



Social Mechanics

The Engines Behind
Everything Multiplayer



Raph Koster
VP Creative Design





Social Mechanics

Things behind
Everything

For Social
Games



Raph Koster
VP Creative Design



What are we going to do?

Go very fast.

Over 160 slides.

I could not restrain myself.



What are we going to do?

Go very fast.

190 slides.

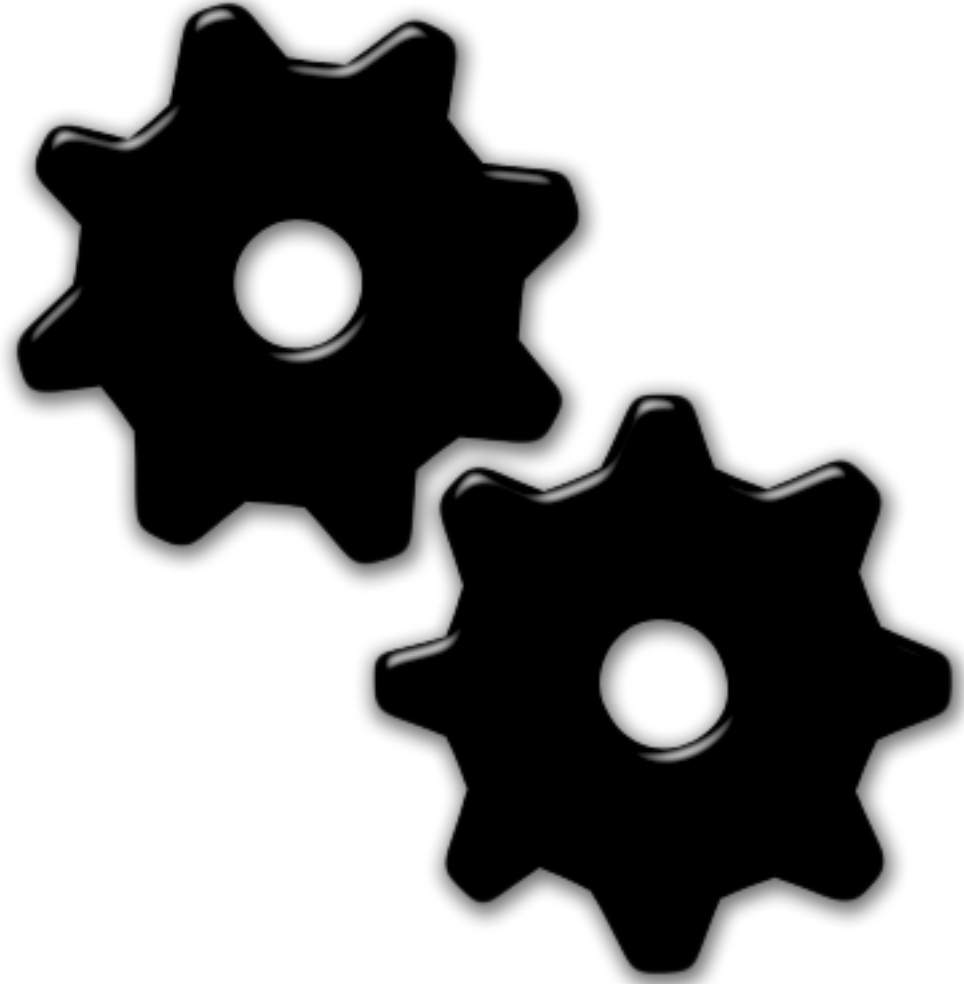
I could not restrain myself.



What are we going to do?

The core 40 mechanics
of multiplayer games.

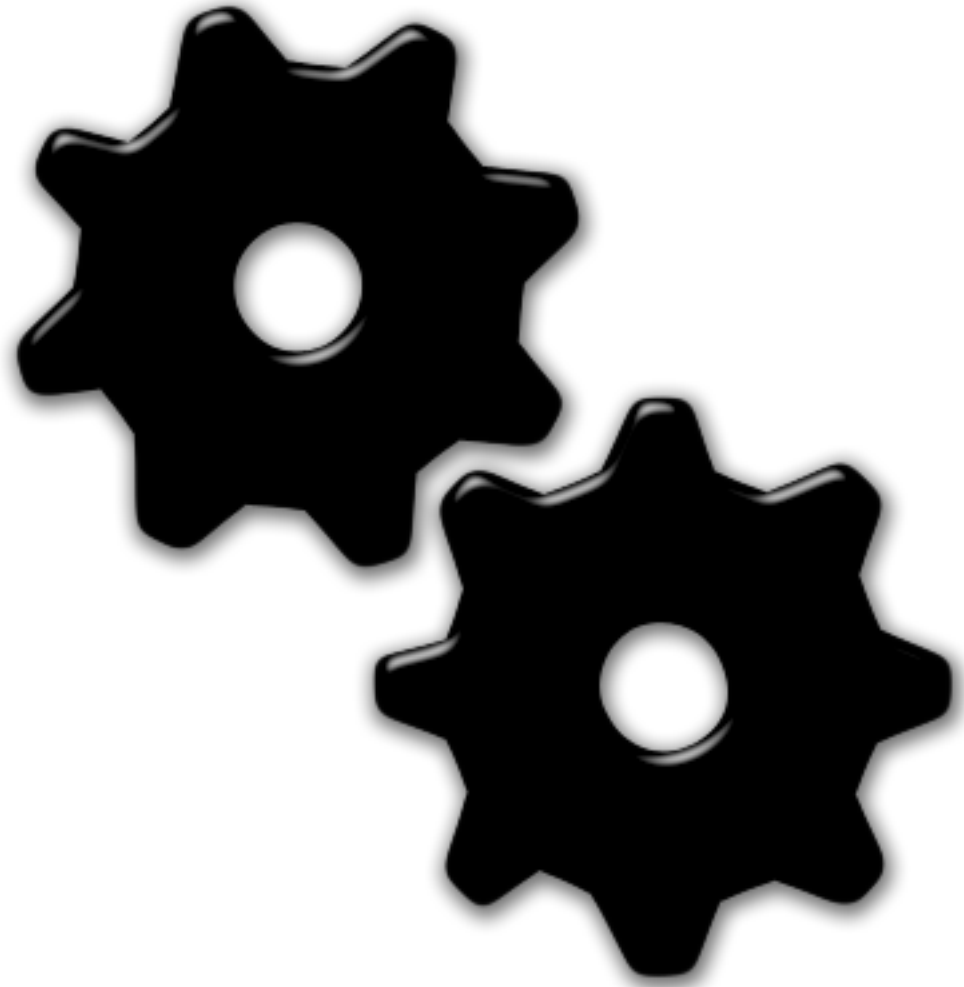
- Yes, all of them.
- No further design
required -- *ever*.*



What are we going to do?

The core 40 mechanics
of multiplayer games.

- Yes, all of them.
- No further design required -- *ever*.*



** For certain values of “ever.”*

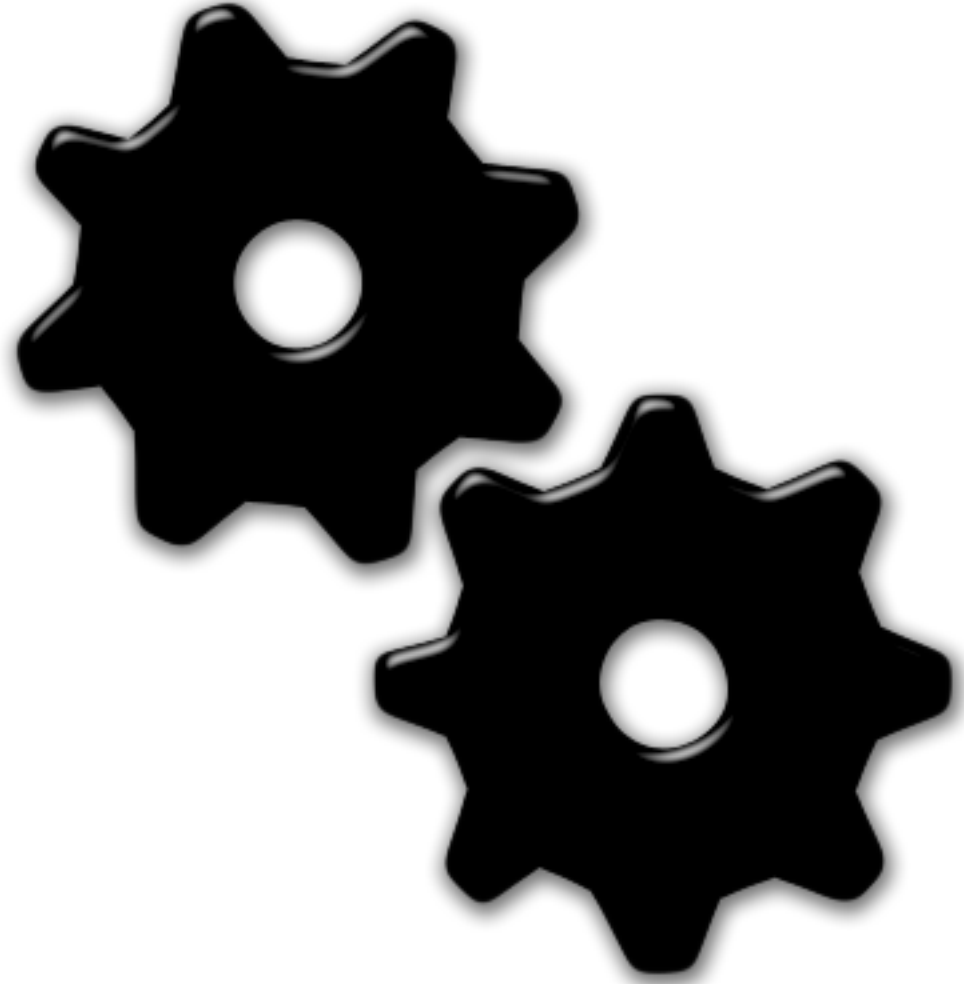


What are we going to do?

They'll be marked like this:



For your tweeting convenience!

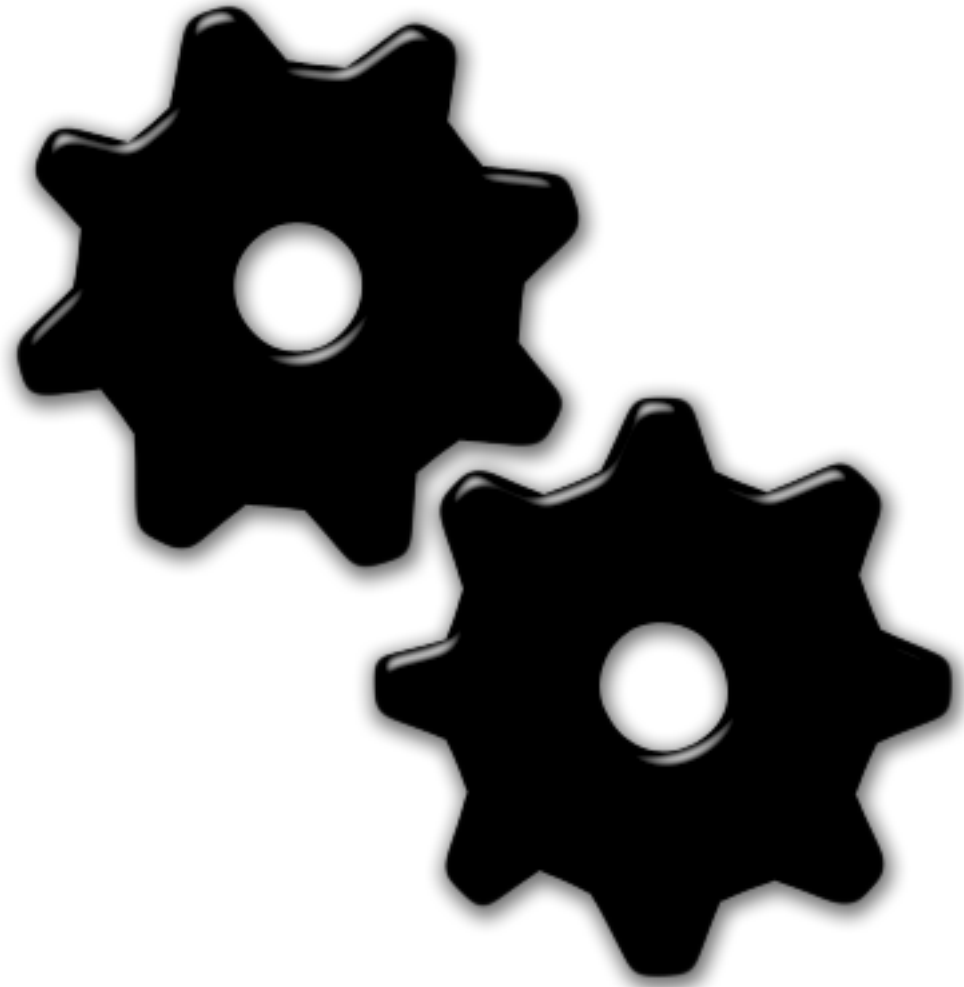


What are we going to do?

They'll be marked like this:

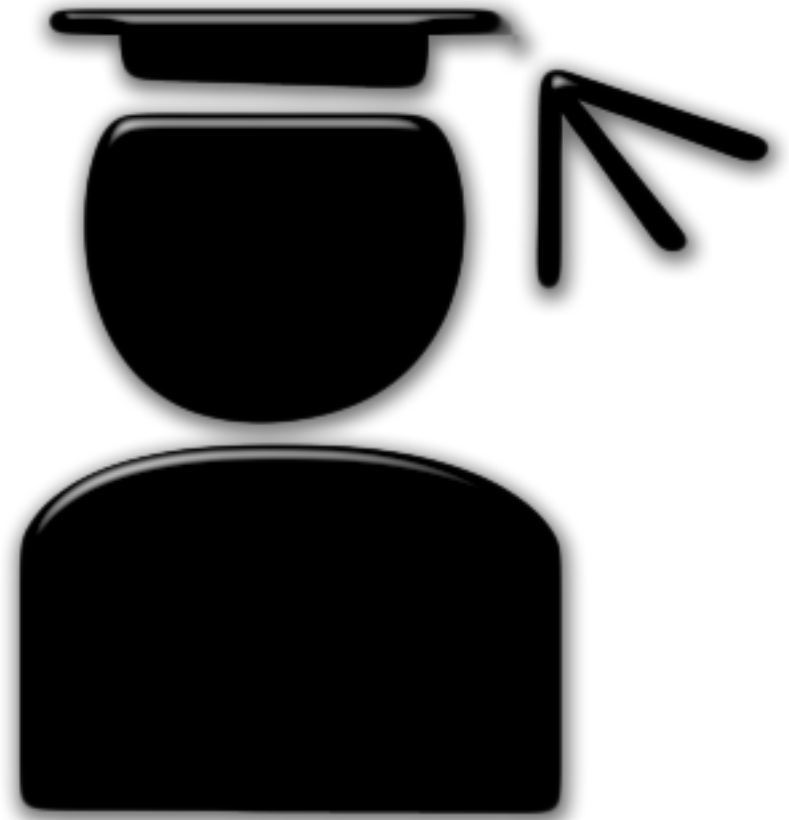


For your tweeting convenience!



