

# How Horror Games Brought Adventure Back from the Dead

Chris Pruett





AMAZING!

# ROBOT INVADER!

IN  
TECHNOTOUCH



Monster Robot  
100 Feet High!

Hi, I'm Chris. I run Robot Invader.





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## The Changing Utility of the Otherworld in the Silent Hill Series

One of the most distinctive traits of the [Silent Hill series](#) is its use of the *Otherworld*, a bleak industrial version of reality where night persists indefinitely and rusted metal and barbed wire are core components of most architecture. The Otherworld (sometimes referred to as *nowhere*) often reflects the layout and geometry of reality, but sometimes the reflection is tenuous, as the Otherworld version of reality is usually twisted and confusing. The Silent Hill games contrast the Otherworld with the Fog World, a daytime locale which appears at first to be a perpetually foggy version of the real world but eventually proves to be something more sinister. The protagonists of the Silent Hill games all unwittingly step out of reality and into the Fog World, and eventually they progress into the Otherworld—this is part of the series' formula. But the way these transitions from world to world work and the game design mechanics at play in each world differ from game to game. Every Silent Hill game has some version of these two worlds, but the *use* and *meaning* of the Otherworld and Fog World varies dramatically across the series. In this article I will discuss some of the ways that the Otherworld is used throughout the Silent Hill series. Be warned that this text is filled with spoilers about the series.

### Silent Hill

In addition to the Fog World and Otherworld, [Silent Hill 1](#) actually has a third world: the "Dark World." This is a transition realm, a place that exists in between the Fog World and Otherworld. The Dark World replaces fog with limitless night, but like the Fog World it otherwise resembles reality. The progression from the Fog World to the Dark World and then to the Otherworld is used several times in Silent Hill for dramatic effect. At the very beginning of the game, for example, Harry chases his daughter Cheryl through the town (Fog), into an unnaturally dark alley (Dark), and finally ends up accosted by monsters in a blood-soaked cul-de-sac surrounded by rusty chain link fence (Other). Later in the game he travels through the back door of a home in Silent Hill, and when he does this he immediately transitions from Fog World to Dark World. His subsequent escape in a crawl through the school's clock tower that results in a transition to the Otherworld.

The Otherworld in Silent Hill is used as a plot device. The transition from the Fog World to the Dark World increases the level of tension felt by the player just as this tension peaks. It's a system by which the designers can slowly crank the pressure on the player up and up and up, until finally, thankfully, they return to the relatively tame Fog World. Though the introductory sequence to the game flows very quickly from Fog to Dark to Otherworld without obvious transitions occur at extremely well-defined points in the game. Unlocking the back door in the Fog World is a "beat" in the narrative, a small crescendo in the beat occurs as Harry crawls through the clock tower and finds himself in the Otherworld for the first time. An even more dramatic crescendo occurs as Harry escapes the school. After this peak, the tension is released and the player is deposited back into Fog World. This three-stage building of tension through the transition repeats several times in Silent Hill, culminating finally in the end boss fight (and, in the good ending, the protagonist's escape to the real world).

### Silent Hill 2



In the [second Silent Hill game](#), the Dark World is dropped and focus is placed on the Fog World and Otherworld. Silent Hill 2's level progression is *descent*. James descends from the real world into the Fog World at the beginning of the game, running down a long trail, and throughout the game he is required to descend deeper and deeper into the Fog World while investigating. In one memorable section, James must travel down an impossibly long staircase that stretches into the distance. He is also often asked to jump into holes or otherwise follow one-way paths into the depths. While the appearance of Pyramid Head is used as a peak in the narrative flow, the actual geometry of the Fog World and the Otherworld is responsive to the player's actions. The repeated appearance of Pyramid Head also serves to ratchet the tension level higher, and when it finally appears, the spike in tension is less dramatic than in the previous title because the tension level is already incredibly high. The game is a slow-burning one; the peaks in the drama may be slightly less noticeable, but only because the entire game builds up the pressure on the player at a gradual, linear rate.

There are other interesting things about the Otherworld in Silent Hill 2 that are not shared by the rest of the series.

I also have this horror game blog.





I started studying horror games because they seemed to be the only genre interested in evoking an explicit emotional response.

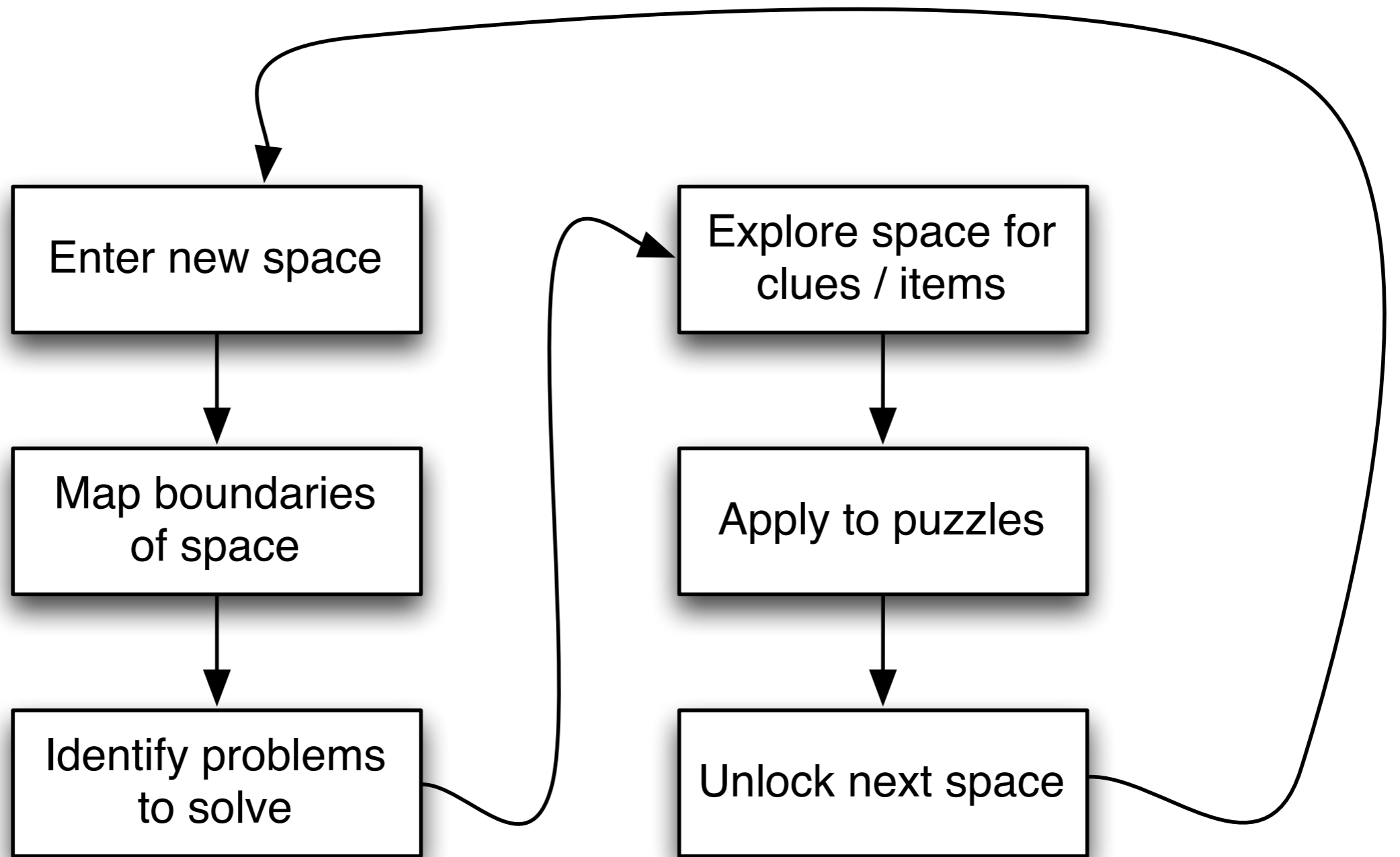




When I started my research, the popular horror games were all pretty similar to each other.



# “Classic” Horror Games

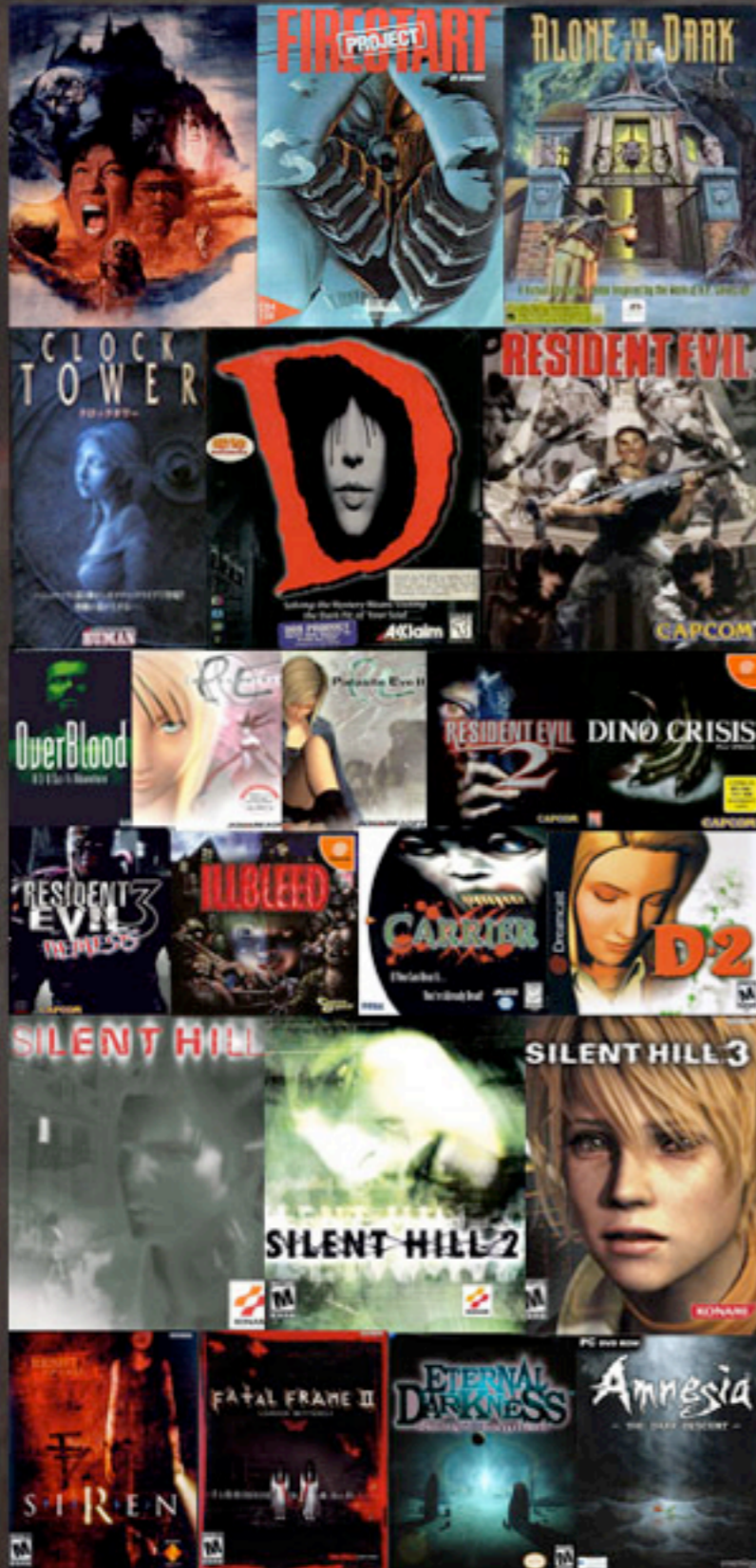


Here’s a simple model that describes the general flow of many games.



