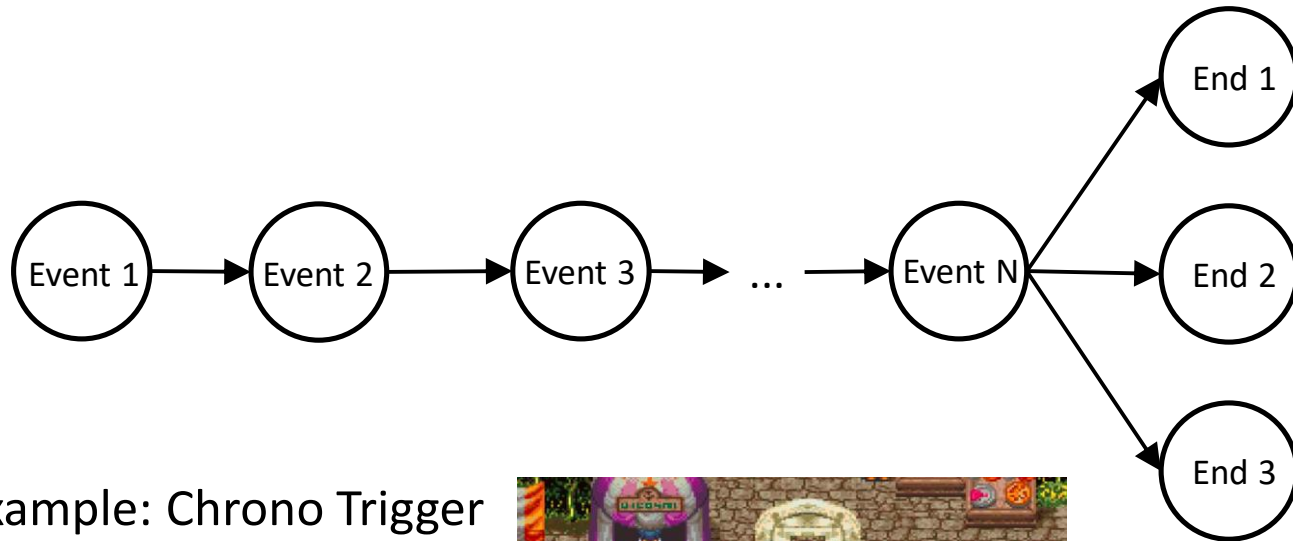
Event

Beginning ⚪—⚪ ⚪—⚪—⚪ End
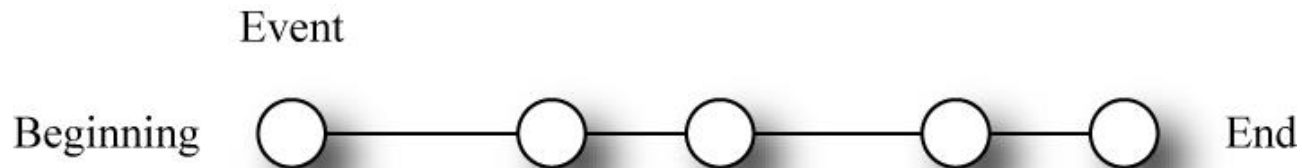
    - Example: Marvel's The Avengers: Iron Man - Mark VII