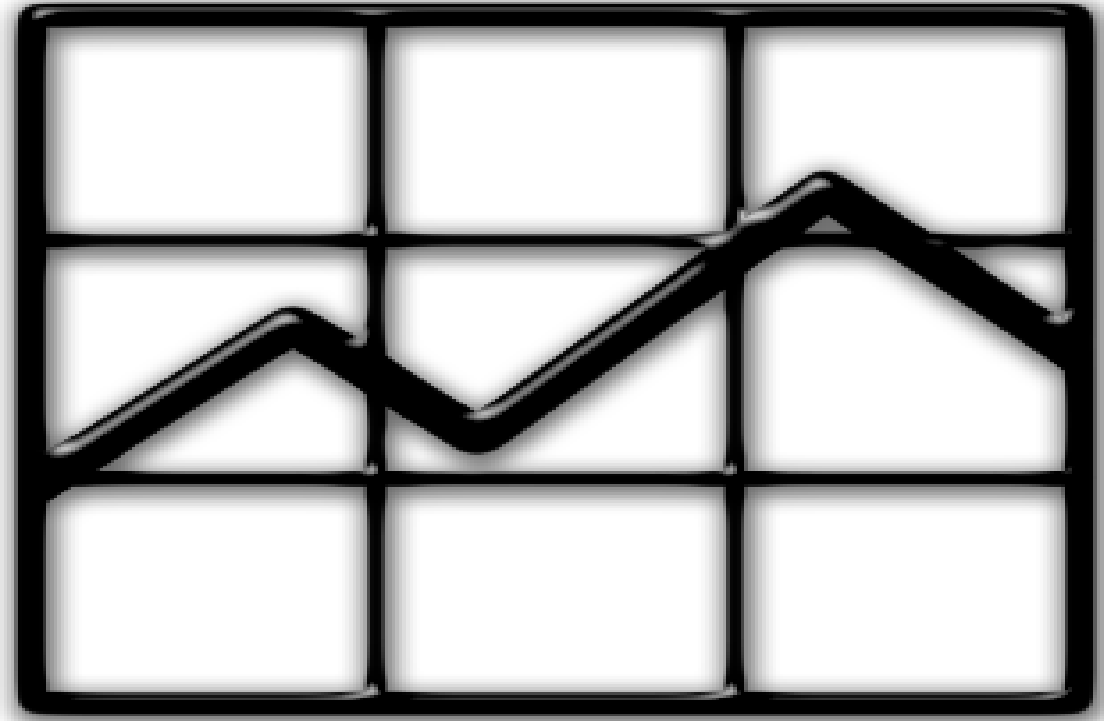
What are we going to do?

We will touch briefly on *game grammar*...



What are we going to do?

...and on *economic theory*...



What are we going to do?

...The famed psychologist
Stanley Milgram...



What are we going to do?

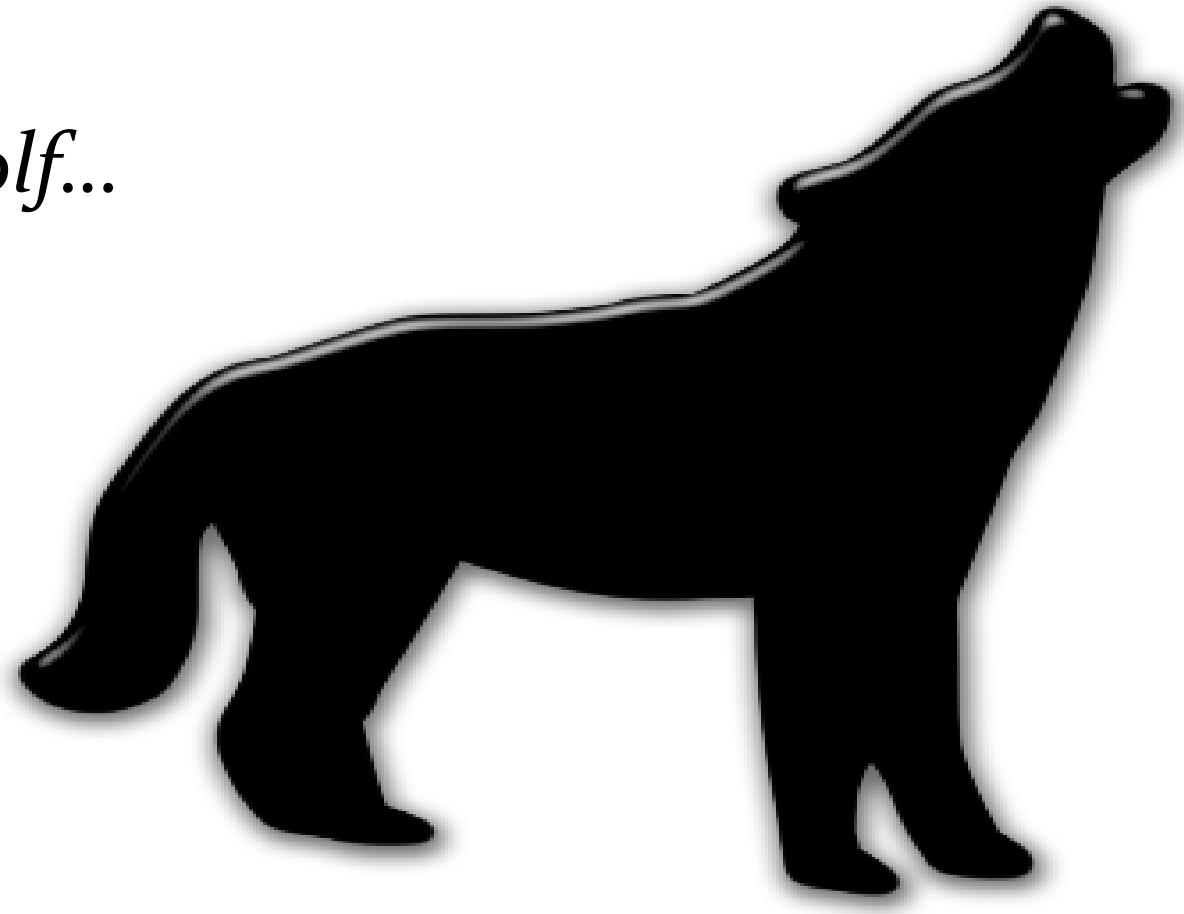
...1940's science fiction...



What are we going to do?

...a game called *Werewolf*...

And...



What are we going to do?

...a somewhat lengthy
discursion into
*structuralist
anthropology,*

for which I apologize, but not as
much as for the time spent on...



What are we going to do?

...a little

Derrida.



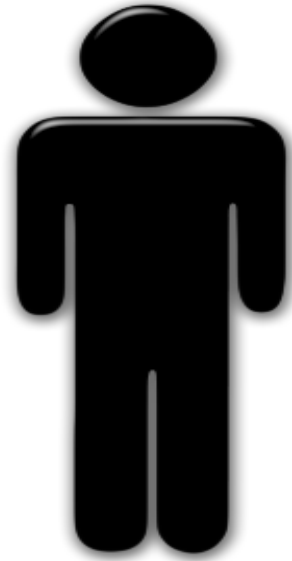
But first...

“A good game should focus entirely on it's single-player aspect first and foremost. Then if it's a simple game like a shooter or racer, use the remaining time and space to fit in a multi-player aspect to it... In other words, multi-playing should never take away from the single-player aspect of the game. **Pure multi-player games really should be few and far between.”**

-- the unfortunately named New Troll, Escapist Forums, 23 June 2009







True single-player

1 v. self/system



Defining a “single player game”

A game that is not played in opposition to
someone else.



Defining a “single player game”

A game that is not played in opposition to, or in parallel with someone else.



Defining a “single player game”

A game that is not played in opposition to, or in parallel with someone else.



This is most social games today



Defining a “single player game”

A game that is not played in opposition to, or in parallel with, or collaboratively with, someone else.



Defining a “single player game”

A game that is not played in opposition to, or in parallel with, or collaboratively with, someone else.

This is the biggest potential for social games



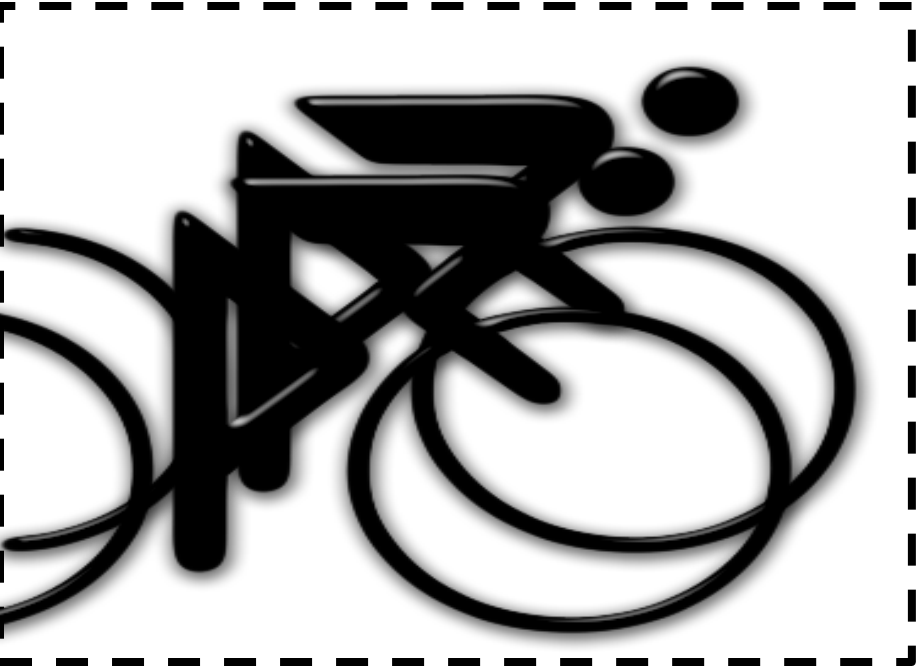
Defining a “single player game”

A game that is not played in opposition to, or in parallel with, or collaboratively with, someone else.

(In other words, hardly anything.)



Boundaries



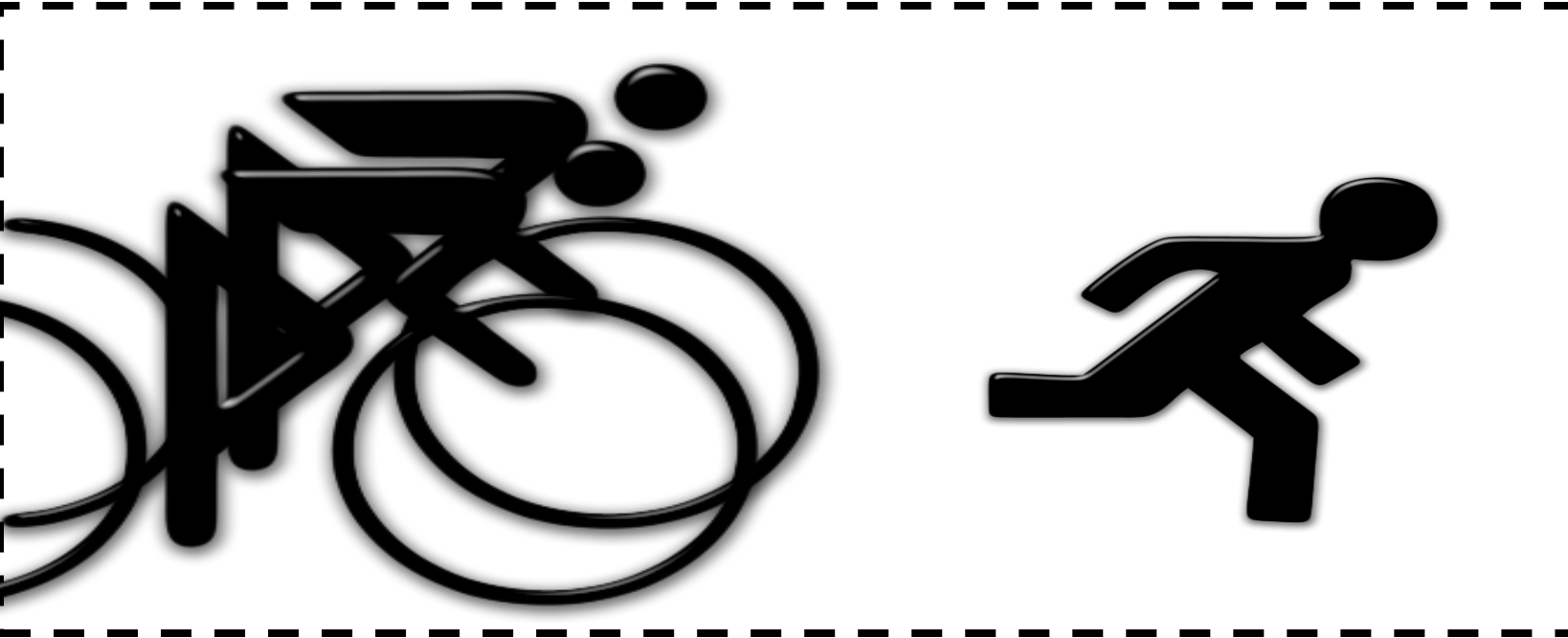
The boundary of a game is not the board, event, world, etc.

Boundaries



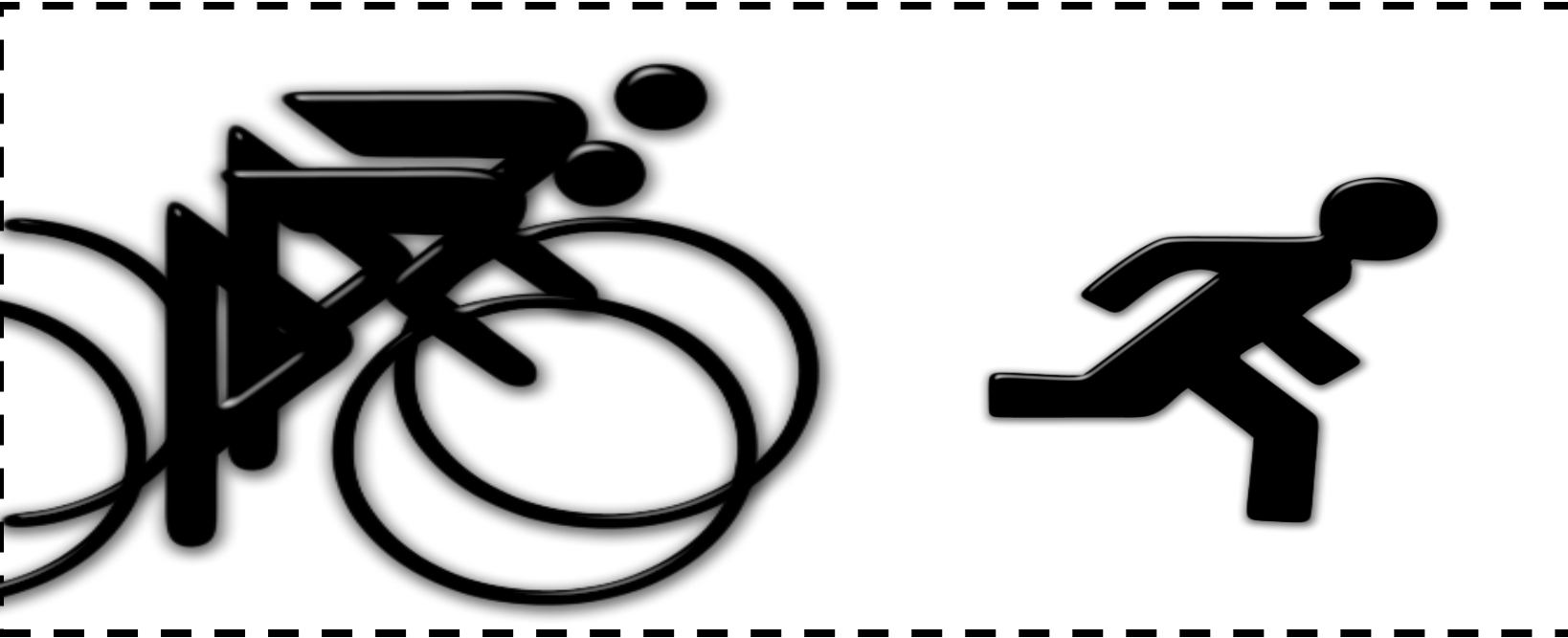
Consider: is training “part of the game”?