# SURVIVAL HORROR

# ACTION HORROR



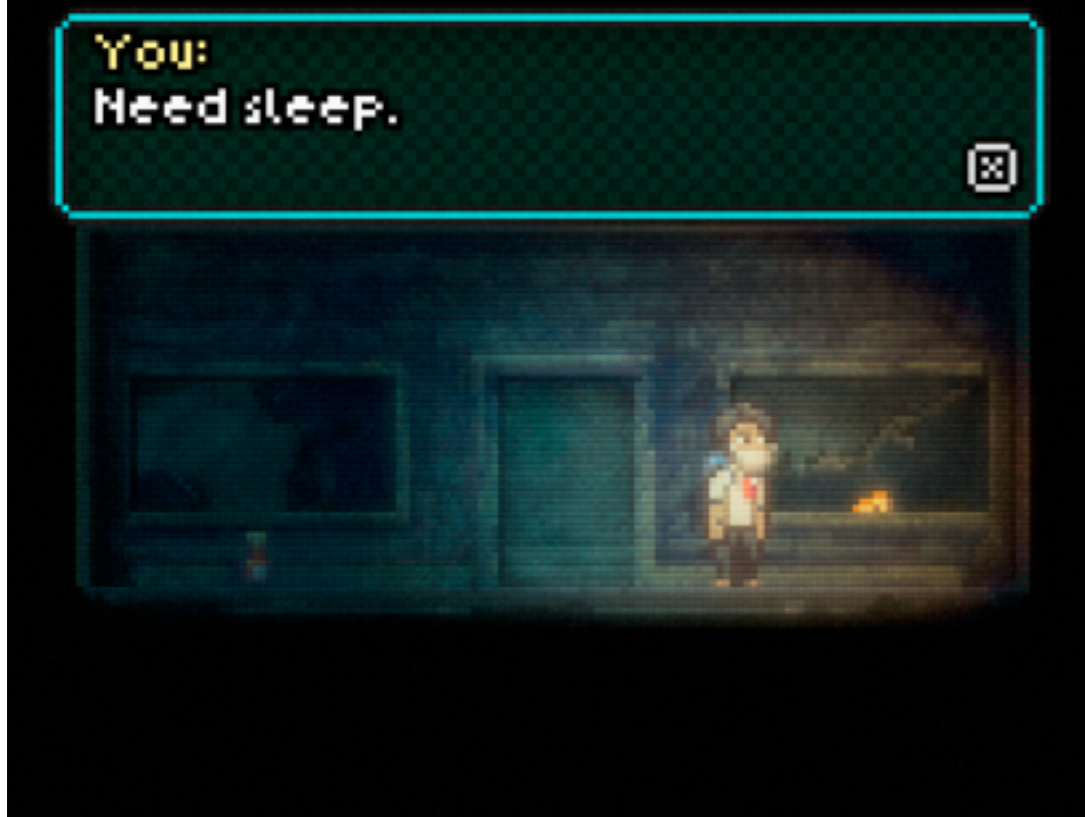
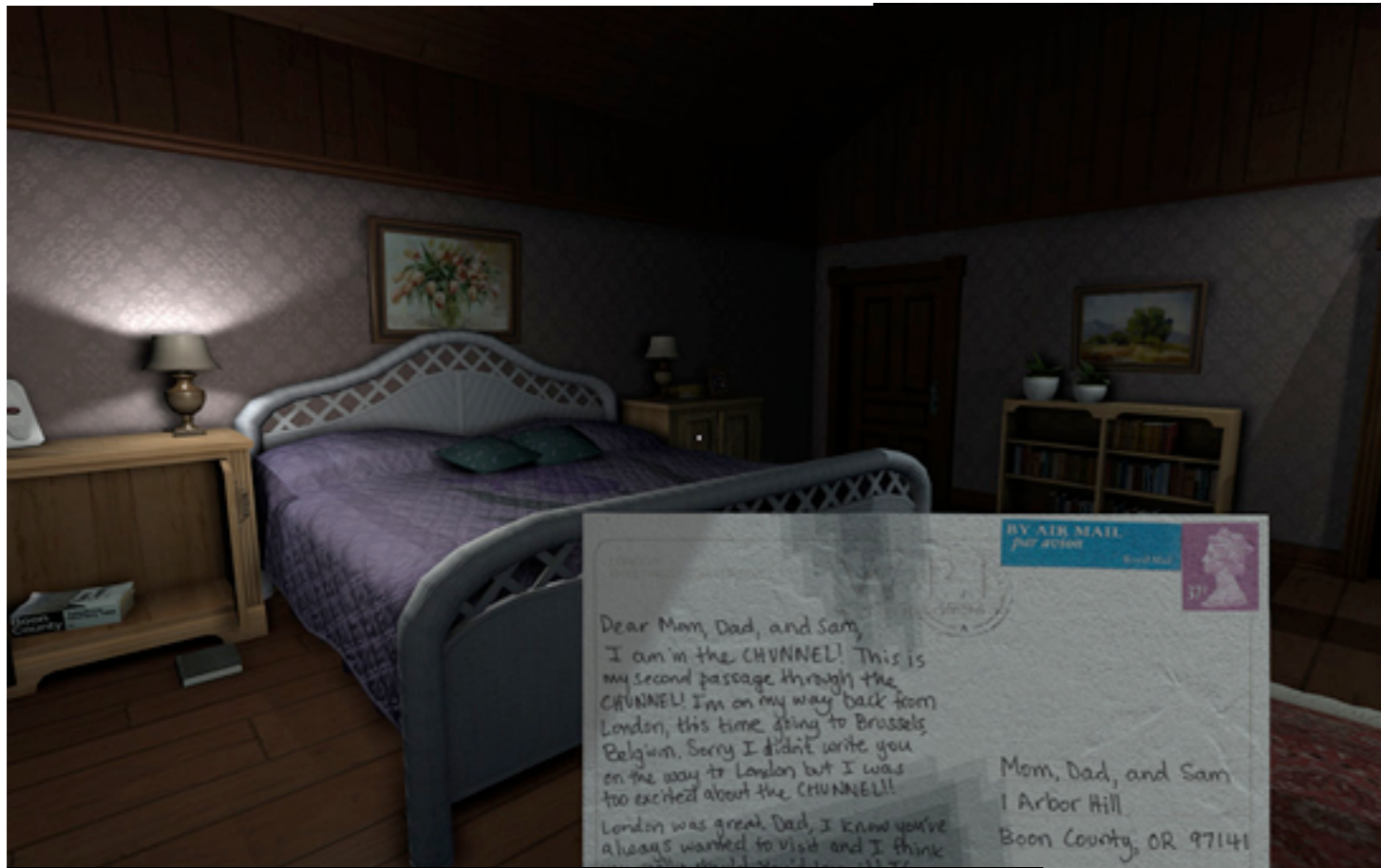
VULNERABILITY ISOLATION EVASION  
 UNDER-ARMED INVESTIGATION  
 PUZZLE-SOLVING PSYCHOLOGICAL



EMPOWERMENT CONFRONTATION  
 HORDES OVER-ARMED SHOCK VALUE  
 COMBAT-DRIVEN VISCERAL

But horror games have been undergoing a transition lately, one that's sort of hard to define.





Horror is a thematic genre, but still, there are major differences between these titles.





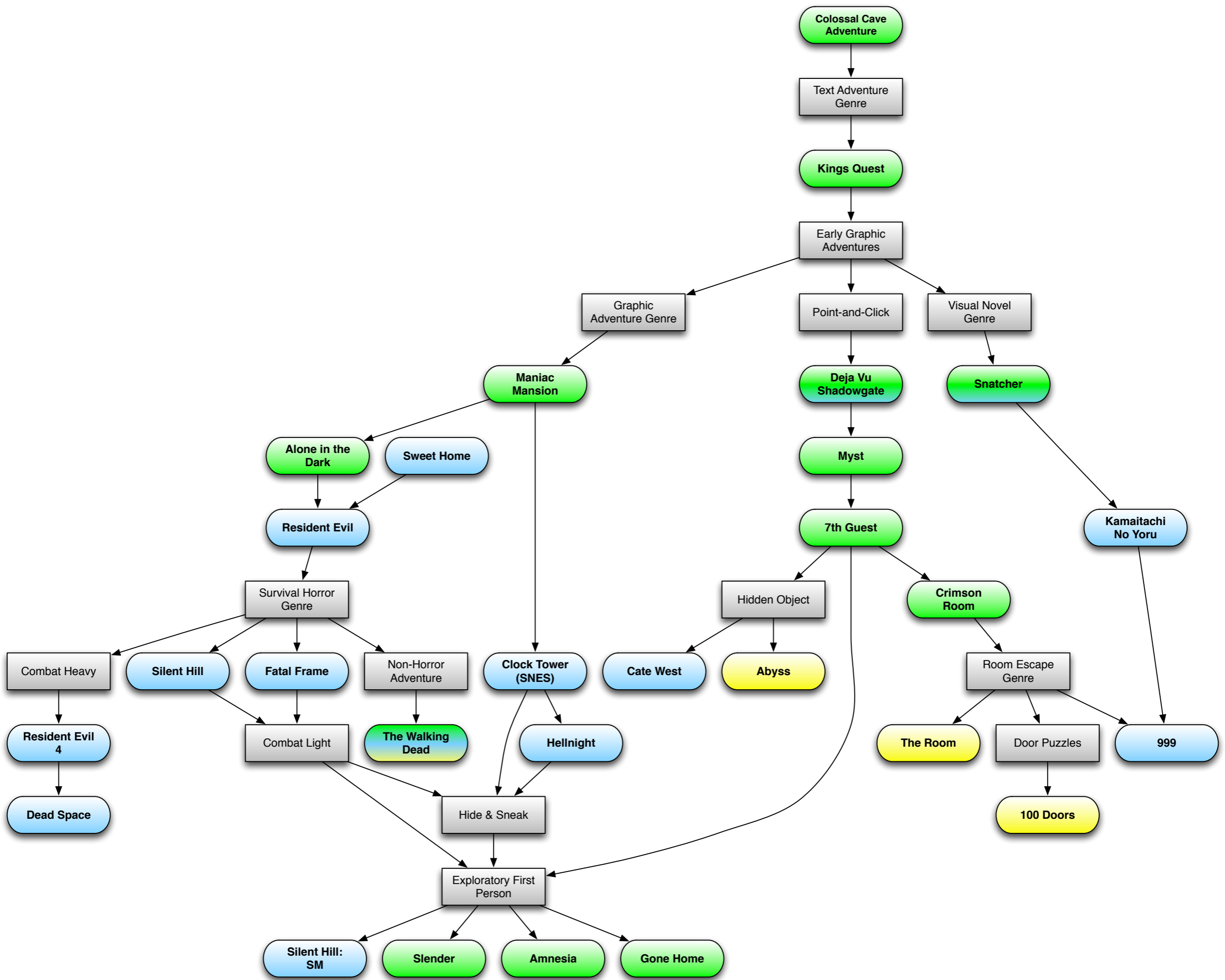
To understand these differences I think it's useful to deconstruct the genre, and look at where common horror game designs come from: Adventure games.



