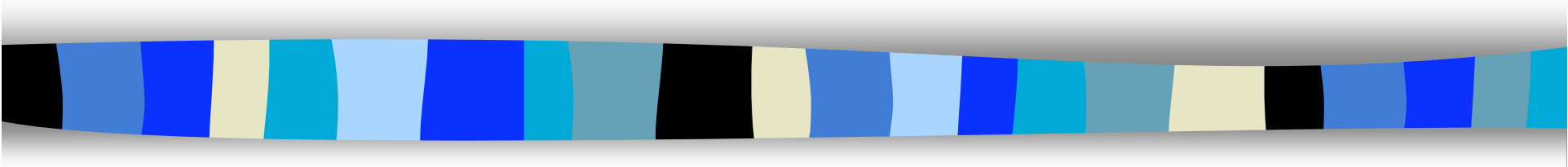


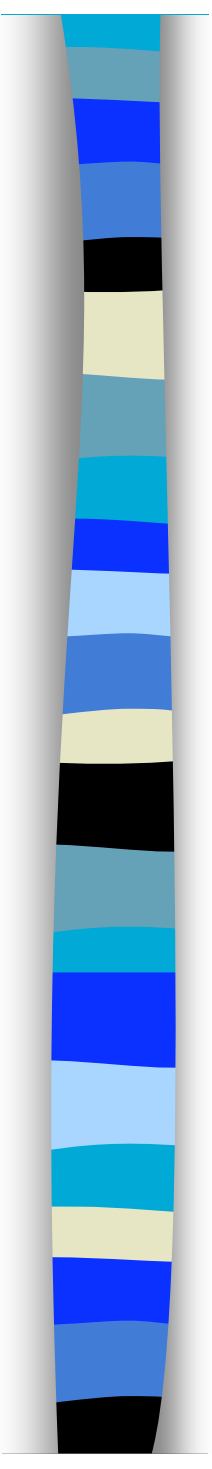
The Role of Story



Topics in Game Development

UNM

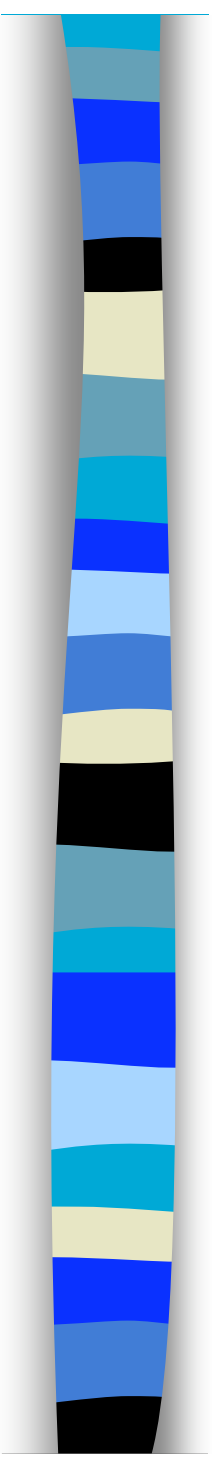
ECE 495/595; CS 491/591



Game Players – Latest Stats

(from Entertainment Software Association)

- Average age: 33
 - 69% over 18
 - 25% over 50!
- Women gamers: 38% of all gamers
 - 42% of online gamers
 - 47% of parents who play games



