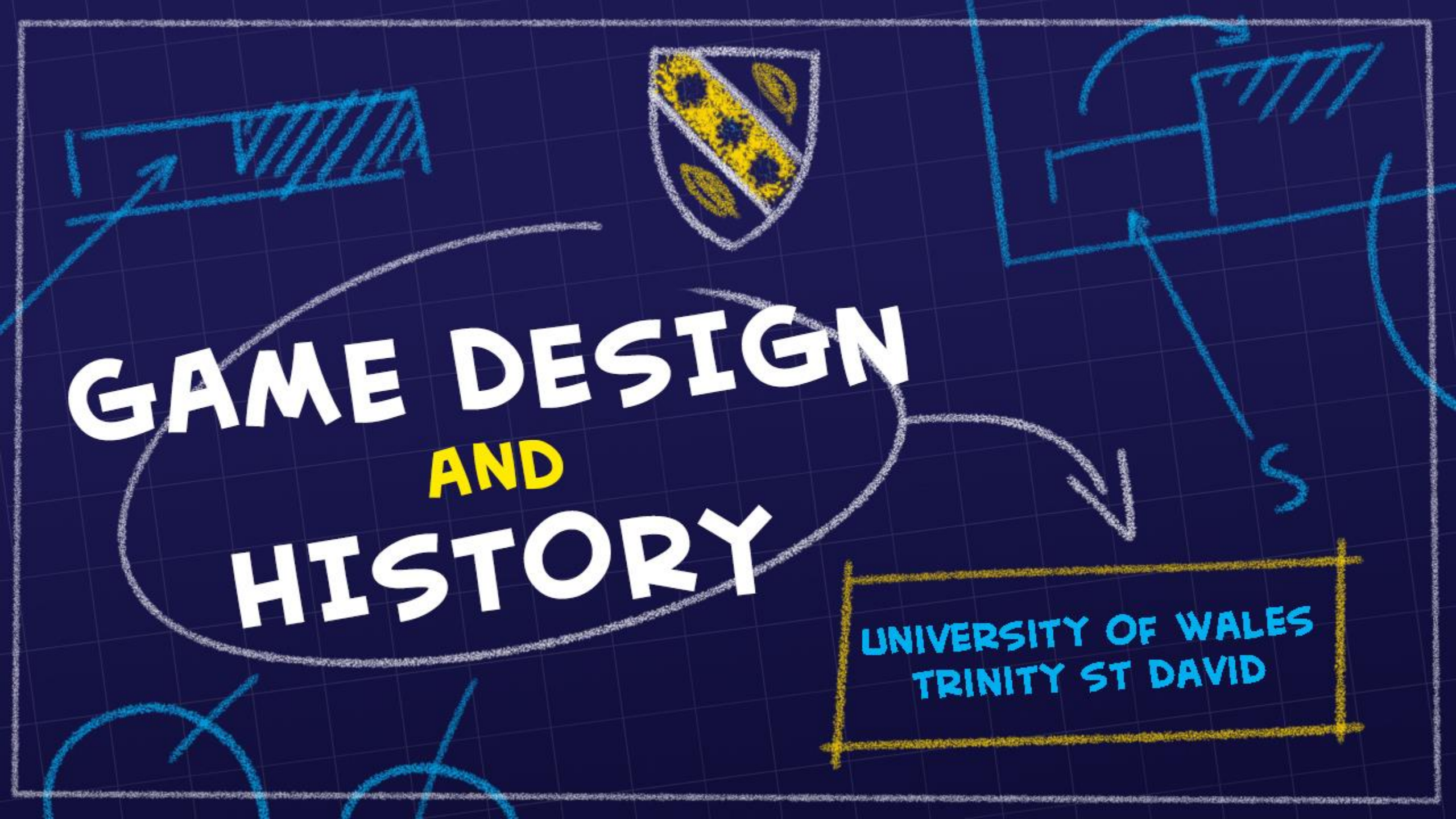




GAME DESIGN AND HISTORY

UNIVERSITY OF WALES
TRINITY ST DAVID



Conflict and Choice

- **Conflict**
 - Definitions of conflict in games
 - Bjork & Holopainen
 - Chris Crawford
- **Choice**
 - Non-linearity
 - Types of choice in games
 - Meaningful and meaningless choices
 - Dominant strategies
 - Triangularity





CONFLICT AND CHOICE

CONFLICT



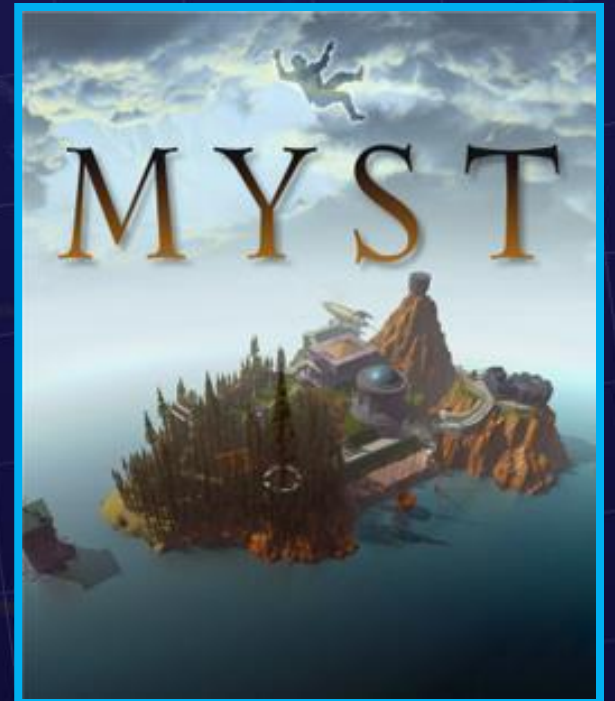
Almost all games contain **conflict**.





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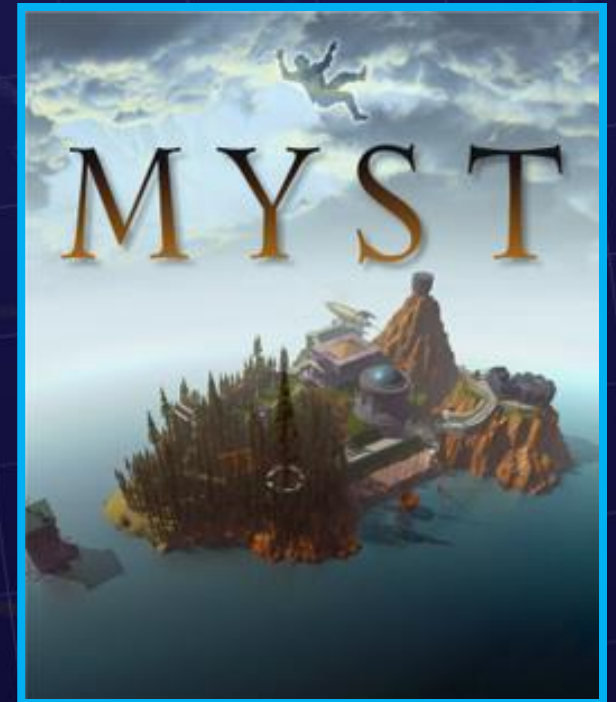
Games can be based on **different kinds of conflict situations** on different levels.





