Fundamentals of Game Design

by Ernest Adams and Andrew Rollings

Game Design and Development
FUNDAMENTALS OF GAME DESIGN
Ernest Adams · Andrew Rollings

Chapter 6: Character Development

These slides are based on PowerPoint slides provided at the Instructor's section of the textbook's online Companion Site.

When students have finished reading this chapter, they will:

- Know the basic goals of character design in games.

- Recognize the difference between a player-defined avatar and a specific or nonspecific avatar.

- Know the issues involved in making non-gender-specific characters.

- Know the visual and behavioral attributes used to help create characters in games.

- Use the attributes of either art-driven or story-driven character design to create your own game characters.

My goal is to help you see how to create your characters:

- What is the player's relationship to the avatar?   How do you create that relationship?

- What specific techniques can you use to design your characters?

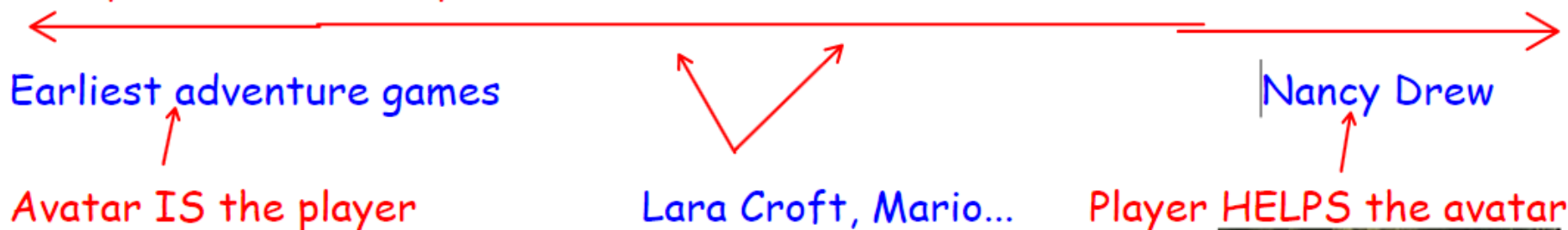# You should create characters that people:

- Find appealing
- Believe in
- Identify with

The relationship between Player and Avatar

Avatar -- character in a game who serves as a protagonist under the player's control (possibly indirect control)

Nonspecific avatars Specific avatars

Earliest adventure games

Nancy Drew

Avatar IS the player

Lara Croft, Mario...

Player HELPS the avatar

Lara Croft is attractive because of, not despite of, her glossy blankness---that hyper-perfect, shiny, computer look. She is an abstraction, an animated conglomeration of sexual and attitudinal signs---breasts, hotpants, shades, thigh holsters---whose very blankness encourages the viewer's psychological projection. Beyond the bare facts of her biography, her perfect vacuity means we can make Lara Croft into whoever we want her to be.

> --- Steven Poole, "Lara's Story"

Q1: Do you want a non-specific, partially specified, or specific character?
Q2: Do you allow the player to design the avatar?

The Effects of Different Control Mechanisms

Indirect control

- Player clicks
  where the avatar should go

- Player is a guide
  to the avatar/character

Direct control

- Player steers the avatar

- Player IS the avatar/character

Q1: Do you want a non-specific, partially specified,
    or specific character?
Q2: Do you allow the player to design the avatar?
Q3: What control mechanism do you want to use?

Male and Female Players and Characters

- Male players do not identify strongly with their avatars
  - Men tend to treat avatars as puppets and often use default avatar without customizing
- Women identify with their avatars
  - Women tend to treat avatars as extensions of themselves and an opportunity for self-expression
  - To make a game more attractive to women, allow them to customize avatar

Quick poll: Which of these two avatars would appeal more to women?

Q1: Do you want a non-specific, partially specified, or specific character?