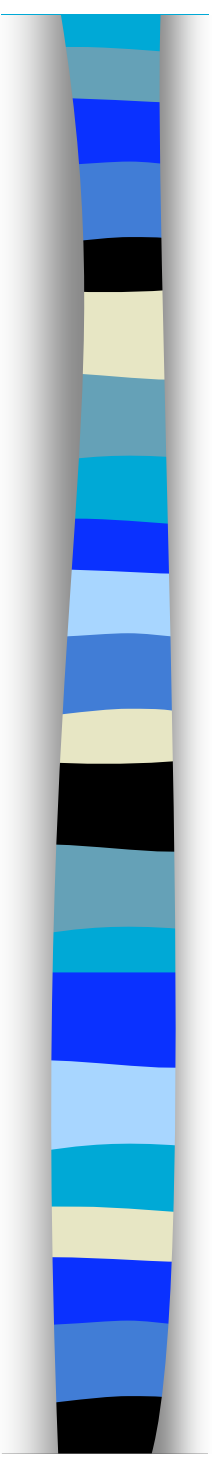
Most popular games by category

■ Game consoles

- Action: 30.1%
- Sports: 17.3%

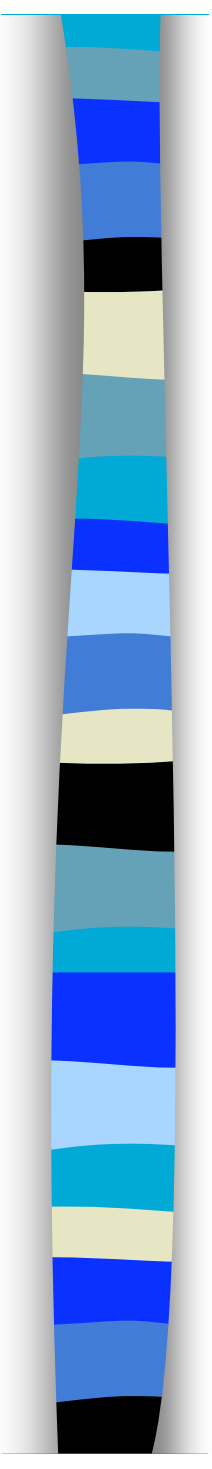
■ Computer games:

- Strategy: 30.8%
- Family & Kids: 19.8%



Most popular games by ratings (units sold)

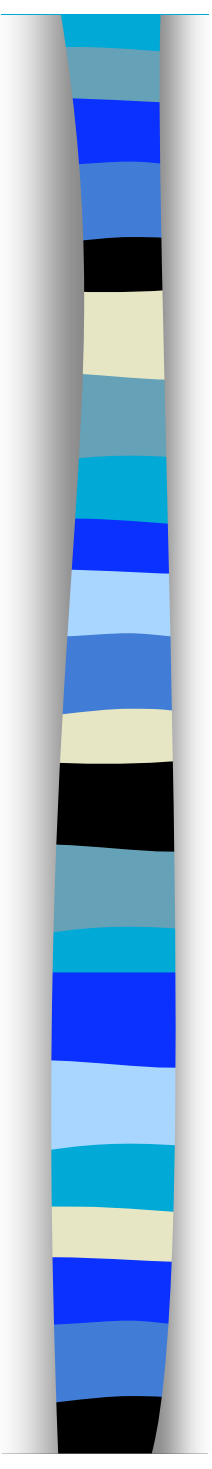
- 49% received an E
- 32% received a T
- 15% received an M



Ratings Guidelines

(Entertainment Software Ratings Board)

- EC (early childhood) 3+
- E (everyone) (6+)
- E 10+ (ten and older)
- T (13+) some violence, crude humor
- M (17+) intense violence, graphic sex, gore
- AO (18+) prolonged violence, graphic sex
- RP (rating pending)



Stories and Games: Warring camps

- **LUDOLOGY** (from Latin, *ludus* = game): games not form of narrative; regarded as unique artifacts; study games as games
- **NARRATOLOGY** (from *narrative*): games are a form of storytelling

Traditional stories (movies, plays, novels, etc):

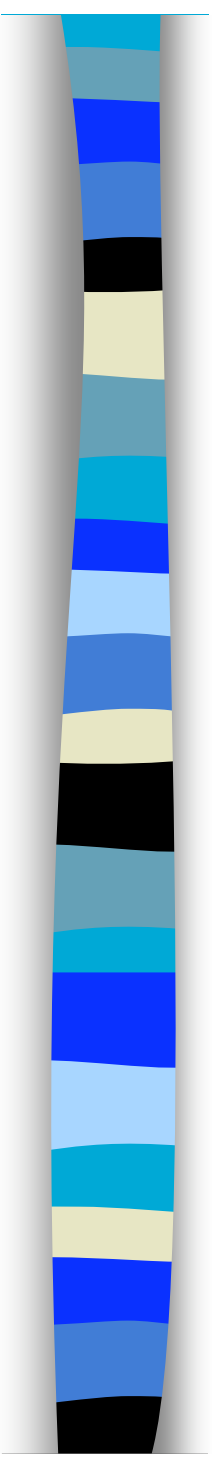


- Pre-constructed; cannot change
- Linear – events in fixed order (usually chronological)
- One unchangeable ending
- Audience cannot interact
- Storyteller the boss: Godlike powers
- Experienced passively