Boundaries



How about doping?

Boundaries



The true boundary of a game is based on where actions that can legally affect gameplay stop. Training yes, doping no.

Boundaries



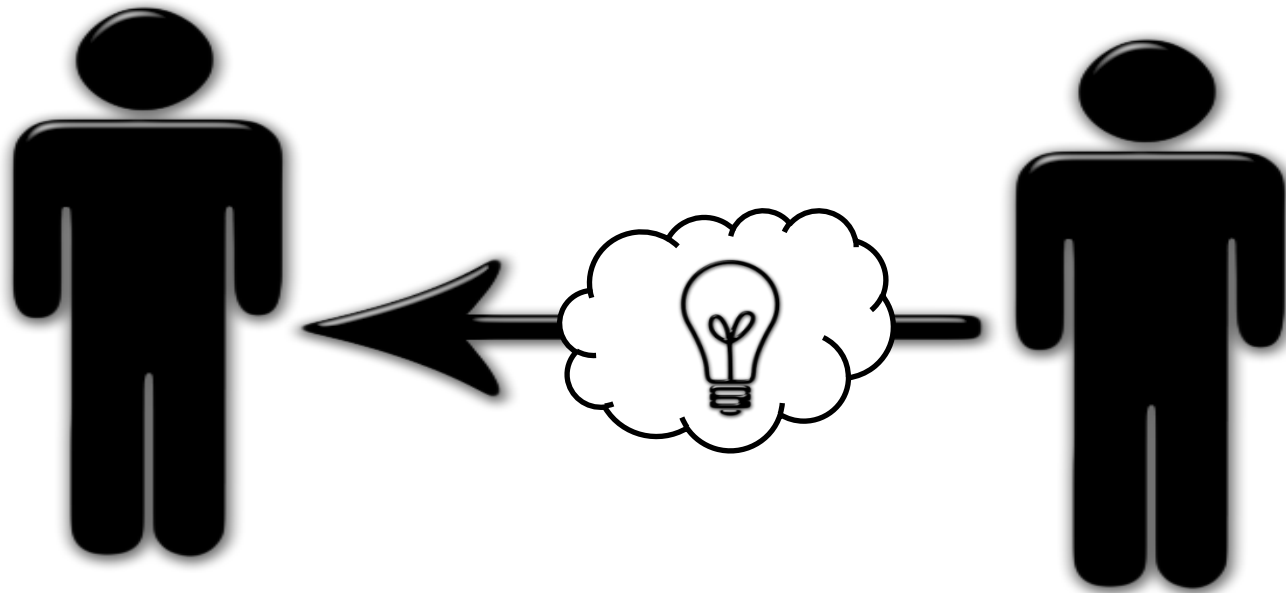
The true boundary of a game is based on where actions that can legally affect gameplay stop. Training yes, doping no.

Helping



The simplest form of multiplayer, present even in single-player games, is simple *advice and assistance*.

An outgrowth of “spectating.”

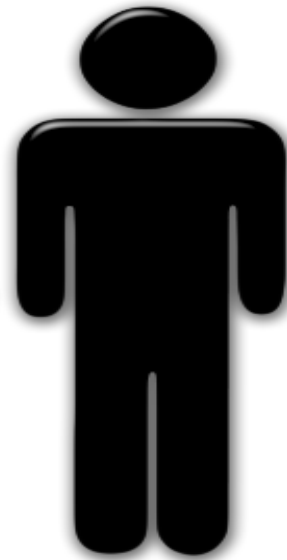
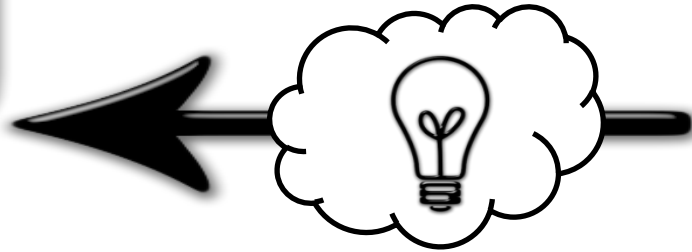
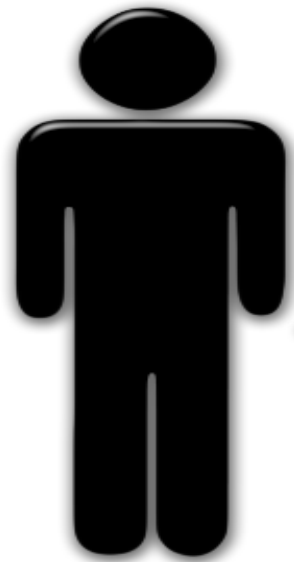


Helping



The simplest form of multiplayer, present even in single-player games, is simple *advice and assistance*.

An outgrowth of “spectating.”



How crappy are your forums?

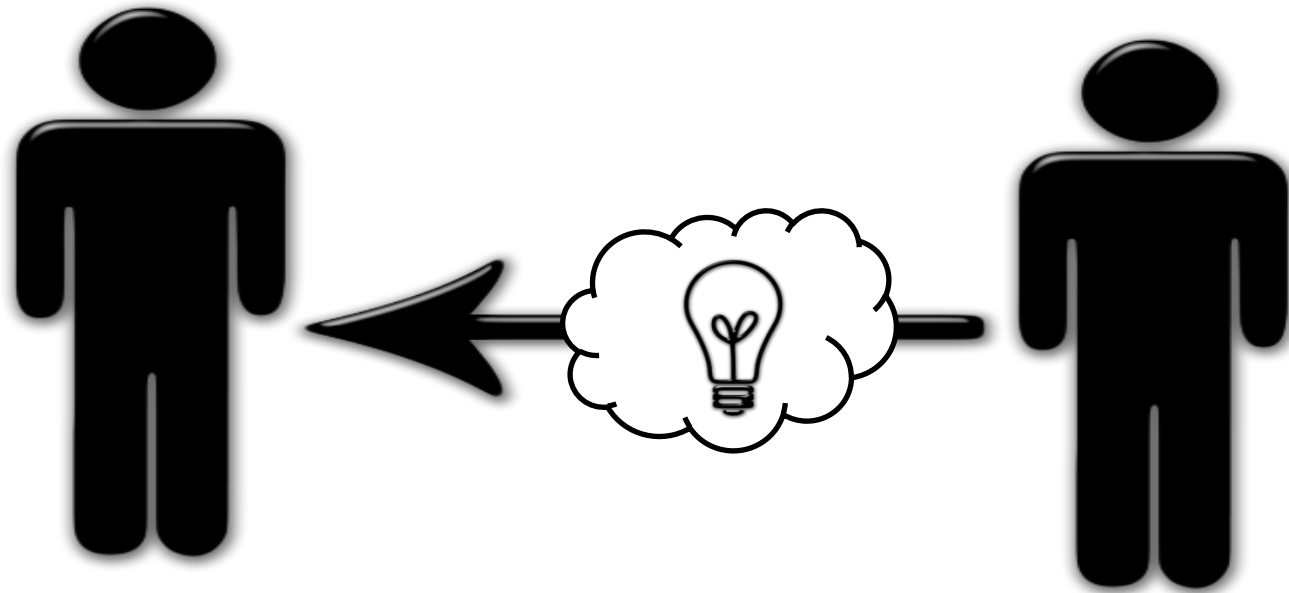


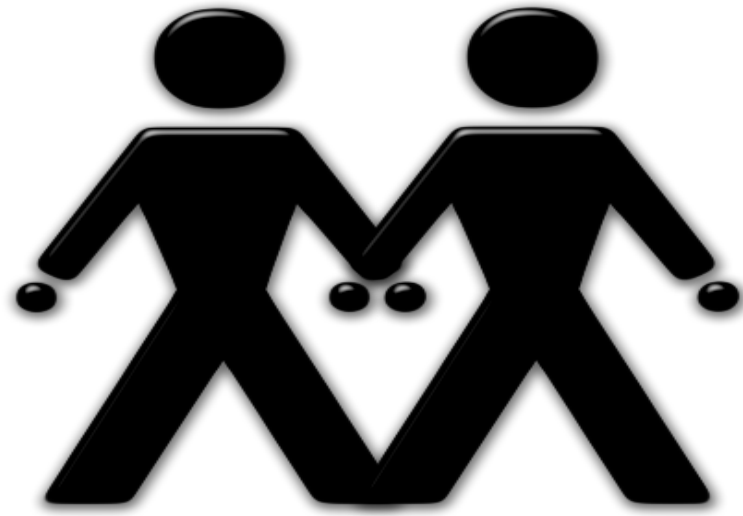
Helping



The simplest form of multiplayer, present even in single-player games, is simple *advice and assistance*.

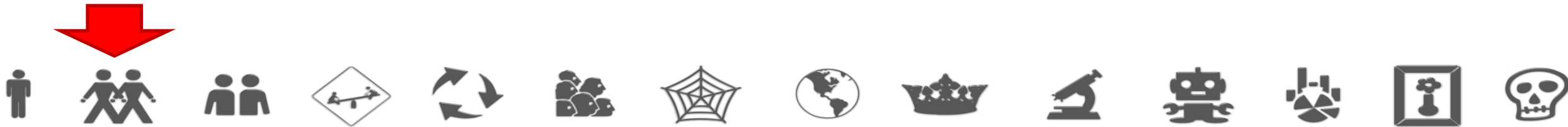
An outgrowth of “spectating.”





Parallel symmetric

1 v system vs 1 v system

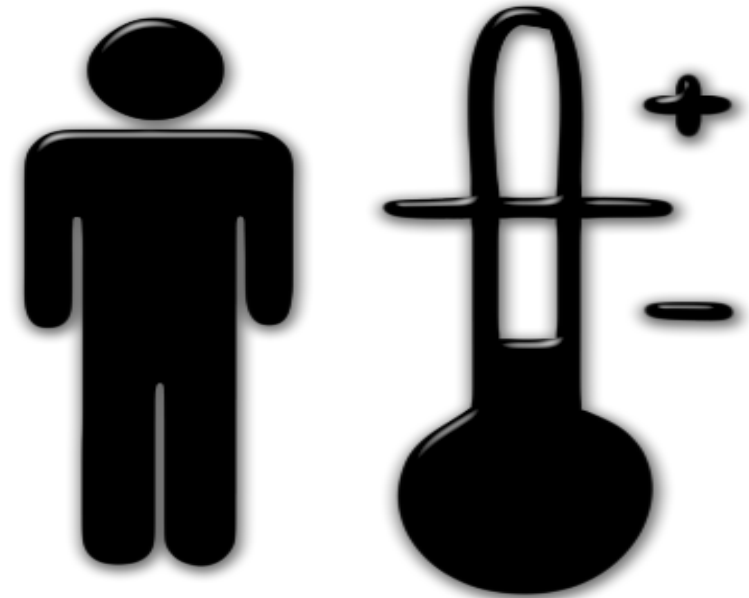


Parallel symmetric games



Status

Quantifying a player's achievement against the systemic opponent.



Typically becomes multiplayer when relative status is compared.



Status

Quantifying a player's achievement against the systemic opponent.



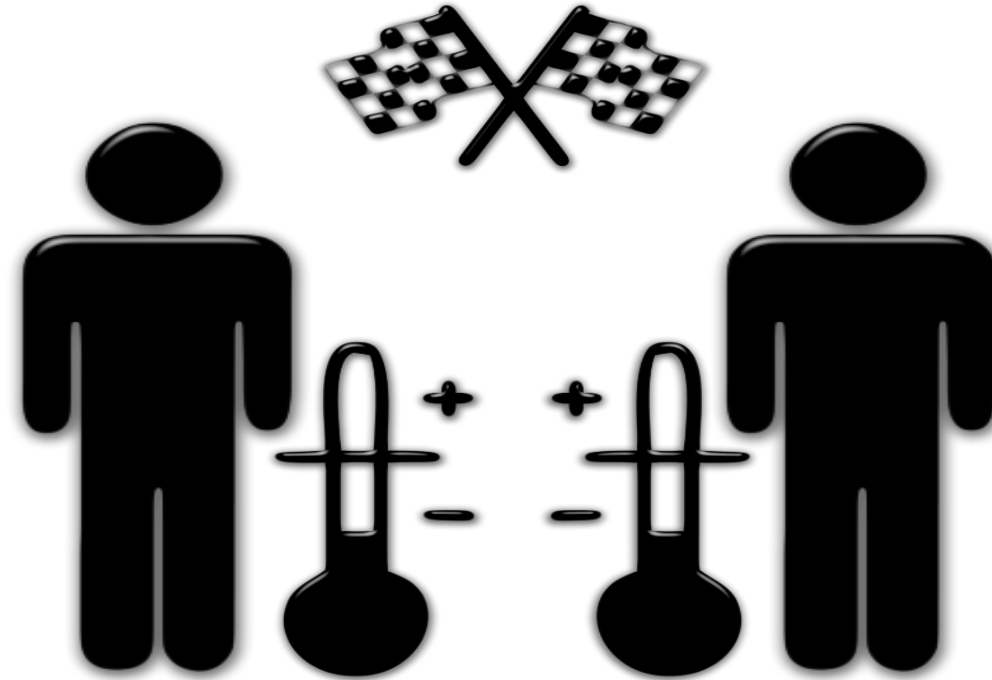
Typically becomes multiplayer when relative status is compared.



Races

The first user to reach a given status level wins.

(The basic boardgame, and basic sport)