Q2: Do you allow the player to design the avatar?
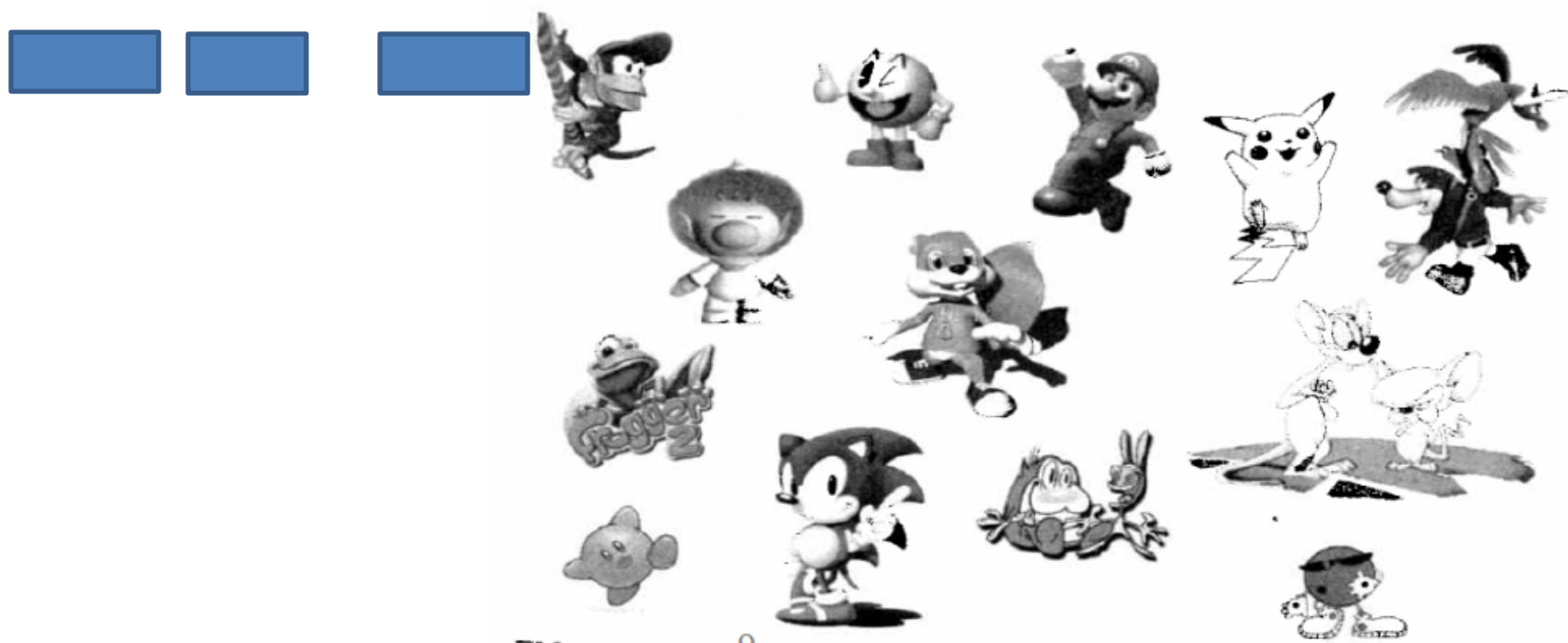
Q3: What control mechanism do you want to use?

Q4: How do you design to appeal to your target audience? Gender issues arise.

Two approaches to character design:

- Art-driven: Think about the character's visual appearance first

- Story-driven: Think about the character's role, personality and behavior first

Q1: Do you want a non-specific, partially specified, or specific character?
Q2: Do you allow the player to design the avatar?
Q3: What control mechanism do you want to use?
Q4: How do you design to appeal to your target audience?
     Gender issues arise.

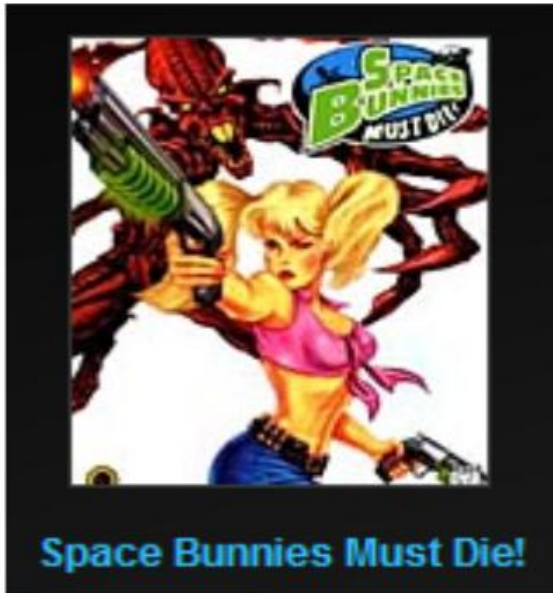Q5: Do you want to use art-driven or story-driven character design?