Multiple-Ending Stories

- Multiple-ending stories follow the same structure as interactive traditional stories, but at the end users are allowed to choose between two or more possible endings.
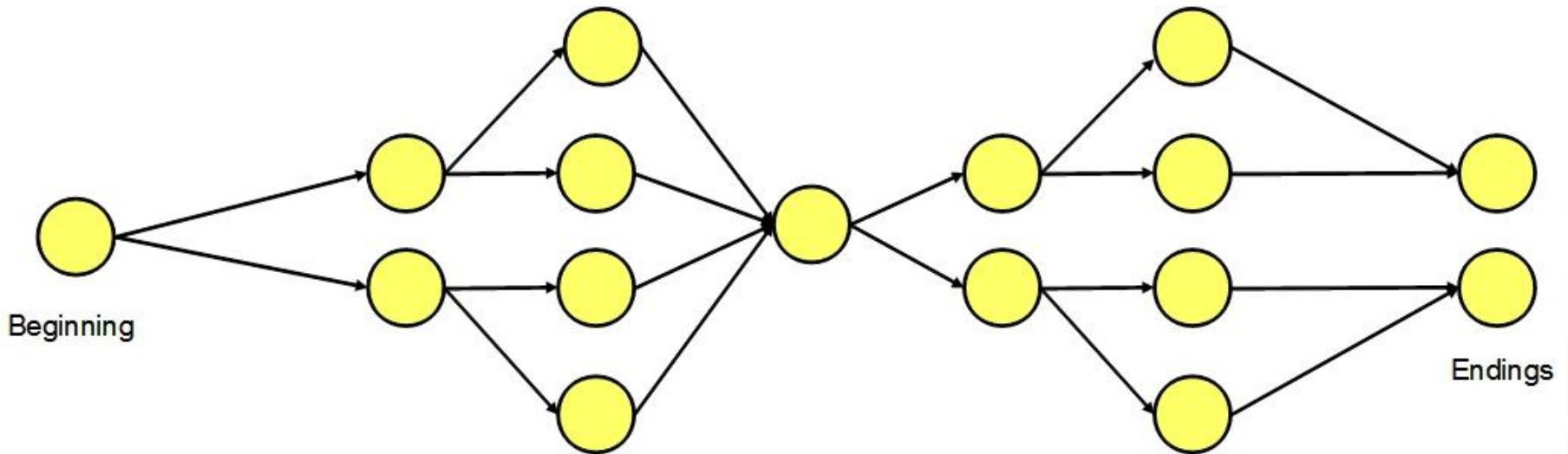

– Example: Chrono Trigger

Branching Path Stories

- Branching path stories include multiple decision points throughout the story, allowing users to make a series of choices as he/she progresses through the narrative.

Beginning

Endings

- Example: Choose Your Own Adventure books

Branching Path Stories

2

The cable attaching you to the *Maray* is extended to its limit. You have come to rest on a ledge near the canyon in the ocean floor that ancient myth says leads to the lost city of Atlantis.

You have an experimental diving suit designed to protect you from the intense pressure of the deep. You should be able to leave the *Seeker* and explore the sea bottom. The new suit contains a number of the latest microprocessors enabling a variety of useful functions. It even has a built-in PDA with laser communicator. You can cut loose from the cable; the *Seeker* is self-propelled. You are now in another world. Remember, this is a dangerous world, an unknown world.

As agreed, you signal the *Maray*, "All systems GO. It's awesome down here." .

3

Carefully maneuvering the *Seeker* between the walls of the canyon, you discover a large round hole. A stream of large bubbles flows steadily out of the hole. The *Seeker* is equipped with scientific equipment to analyze the bubbles. It also has sonar equipment that can measure depth. The ocean covers close to 90% of the earth and is mostly unknown. Who knows where this hole might lead?