*“In conflict, **two or more parties**, often players or players against the game system, have goals, that **cannot** be satisfied together.”*

(Bjork & Holopainen, 2004, p.239)





Competitions with individual rewards for players are conflict situations – only some players are able to reach their goals in an adequate manner.





For conflict to exist, **players must be aware that they have opponents.**





*“Conflict makes challenge **personal**.*

*It’s one thing to be challenged by a cliff waiting to be climbed, or a puzzle waiting to be solved, but it’s entirely another thing to go up against a **real live opponent**.”*

(Crawford, 2003, p.55)





Challenge without conflict is predictable.

Playing a crossword puzzle presents a challenge but no active agent introducing conflict in unpredictable ways.



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Playing a crossword puzzle presents a challenge but no active agent introducing conflict in unpredictable ways.

“Conflict enlivens and animates challenge; without conflict, challenge is limp and passive.”

(Crawford, 2003, p.55)



Crawford states that the **same applies to narrative.**

Conflict puts a protagonist **under stress**, forcing choices that **reveal character.**





In single player games, a player will struggle **against the game system**.

Certain categories of games do not have **explicit** conflict situations, such as simulation games.



Bjork and Holopainen suggest that it is possible to play a simulation game such as *SimCity* or *The Sims* in such a way that there is no perceived conflict situation, but as soon as players **set goals for themselves** in the game there has to be **conflict** - **otherwise there is no game.**



Examples of conflict in games

“The conflict situation in Tetris is that the game system creates blocks that start to fall down, and the player tries to keep the screen as clear from blocks as possible.”

(Bjork & Holopainen, 2004, p.239)





Examples of conflict in games

“In Chess, the conflict situation is clear: the two players try to checkmate each other’s king, and the winner is the first player able to do that.”

(Bjork & Holopainen, 2004, p.239)





Bjork and Holopainen (2008) state that **conflict is a source of emotional immersion** in games, creating tension where other players or the game system are working against the player.





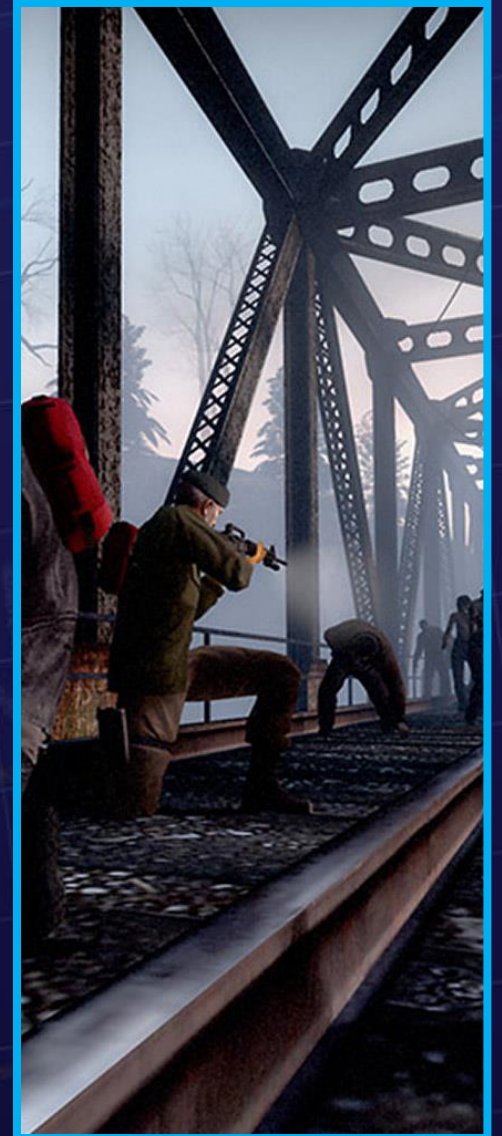
Games use different kinds of conflict situations as the main motivations for players to play the game and for spectators to watch the drama unfold.