Art-driven character design:

- Characters fall into three general categories:
  - Humanoids—physical features like a human's
  - Nonhumanoids—shaped like vehicles or machines, animals, or monsters
  - Hybrids—beings such as mermaids or human/machine combinations
- Art-driven characters are usually stereotypes:
  - Most common character stereotypes are cool, tough, cute, and goofy

Art-driven character design:

- Hypersexualization is exaggerating sexual attributes of characters
- Avoid hypersexualized characters because:
  - They are clichés
  - They appeal only to a puerile audience
  - They may turn off part of your target audience

Space Bunnies Must Die!

Art-driven character design

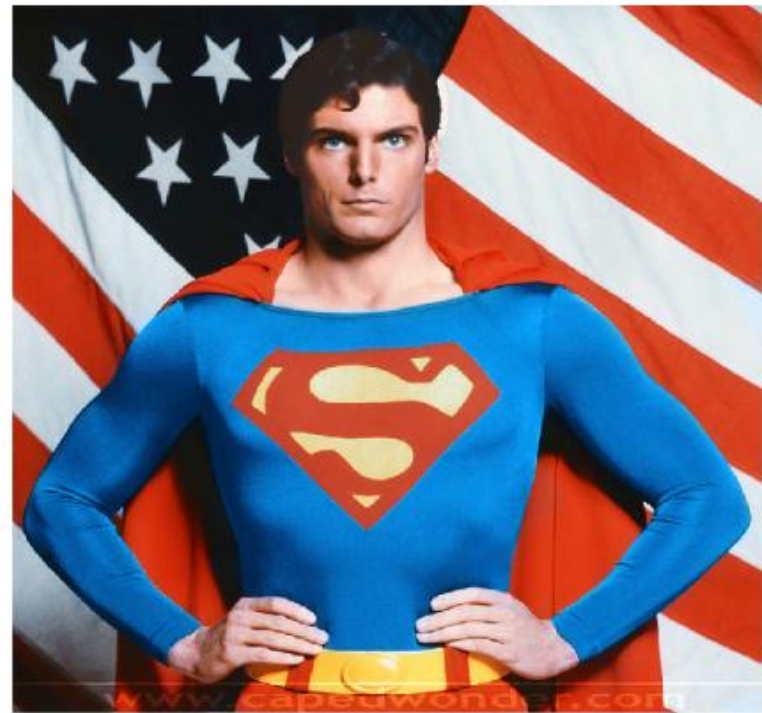## Clothing, Weapons, Symbolic Objects, and Names

- Accessories reveal personal style
- Choice of weapons can also be revealing
- Transferring an object can symbolically transfer a power or reward
- Names that reveal too much of the character's personality aren't necessary

Art-driven character design
Color Palette and Sidekicks

- Use a signature color for the main character
- Choose a color palette to reflect character's attitudes and emotional temperament

- Sidekicks offer several benefits:
  - They allow you to give the player additional moves and actions
  - They extend the emotional range
  - They can be used to give the player information he wouldn't get any other way

Art-driven character design: Concept art

FIGURE 6.6 Concept art of a fantasy Mongol horsewoman.
Courtesy of Björn Hurri.

What does this concept art tell us about the character?