Story network of the Choose Your Own Adventure book *The Mystery of Chimney Rock* (1979).
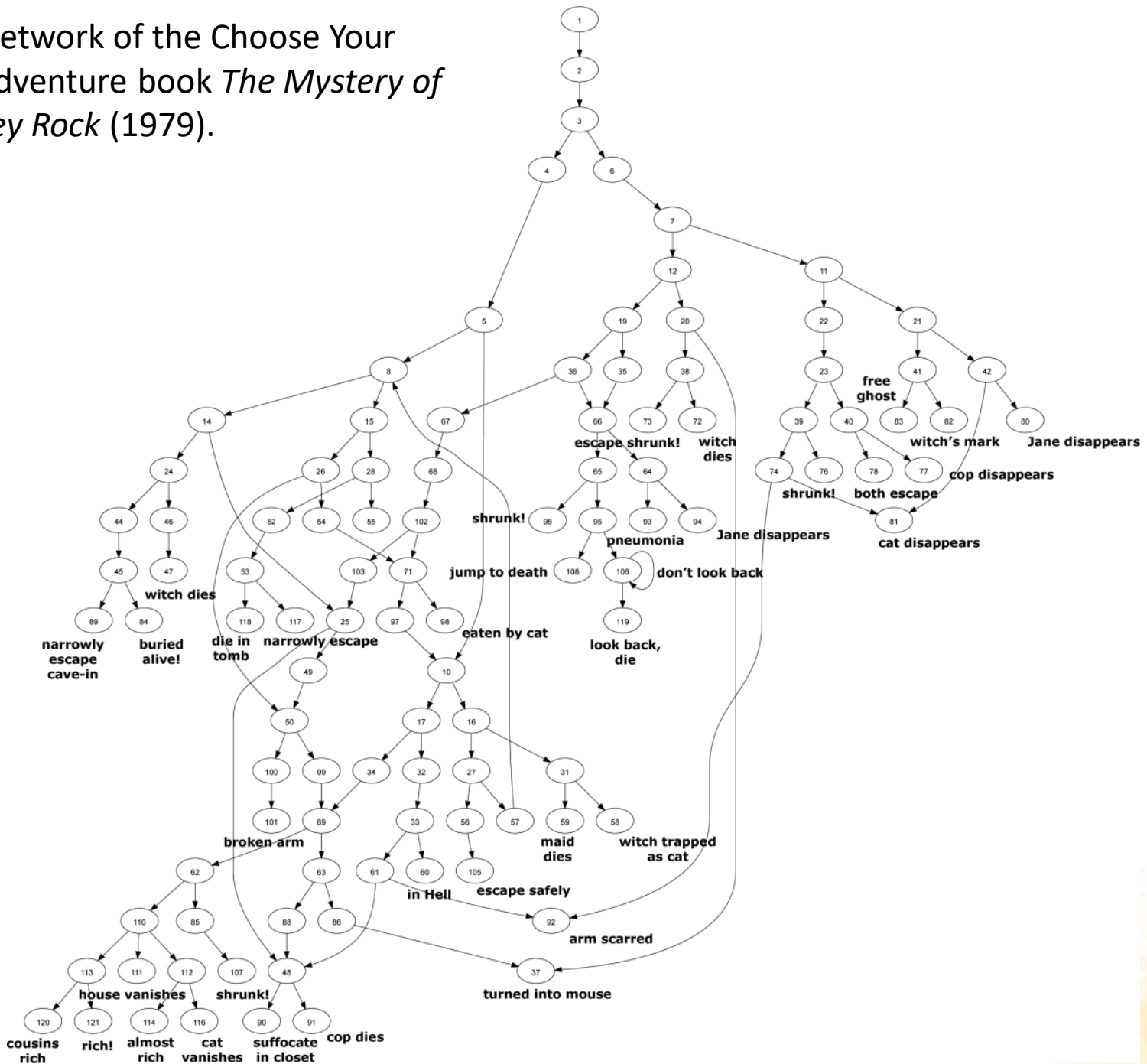
Open-Ended Stories

- Open-ended stories are an evolution of the branching path formula. While branching path stories retain a strong writer-controlled structure that moves the user from decision point to decision point, open-ended stories are more open to user interactions.

  - There is no explicit branching network and the narrative is usually generated by a computer algorithm (such as planning algorithms).

 - Example: Logtell
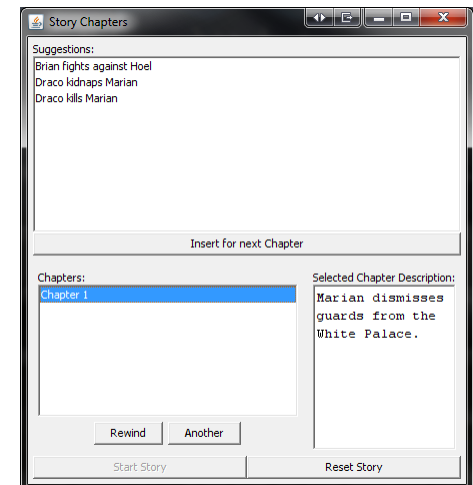
Fully Player-Driven Stories

- Player-driven stories don't have a main plot. The narrative emerges from the player's interactions with virtual characters and environments.
    - This type of story is usually implemented as a simulation.

    - Example: The Sims

How to create an interesting narrative?

- We can start by following a basic <u>narrative pattern</u> (also called narrative structure).