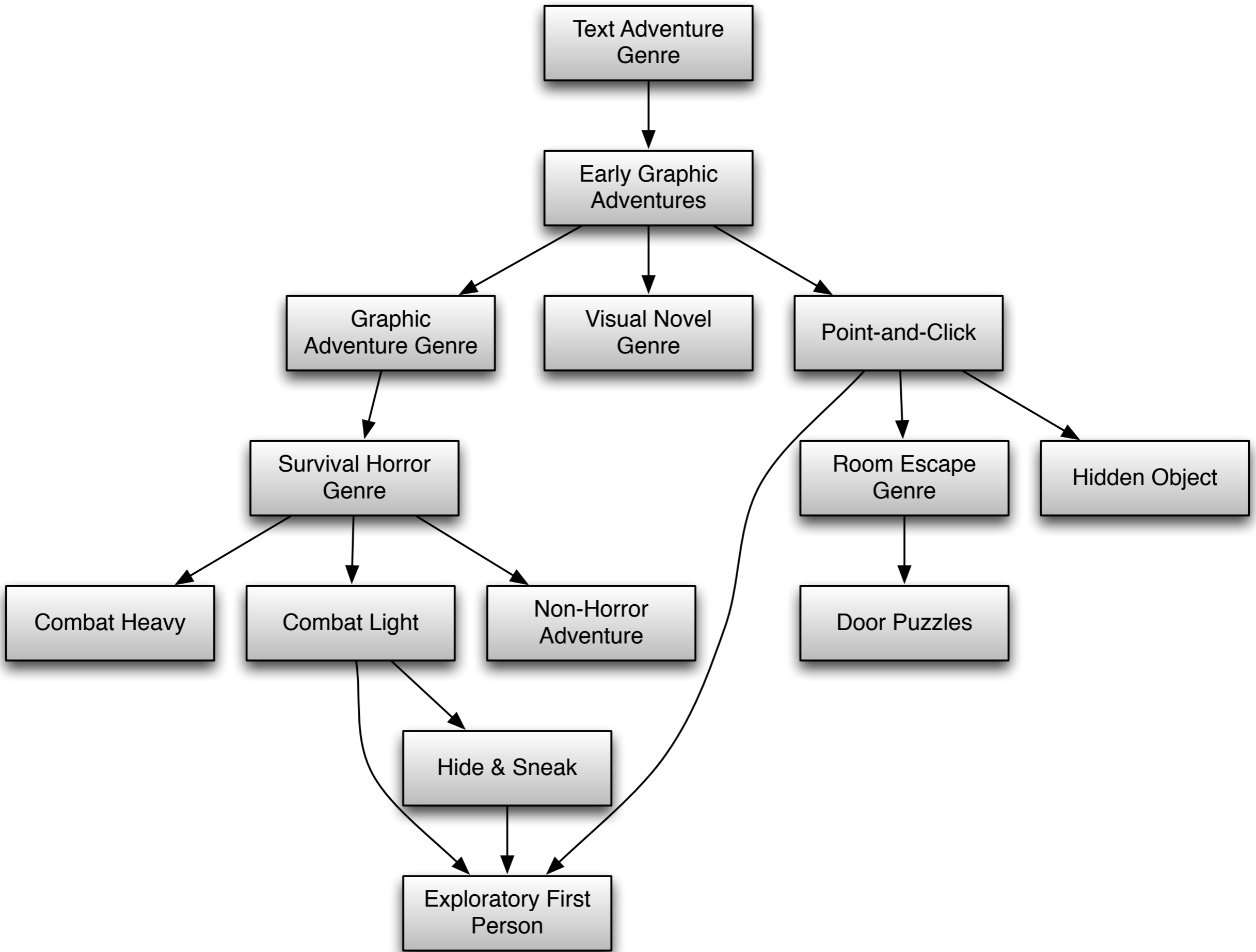


What I want to talk about today is how horror games have been the primary stewards of Adventure DNA for the last decade or so, and how they have spawned new games.











# Colossal Cave Adventure

- Explore an area
- Navigate by typing directions
- Collect items
- Read descriptive text
- Interact by typing action verbs with nouns
- Apply items to objects to solve puzzles
- Solve puzzles to widen explorable area

Text Adventure  
Genre



## **welcome to adventure**

THE OBJECT OF YOUR ADVENTURE IS TO FIND TREASURES AND RETURN THEM TO THEIR PROPER PLACE.

I'M YOUR CLONE. GIVE ME COMMANDS THAT CONSIST OF A VERB AND A NOUN.

i.e., go east, take key, climb tree, save game, take inventory, find axe.

YOU'LL NEED SPECIAL ITEMS TO DO SOME THINGS, BUT I'M SURE YOU'LL BE A GOOD ADVENTURER AND FIGURE THESE THINGS OUT.

NOTE THAT GOING IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION WON'T ALWAYS GET YOU BACK TO WHERE YOU WERE!

happy adventuring!!



# Maniac Mansion

Early Graphic  
Adventures

- Explore an area
- ~~Navigate by typing directions~~
- **Navigate by pointing-and-clicking**
- Collect items
- Read descriptive text
- **Visually inspect scene**
- ~~Interact by typing action verbs with nouns~~
- **Interact by pointing-and-clicking on verbs and objects**
- Apply items to objects to solve puzzles
- Solve puzzles to widen explorable area





Walk to  
Push Open  
Pull Close  
Give Read  
key  
chainsaw

Walk to  
Pick up  
What is

Unlock  
New kid  
Use

Turn on  
Turn off  
Fix

flashlight  
cheese

action verbs  
inventory  
flat 2D perspective



# Alone in the Dark

Graphic  
Adventure Genre

- Explore an area
- ~~Navigate by typing directions~~
- ~~Navigate by pointing and clicking~~
- **Navigate by direct character control**
- Collect items
- Read descriptive text
- Visually inspect scene
- ~~Interact by typing action verbs with nouns~~
- ~~Interact by pointing and clicking on verbs and objects~~
- **Interact by moving character to specific locations**
- Apply items to objects to solve puzzles
- Solve puzzles to widen explorable area
- **Fight enemies via real-time combat**





No hud  
3D perspective  
real-time combat  
direct control



# Resident Evil

Survival Horror  
Genre

- Explore an area
- ~~Navigate by typing directions~~
- ~~Navigate by pointing and clicking~~
- Navigate by direct character control
- Collect items
- Read descriptive text
- Visually inspect scene
- ~~Interact by typing action verbs with nouns~~
- ~~Interact by pointing and clicking on verbs and objects~~
- Interact by moving character to specific locations
- **Interact with puzzle-specific interfaces**
- Apply items to objects to solve puzzles
- Solve puzzles to widen explorable area
- Fight enemies via real-time combat
- **Manage limited resources, inventory space**





No hud



## Actions

An Empty Flask  
An Empty first aid case  
The Dresser's Key



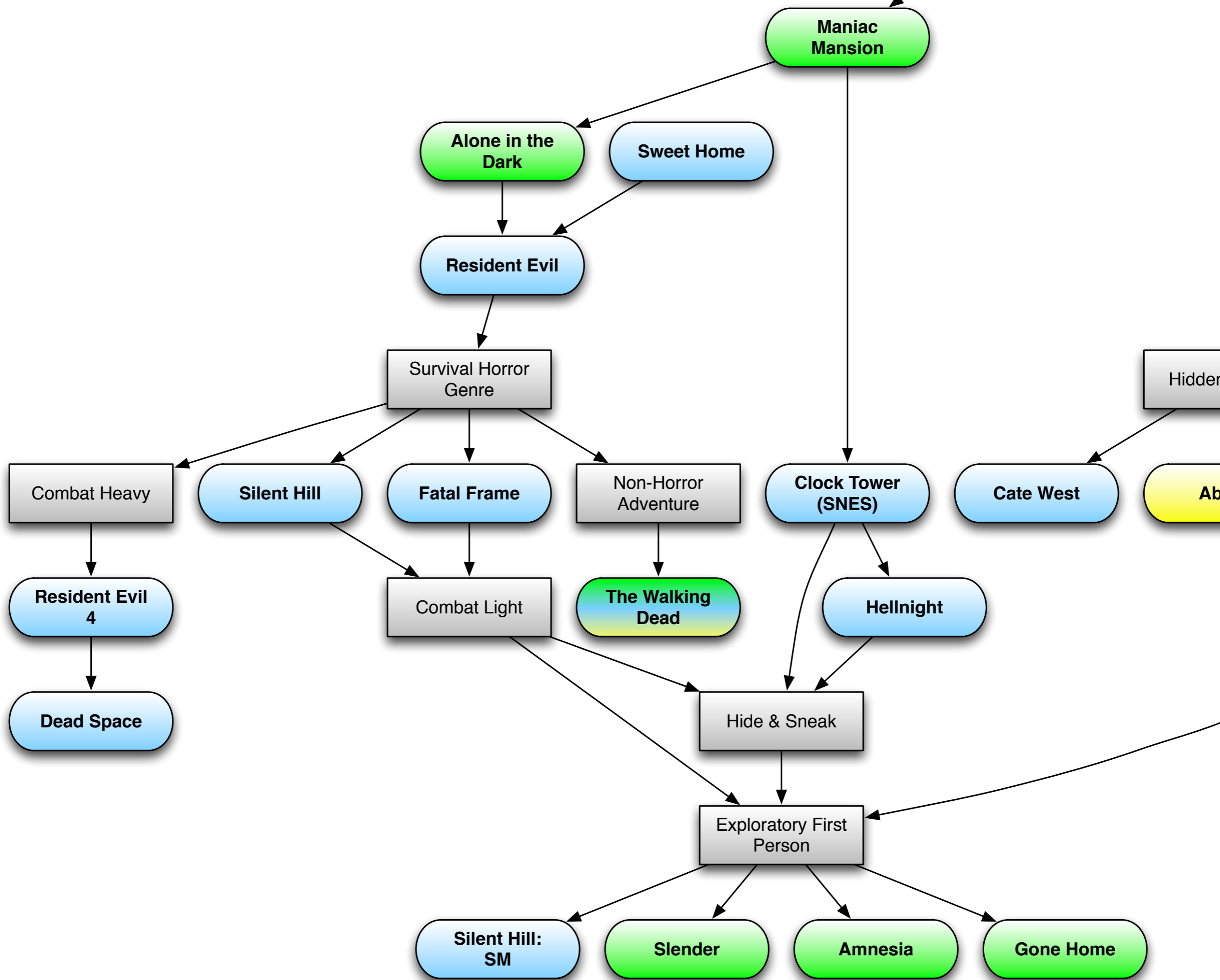
14



Fight  
Open/Search  
Close  
Push







But the survival horror genre itself has gone in several different directions

# Resident Evil 4

Combat Heavy

- Explore an area
- ~~Navigate by typing directions~~
- ~~Navigate by pointing and clicking~~
- Navigate by direct character control
- Collect items
- Read descriptive text
- Visually inspect scene
- ~~Interact by typing action verbs with nouns~~
- ~~Interact by pointing and clicking on verbs and objects~~
- Interact by moving character to specific locations
- ~~Interact with puzzle-specific interfaces~~
- ~~Apply items to objects to solve puzzles~~
- ~~Solve puzzles to widen explorable area~~
- Fight enemies via real-time combat
- Manage limited resources, inventory space



# Silent Hill: Shattered Memories

- Explore an area
- ~~Navigate by typing directions~~
- ~~Navigate by pointing and clicking~~
- Navigate by direct character control
- ~~Collect items~~
- ~~Read descriptive text~~
- Visually inspect scene
- ~~Interact by typing action verbs with nouns~~
- ~~Interact by pointing and clicking on verbs and objects~~
- ~~Interact by moving character to specific locations~~
- **Interact by investigating objects**
- Interact with puzzle-specific interfaces
- ~~Apply items to objects to solve puzzles~~
- Solve puzzles to widen explorable area
- ~~Fight enemies via real-time combat~~
- ~~Manage limited resources, inventory space~~
- **Run and hide from danger**