Conflict can be carried out with **varying degrees of intensity.**

Crawford (2003) suggests that **intense conflict necessitates a short game.**

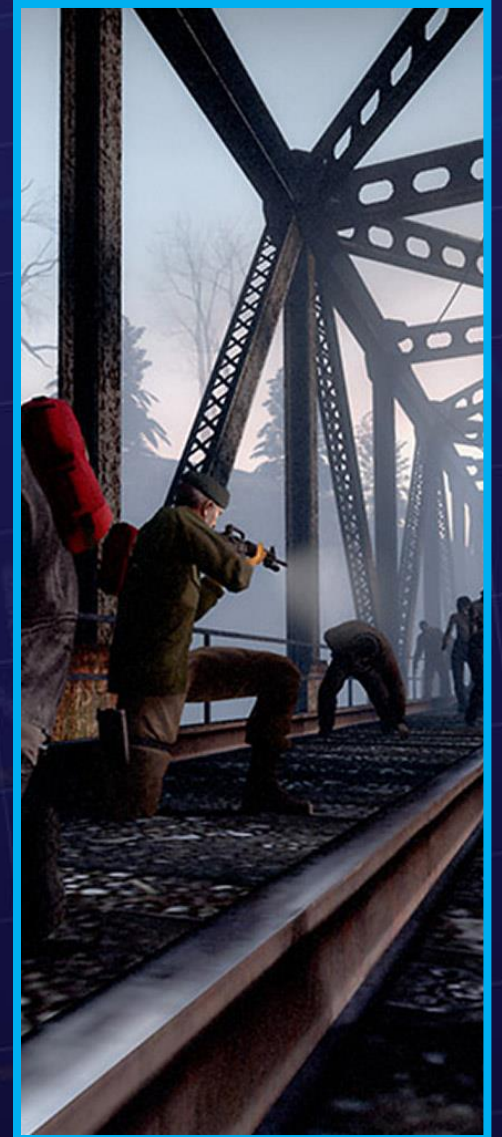




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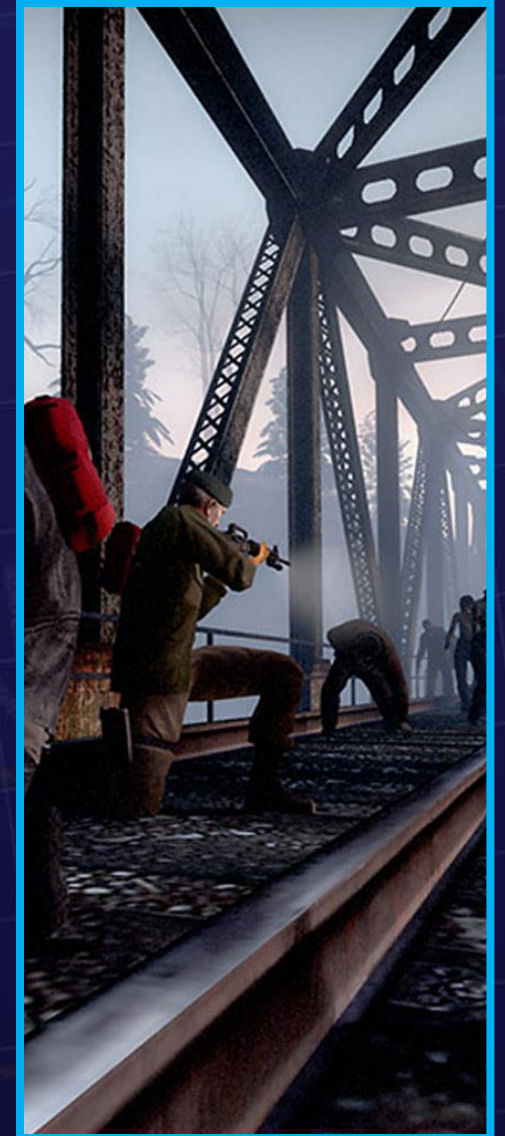
Longer games should be less intense.





Many designers create games of long-duration intensity.

The enemies keep on coming, the killing is non-stop, and the player is **exhausted** when the game finally ends.





Many designers create games of long-duration intensity.

The enemies keep on coming, the killing is non-stop, and the player is **exhausted** when the game finally ends.

A well-paced game design will rely on more indirect and less intense forms of conflict if it is to last a long time.





Violence in videogames

“Game designers cling to violence only because they cannot imagine other forms of conflict.”

(Crawford, 2003, p.61)

Crawford states that violence in games represents the most extreme form of conflict: gory, physical, direct and intense.



Violence in videogames

“Game designers cling to violence only because they cannot imagine other forms of conflict.”

(Crawford, 2003, p.61)

However, his objection to this is less about morals – it is more to do with aesthetics and issues of taste.

**CONFLICT
AND CHOICE**

CHOICE



Non-linearity



“In general, when someone says something is linear they mean it follows a line.”

(Rouse, 2005 p.119)



Non-linearity



A linear experience would mean that there is **only one way** to navigate from point A to point B, with no choices to be made.

Reading a book or watching a movie would be considered a linear experience.



The purpose of non-linearity

Non-linearity gives interactivity meaning. The more parts of a game that can be made non-linear, the better it will be. However, this will also mean that the game will become far more **time consuming and difficult to develop.**

It is hard to design non-linear games – they are certainly **harder to develop than linear experiences.**



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Non-linearity is typically presented in the form of choices – different paths that the player can take to get from point A to point B.



Using *Chess* as an example:

There are a **vast number of ways** to capture the opponent's king and to be victorious.

The variety and possibilities keep the game interesting - the amount of **choice** presented to players make the game **non-linear**.





Richard Rouse describes different ways in which to present choices to players.

- **Storytelling**
- **Multiple Solutions**
- **Order**
- **Selection**



**CONFLICT
AND CHOICE**

STORYTELLING



Non-linear storytelling has to be tied to non-linear gameplay.

There is no point in constructing a non-linear plot if the game it supports provides little in terms of meaningful decisions for players to make.

*“Storytelling is perhaps one of the most neglected parts of games in terms of non-linearity, with many developers allowing for **non-linear gameplay** while constraining their games to a **completely linear story**.”*

(Rouse, 2005 pp.119-120)

**CONFLICT
AND CHOICE**

**MULTIPLE
SOLUTIONS**



*“A well-designed game will **allow players to come up with their own solutions to the challenges the game presents.***”

Almost any challenge should have multiple ways for players to overcome it.

Having multiple solutions to the individual challenges within a game is a big part of non-linearity.”

(Rouse, 2005, p.120)



**CONFLICT
AND CHOICE**

ORDER



*“Giving players choices of different puzzles to solve allows them to **put aside a troubling puzzle and go work on another one for a while.**”*

After completing the second puzzle, players may return to the first refreshed and revitalized, and thereby have a better chance of solving it.”

(Rouse, 2005, p.120)





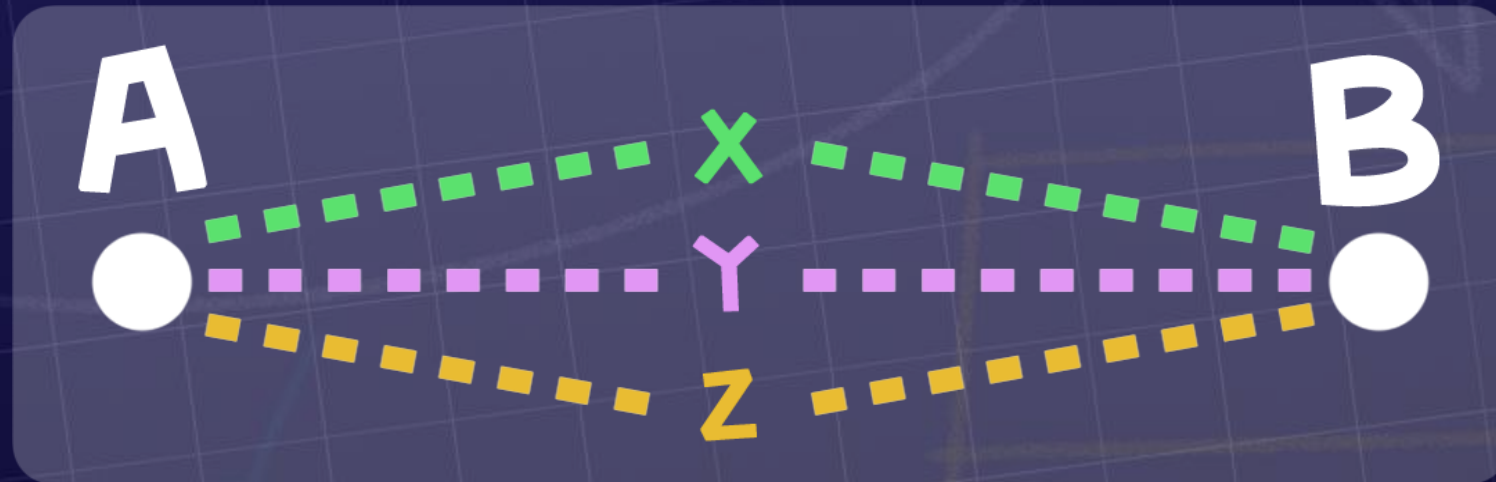
**CONFLICT
AND CHOICE**

SELECTION



Letting a player pick which challenges they want to overcome also makes a game **non-linear**.