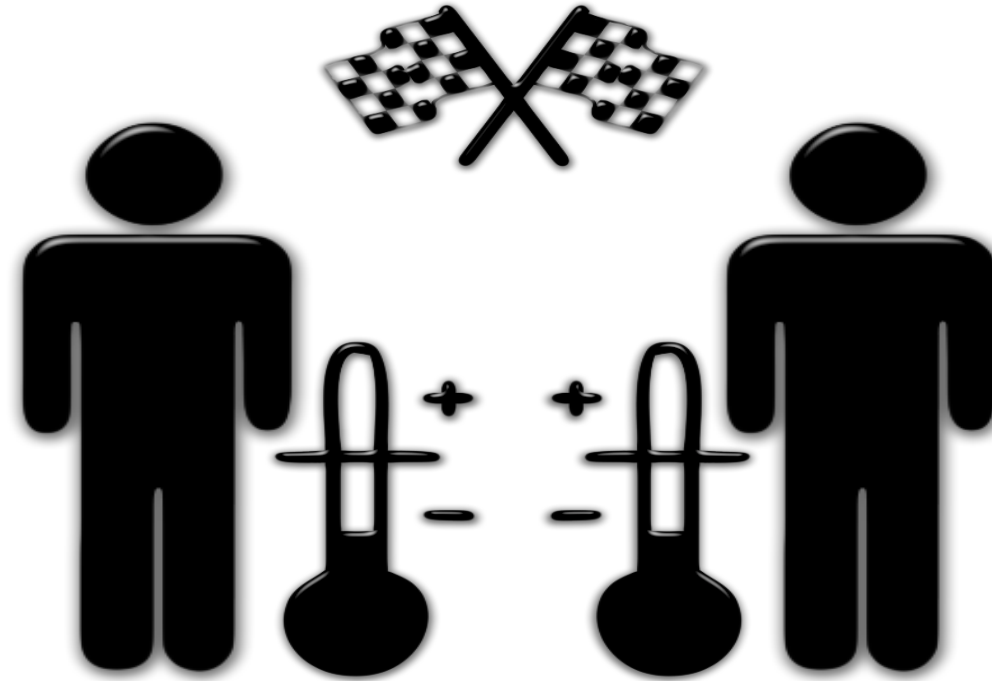


Races

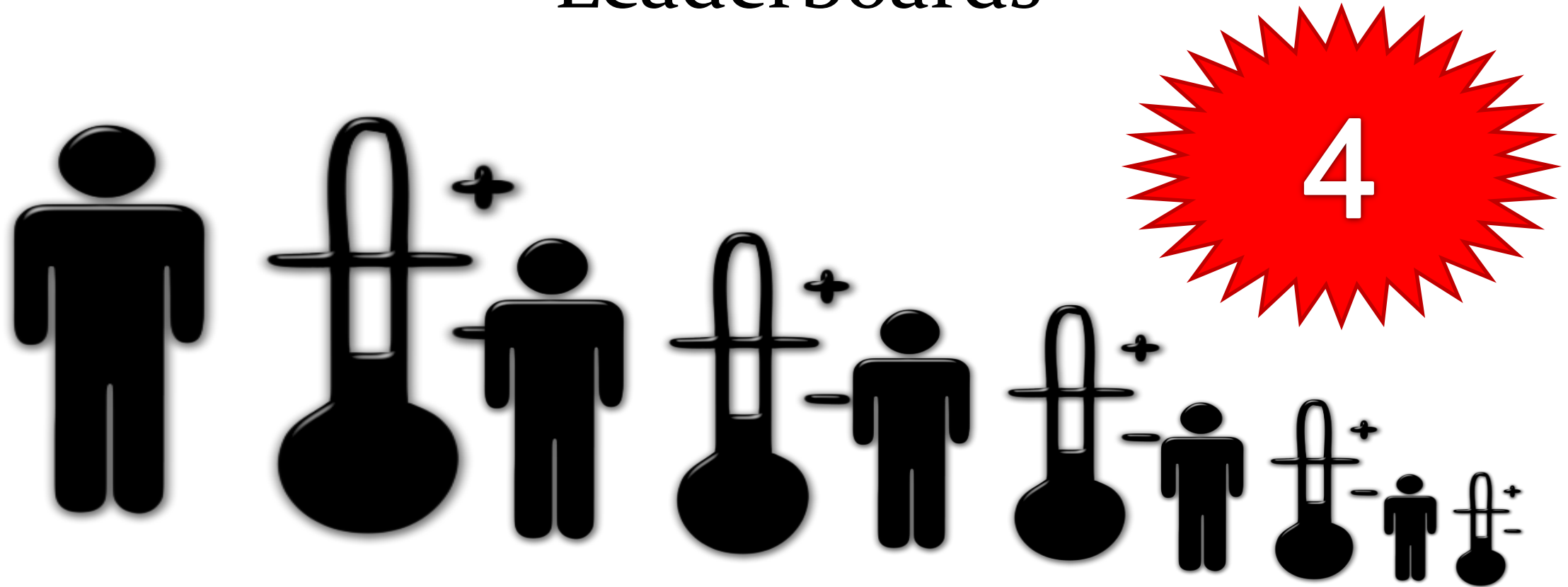
The first user to reach a given status level wins.

(The basic boardgame, and basic sport)

Curiously absent!
Why not have races
to level?



Leaderboards



Compete in asynchronous parallel with all historical attempts.

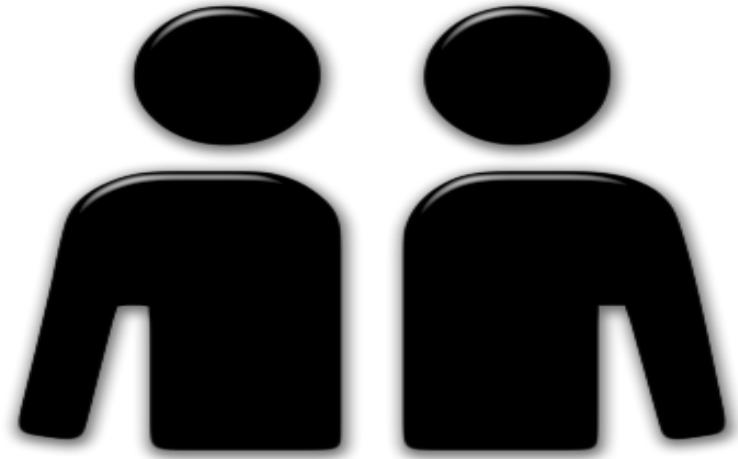


Leaderboards



Compete in asynchronous parallel with all historical attempts.





Parallel asymmetric

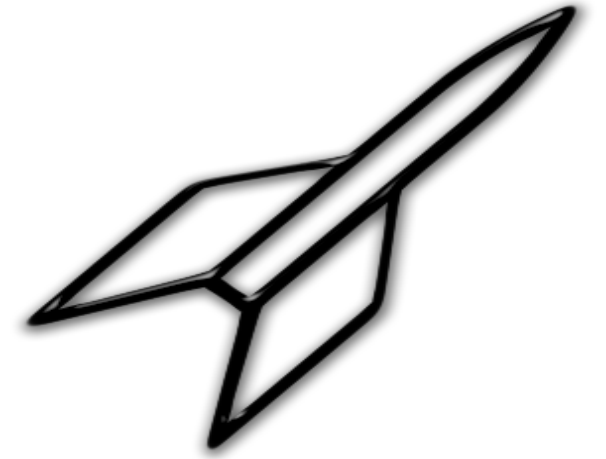
1 vs system, vs 1 vs another system



A hypothetical arcade game

The player is playing *nested games* of...

1. Steering the ship
2. Hitting the asteroids with lasers
3. Dodging asteroids and bullets and UFOs
4. Getting advice from her friend over the shoulder
5. Getting as high a score as she can
6. To brag to her friend that she beat him
7. And competing against everyone who has played this particular arcade machine



This *nesting* quality will be important...



Scaling parallel

Scaling parallel symmetric play to large numbers is hard to do in a time-bounded way.

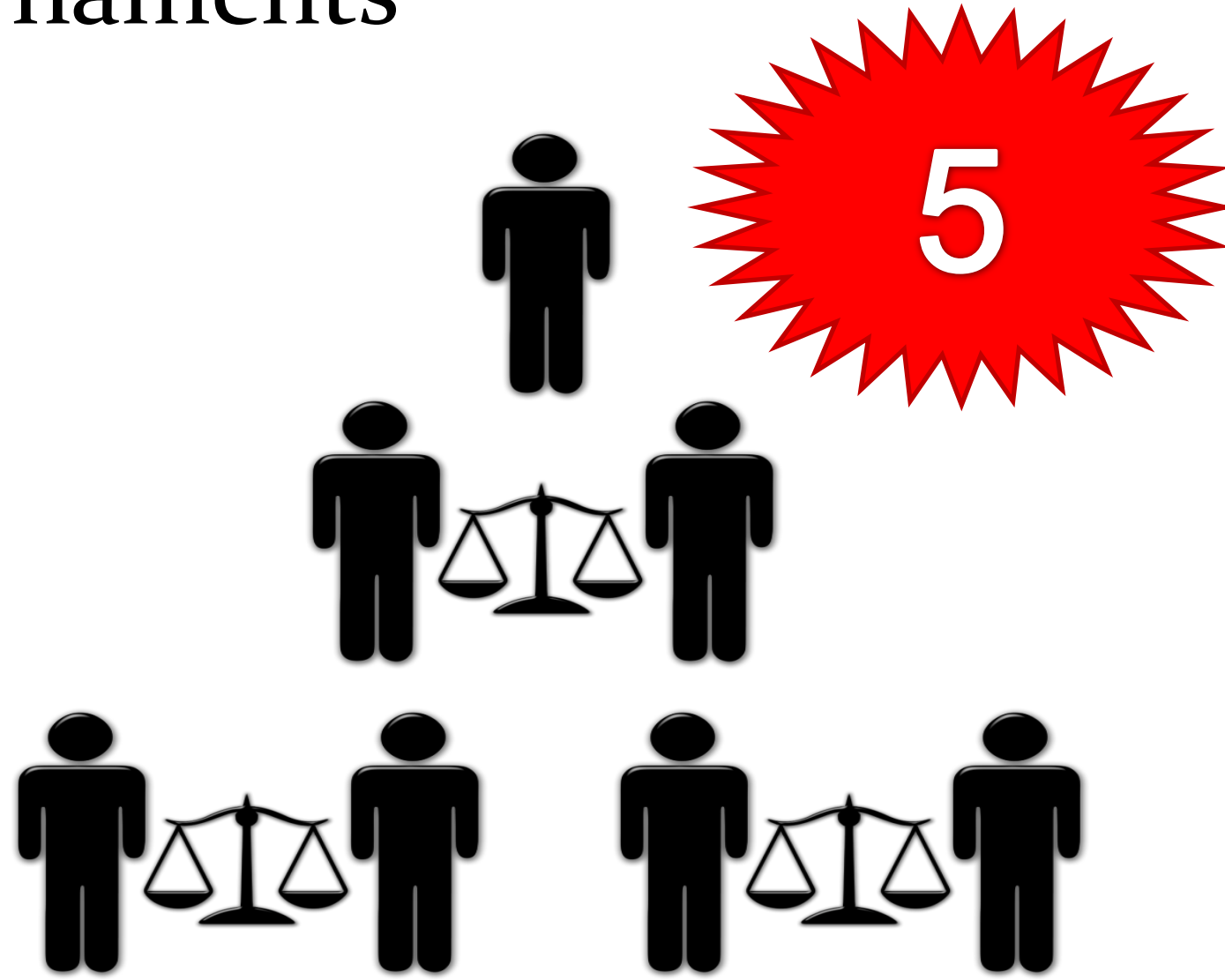
- For example, a few people can play an arcade game one after the other and compare...
- ...or an infinite amount can play against everyone ever via the high score table...

But how do you do a medium size number?



Tournaments

Brackets are often a game of their own distinct from the scoring or status comparison.



Tournaments

Brackets are often a game of their own distinct from the scoring or status comparison.

Social games often use supersimple level bracketing for PvP matchmaking

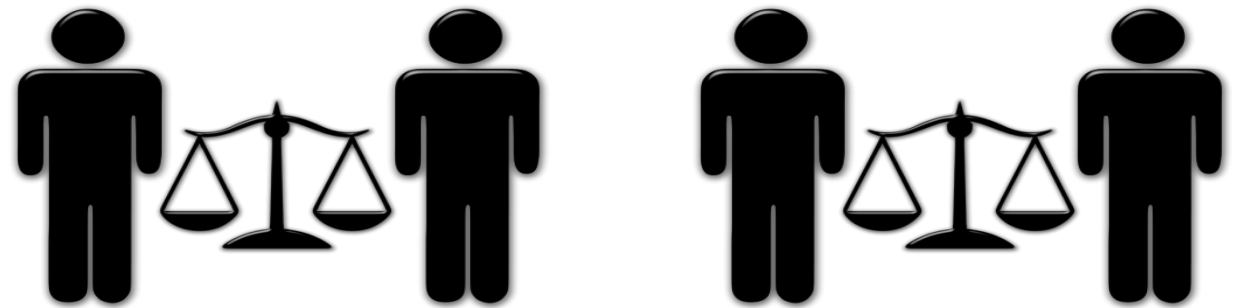


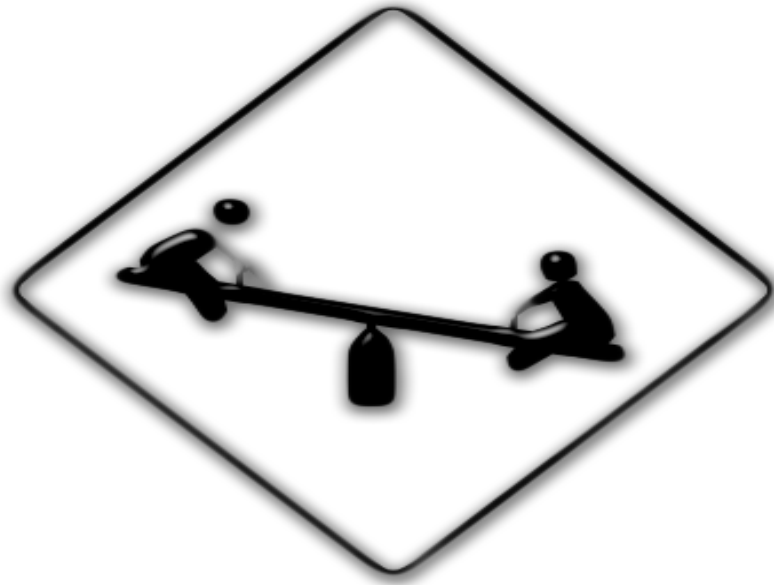
Tournaments

Brackets are often a game of their own distinct from the scoring or status comparison.

Of course, tournaments are often used for...

Social games often use supersimple level bracketing for PvP matchmaking





Opposition

1 VS 1

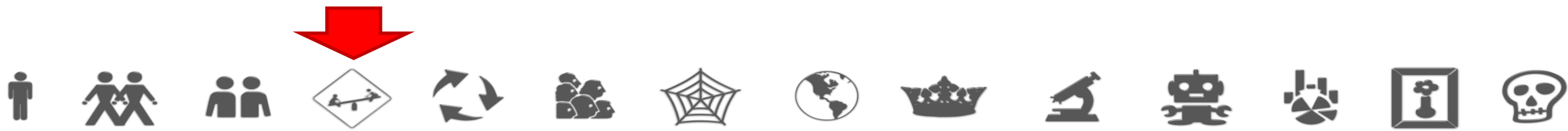




You could almost skip this category for social games

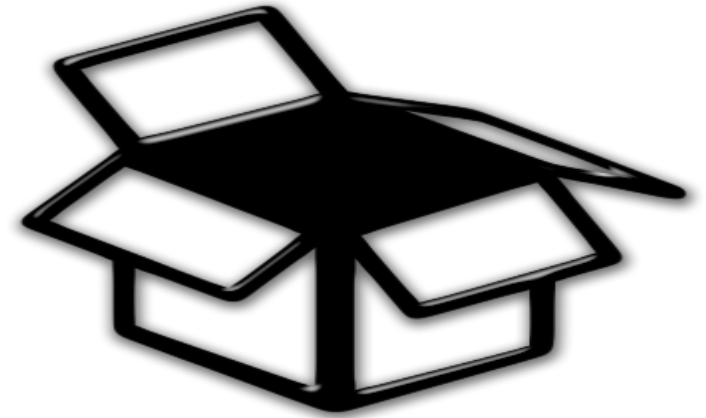
Opposition

1 VS 1



Rival and non-rival goods

A rival good is something that cannot be used by someone else at the same time.

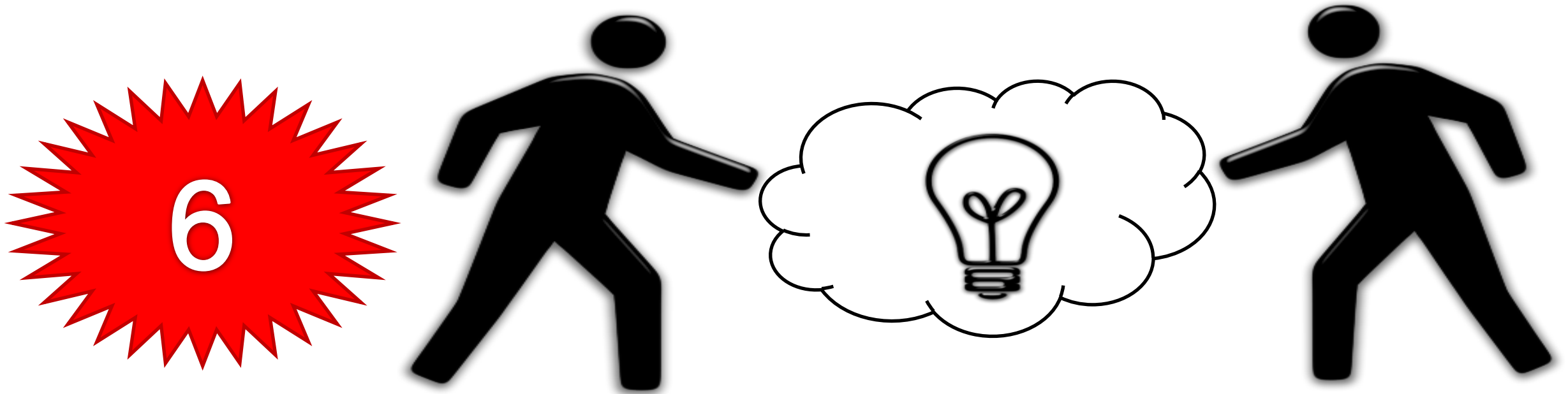


A non-rival good is stuff like information, or the public park.