Hide & Sneak

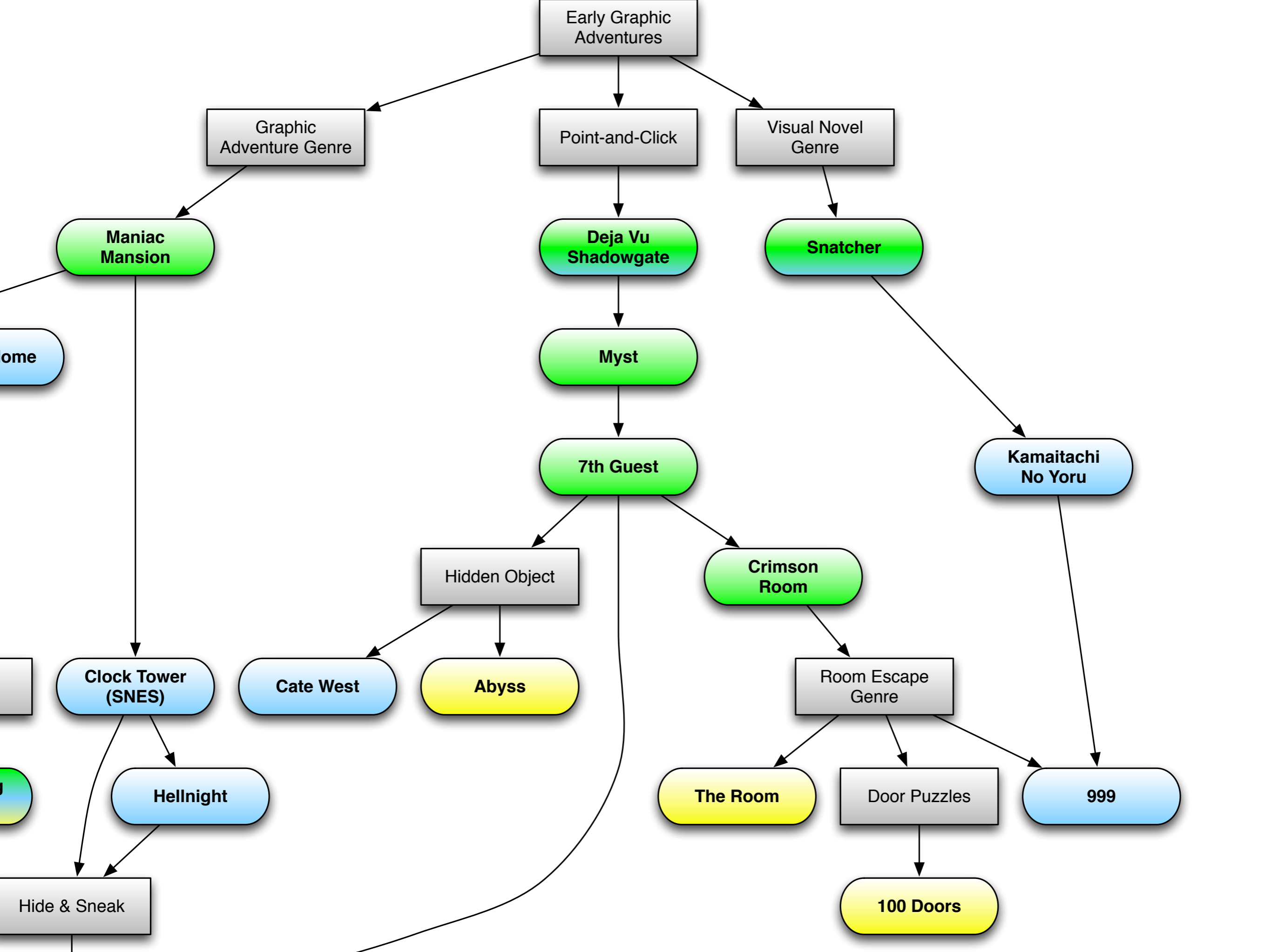
Exploratory First  
Person

# Gone Home

Exploratory First  
Person

- Explore an area
- ~~Navigate by typing directions~~
- ~~Navigate by pointing and clicking~~
- Navigate by direct character control
- ~~Collect items~~
- ~~Read descriptive text~~
- Visually inspect scene
- ~~Interact by typing action verbs with nouns~~
- ~~Interact by pointing and clicking on verbs and objects~~
- ~~Interact by moving character to specific locations~~
- ~~Interact by investigating objects~~
- ~~Interact with puzzle-specific interfaces~~
- ~~Apply items to objects to solve puzzles~~
- ~~Solve puzzles to widen explorable area~~
- ~~Fight enemies via real-time combat~~
- ~~Manage limited resources, inventory space~~
- ~~Run and hide from danger~~





# Crimson Room

Room Escape  
Genre

- Explore an area
- ~~Navigate by typing directions~~
- **Navigate by pointing-and-clicking**
- ~~Navigate by direct character control~~
- **Collect items**
- **Read descriptive text**
- **Visually inspect scene**
- ~~Interact by typing action verbs with nouns~~
- ~~Interact by pointing-and-clicking on verbs and objects~~
- ~~Interact by moving character to specific locations~~
- **Interact by investigating objects**
- **Interact with puzzle-specific interfaces**
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- ~~Solve puzzles to widen explorable area~~
- ~~Fight enemies via real-time combat~~
- ~~Manage limited resources, inventory space~~
- ~~Run and hide from danger~~





ITEM

TEXT

小さな箱を見つけた。

# Abyss: The Wraiths of Eden

Hidden Object

- Explore an area
- ~~Navigate by typing directions~~
- Navigate by pointing-and-clicking
- ~~Navigate by direct character control~~
- Collect items
- Read descriptive text
- Visually inspect scene
- ~~Interact by typing action verbs with nouns~~
- ~~Interact by pointing-and-clicking on verbs and objects~~
- ~~Interact by moving character to specific locations~~
- Interact by investigating objects
- Interact with puzzle-specific interfaces
- Apply items to objects to solve puzzles
- **Solve puzzles to widen explorable area**
- ~~Fight enemies via real-time combat~~
- ~~Manage limited resources, inventory space~~
- ~~Run and hide from danger~~
- **Progress via abstract puzzles (hidden object, domino tiles)**







# 100 Doors

## Door Puzzles

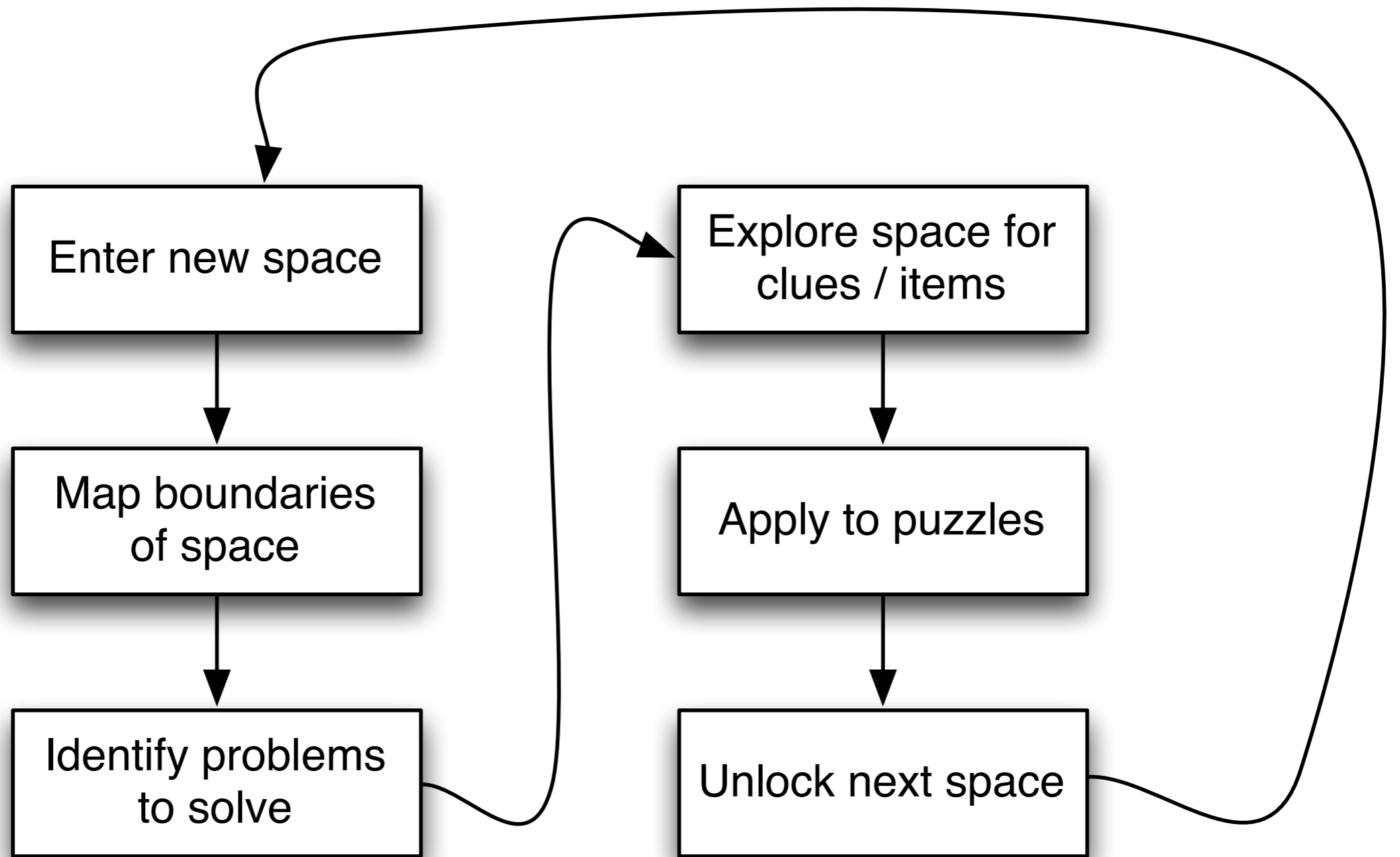
- ~~Explore an area~~
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- ~~Navigate by direct character control~~
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- **Apply items to objects to solve puzzles**
- **Solve puzzles to widen explorable area**
- ~~Fight enemies via real-time combat~~
- ~~Manage limited resources, inventory space~~
- ~~Run and hide from danger~~
- ~~Progress via abstract puzzles (hidden object, domino tiles)~~







# Exploration/Puzzle Loop



Here's a simple model that describes the general flow of many games.





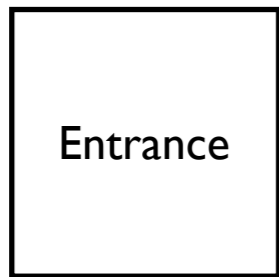
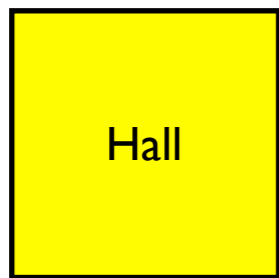
Quick example using Shadowgate.

Entrance



Very beginning of the game, first thing we do is open the door.





This takes us to a hall. There's some narrative here. Then what? There are two doors but they are both locked!