Games – a different storytelling environment

- Interactive: players participate
- Nonlinear
- Different outcomes possible
- Player co-creator of story
- Experienced as active play, not passively





Some views of story & games

- Henry Jenkins (MIT): game designers are “narrative architects” – design worlds, shape spaces
- Celia Pearce (UC Irvine): story should not dominate; games are all about play... designers should create a compelling framework for play

What is a story?



- Mostly inter-changeable with “drama” and “narrative”
- Depict **characters** in **series of dramatic events**, following action from **inception to conclusion**

Games are naturally story-like; contain basic elements of drama



- Conflict: 2 sides fighting
- Greeks: competition for a desired prize (agon)
 - The protagonist (the hero; the one going for the goal)
 - The antagonist (the opposing force; the adversary)
- Obstacles & challenges
- A resolution

Games also have:



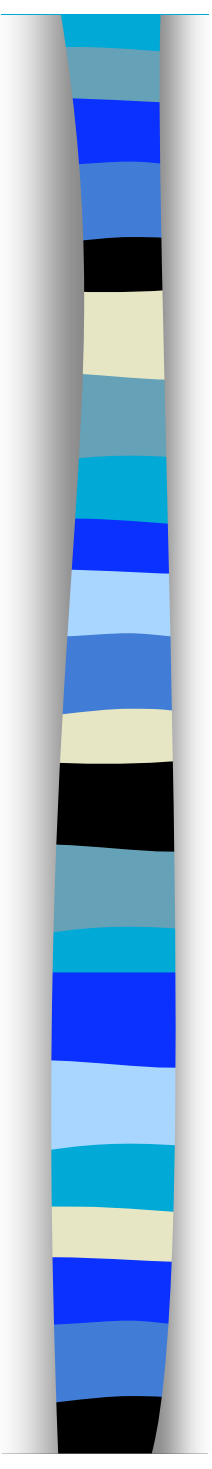
- A structure (beginning, middle, end)
- Clear cut rules
- Rewards and penalties
- A defined playing space (court, field, track) – a setting

Many storytelling concepts are useful to game design:



IMMERSIVENESS

- Become sucked into story, totally absorbed
- Provided by great plot, characters, settings
- Games even more immersive than linear stories:
 - Player controls what happens
 - A “live” experience
 - Sense of being inside story
 - Can be augmented by tactile and other other sensory feedback



2. Plot

- The “what happens” in a story
- Closely related to structure
- Can provide surprises, the unexpected
- In games:
 - Also the “what happens”
 - Provides starting point, middle, endings
 - Less elaborate than linear stories

3. Characters



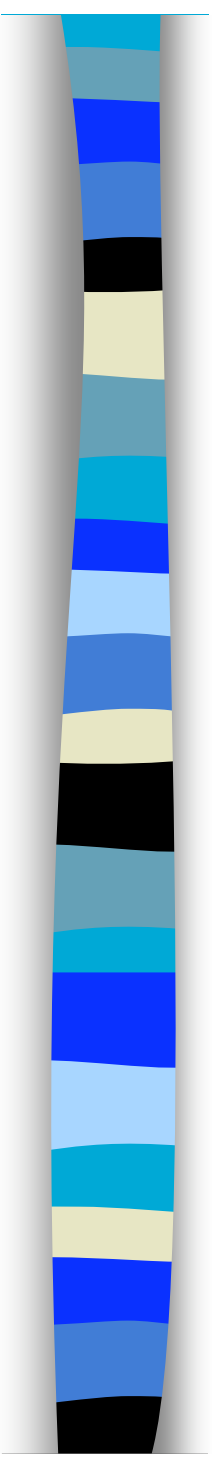
©2007 Carolyn
Handler

- “Humanize” a story, bring it to life
- Strong characters can help popularize a game
- In games:
 - Often less developed than in linear stories
 - Antagonists may be abstract
 - Players control or “become” characters