Art-driven character design: Model Sheets

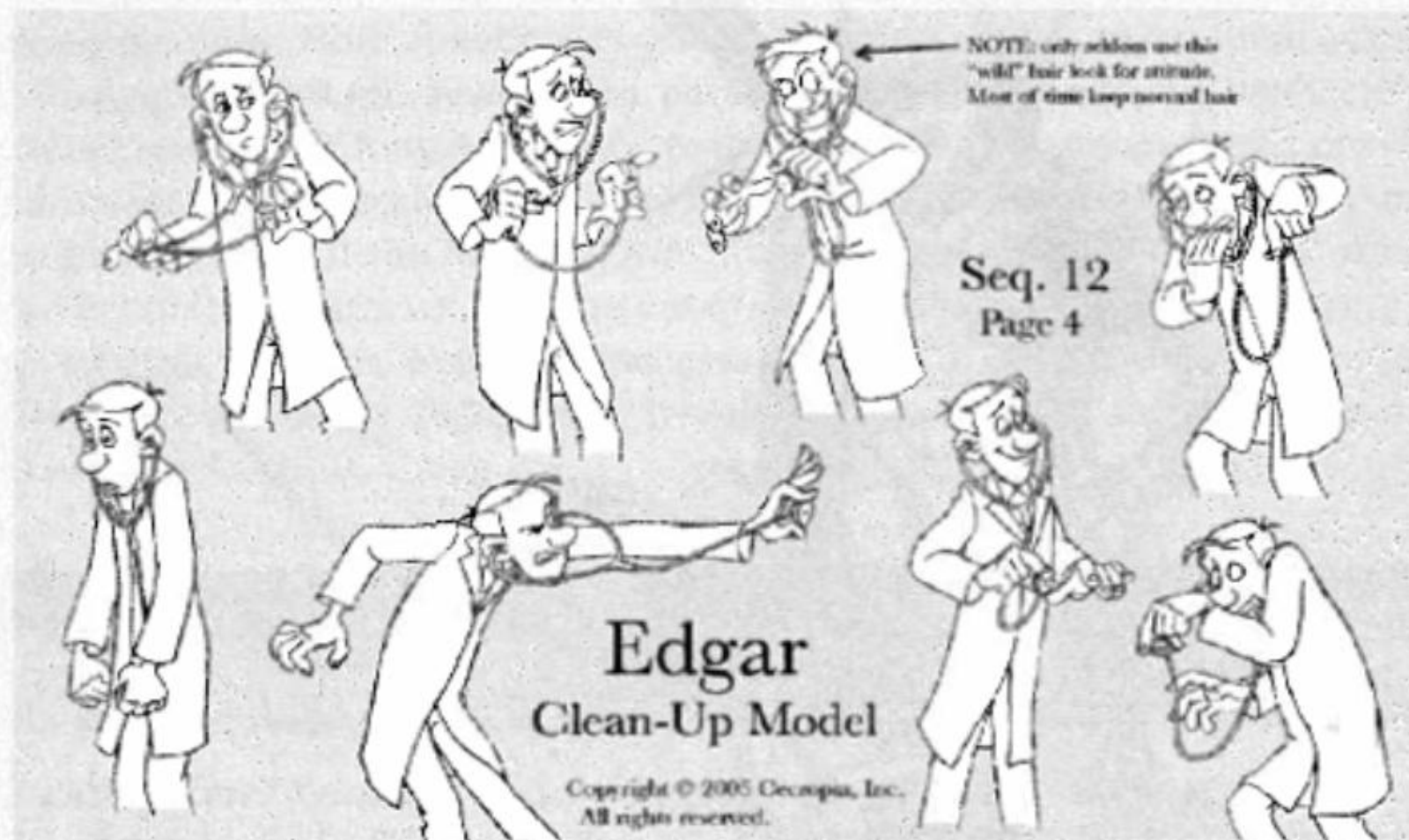sheet from *The Act,* a coin-op game by Cecropia Inc. that uses hand-drawn animation.

FIGURE 6.7 A model sheet of the Edgar character from *The Act.*

Art-driven character design: Model Sheets

Two approaches to character design:

- Art-driven: Think about the character's visual appearance first

- Story-driven: Think about the character's role, personality and behavior first

Q1: Do you want a non-specific, partially specified, or specific character?
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Q4: How do you design to appeal to your target audience?
     Gender issues arise.

Q5: Do you want to use art-driven or story-driven character design?