Flower-picking

Non-zero-sum resource consumption: You compete to get stuff, but there is always more stuff.



Speed-up arrows on a race track... even pickups in many games.



Flower-picking

Non-zero-sum resource consumption: You compete to get stuff, but there is always more stuff.



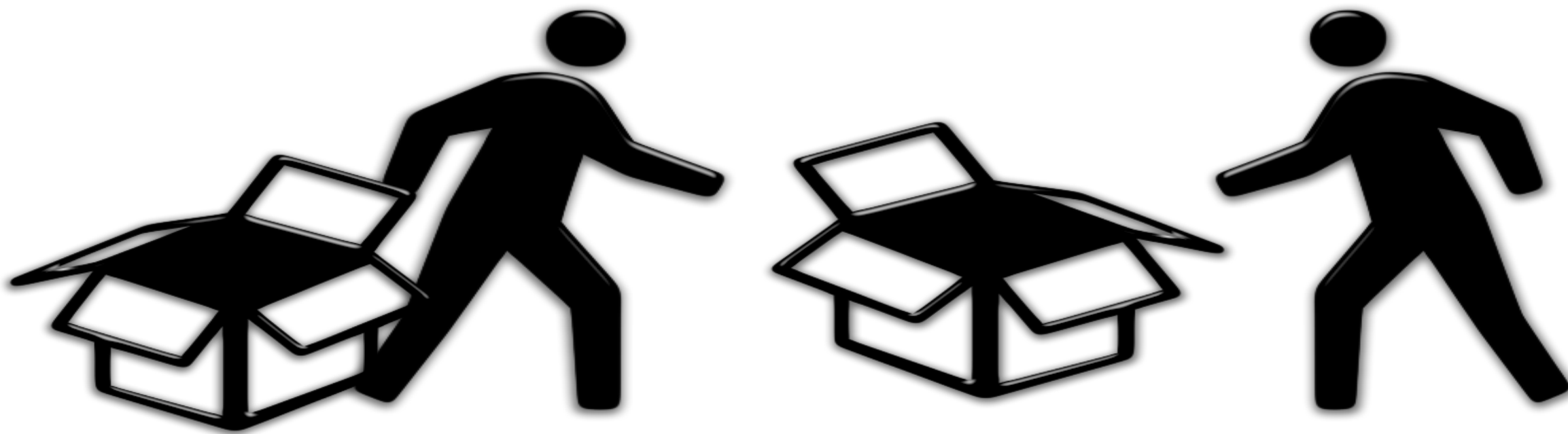
Speed-up arrows on a race track... even pickups in many games.





Dot-eating

Zero-sum resource consumption.
(also “territory”, in a graph theory sense).



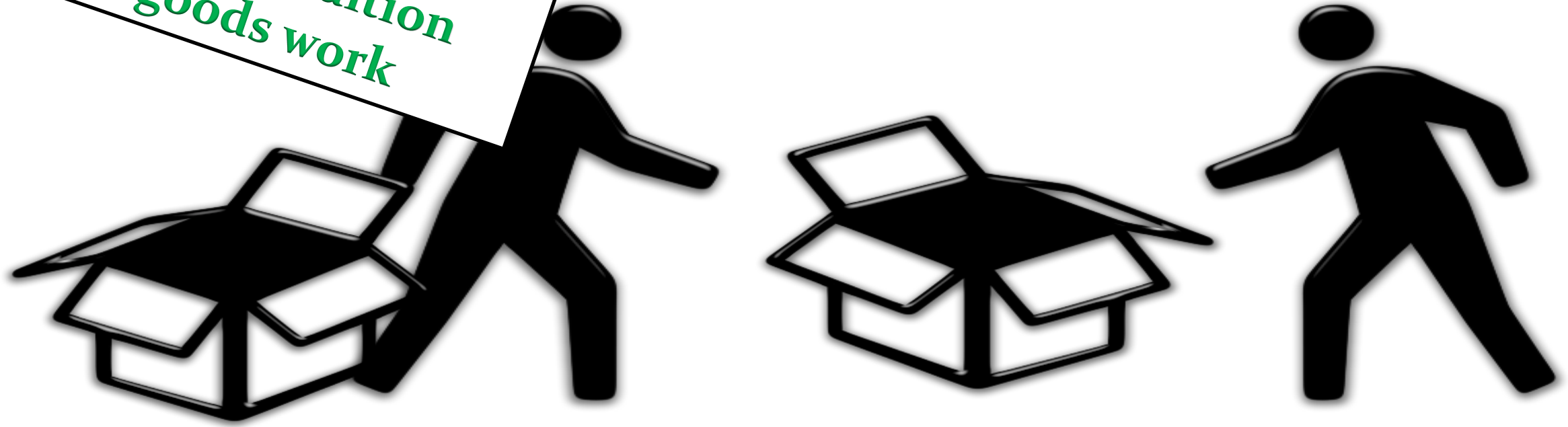
Players compete to get stuff, and whatever I get, you can't have.

Dot-eating

Zero-sum resource consumption.
(also “territory”, in a graph theory sense).



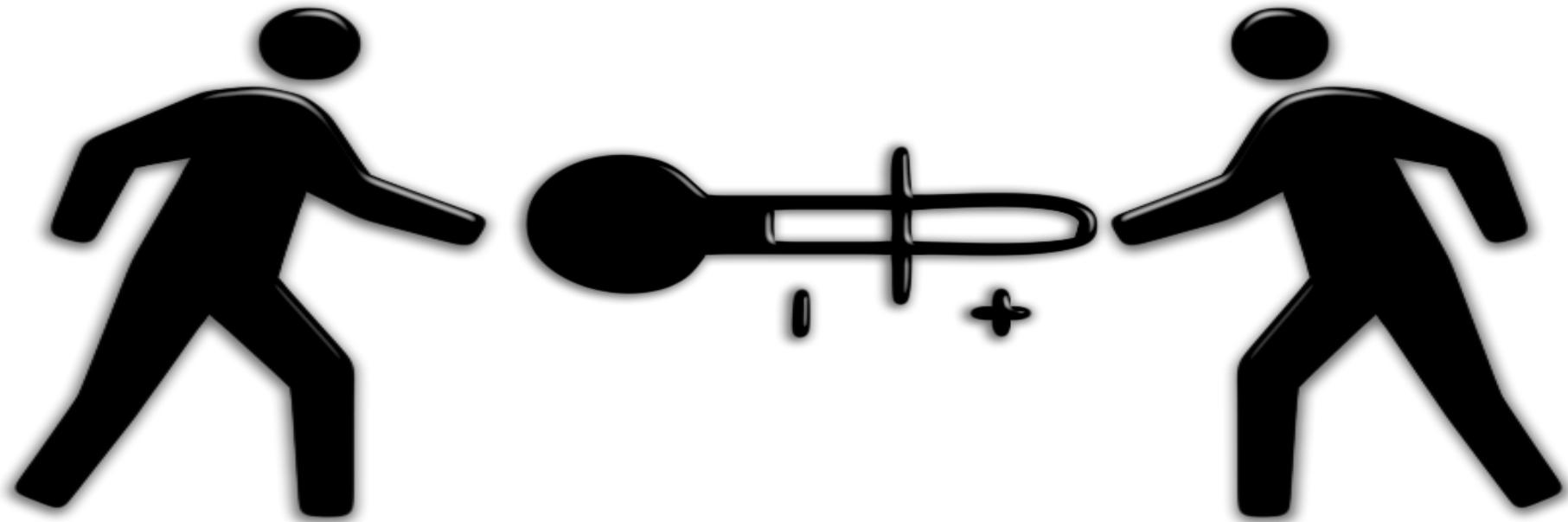
*How players think
limited edition
goods work*



Players compete to get stuff, and whatever I get, you can't have.

Tug of war

I can take your stuff, you can take my stuff.



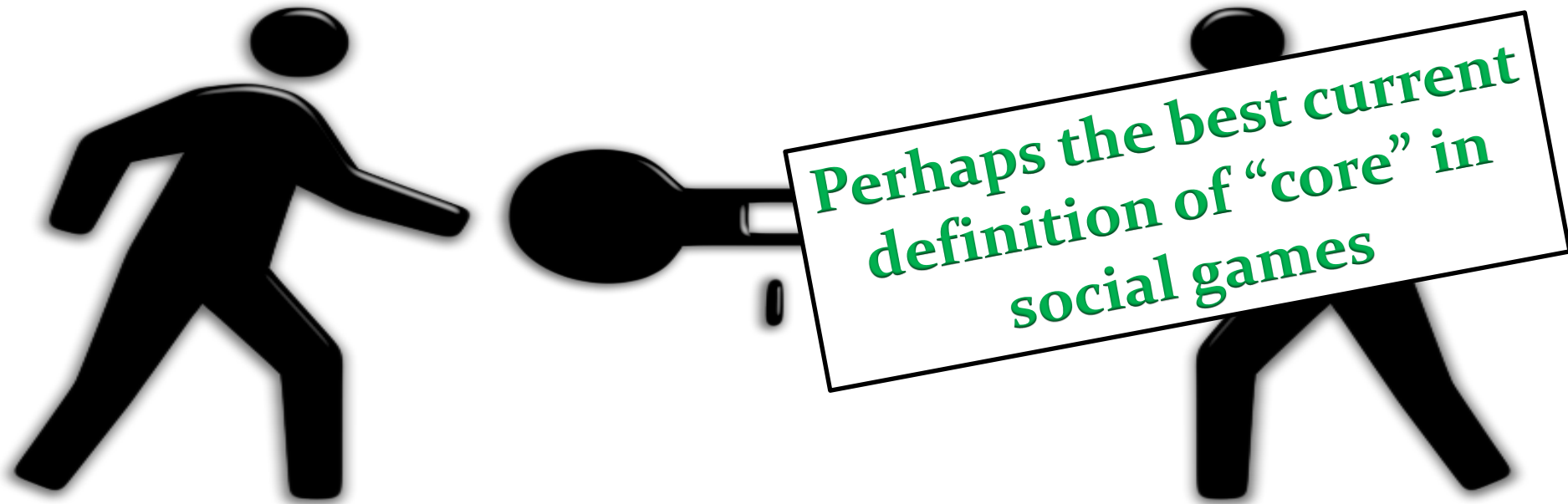
Exactly like “zero-sum status.”

The engine behind all combat games.



Tug of war

I can take your stuff, you can take my stuff.

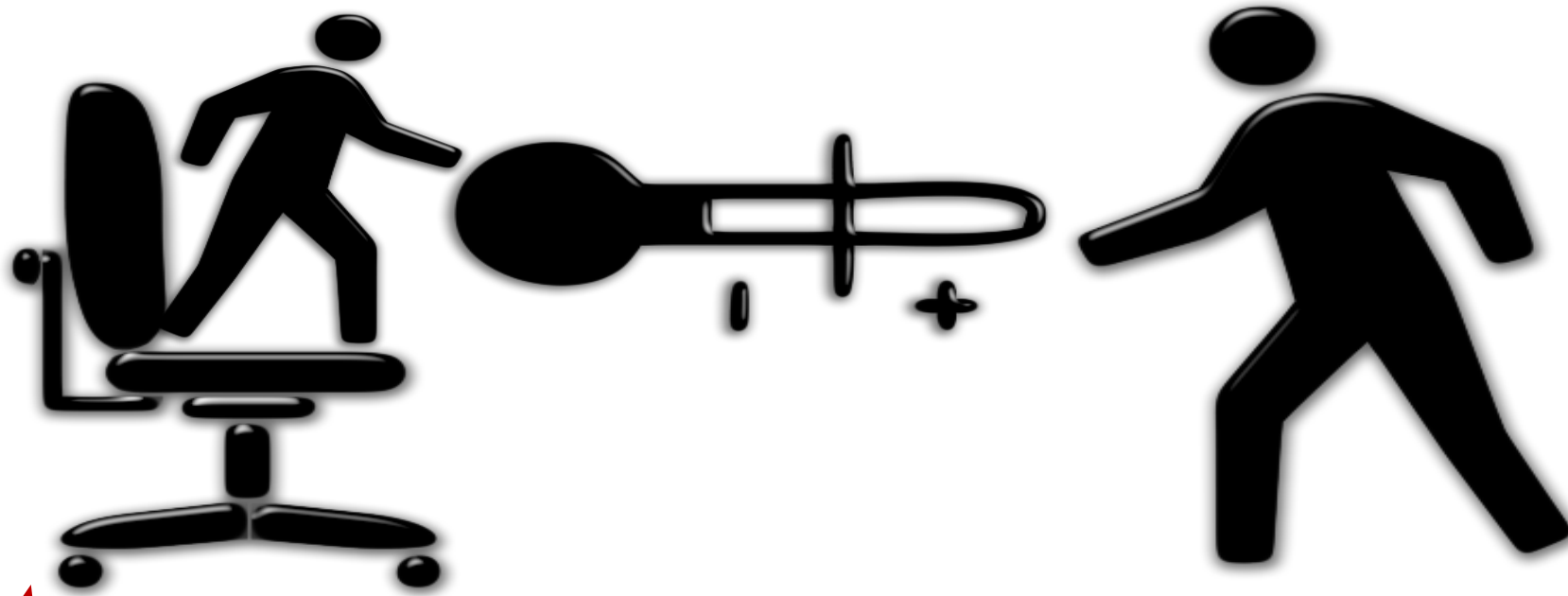


Exactly like “zero-sum status.”

The engine behind all combat games.



Handicapping



9

Artificially equalizing status in order to provide a tighter race.



Secrets

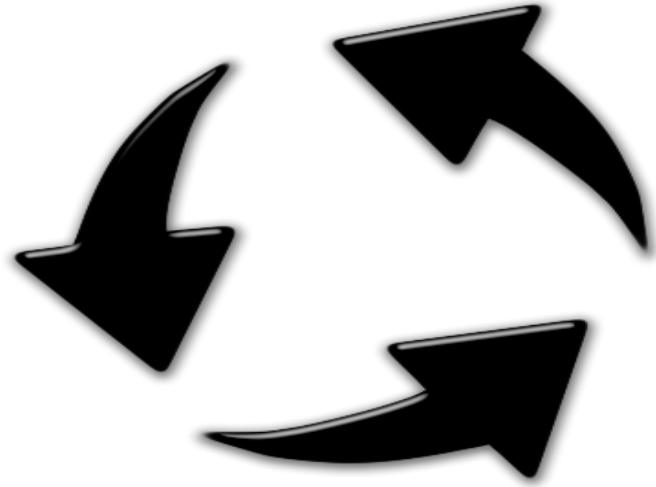


In game theory terms, “imperfect information” – knowledge as a rivalrous good.

Fog of war, hands of cards, etc.

10





Multifront opposition

1 VS 1 VS 1 VS ... n



Gutschera's terms

At GDC 2009 K. Robert Gutschera used different terms than mine:

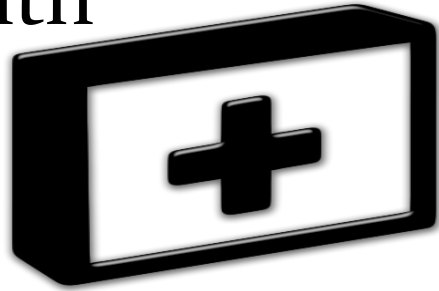
- *Orthogames*: games with a statistical rating outcome
- Parallel symmetric games: *races* (OK, same term here)
- *Brawls*: gluing together 2 player orthogames.
- *Politics* start when you have a choice of whom to interact with.