- A narrative pattern emerges from the fact that most narratives share several <u>common characteristics</u>.
  - These common characteristics were first described by Aristotle. According to him, each act contains predictable elements common to all stories.

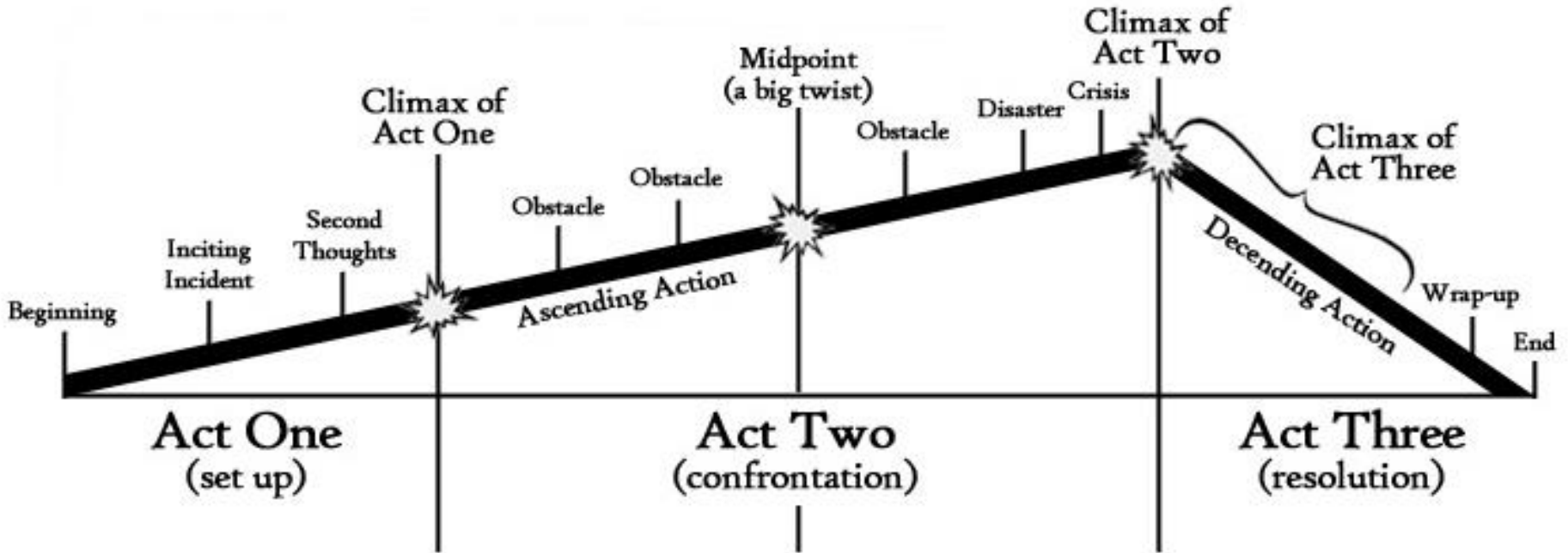- Examples of narratives structures: <u>three-act structure</u> and <u>the hero's journey</u>.