A number of challenges could be presented, and **any one of them** would allow players to proceed.





Players can try different challenges if they encounter difficulties, reducing the chance of them becoming completely stuck.

Giving players a choice allows them to **make use of their own personal skills** to get through the game.

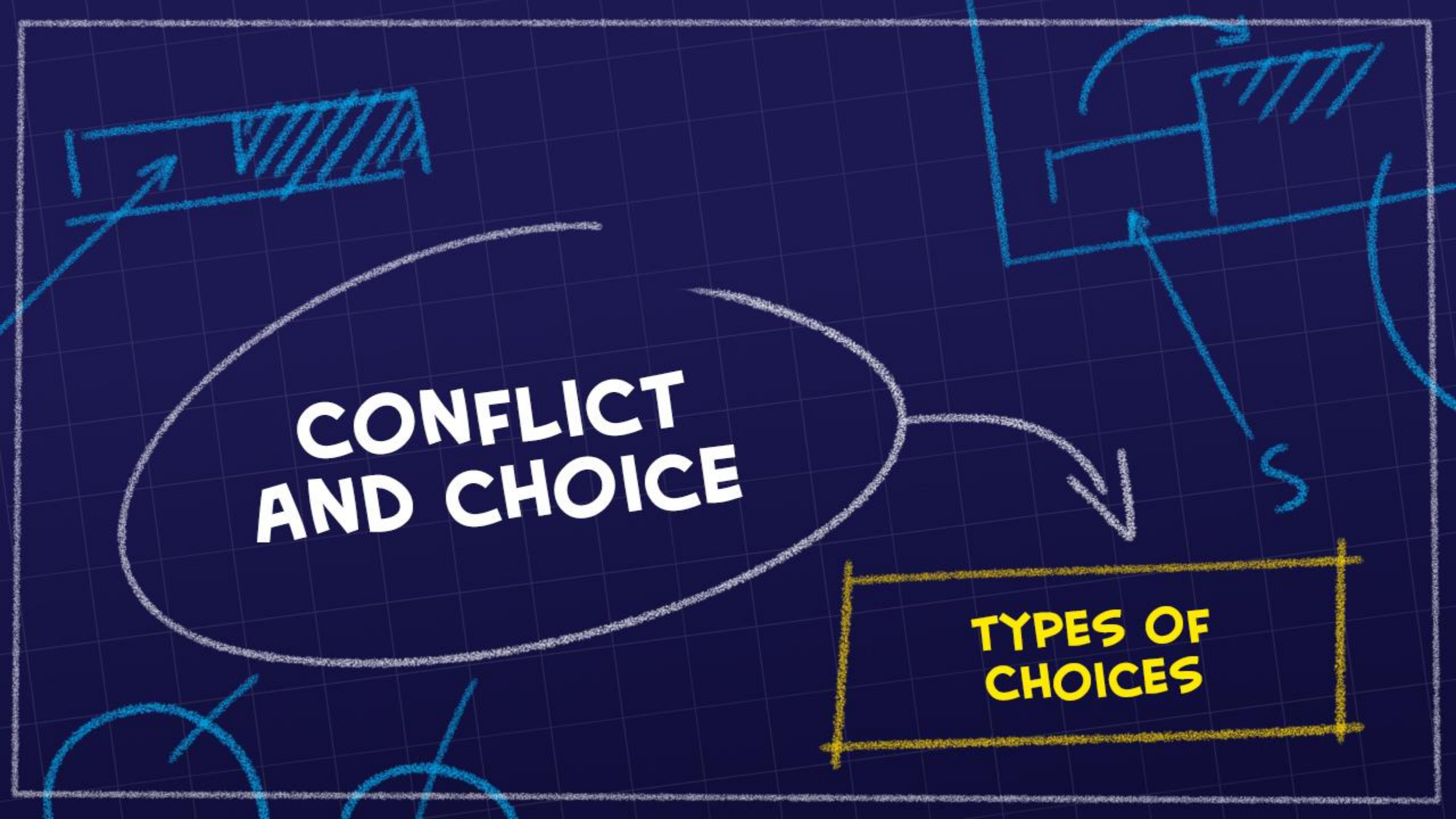




*“For a game to be a game at all, the players have to be able to make what they feel are **interesting choices**. This means that the choices must have **seemingly different effects** and have **effects that are meaningful**.*

*If these conditions are met, players can feel that they have **freedom of choice** within the game system and they can **affect the outcome** of the game.”*

(Bjork & Holopainen, 2004, p.209)



CONFLICT AND CHOICE

**TYPES OF
CHOICES**



Types of choices in games include:

- Hollow
- Obvious
- Uninformed
- Informed
- Dramatic
- Weighted
- Immediate
- Long-term
- Orthogonal