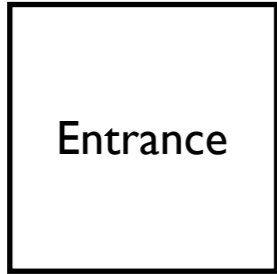
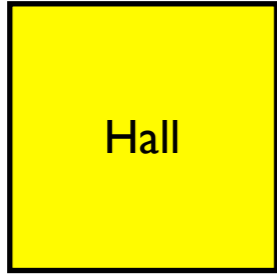
Hall

Entrance

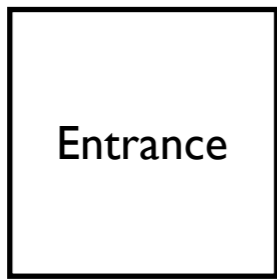
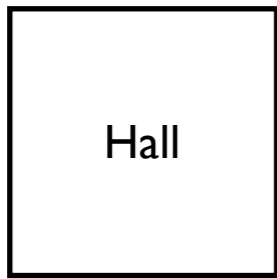
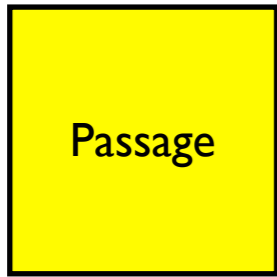


Nowhere else to go, so we go back to the entrance. Clicking the skull reveals a key! A-ha!





Back into the hall...



The key unlocks the wooden doors and takes us to a passage.

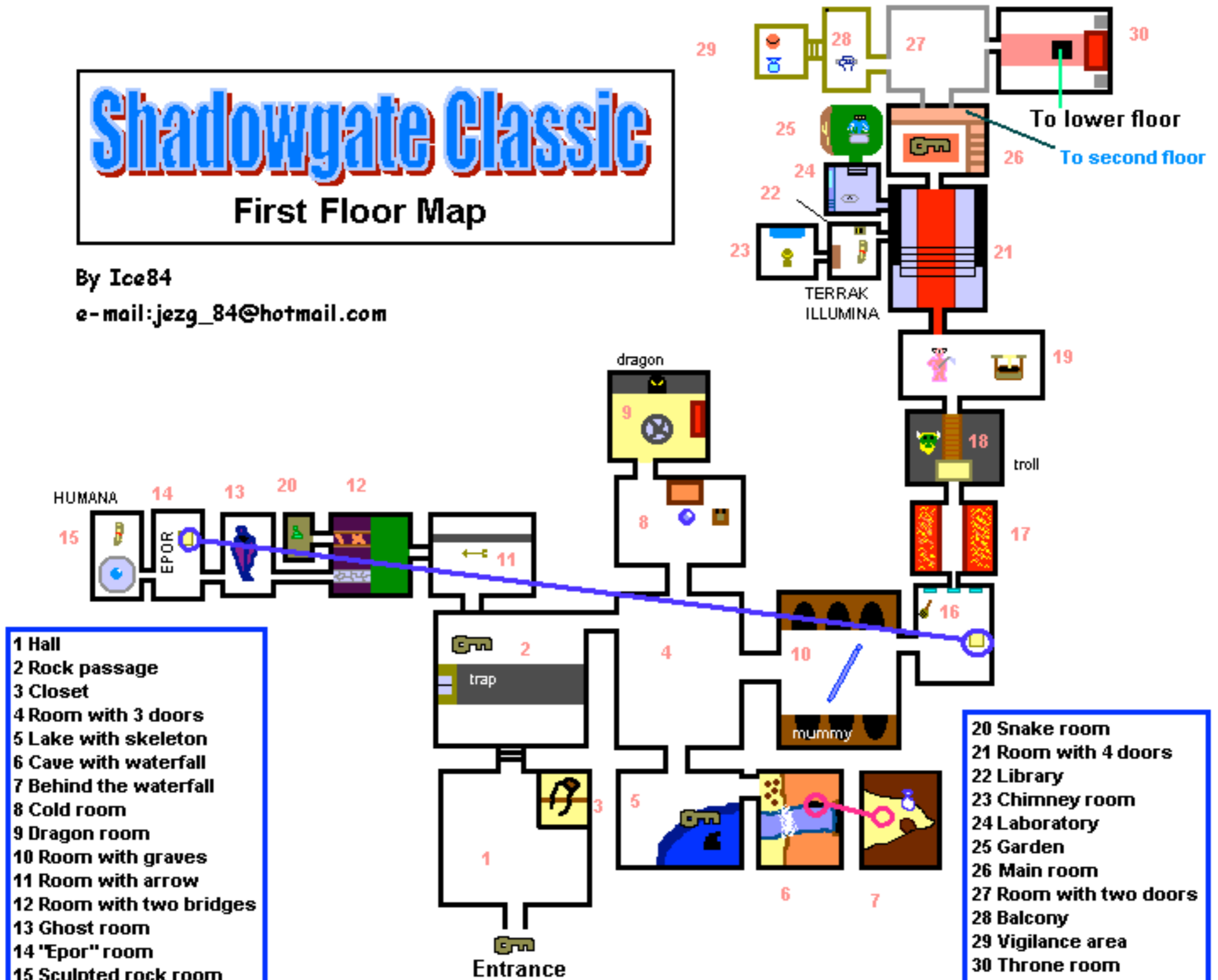


# Shadowgate Classic

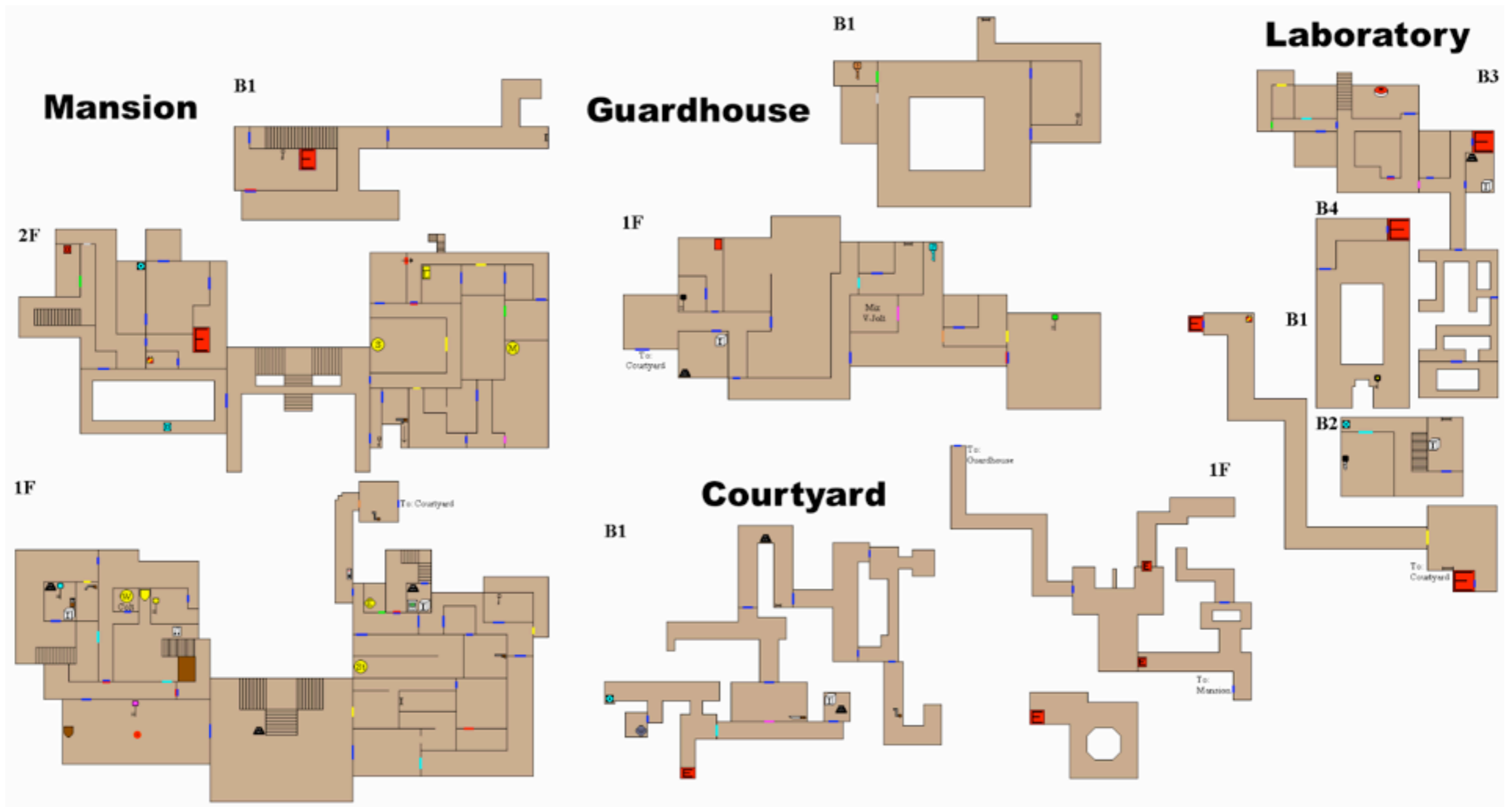
## First Floor Map

By Ice84

e-mail: jezg\_84@hotmail.com

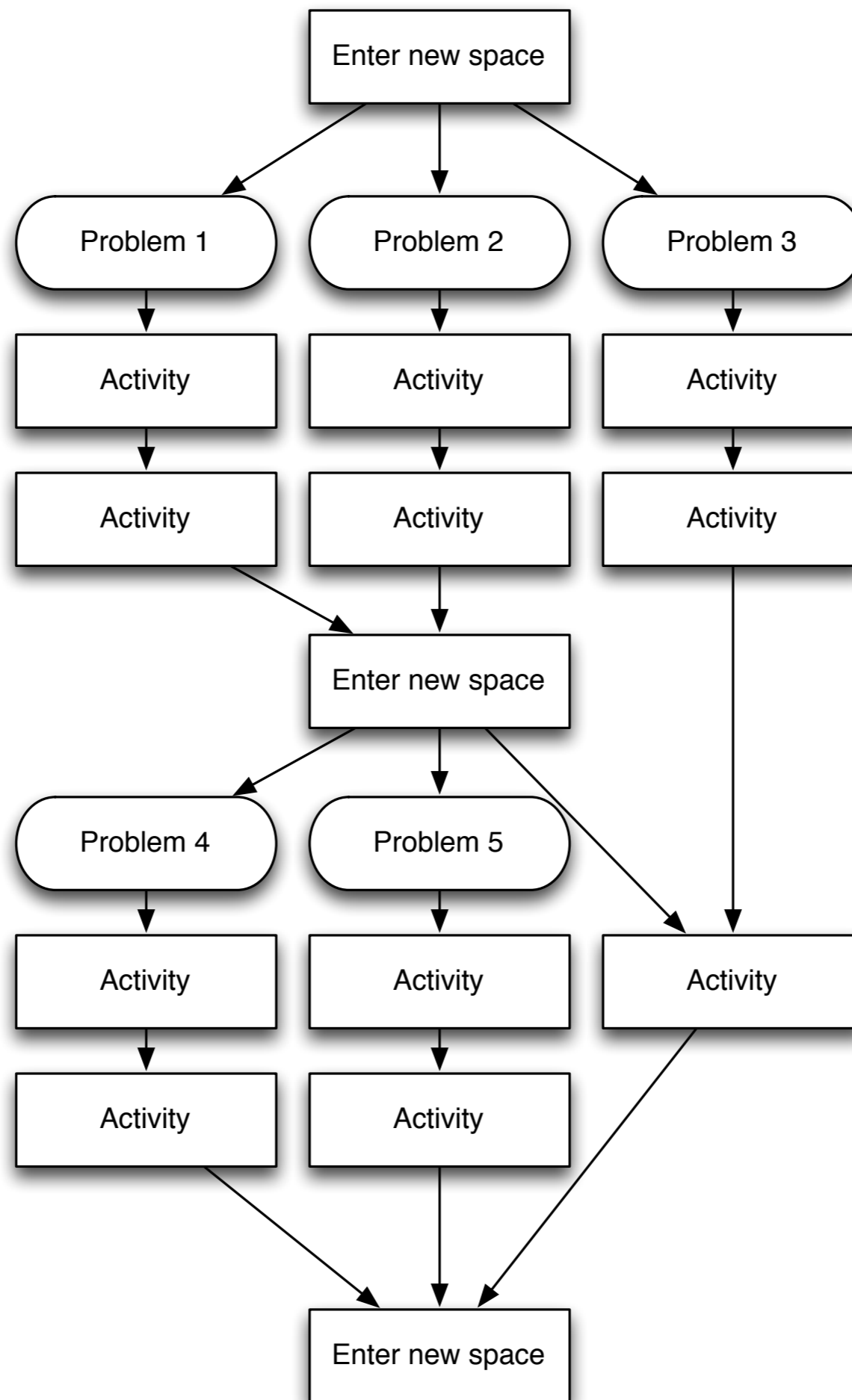


We find a key inside that book that opens the other door in the hall, where we get items, and then we can move forward to several other areas from the passage, etc. The space slowly opens up as we collect things and solve puzzles.