Rival goods mechanics

Several forms of “brawls” depend on treating resources within the game, such as...

Health



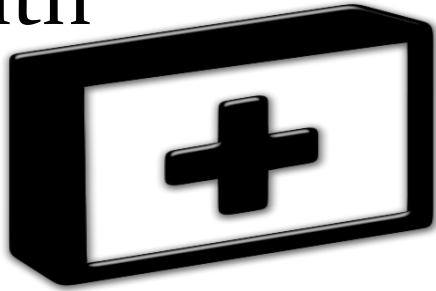
as rival goods.



Rival goods mechanics

Several forms of “brawls” depend on treating resources within the game, such as...

Health



Survival



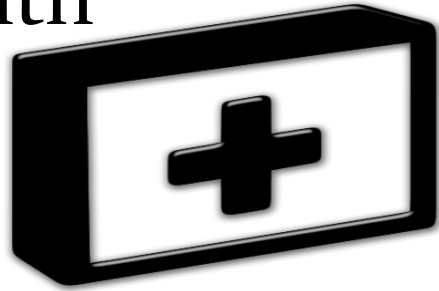
as rival goods.



Rival goods mechanics

Several forms of “brawls” depend on treating resources within the game, such as...

Health



Survival



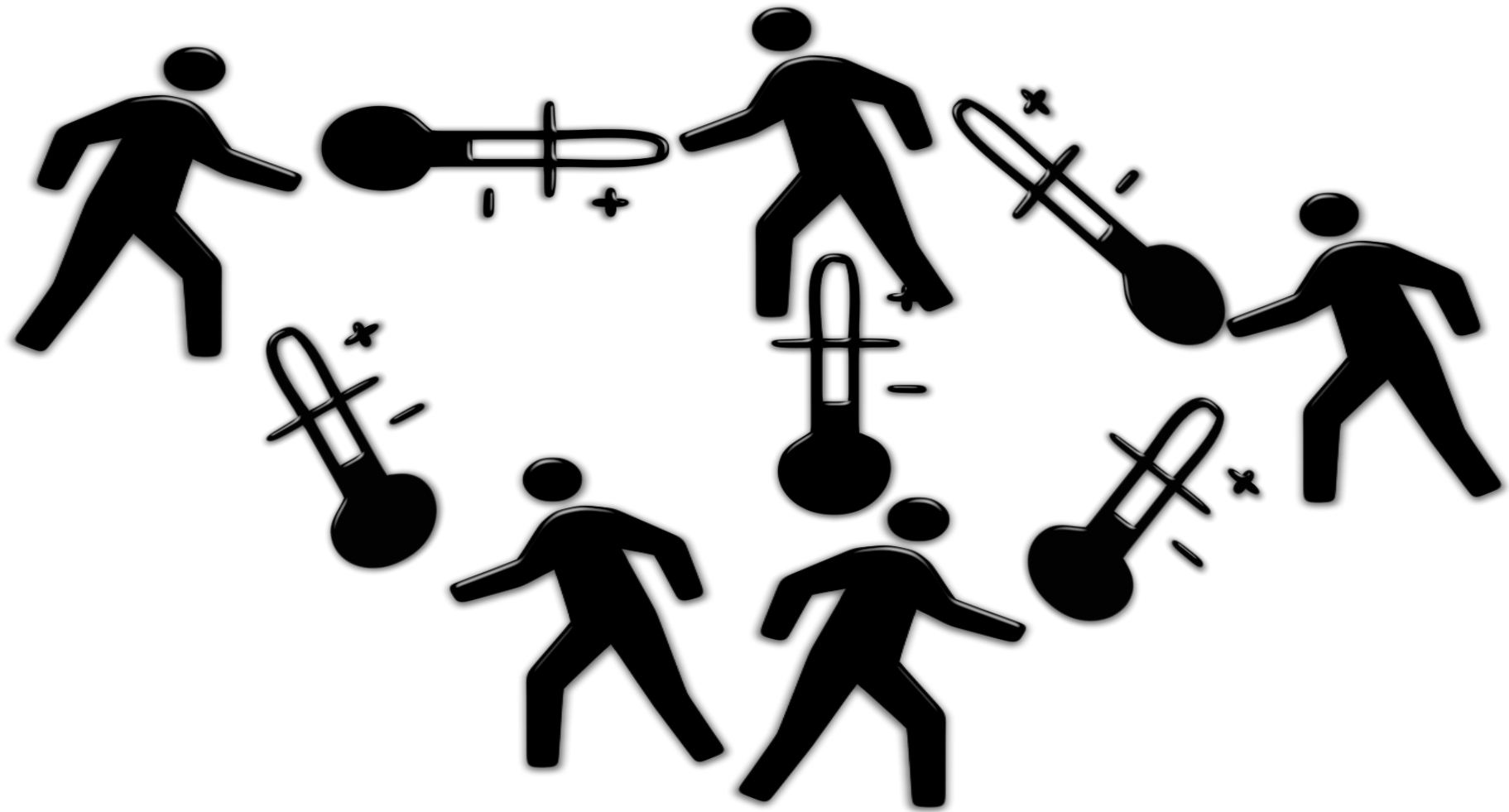
Stuff



as rival goods.



Take many tugs of war...



Last man standing

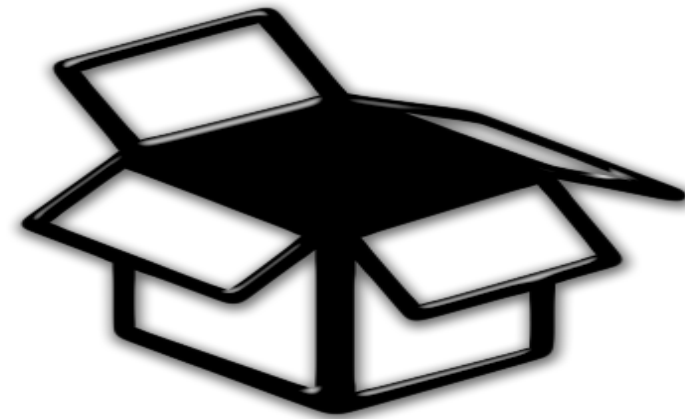
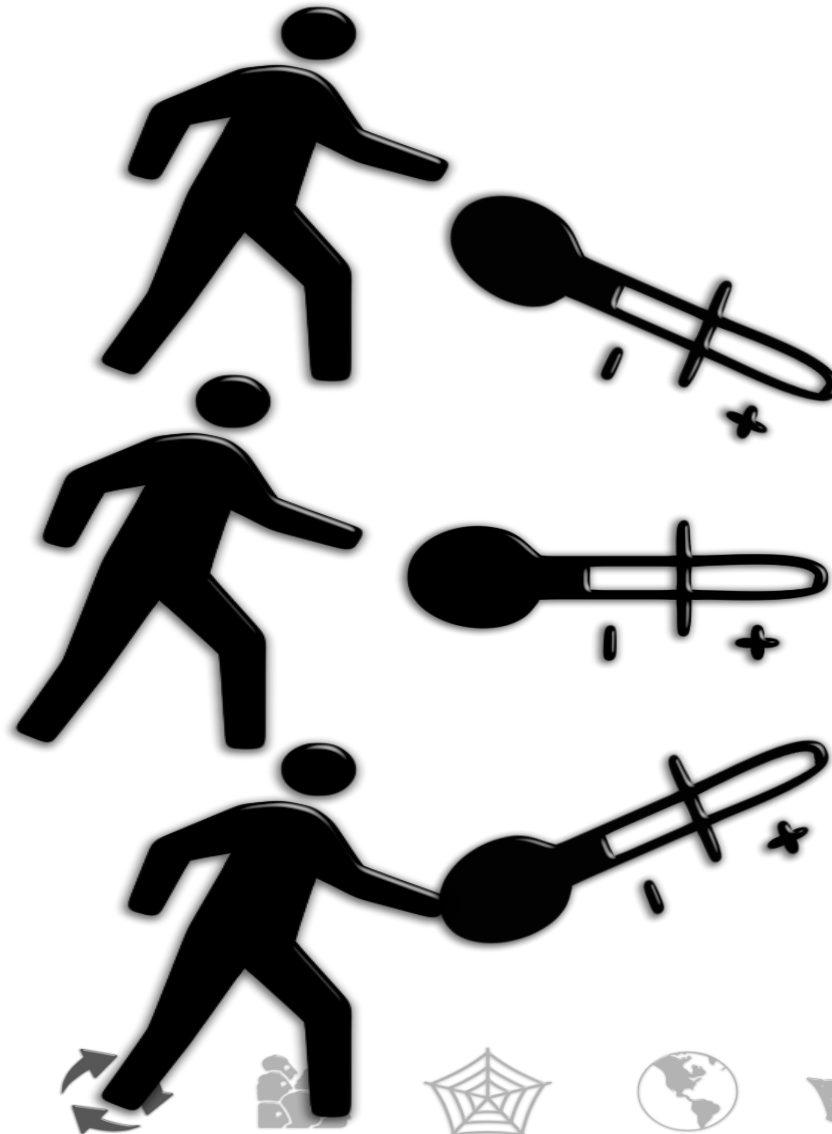


11



Bidding

Mediate your status
tug of war

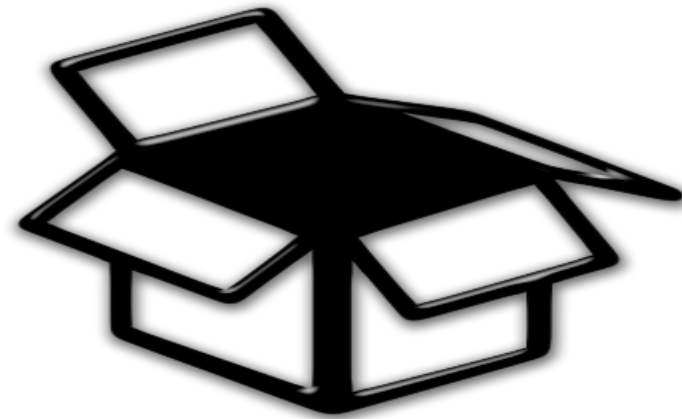


via a rivalrous good.

Bidding

Mediate your status
tug of war

1
2
One of the great
mysteries of social
gaming: where's the
silent auctions?



via a rivalrous good.

Social effects depend on humanization

Numerous social science experiments have found that a variety of psychological effects only occur when we think the interlocutor is human, or “like us.”

- The Milgram buzzer experiment
- Zimbardo’s work

(Mirror neurons are all the rage.)



Social effects depend on humanization

Numerous social science experiments have found that a variety of psychological effects only occur when we think the interlocutor is human, or “like us.”

- The Milgram buzzer experiment
- Zimbardo’s work

(Mirror neurons are all the rage.)

Why don't we use psychology?

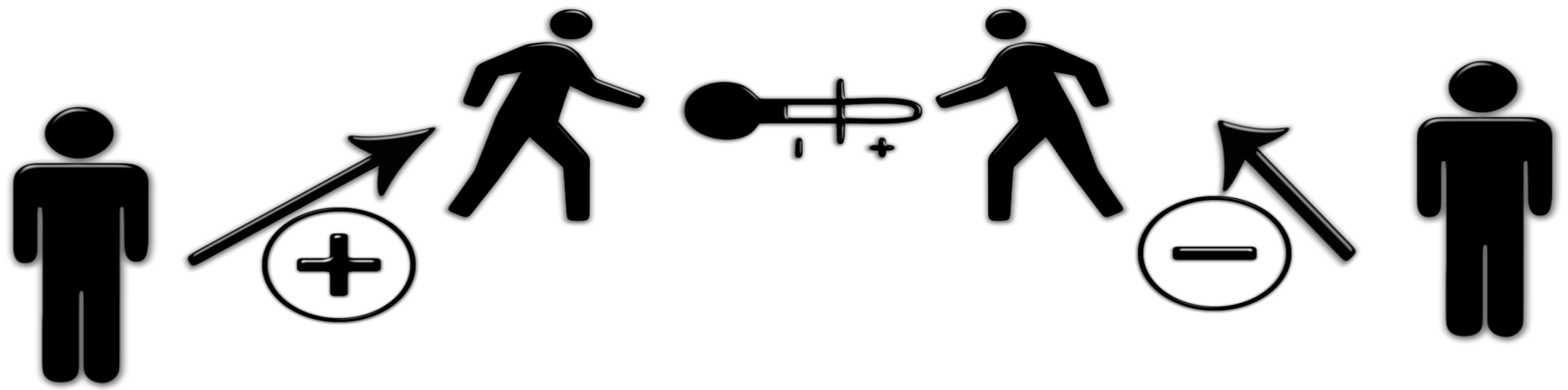


Booing

Lousy communication channels?

The multiplayer evolution of “helping”

A psychological 3rd party attack – it only works on human opponents.



Deception and bluffing

Once secrets are treated as goods, *misinformation* becomes a form of tug-of-war.

Excessive dependence
on quantification?

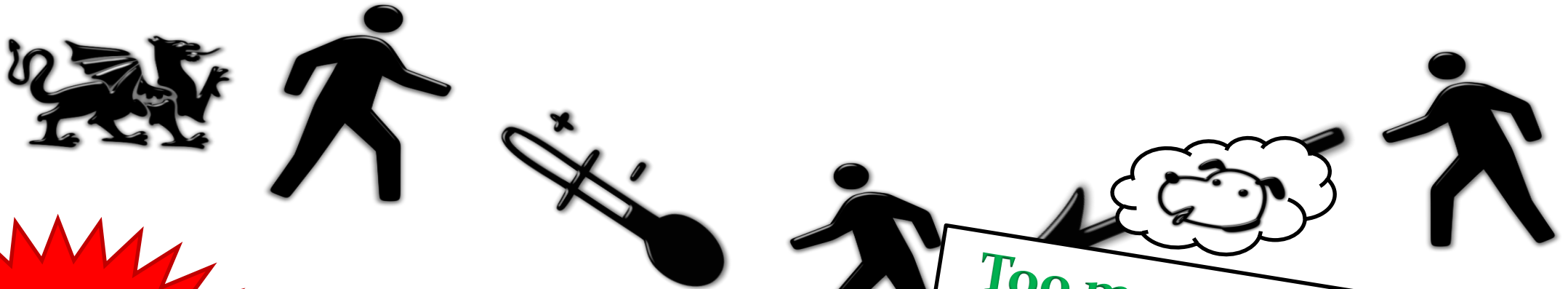


13



Deception and bluffing

Once secrets are treated as goods, *misinformation* becomes a form of tug-of-war.



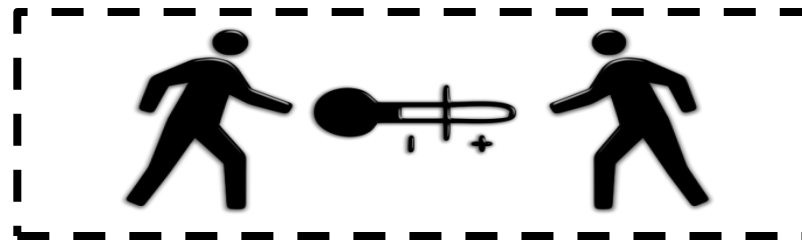
13

Too many engineers in control?



3rd party betting

3rd parties play a bidding game against a rivalrous resource pool, based on the outcome of a multiplayer game.