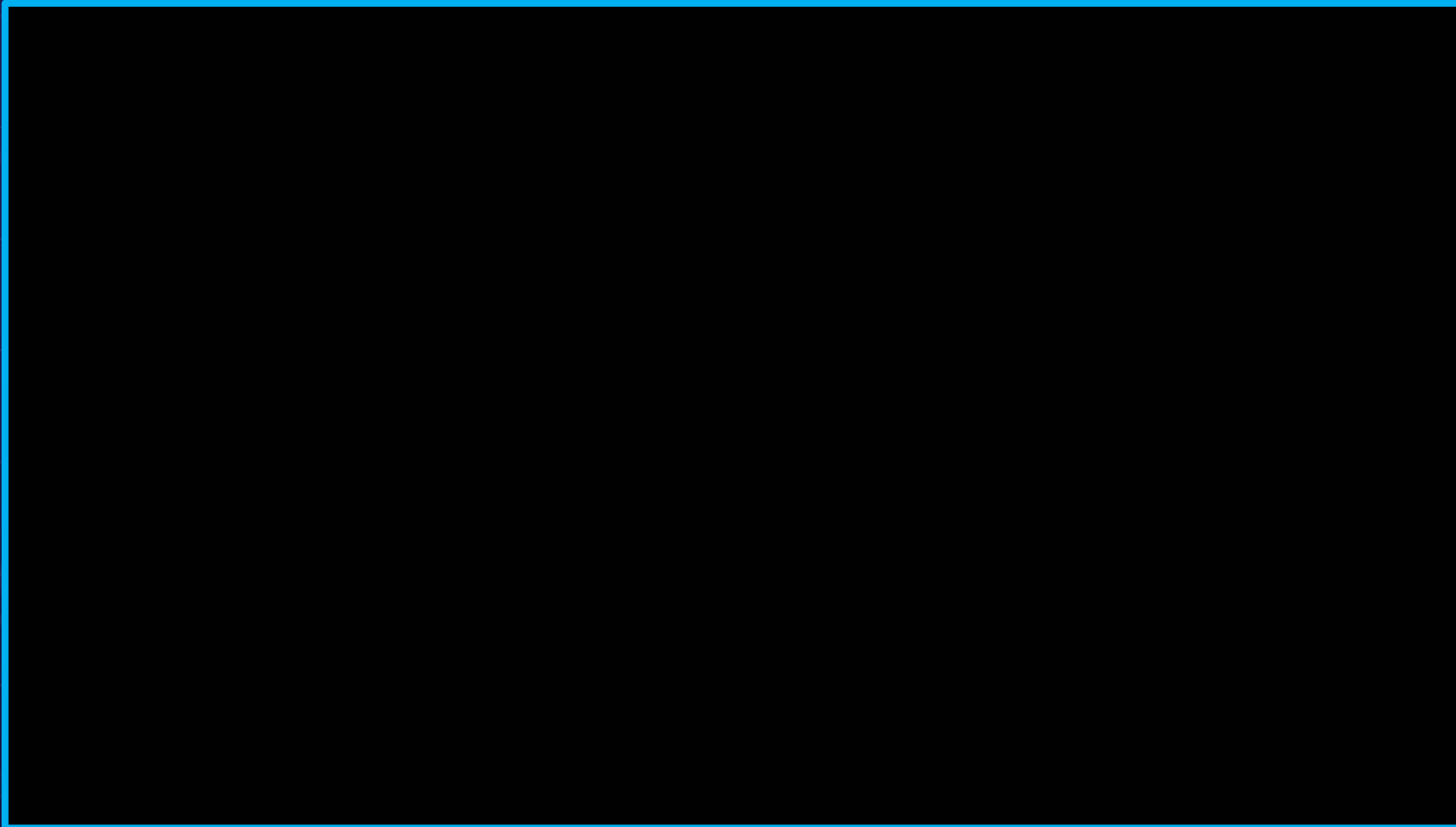


- **Hollow** – No real consequence (*Saints Row 2*, Volition Inc., 2009)





- **Obvious** – A decision requiring no real choice
(*Bioshock Infinite*, Irrational Games / 2K, 2013)





- **Uninformed** – A random decision

(Alex Kidd in High Tech World, Sega, 1989)



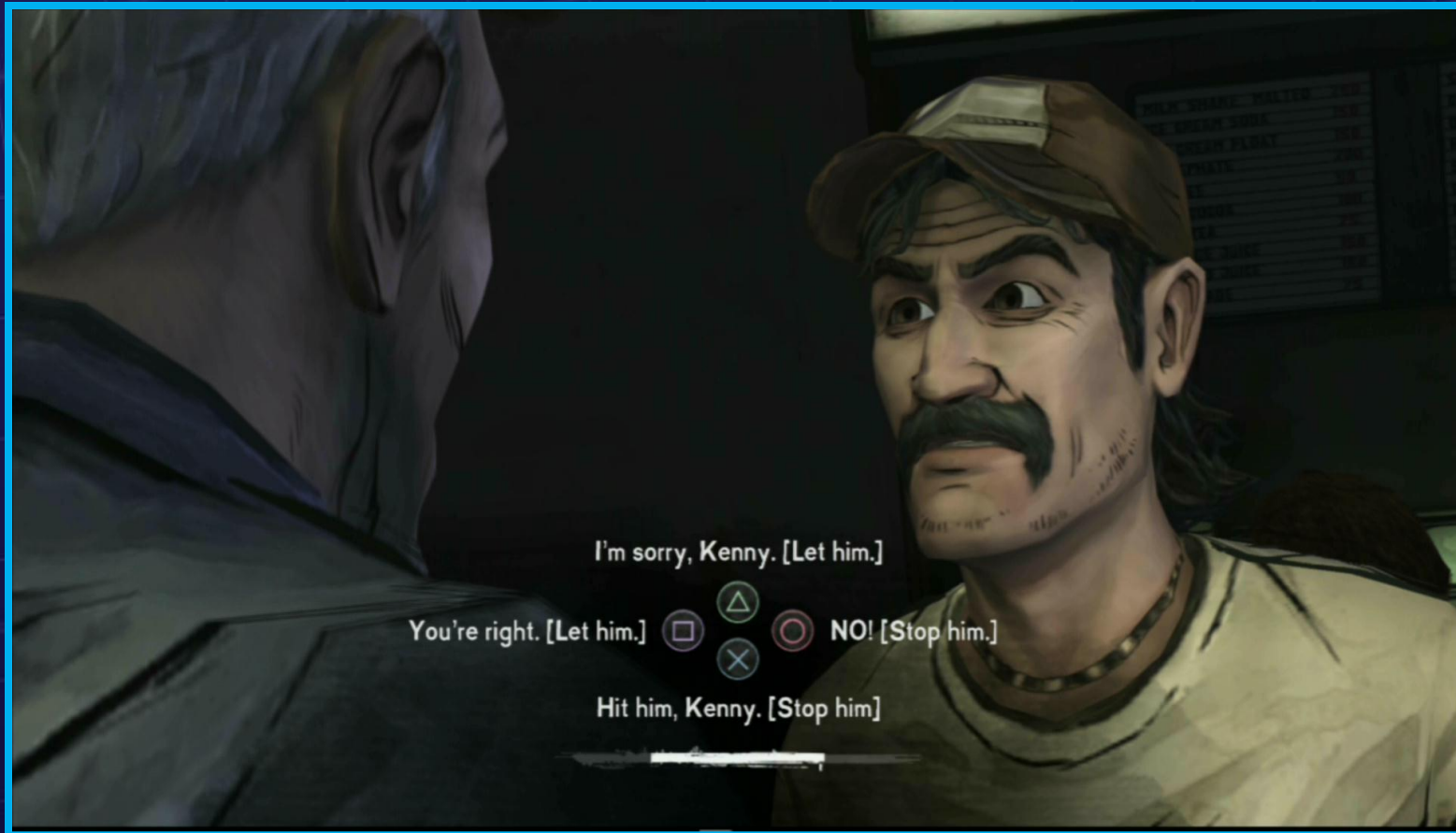


- **Informed** – A choice based on information presented within the game
(*LA Noire*, Team Bondi / Rockstar, 2011)