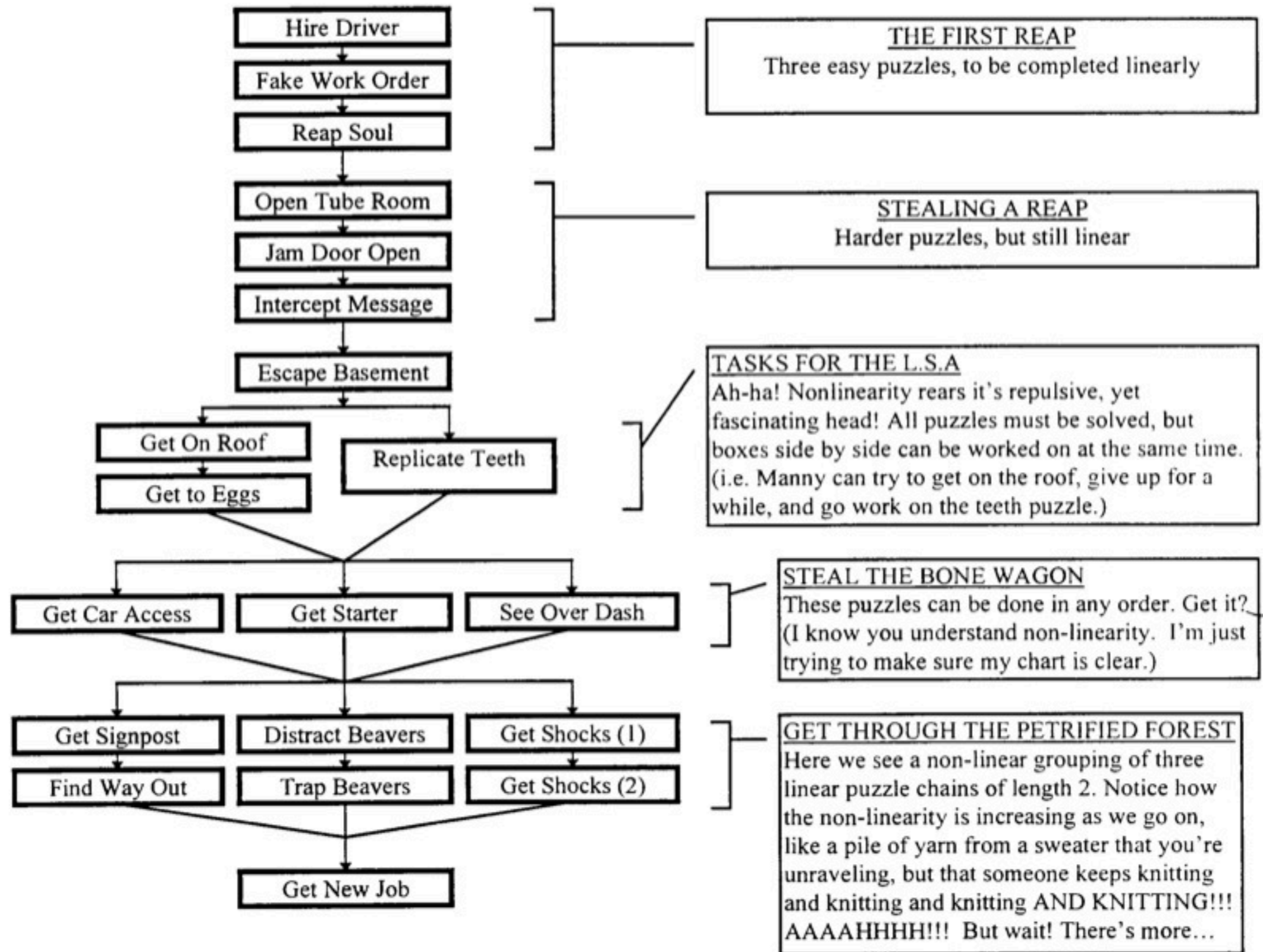
Resident Evil is all about recursion. Progression through the map is a core gameplay mechanic. The map changes as keys are acquired, and eventually the enemies change too.





Although what actually happens is that space gets unlocked before the previous space is complete, so the surface area of the problems widens.

# Puzzle Structure – Year One

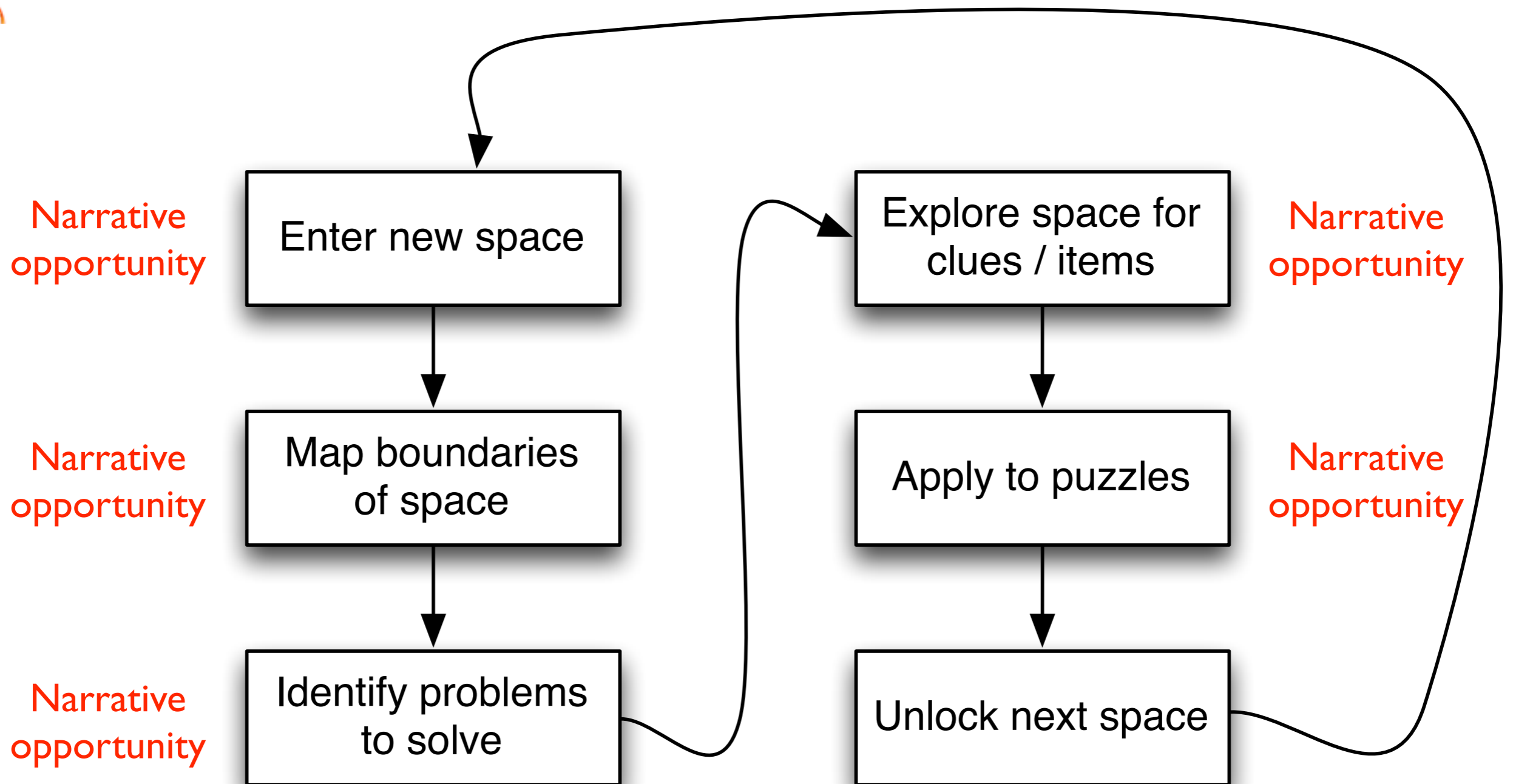


Here's an early puzzle dependency chart from Grim Fandango.





# Narrative and World Building



Anyway, one of the strengths of this model is that it lends itself to narrative easily.

## **First Era:**

Expressiveness via textual verbs  
Slow-paced activities  
Mouse-driven interface

## **Second Era:**

Expressiveness via art, sound, and text  
Fast-paced activities  
Controller-driven interface  
Significant increase in difficulty

## **Third Era:**

Expressiveness via art, sound, and text  
Slow- and fast-paced activities  
Touch-driven interface  
Significant simplification of core design components  
Wider range of topics



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Expressiveness via textual verbs  
Slow-paced activities  
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## **Second Era:**

Expressiveness via art, sound, and text  
Fast-paced activities  
Controller-driven interface  
Significant increase in difficulty

**Increased budget,  
processing power**



**Switch to  
consoles**



## **Third Era:**

Expressiveness via art, sound, and text  
Slow- and fast-paced activities  
Touch-driven interface  
Significant simplification of core design components  
Wider range of topics

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Significant increase in difficulty