Story-driven character design:
Start with a *Backgrounder*

Role, Attitude, and Values

- Every character in a game plays a role
- To design characters, you have to envision them and answer many questions about them
- Create a *backgrounder*, or character background paper, for major characters → **Backgrounder Questions**
- Show character personality through appearance, language, and behavior

Show rather than *Tell*

Story-driven character design: *Attributes*

Attributes

- Attributes are the data values that show a character's location, health, property, etc.
- Attributes can be divided into:
  - Status attributes that change frequently
  - Characterization attributes that change infrequently
- Attributes a character needs depend on the genre and nature of the gameplay

In your game, consider following a modern trend: attributes that model social relationships and emotional states (not just physical characteristics)

So details will be in the chapter for your game genre, later in the text

Story-driven character design: *Character Dimensionality*

- Characters can be classified into four groups:
  - Zero-dimensional characters display only discrete emotional states
  - One-dimensional characters have only a single variable to characterize a changing attitude

● HATE   **● FEAR**

FIGURE 6.9 Zero-dimensional characters have binary emotional states with no mixed feelings. They may have more than two.

antipathy   neutrality   sympathy

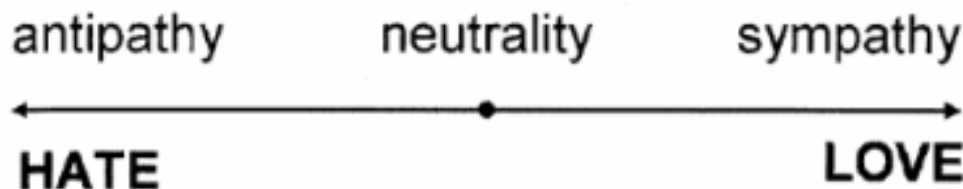**HATE**   **LOVE**

FIGURE 6.10 One-dimensional characters have a single variable that describes an emotion that changes over time.

Examples from Lord of the Rings:

Story-driven character design: *Character Dimensionality*

- Characters can be classified into four groups:
  - Zero-dimensional characters display only discrete emotional states
  - One-dimensional characters have only a single variable to characterize a changing attitude
  - Two-dimensional characters are described by multiple variables that express their impulses, but those impulses don't conflict
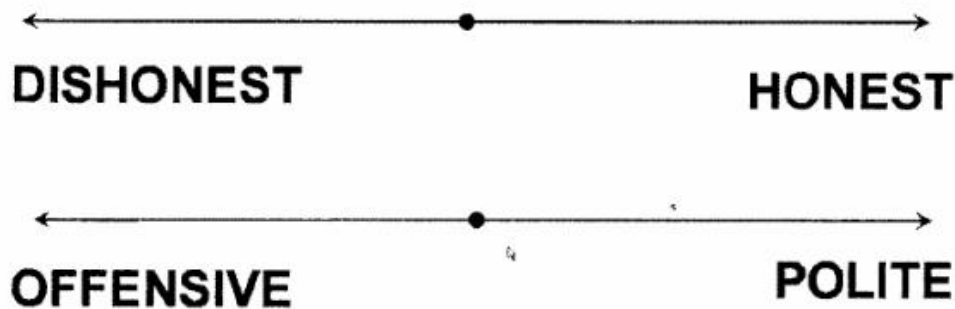 - Three-dimensional characters have multiple emotional states that can produce conflicts

nameless Orcs

●	●
HATE	**FEAR**

Gimli's relationship to elves

antipathy   neutrality   sympathy

HATE ←————————→ **LOVE**

Lord of the Rings example:

DISHONEST ←————————→ **HONEST**

OFFENSIVE ←————————→ **POLITE**

FIGURE 6.11 Two-dimensional characters have multiple, nonconflicting impulses.

antipathy   psychopathy
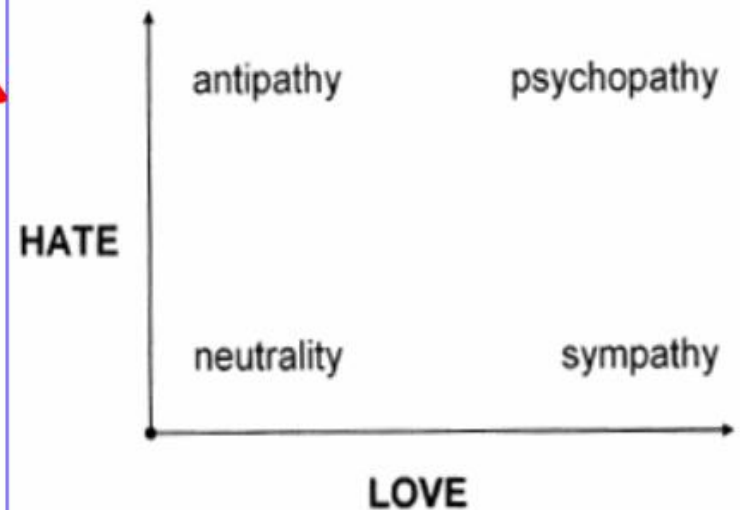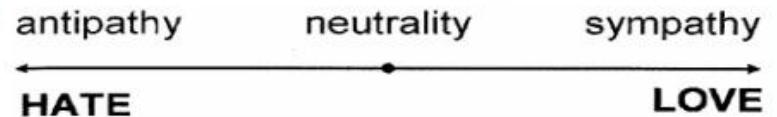
HATE