- **Dramatic** – Strongly connects to the player's feelings, perhaps leading to the death or injury of a major character
(*The Walking Dead*, TellTale Games, 2012)





- **Weighted** – Clear positive or negative outcomes of each choice
(*Fable*, Big Blue Box / Lionhead Studios, 2004)





- **Immediate** – Consequences are immediate
(*Orcs Must Die!*, Robot Entertainment, 2011)





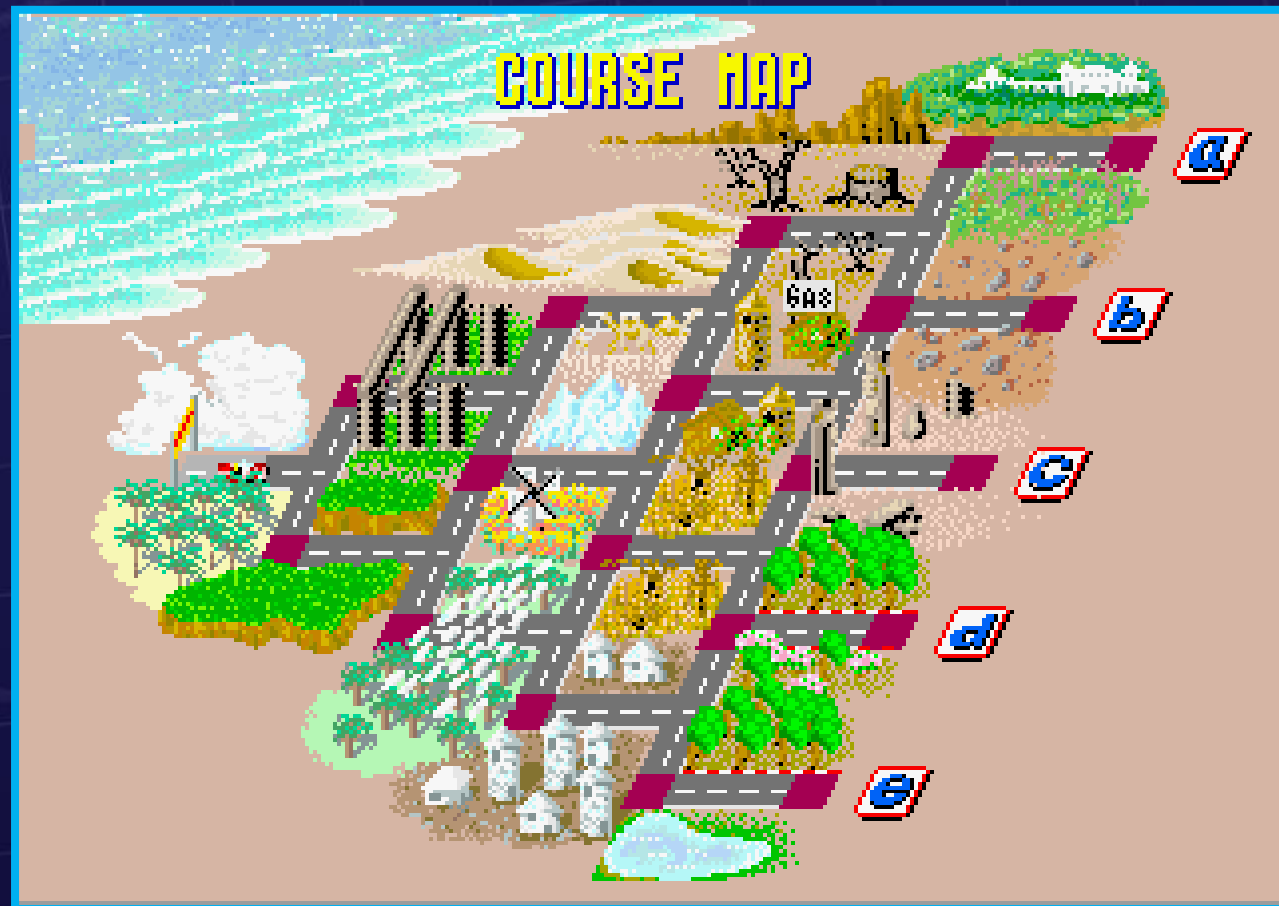
- **Long-Term** – Consequences transpire later on in the game
(*The Walking Dead*, TellTale Games, 2012)





- **Orthogonal** – Distinct choices, leading to different outcomes, independent of all other choices

(Out Run, Sega, 1986)



**CONFLICT
AND CHOICE**

**MEANINGFUL
CHOICE**



One of the major challenges for game design is to create **interesting and meaningful choices.**





One of the major challenges for game design is to create **interesting and meaningful choices.**

A good game gives the player meaningful choices.





Schell (2008) defines meaningful choices as **those that will have a real impact on what happens next** and how the game turns out.

These choices are the heart of **interactivity**.





Meaningful choices for players lead to ask themselves questions such as:



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- How should I dress my character?
- Should I try to get through the game quickly or carefully?
- Should I focus on offense or defence?
- What strategy should I use in this situation?
- Which power should I choose?
- Should I play it safe or take a big risk?

**CONFLICT
AND CHOICE**

**MEANINGLESS
CHOICE**



Meaningless choices

Some designers fall into the trap of offering the player meaningless choices.

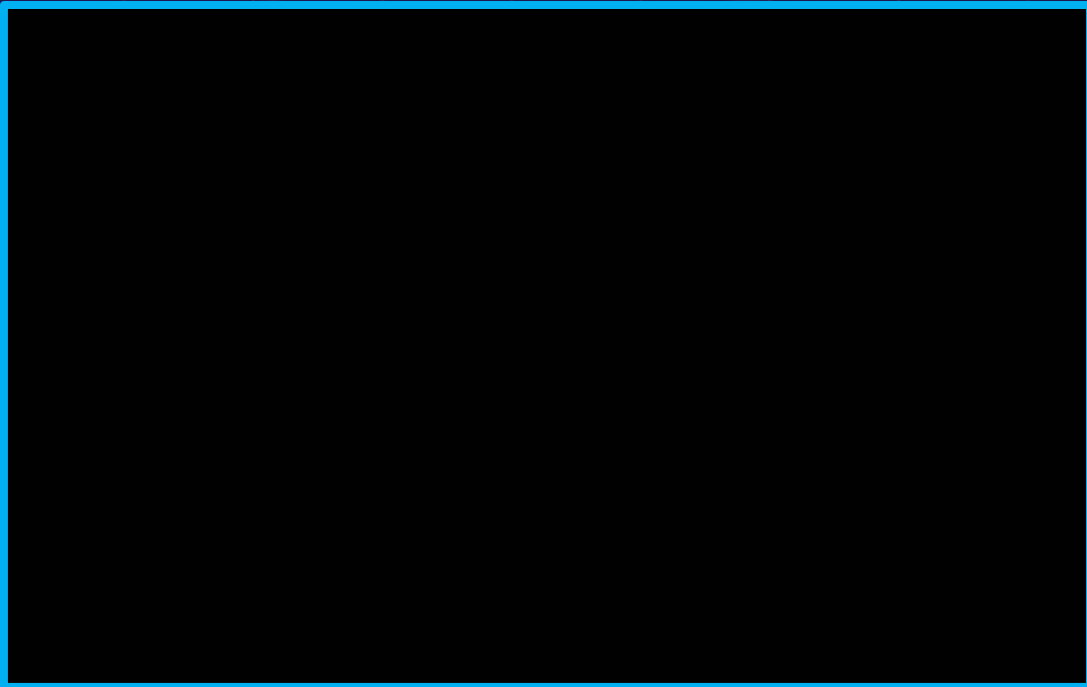
Examples include:

- Offering dozens of cars in a racing game that all handle in **exactly the same way**
- A choice of several weapons in a game, with **one being far more powerful** or useful than any others



Dominant strategy

When choices are offered to a player but one of them is clearly better than the others, it is called a **Dominant Strategy** (Schell, 2008).





The number of choices a player seeks is dependant on the **number of things they desire.**

To properly determine the number of choices, a designer needs to figure out the types and number of things that a player would like to do.

(Schell & Mateas, 2008)



For example:





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- **If Choices > Desires**, the player will be overwhelmed.



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- If Choices < Desires, the player will be frustrated.



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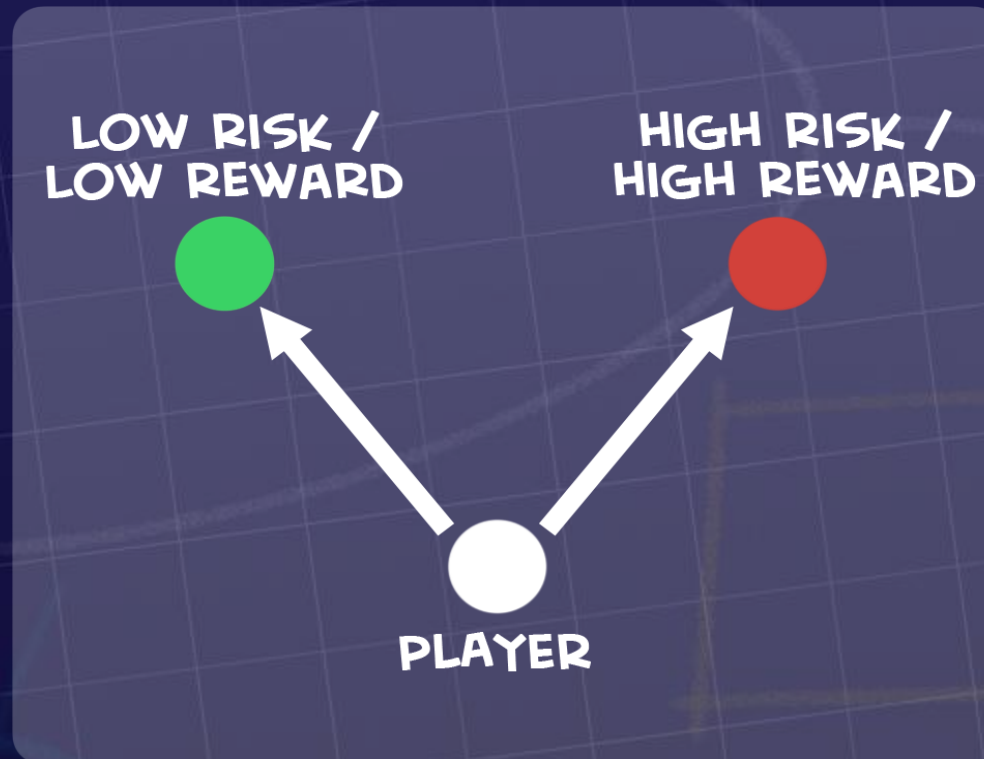
- If **Choices > Desires**, the player will be overwhelmed.
- If **Choices < Desires**, the player will be frustrated.
- If **Choices = Desires**, the player has a feeling of freedom and fulfillment.

**CONFLICT
AND CHOICE**

TRIANGULARITY



Jesse Schell describes a meaningful choice scenario in games as **Triangularity** – balancing a **high risk, high reward** against a **low risk, low reward** choice.





Space Invaders is a game that contains a good example of triangularity.

Players will shoot slow-moving, low-reward invaders for most of the game, but will occasionally be given a choice to shoot at a flying saucer at the top of the screen that is **high-reward and worth more points**.



*“A game with **poorly designed choices** for players is nearly as linear as a game with **no choices at all**. The non-linearity your game provides must be **meaningful** and **useful** to players or it is a waste.”*

(Rouse, 2005, p.123)