Three-Act Structure
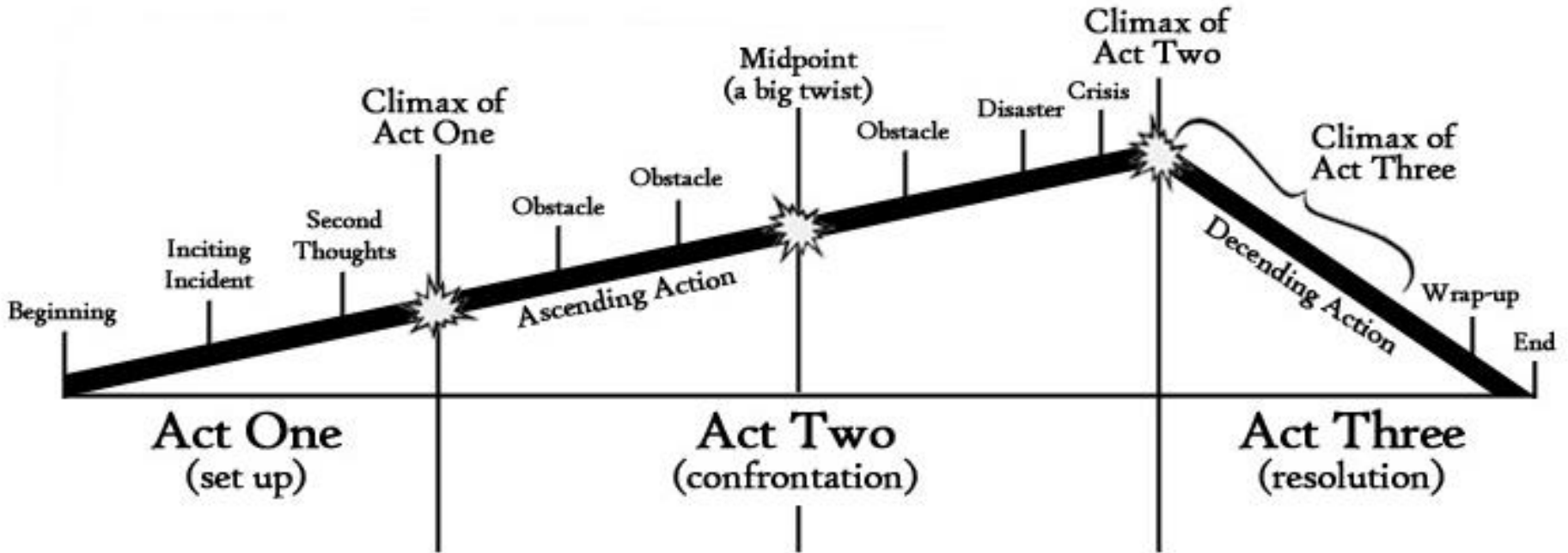
Act One:
- Contains exposition or a summary of who are the main characters, their background story (setting) and what they want (motivation).
- It also contains a inciting incident (call to action) that leads the protagonist to leave the security of home.
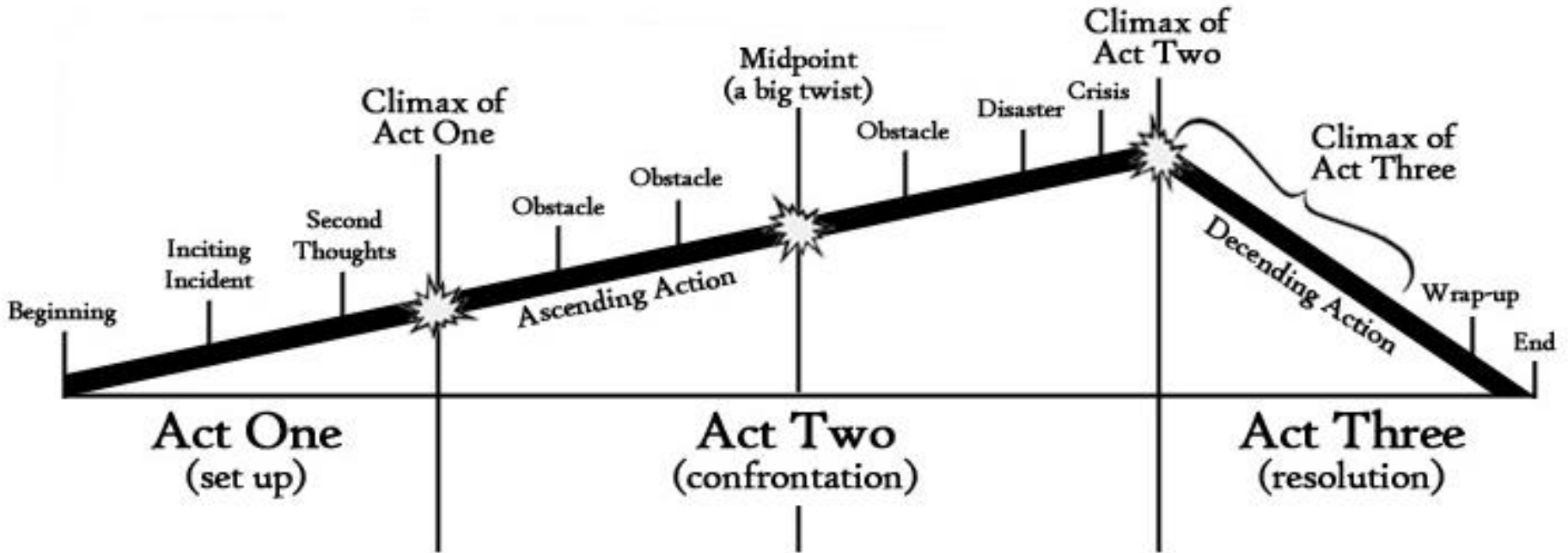
Three-Act Structure