neutrality   sympathy

LOVE

FIGURE 6.12 Three-dimensional characters can have conflicting impulses that produce inconsistent behavior.

Lord of the Rings example:

19

Story-driven character design: *Character Growth*

- A game that aspires to be more than a simple adventure must include character growth

- To build character growth into a game, decide which characters will grow and how
  - Games often use physical growth because it is easy to show and implement

Physically?
Intellectually?
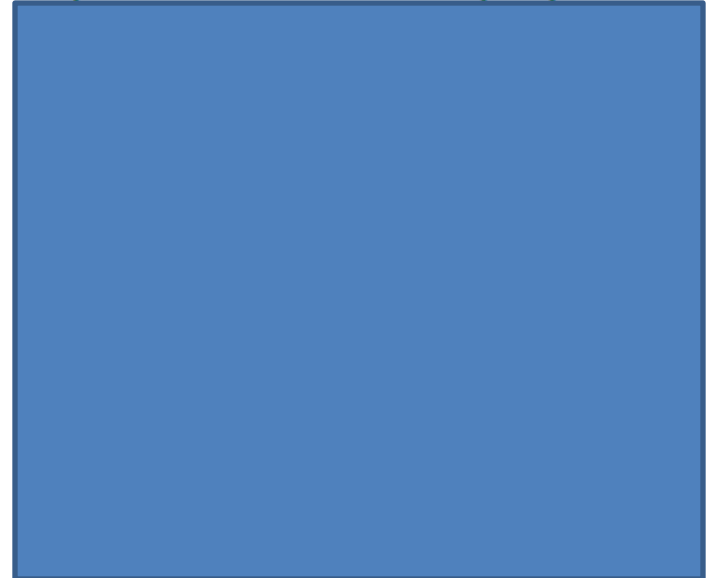Morally?
Emotionally?

How to implement this growth within the game?
- Changes in numeric or symbolic attributes?
- Changes in plot?
- Or ...?

How will growth affect gameplay, if at all?

How will the growth be represented to the player?
-
-
-
-

Story-driven character design: *Character Archetypes*

- Many stories that follow the Hero's Journey pattern include archetypal characters
  - Characters fundamental to storytelling
  - Found in stories from all cultures
  - May be fundamental to the human psyche

Also known as the Monomyth

References:
- Joseph Campbell identified the Hero's Journey pattern.
- Christopher Vogel's book, *The Writer's Journey*, gives a condensed treatment of Vogel's work for screenwriters. Good source for your character design.
- Wikipedia gives a good account of the highlights:

    Monomyth (aka Hero's Journey)

Audio design

- Sounds reveal the character
  - Sound effects
  - Vocabulary
  - Grammar and sentence construction
  - Accent
  - Delivery
  - Vocal quirks

Character design, Summary

Q1: Do you want a non-specific, partially specified, or specific character?

Q2: Do you allow the player to design the avatar?

Q3: What control mechanism do you want to use?

Q4: How do you design to appeal to your target audience? Gender issues arise.

Q5: Do you want to use art-driven or story-driven character design?

Art-driven tips:
- Consider stereotypes like cute, cool, tough and goofy
- Avoid hypersexualized characters
- Use clothing, weapons, symbolic objects and names
- Include concept art, model sheets
- Color:
  - Signature color for main character
  - Colors set mood
- Consider sidekicks

Story-driven tips:
- Start with a Backgrounder
  - *Show* personality rather than *Tell* it
- See the chapter on your game genre for tips on Attributes to include
- Consider the four levels of Character Dimensionality
- Consider which characters will grow, how they will grow, how that affects gameplay, and how the player sees the growth
- Consider archetypes, ala the Hero's Journey

Audio can help develop your character