**Increased budget,  
processing power**

**???**

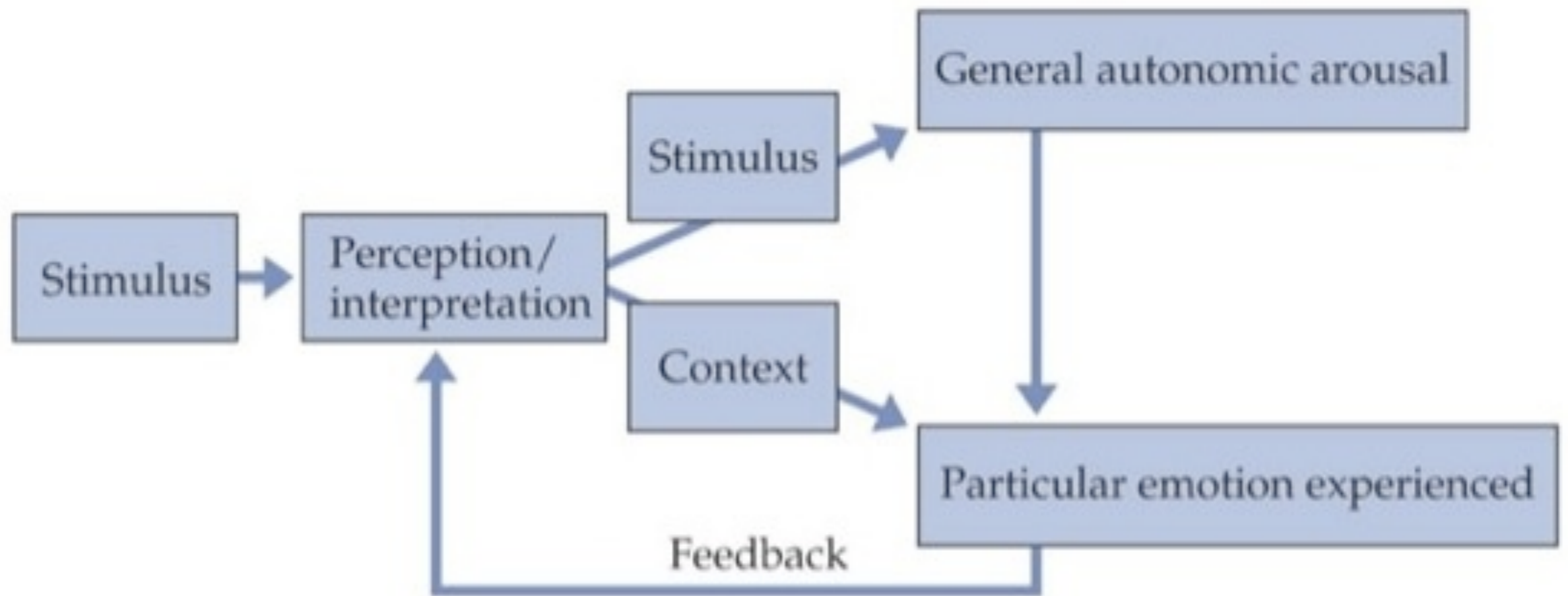
**Switch to  
consoles**

**???**

## Third Era:

Expressiveness via art, sound, and text  
Slow- and fast-paced activities  
Touch-driven interface  
Significant simplification of core design components  
Wider range of topics

# Two-Factor Theory of Emotion



This was dubbed the Two-Factor Theory of Emotion. It says that the brain can create emotions based on external contextual labels and non-obvious physiological reaction.





In 1974 some other psychologists, Donald Dutton and Arthur Aron, did a follow-up experiment. In this one they interviewed men who were crossing foot bridges in Canada.



They used two interviewers: a young man and a young, attractive woman.





They also used two bridges, a solid, safe bridge that was not high off the ground, and a super scary suspension bridge over a ravine.





**Safe Bridge**

**Scary Bridge**


In all cases the interviewer asked men passing by to answer some survey questions that were secretly designed to measure sexual arousal. At the end, the interviewer wrote her phone number on a slip of paper and handed it to the men just in case they had further questions.

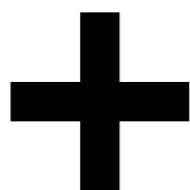


Safe Bridge  
Scary Bridge

X	X
X	O

When the experiment was conducted with the attractive woman on the scary bridge, sexual content in the survey answers was high and 50% of the men called back, presumably looking for a date. No other combination of bridge or interviewer produced this concentrated result.





The psychologists had successfully converted fear into sexual arousal. They assumed that the men were in an elevated physiological state due to the scariness of the bridge, but by introducing an attractive woman to them, they caused their brains to misread the elevation as sexual arousal.



A difficult game makes you sweat. It makes you grip the controller harder, makes your heart rate increase, causes a release of adrenaline. That's probably why it feels so good to complete a difficult challenge in a game.

## First Era:

Expressiveness via textual verbs  
Slow-paced activities  
Mouse-driven interface

## Second Era:

Expressiveness via art, sound, and text  
Fast-paced activities  
Controller-driven interface  
Significant increase in difficulty

## Third Era:

Expressiveness via art, sound, and text  
Slow- and fast-paced activities  
Touch-driven interface  
Significant simplification of core design components  
Wider range of topics

**Horror games**



**Wider audience**



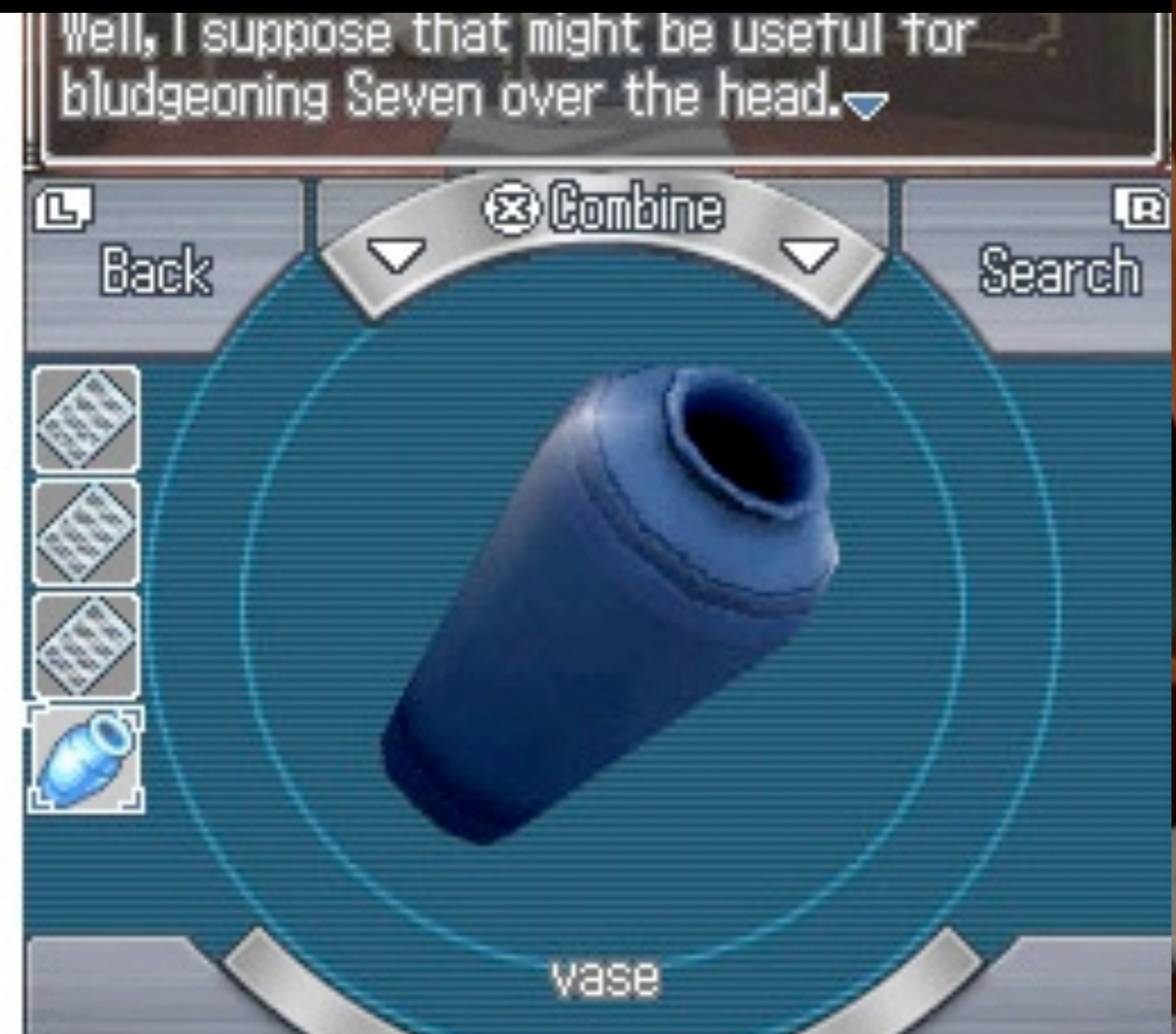
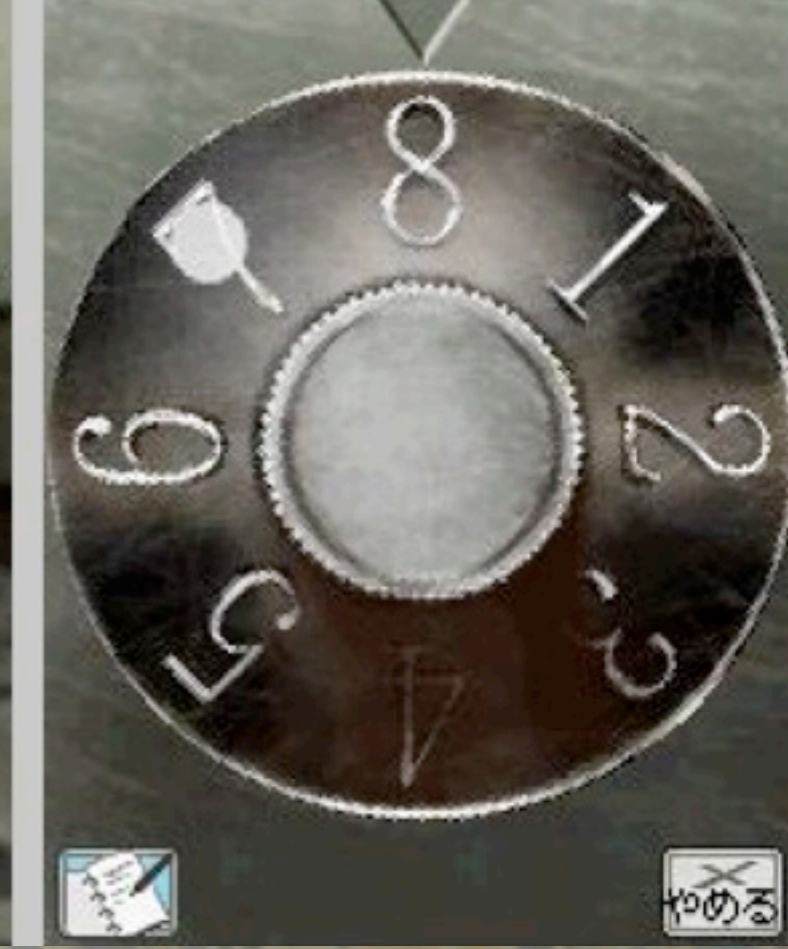
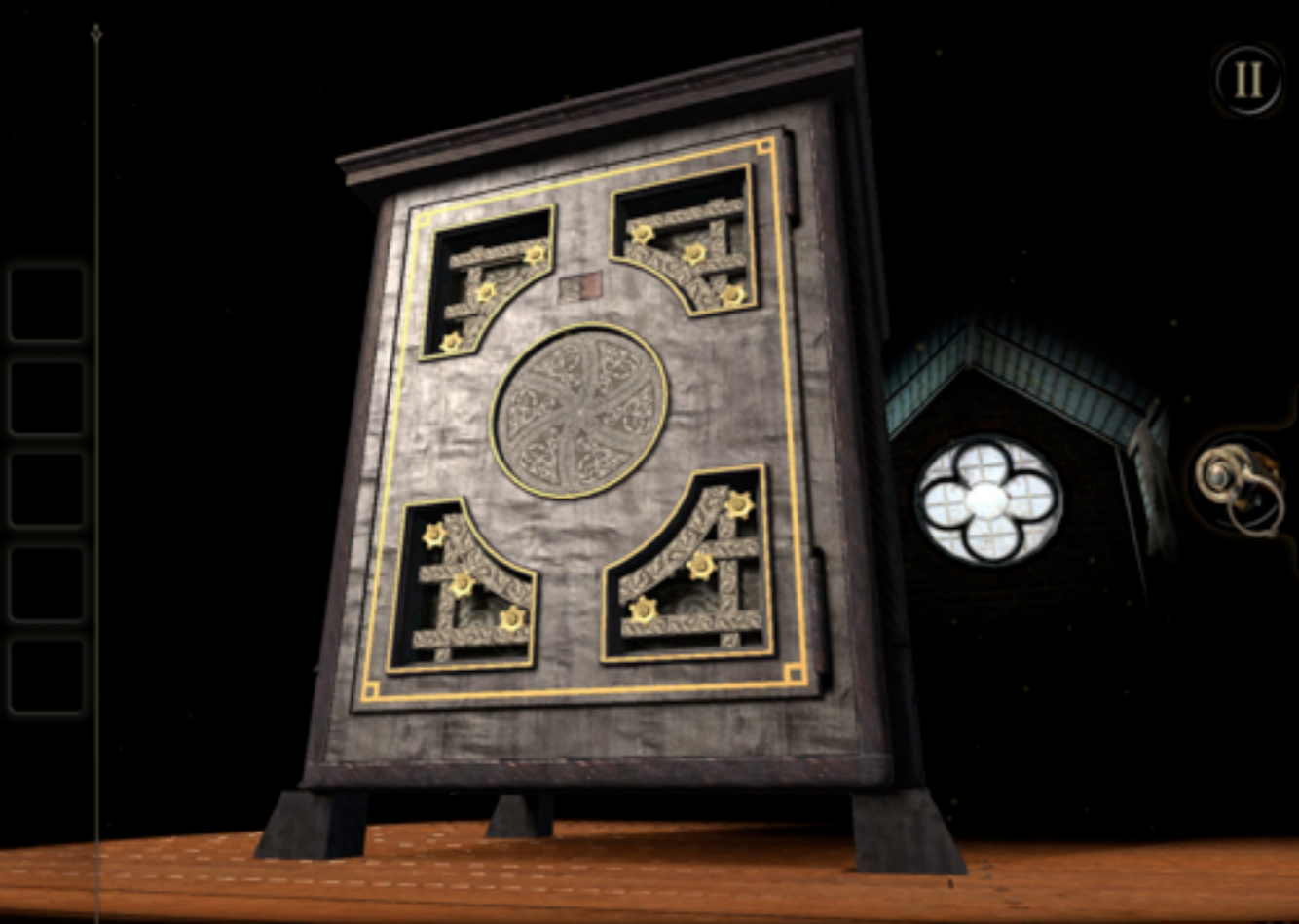
**Switch to  
web, mobile,  
Steam**



