Schell Lenses

• The Lens of the Story Machine
• The Lens of Obstacle
• The Lens of Simplicity and Transcendence.
• The Lens of The Hero’s Journey.
• The Lens of the Weirdest Thing.
• The Lens of Story.
• The Lens of Freedom.
• The Lens of Indirect Control.
• The Lens of Collusion.
65  The Lens of The Story Machine

A good game is a machine that generates stories when people play it. To make sure your story machine is as productive as possible, ask yourself these questions:

- When players have different choices about how to achieve goals, new and different stories can arise. How can I add more of these choices?
- Different conflicts lead to different stories. How can I allow more types of conflict to arise from my game?
- When players can personalize the character and setting, they will care more about story outcomes. How can I let players personalize the story?

Illustration by Jim Rugg

66  The Lens of The Obstacle

A goal with no obstacles is not worth pursuing. Use this lens to make sure your obstacles are ones that your players will want to overcome.

- What is the relationship between the main character and the goal? Why does the character care about it?
- What are the obstacles between the character and the goal?
- Is there an antagonist who is behind the obstacles? What is the relationship between the protagonist and the antagonist?
- Do the obstacles gradually increase in difficulty?
- Some say “The bigger the obstacle, the better the story”. Are your obstacles big enough? Can they be bigger?
- Great stories often involve the protagonist transforming in order to overcome the obstacle. How does your protagonist transform?

Illustration by Sam Yip
68 The Lens of The Hero's Journey

Illustration by Chris Daniel

Many heroic stories have similar structure. Use this lens to make sure you haven't missed out on any elements that might improve your story. Ask yourself these questions:

- Does my story have elements that qualify it as a heroic story?
- If so, how does it match up with the structure of the Hero's Journey?
- Would my story be improved by including more archetypal elements?
- Does my story match this form so closely that it feels hackneyed?

69 The Lens of The Weirdest Thing

Illustration by Reagan Heller

Having weird things in your story can help give meaning to unusual game mechanics, capture the interest of the player, and make your world seem special. Too much weirdness, though, will render your story puzzling and inaccessible. To make sure your story is the good kind of weird, ask yourself these questions:

- What's the weirdest thing in my story?
- How can I make sure that the weirdest thing doesn't confuse or alienate the player?
- If there are multiple weird things, should I maybe get rid of, or coalesce some of them?
- If there is nothing weird in my story, is the story still interesting?
The Lens of Story

To be sure the story in your game is as good as it can be, ask yourself these questions:

- Does my game really need a story? Why?
- Why will players be interested in this story?
- How does the story support the other parts of the tetrad (aesthetics, technology, mechanics)? Can it do a better job?
- How do the other parts of the tetrad support the story? Can they do a better job?
- How can my story be better?

Illustration by Diana Patton

The Lens of Freedom

A feeling of freedom is one of the things that separates games from other forms of entertainment. To make sure your players feel as free as possible, ask yourself these questions:

- When do my players have freedom of action? Do they feel free at these times?
- When are they constrained? Do they feel constrained at these times?
- Are there any places I can let them feel more free than they do now?
- Are there any places where they are overwhelmed by too much freedom?

Illustration by Nathan Mazur
72 The Lens of Indirect Control

Illustration by Cheryl Ceol

Every designer has a vision of what they would like the players to do to have an ideal play experience. To help ensure the players do these things of their own free will, ask yourself these questions:

- What do I want the player to experience?
- How can the characters help fulfill this experience, without compromising their goals in the game world?
- What is some other method I can use to coerce players towards ideal behavior without impinging on their feeling of freedom?
- Can I use music or sound to get players to do it?
- Can I use in-game characters to get players to do it?
- Can I use visual design to get players to do it?
- Can I design my interface to get players to do it?
- Can I set the goals to get players to do it?
- Can I set constraints to get players to do it?
- Ideally, what would I like the players to do?
Indirect Control (Schell)

Get the player to take the right actions without forcing him/her – thus preserving the illusion of meaningful choice.

- Constraints: Choice within limits.
- Goals: Ends and means are made clear.
- Interface: Avatar appearance suggests actions.
- Visual Design: Paths and architecture guide way.
- Characters: Appealing characters say what to do.
- Music: Sounds suggest actions by association.
Exercise
Jack and Beanstalk Game

• Design an RPG based on Jack and the Beanstalk.

• Story:
  – Consider which of the interactive story structures you will use.
  – Describe the choices available to the player at various points in the game.
  – Characterize the variety (or lack thereof) in the stories that can result from the gameplay.

• Mechanics:
  – Describe the mechanics occurring in each part of the story.
  – Explain how the story and mechanics support each other, or fail to support each other.
Jack and the Beanstalk
(Wikipedia Plot Summary)

Jack is a young lad living with his widowed mother. Their only means of income is a cow. When this cow stops giving milk one morning, Jack is sent to the market to sell it. On the way to the market he meets an old man who offers to give him "magic" beans in exchange for the cow.

Jack takes the beans but when he arrives home with no money, his mother gets angry and throws the beans out the window and sends Jack to bed without supper.

As Jack sleeps, the beans grow into a gigantic beanstalk. Jack climbs the bean stalk and arrives in a land high up in the sky where he follows a road to a house, which is the home of an ogre. He enters the house and asks the ogre's wife for food. She gives him food, but the ogre returns and senses that a human is nearby:

Fee-fi-fo-fum!
I smell the blood of an Englishman?
Be he 'live, or be he dead,
I'll grind his bones to make my bread.

However, Jack is hidden by the ogre's wife and overhears the ogre counting his money. Jack steals a bag of gold coins as he makes his escape down the beanstalk. Jack repeats his journey up the beanstalk two more times, each time he is helped by the increasingly suspicious wife of the ogre and narrowly escapes with one of the ogre's treasures. The second time he steals a hen which laid golden eggs and the third time a magical harp that played by itself. This time he is almost caught by the ogre who follows him down the beanstalk. Jack calls his mother for an axe and chops the beanstalk down, killing the ogre. The end of the story has Jack and his mother living happily ever after with their new riches.
Exercise
Adapt a Movie, Book or Play

• Pick a movie, play or novel and think about how to make it into a role-playing game.
• Identify the theme of the movie or novel.
• Devise game mechanics that support the theme in some way.
• Draw and annotate a state diagram showing the impact of player actions on the story.
Movies, Plays and Novels

- The Wizard of Oz
- Romeo and Juliet
- The Godfather
- It’s a Wonderful Life
- Groundhog Day
- Huckleberry Finn
- Lord of the Rings
- Spirited Away
- Star Wars
- Toy Story
Five Virtues: generosity, fellowship, purity, courtesy, compassion

## Quests Built Around Systems of Correspondence

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<th>3rd Cycle</th>
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<td>Nativity</td>
<td>Epiphany</td>
<td>Resurrection</td>
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Figure 1.1. The five cycles of the five pentads contained in Sir Gawain’s pentacle.

Five Virtues: generosity fellowship purity courtesy compassion
Meaning Encoded in Physical Space

- Physical journey in space is correlated with personal growth of the hero.
- Layout of spaces encodes relationships among actors and/or principles.
- Crossing of threshold corresponds to demonstration of virtue and fulfillment of a quest.
Exercise
Survival at Vassar

• Define a series of four quests.
• Each quest should occur in a specific meaningful space.
• Each quest should demonstrate a virtue.
• Each virtue should be represented symbolically by an object, body part, color and/or a sensory modality.
• Define a final quest as a culmination of the first four.

Whatever you do, don’t be ironic!