4. Setting

- This is “world” of your game
- Can suggest story possibilities
- Can be physical
- Can be a fantasy world
- Can be a particular time period





5. Goals and Motives

- Grow out of the main character and plot
- It is what the hero is trying to achieve
- Should be easy to understand, difficult to accomplish
- A well-established goal:
 - Will drive the player through game to end
 - Will add meaning to a game

6. Obstacles

- Can be:
 - Physical
 - Cerebral (puzzles)
 - Other characters
- Help make story or game riveting
- In game, should not be:
 - too easy: player bored
 - too hard: player gives up



7. Rewards and penalties



- Carrot and stick
- In stories and games, help provide incentives to keep going
- In games, also a way to measure success or failure
- Can be: a score, \$; powers; advancement; little things that can be used for something big

8. Emotion

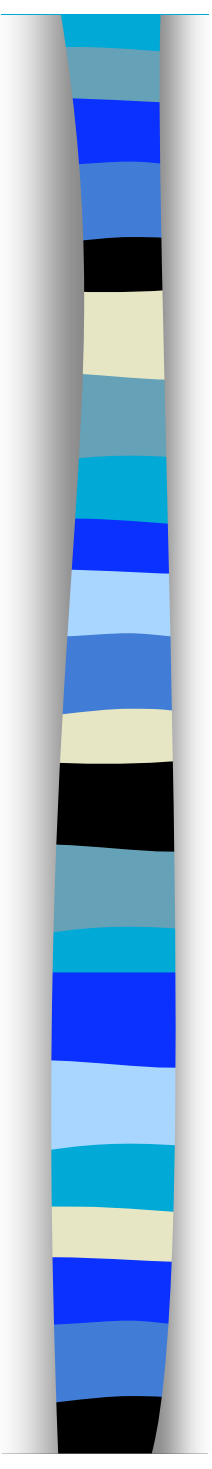
- 2 kinds: expressed by characters, experienced by audience or players
- Can make a game richer, more compelling, more memorable
- Some emotions often found in games: fear, hope, tension, anxiety
- Some more rare: shame, sorrow, compassion, empathy



9. Urgency



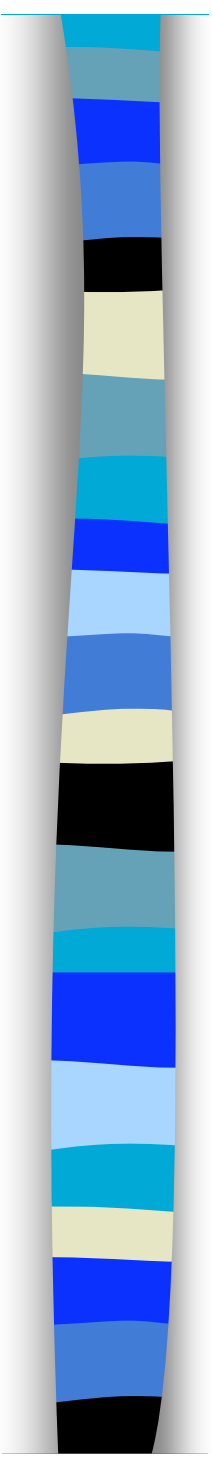
- Provided by a sense of time running out
- Device from stories: the ticking clock (must succeed at something by certain time, or disaster)