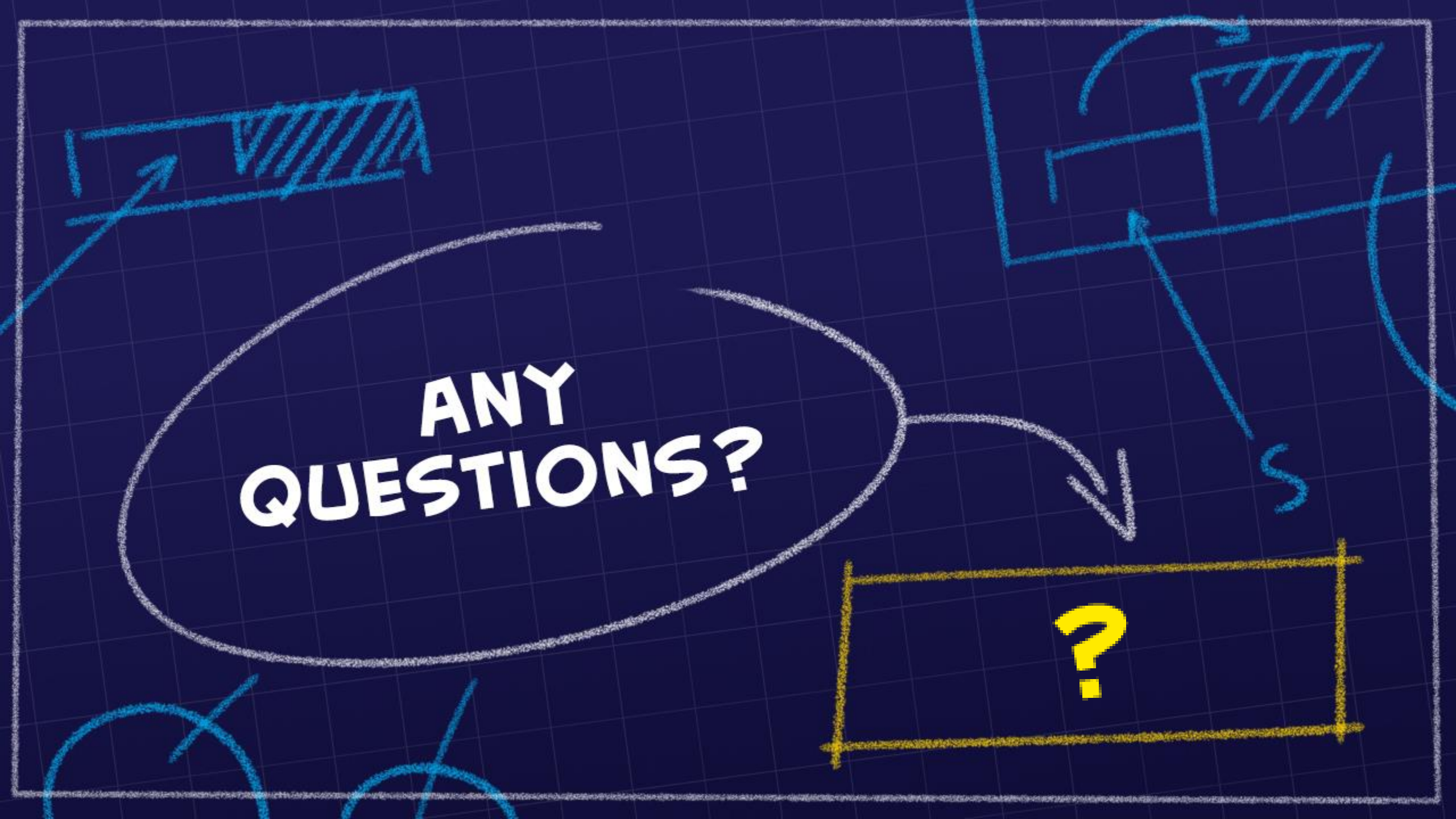
**CONFLICT
AND CHOICE**

SUMMARY



Conflict and Choice: Summary

- **Conflict**
 - **Definitions of conflict in games**
- **Choice**
 - **Non-linearity**
 - **Types of choice in games**
 - **Meaningful and meaningless choices**
 - **Dominant strategies**
 - **Triangularity**

A hand-drawn diagram on a chalkboard background. A central white oval contains the text "ANY QUESTIONS?". An arrow points from the oval to a yellow rectangle containing a large yellow question mark. In the top left, there is a blue rectangle with diagonal hatching and an arrow pointing towards the center. In the top right, there is a blue diagram with a rectangle, a curved arrow, and a letter 'S'. In the bottom left, there are blue circles and lines.

**ANY
QUESTIONS?**

?



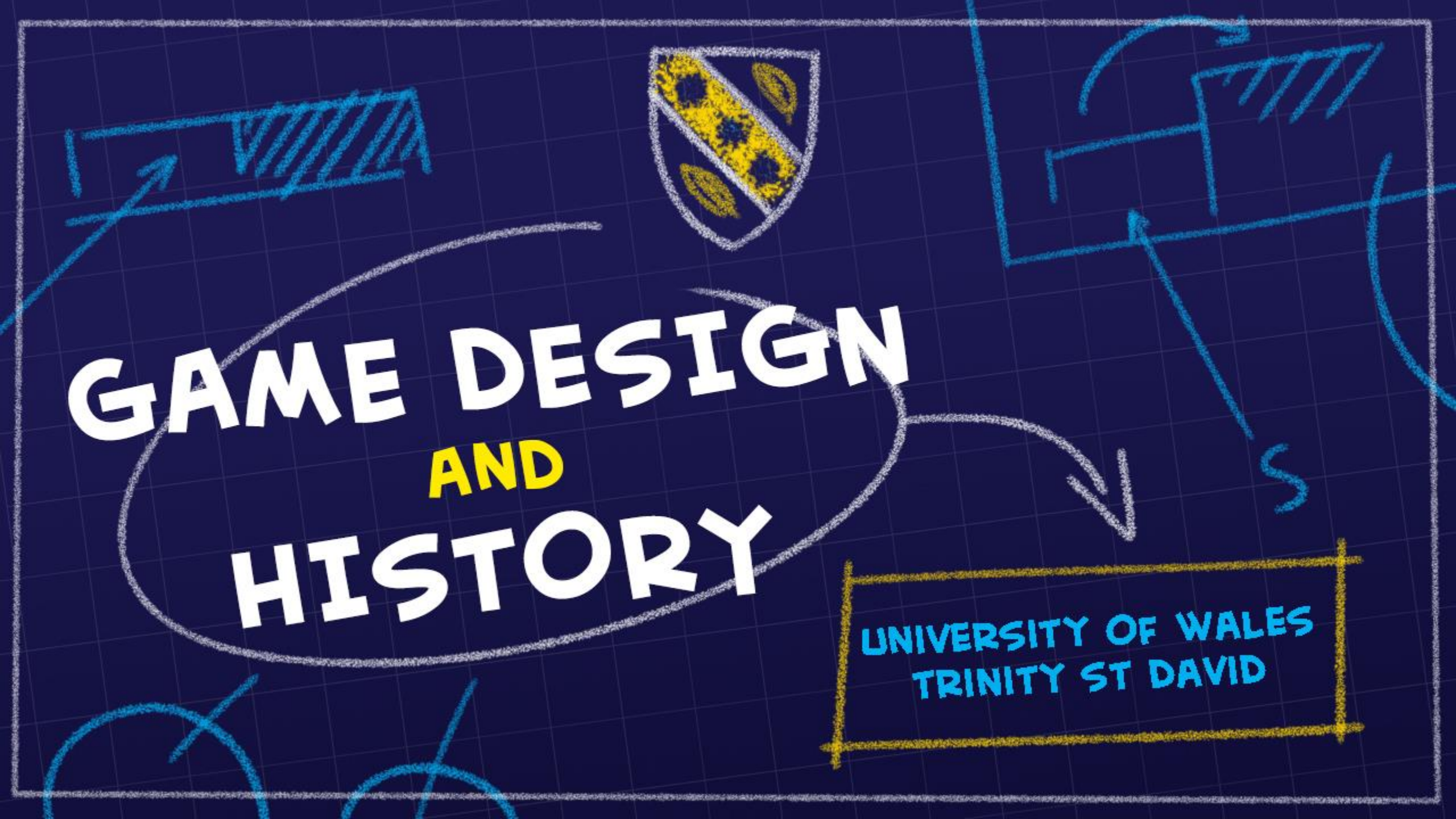
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