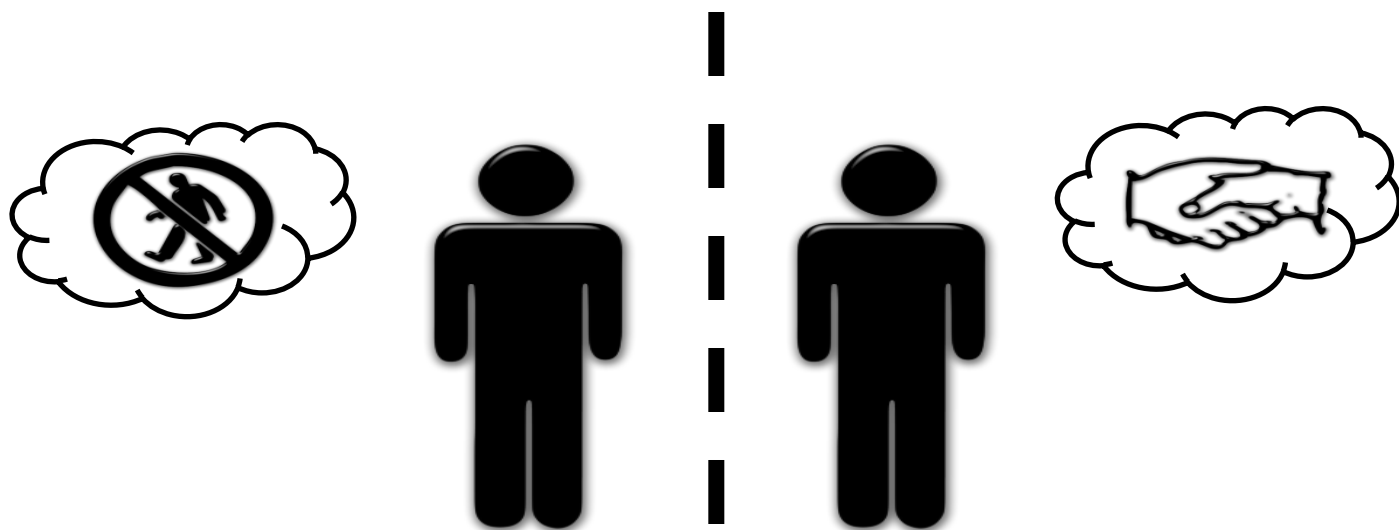


Virtually none of the psych-dependent mechanics are used



Prisoner's Dilemma

Teammates with secrets from each other who must choose independently to collaborate or both lose.



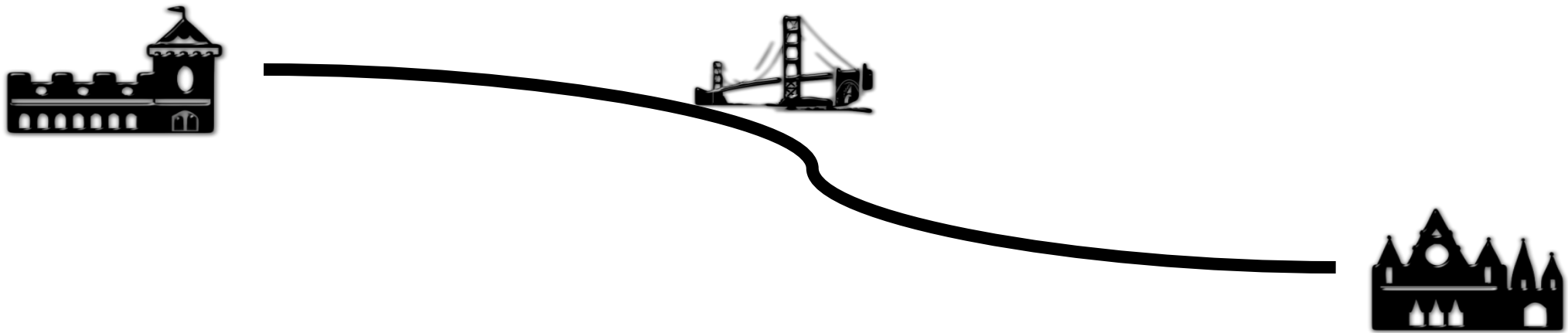
Except by devs *against* players



Kriegspiel

Credited to Von Reiswitz

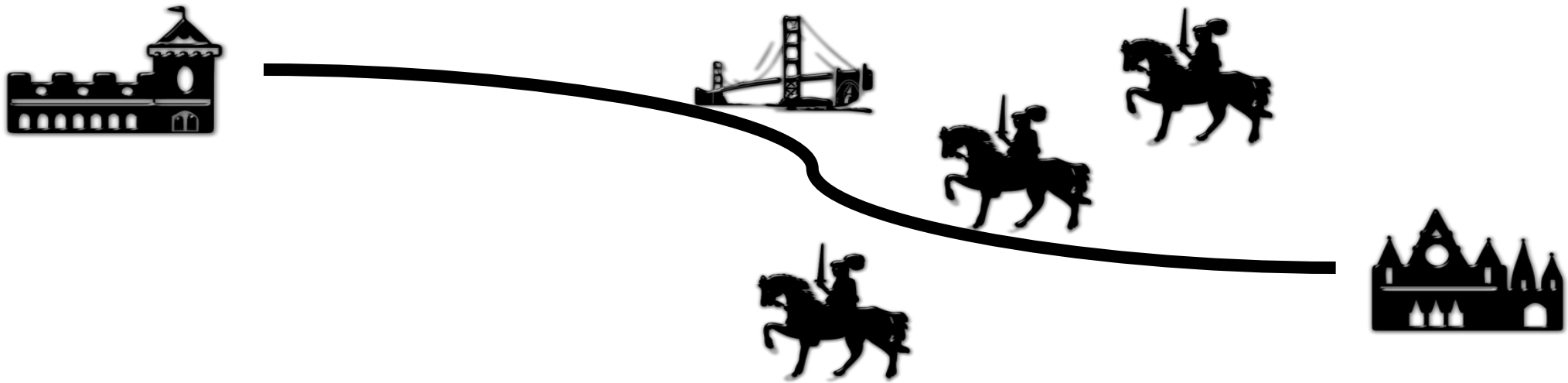
- First used around 1812 as a form of training for the Prussian army



Kriegspiel

Credited to Von Reiswitz

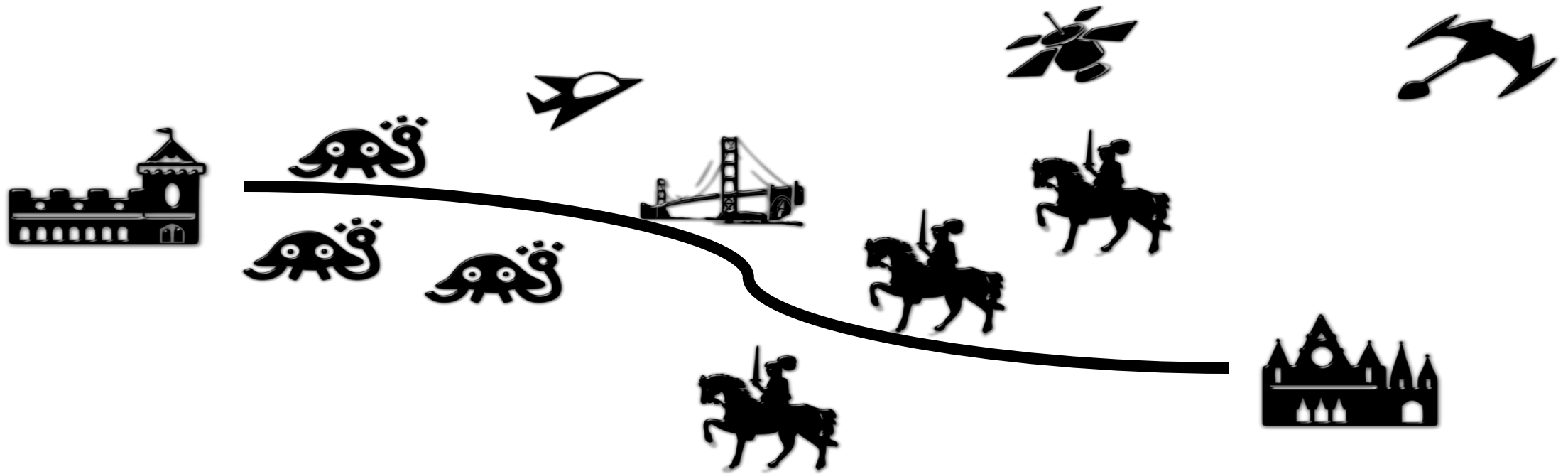
- First used around 1812 as a form of training for the Prussian army



Kriegspiel

Popularized by science fiction writers

- H G Wells wrote *Floor Games* (1911) and *Little Wars* (1913)
- Which led to Fletcher Pratt designing naval wargames in the 1940s



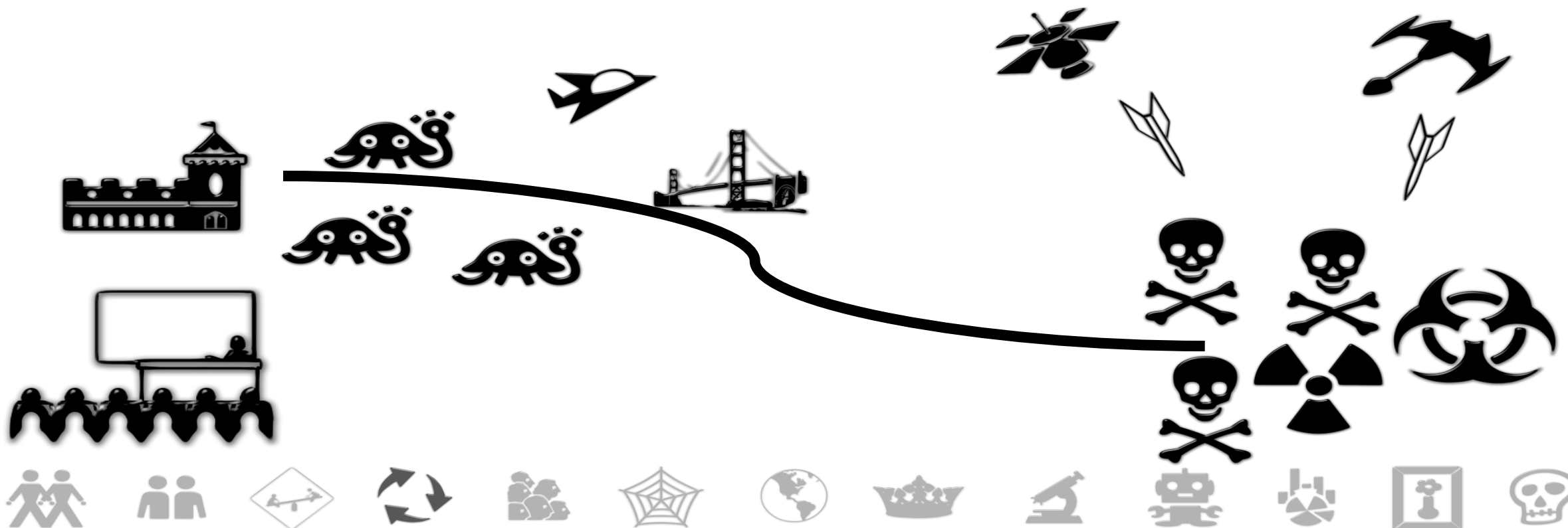
Kriegspiel

Some of whom went on to invent the think tank.



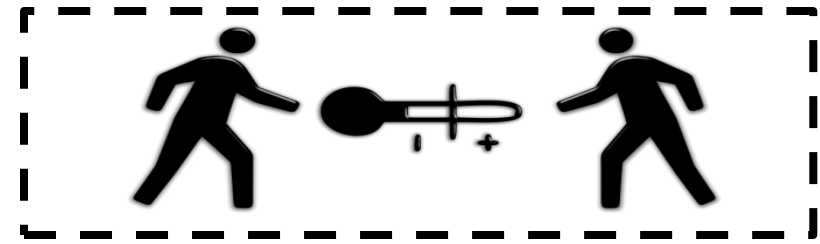
Kriegspiel

Some of whom went on to invent the think tank.



Gamesmaster pattern

A multiplayer game that relies on a third party to *direct* the game – an evolution of the non-mechanic “referee.”

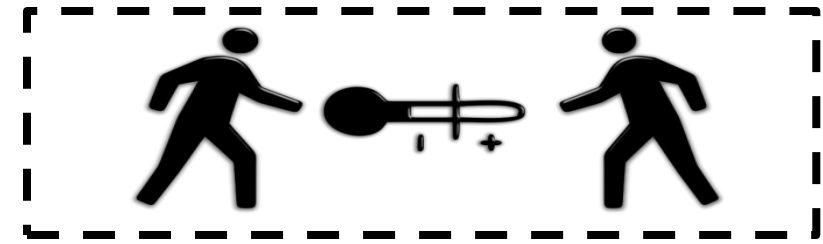


(Us in this room)



Gamesmaster pattern

A multiplayer game that relies on a third party to *direct* the game – an evolution of the non-mechanic “referee.”



Leads directly to...