Act Two:
- Contains a series of challenges and obstacles (rising action) that prevent the protagonist from easily achieving his goal.
- It also leads to some sort of a final conflict (climax), which puts the protagonist and antagonist against each other.

Three-Act Structure

Act Three:
- Features the resolution of the story and its subplots.
- It presents a series of events that resolves the conflicts that have arisen (not necessary with happily endings).

The Hero's Journey (Monomyth)

- The hero's journey is a narrative pattern that involve a hero who goes on an adventure, and in a decisive crisis wins a victory, and then comes home changed or transformed.

- The pattern was proposed by Joseph Campbell and it comprises 17 stages.
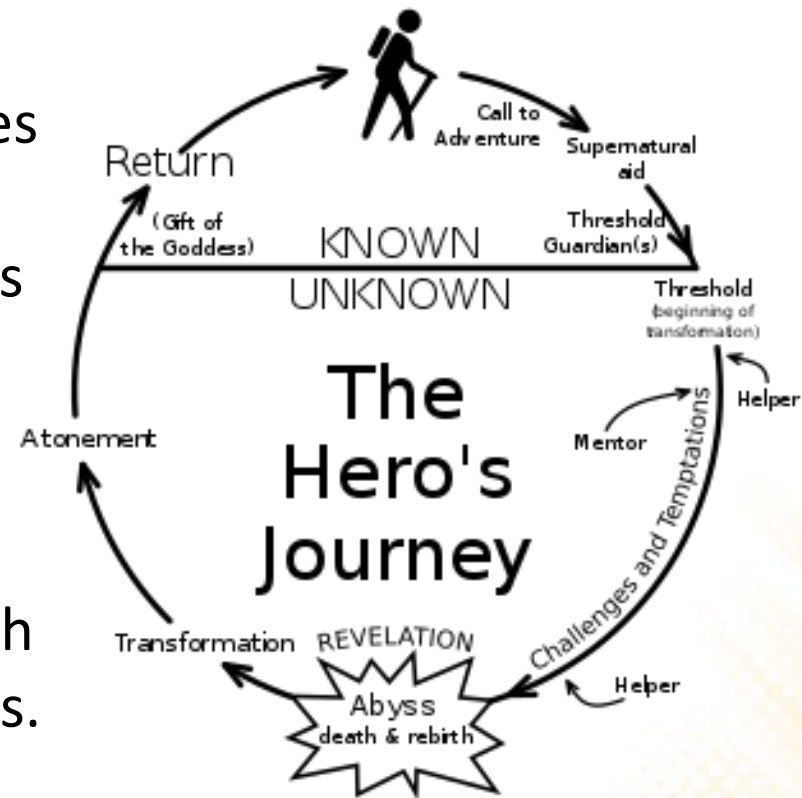
Everyday World

Call to Adventure (1)
Disruption and Awakening
– **Refusal of the Call** (2)
– **Supernatural Aid** (3)
– Mentor may appear

Return
– **Master of the Two Worlds** (16)
– **Freedom to Live** (17)

First Threshold (4)
Resistance and commitment
– Threshold Guardians
– **Belly of the Whale** (5)

Known World
_____
Unknown World

Return Threshold (15)
Challenges to the return
– **Refusal of the Return** (12)
– **Magic Flight** (13)
– **Rescue from Without** (14)
– Final Challenge

Joseph Campbell's Monomyth
Eight Stages

(Campbell's original 17 elements are listed in boldface and their original sequence indicated in parenthesis)

