

The Weekend: Implicit Branching for Enhanced Suspense And Better Replay Value in Interactive Narrative

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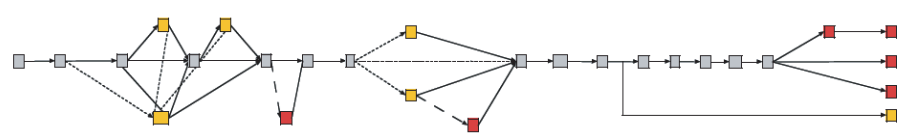
Problem

Many interactive narratives use a branching structure that puts the interactor "on rails". To make such a structure interesting as a story and provide meaningful choices to the interactor a large number of branches are required. This is often not practical from a production perspective. A better alternative is a system of "counters" that keeps track of states. While still using an implicit branching structure, such a system reduces the need for "branch production" considerably. Additionally, it allows for "delayed consequences" which translate into more interesting, immersive experiences for the interactor, as an arc of suspense is created between an action and the consequences at a later stage in the narrative. This technique is applied in the Interactive Narrative *The Weekend*.

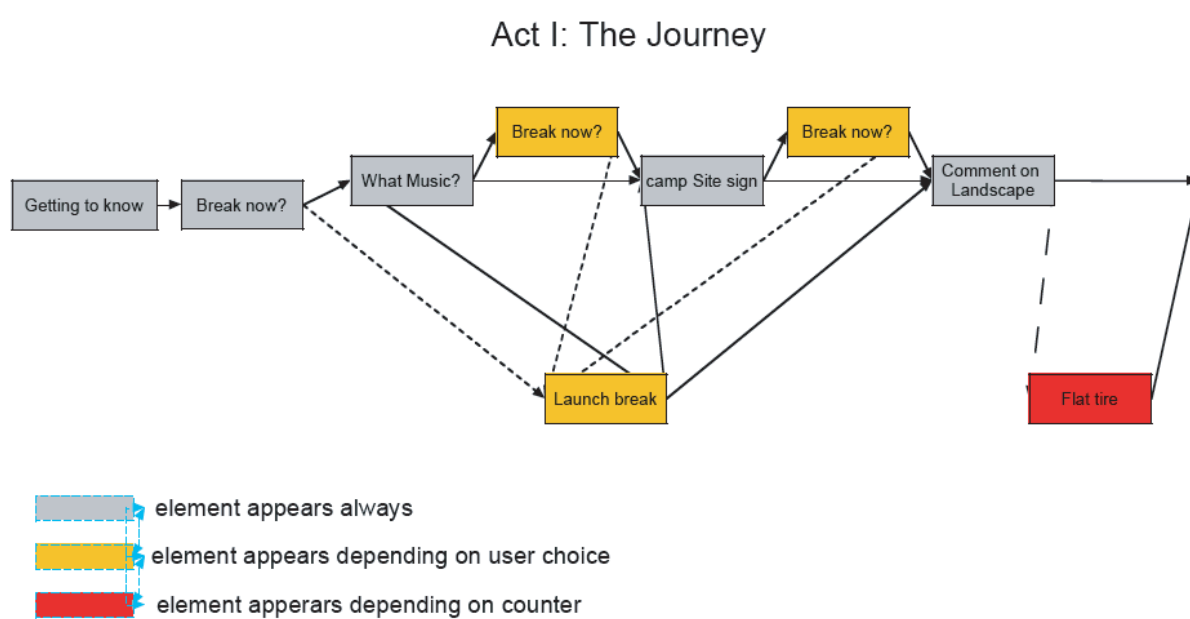
The Weekend on the Web: lcc.gatech.edu/~hkoenitz/in/



Typical Branching Tree Structure (Evening HF)



Overview: Structure in *The Weekend*



Structure (Act I) in *The Weekend*

- element appears always
- element appears depending on user choice
- element appears depending on counter

The Counter System

The Weekend uses three different main "counters" which are implemented as global variables. The first counter collects "character points" (i), the second "Quarrel points" (a) and the third points in "Attractiveness" (b). An additional variable (c) determines if the car will encounter a flat tire in the first act, as shown in the diagram. An answer to a question adds to the counters. Counter values determine if some choices become available to an interactor at a later stage.

Example of Story Event in *The Weekend*: Beach Walk

Conversation with the romantic interest

Hey, let's go for a walk? (neutral, do not change counter)

Would you like to see, if there's a kite rental place around? (add one character point: +i)

I'm so glad we get away from them, they are so quarrelsome (subtract one character point -i).

Consequences for both neutral and positive answers:

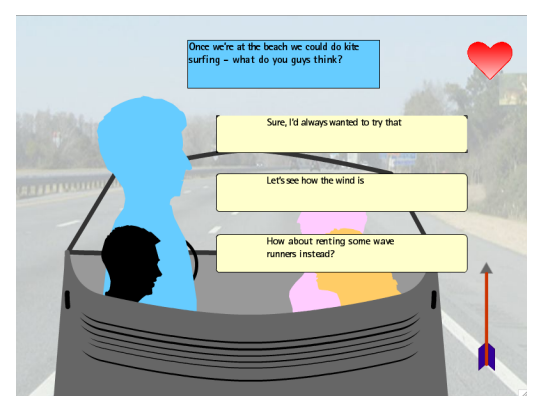
If character points > 5, then offer gets accepted, add one point to the attractiveness counter

(+b), conversation continues.

Walking on the beach is so nice (neutral, do not change counter)

I'm glad you walk with me (add one character point +i)

A long beach walk would be nice now (subtract one character point -i)



The Weekend

Future Directions

In the *Advanced Stories Group* at LCC, we are working on implementing implicit branching in a structured definition format. This is a part of our effort to create an open, extensible framework for Interactive Narrative.

ASG website: (<http://lcc.gatech.edu/~hkoenitz/ASG/blog>)