Story also used in cut scenes, cinematics

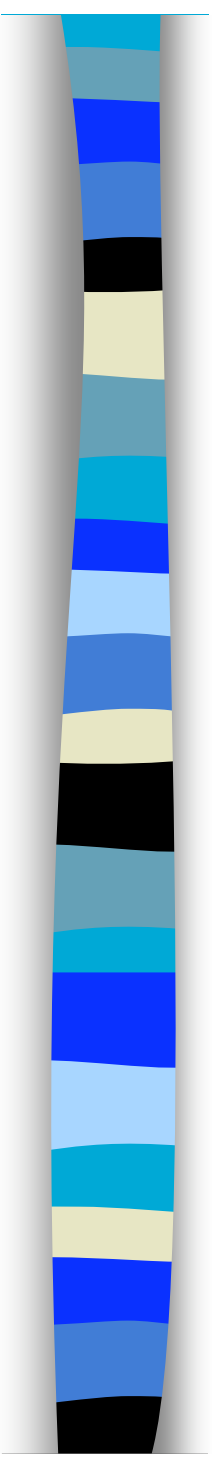
- Linear sequences just like movie scenes
- Used to:
 - open game (provides backstory, motivation)
 - wrap up game (pulls everything together)
 - bridge parts of game (introduce new characters, challenges)

USE SPARINGLY: can slow down game,
annoy players!



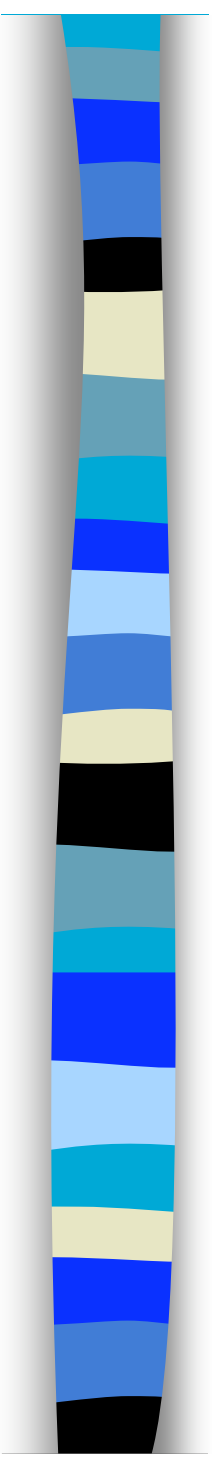
Where do ideas for games come from?

- News stories, documentaries
- History
- Mythology
- An event from real life (more common in linear stories)
- An interesting setting
- Fantasy themes
- Letting imagination run free – brainstorming
- Adaptations of books, movies (AVOID!)
- Sequels to popular game franchise (not an option)



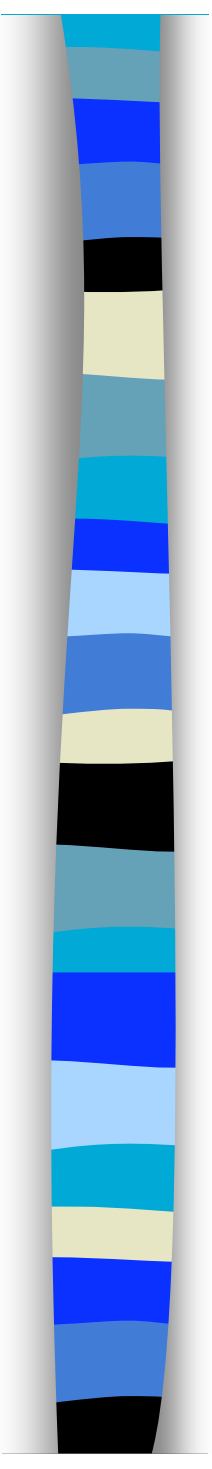
What kinds of ideas work best?

- Stories that provide lots of action, things for player to do
- Stories with simple, understandable, meaningful goals
- Stories with exciting challenges
- Stories with colorful settings
- Stories that provide escape from “ordinary” life



Ideas that absolutely won't work?

- No such thing!
- Limitations are self imposed (by industry)
- But some ideas, themes, genres very difficult in games:
 - Complex character development
 - Musical comedy
 - Slapstick comedy
 - Complex social or political issues
 - Realistic, contemporary stories
- Innovative ideas may break new ground, be a hit



In short, stories provide games with:

- Immersiveness
- Plot
- Characters
- Settings
- Goals
- Motivation
- Obstacles
- Rewards, penalties
- Urgency
- Emotion