Road of Trials (6)
Challenges and temptations
– Tests challenge & prepare hero
– Consciousness expands
– Helpers arrive as needed
– Synchronistic events

Apotheosis (10)
Final death and rebir
– **Ultimate Boon** (11)
– Consolidate experience
– Build new meaning

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Nadir/Abyss
Supreme Ordeal
– **Meeting with the Goddess** (7)
– **Woman as Temptress** (8)
– **Atonement with Father** (9)
– Revelation brings new perspective
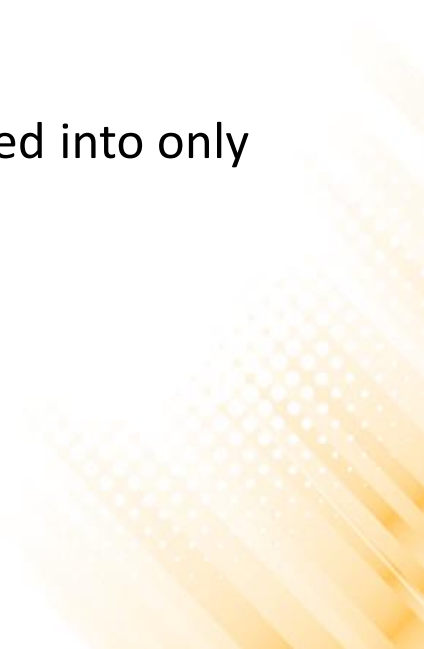
Transformation
Revelation brings Rebirth
– Transformed perspective gives birth to the transformed self
– New attitudes, beliefs and behaviors emerge
– Self is reborn

Narrative Theories

- Starting from the assumption that stories share certain common characteristics, narrative theories aim at explaining the narrative phenomena.

- Examples of theorists:
  - Vladimir Propp
  - Aarne-Thompson
  - Roland Barthes
  - Tzvetan Todorov
  - Claude Levi-Strauss

Propp Theory

- Propp examined 100 Russian fairy tales, and showed that they could all be described by 31 typical narrative functions (such as villainy, hero's departure, reward).

  – Propp also showed that these functions have a chronological order that defines the basic structure of a fairy tale.

  – He also concluded that all characters could be summarized into only seven character types.

Propp Theory

- **Character types:**
  1. <u>The villain</u>: an evil character that fight against the hero.
  2. <u>The dispatcher</u>: a character who illustrates the need for the hero's quest and sends the hero off.
  3. <u>The helper</u>: a typically magical entity that comes to help the hero in their quest.
  4. <u>The princess and her father</u>: gives the task to the hero, identifies the false hero, marries the hero.
  5. <u>The donor</u>: prepares the hero or gives the hero some magical object.
  6. <u>The hero</u>: the character who reacts to the dispatcher and donor characters, fight against the villain, and marry the princess.
  7. <u>False hero</u>: takes credit for the hero's actions or tries to marry the princess.

Propp Theory

- **Narrative functions (some examples):**
  - Villain appears (e.g. trying to find jewels, children, etc.).
  - Villain gains information about the victim.
  - Villain attempts to trick the victim.
  - Hero is fooled by the villain.
  - Hero acquires a magical agent.
  - Hero and Villain in direct combat.
  - Villain is defeated (killed).
  - False hero claims Hero's success.
  - Hero marries and ascends the throne.

Interactive Storytelling

- **Plot Generation:**
  - Manually authored branching networks.
  - Planning algorithms (character-based vs plot-based).

- **User Interaction:**
  - GUI interfaces, speech recognition, virtual reality interaction, hand-drawn sketches, social networks, …

- **Dramatization:**
  - Visual representation of the narratives.
  - Text, images, video, 2D/3D animations, comics, virtual reality, augmented reality, …

Project Assignment 1

1) Identify the narrative in your project:

   - The project includes a narrative integrated with the system (the system tells a narrative)? If so, describe the narrative and try to identify branching points.

   - If your system is not designed to tell a story, can you describe the use of the system as a narrative? Create a narrative describing a typical user interacting with the system. Try to add branching points to highlight the different actions the user can perform while using the system.