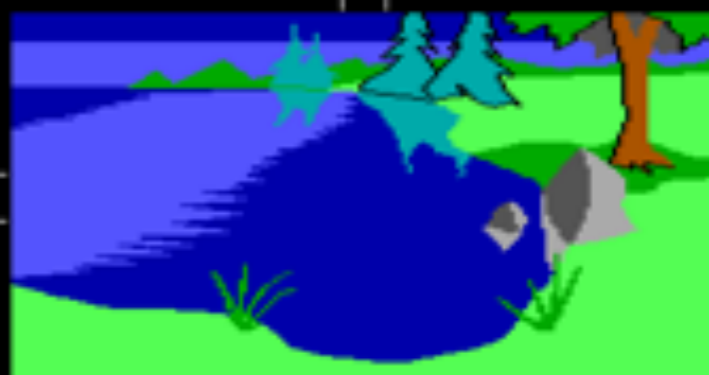
**Decreased dev cost**









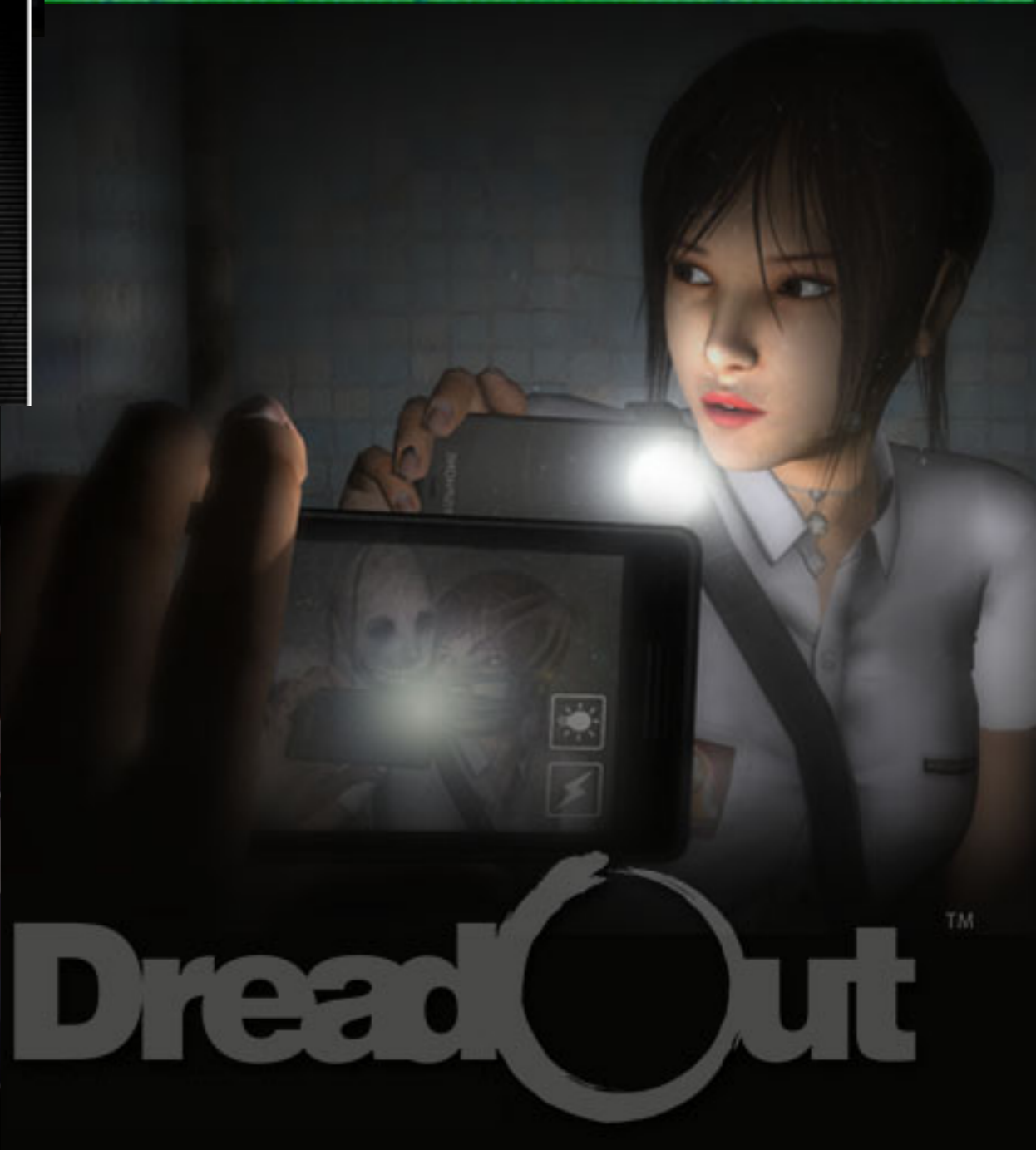


King's Quest



Year Walk









**Deadly Premonition: The Director's Cut**  
by Rising Star Games



**WARMACHINE: Tactics**  
by WhiteMoon Dreams



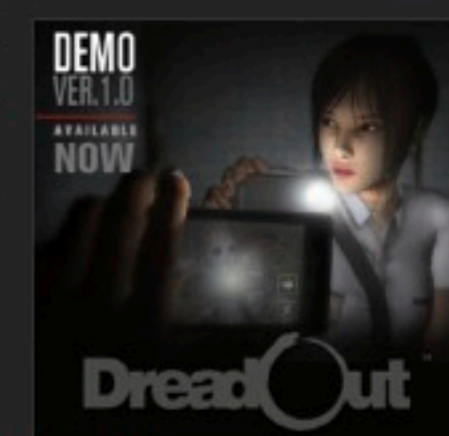
**7 Days to Die - Zombie Survival**  
by Husker Head



**Dominions 3: The Awakening**  
by Johan



**The Cat Lady**  
by Screen 7



**DreadOut**  
by Digital Happiness



**Shadow of the Eternals**  
by pcarpicci



**The Dead & Linger - Alpha**  
by [Sandswept] Zag



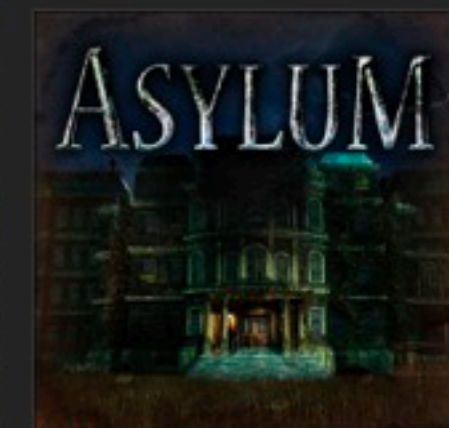
**The Forest**  
by ben



**Doorways**  
by Saibot Studios



**Zafehouse: Diaries**  
by Screwfly Studios



**Asylum**  
by AgustinCordes



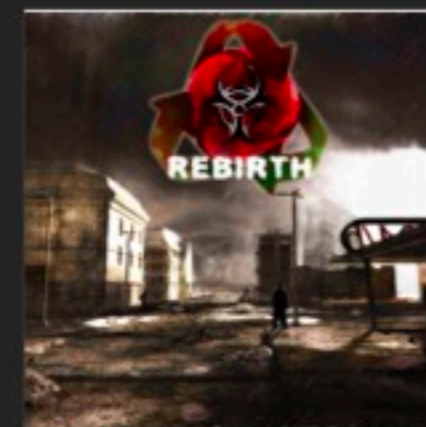
**Damned: A Randomized Open World**  
by 9heads



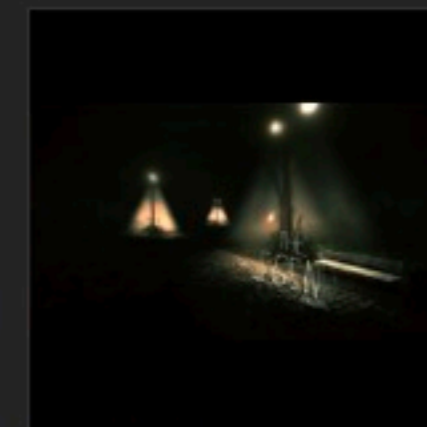
**Among the Sleep**  
by Krillbite Studio



**Darkwood**  
by Acid Wizard Studio



**Rebirth**  
by Rico



**The Legend**  
by AustinHand



**Routine**  
by Aaron Foster



**Bleusis**  
by Nocturnal Works



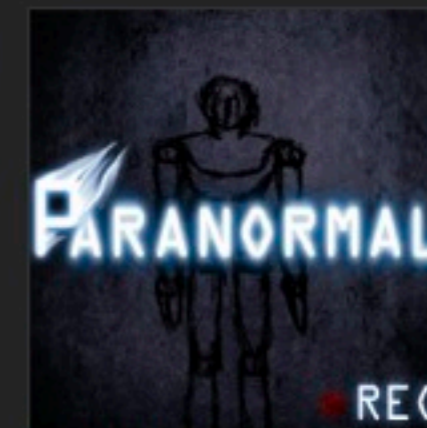
**The 7th Guest**  
by Trilobyte



**Stranded Deep**  
by Ben4Views



**Huntsman: The Orphanage**  
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**Paranormal**  
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**Thanks!**

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