Arguably we could do a lot more directing than we do





Small groups

n vs n

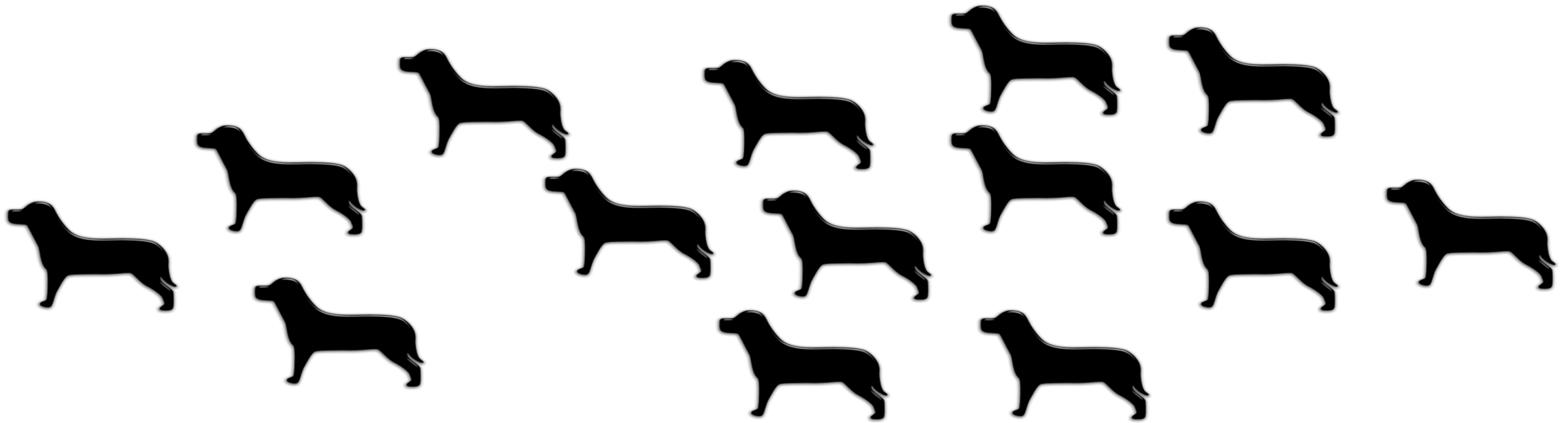


Werewolf

Aka Mafia, etc

A game where players have secret roles

- Villager

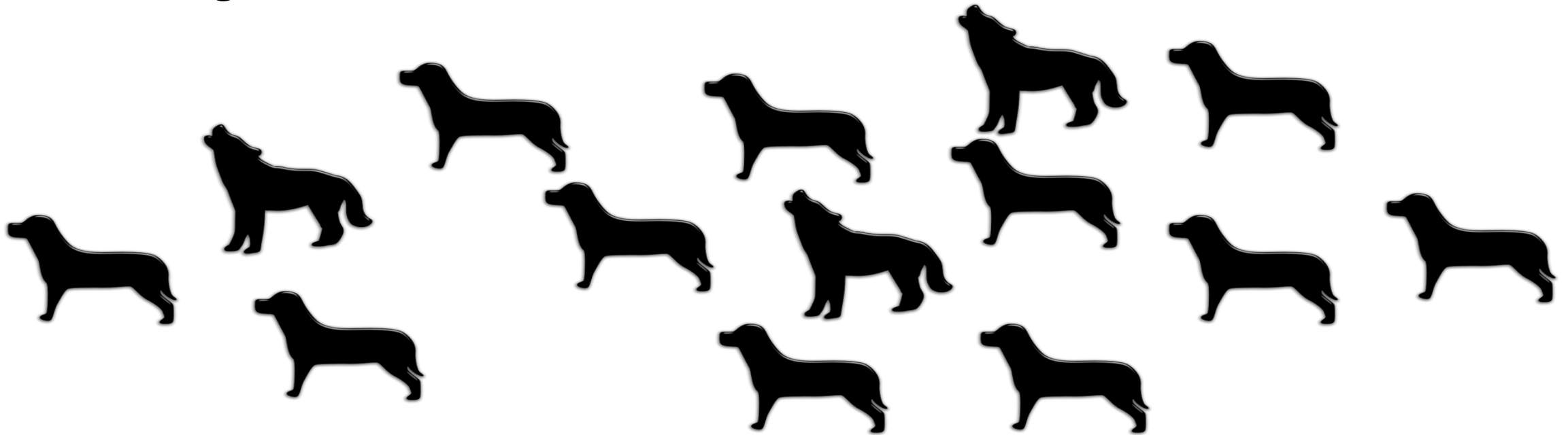


Werewolf

Aka Mafia, etc

A game where players have secret roles

- Villager, werewolf

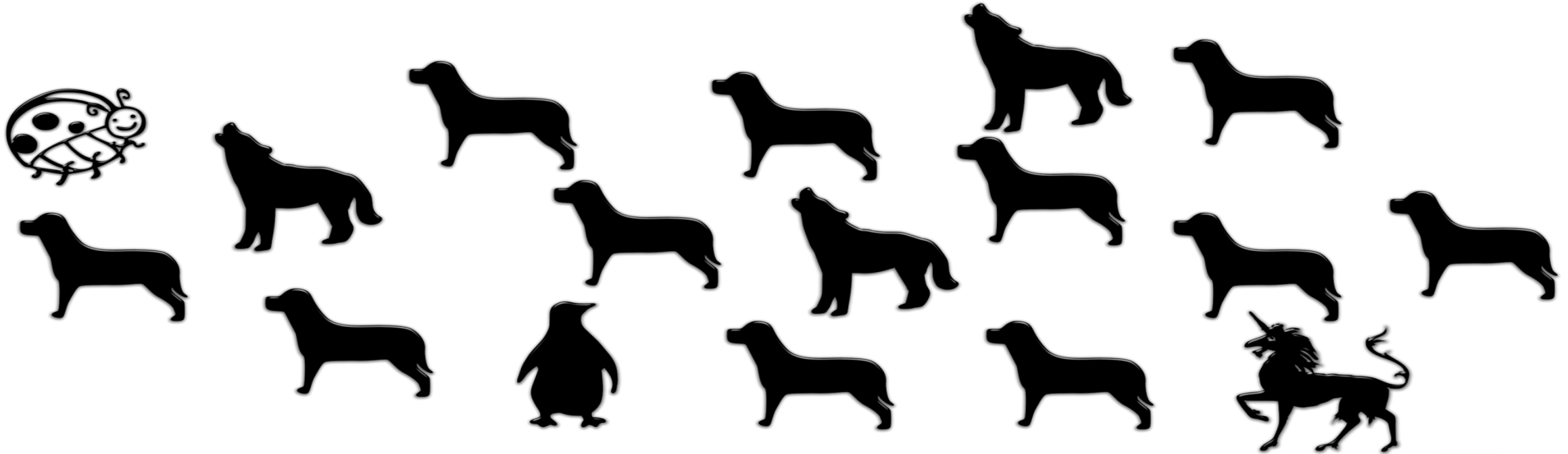


Werewolf

Aka Mafia, etc

A game where players have secret roles

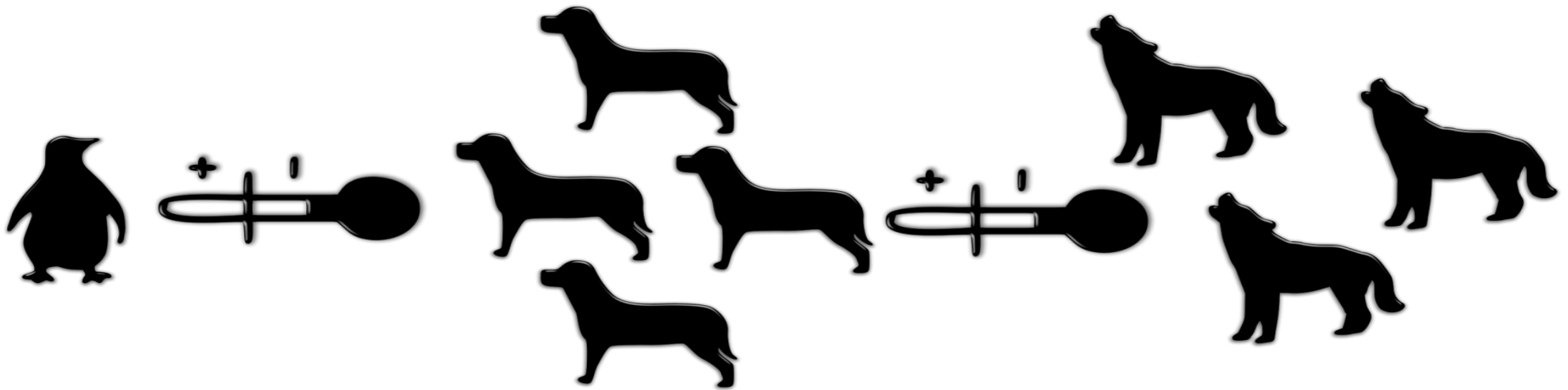
- Villager, werewolf, various other small optional ones



Werewolf

Wolves get to kill off villagers, Villagers get to lynch anyone

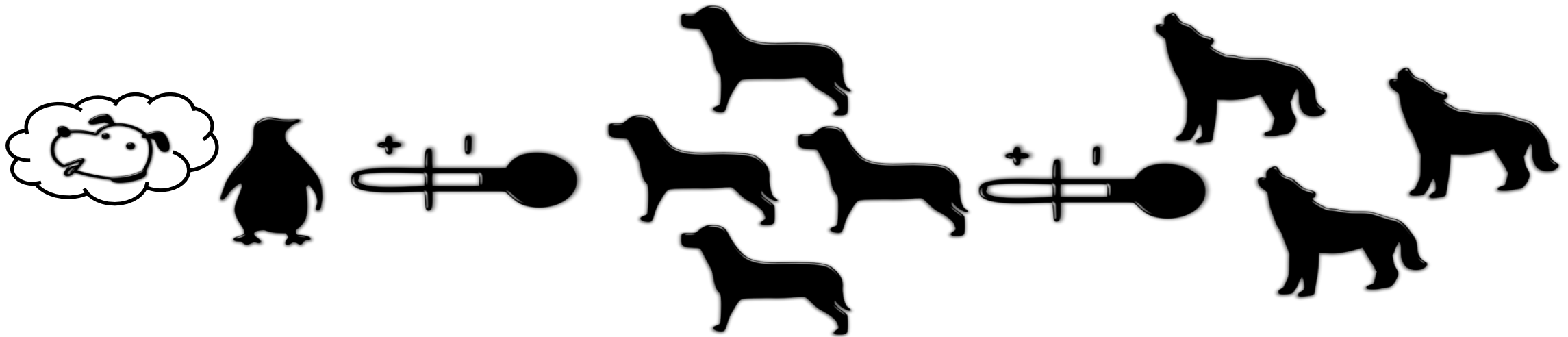
- Tons of these mechanics are present: deception, Prisoner's Dilemma, brawls, gamemaster...



Werewolf

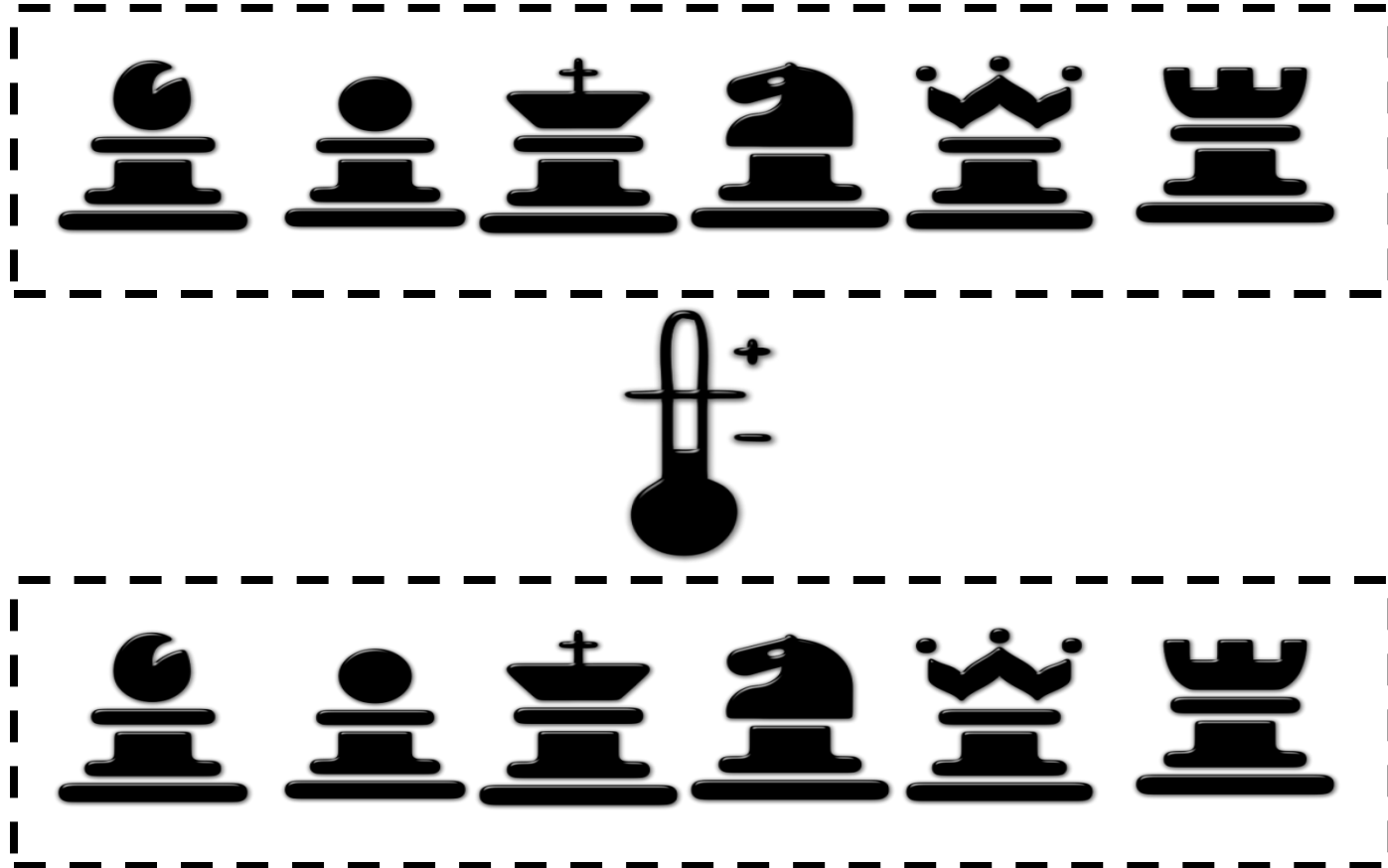
Wolves get to kill off villagers, Villagers get to lynch anyone

- Tons of these mechanics are present: deception, Prisoner's Dilemma, brawls, gamemaster...



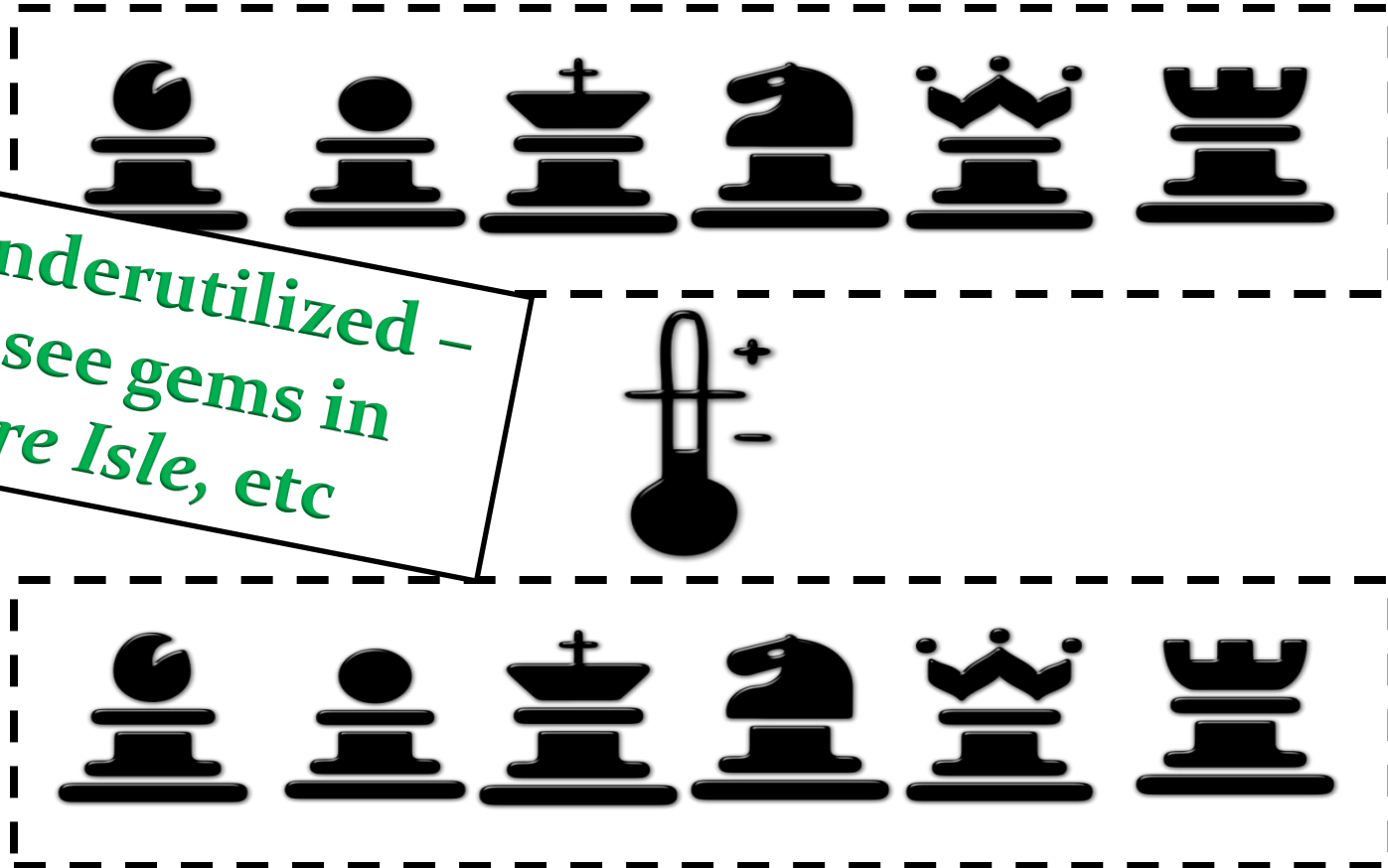
Roles

Specialization into different games within one group



Roles

Specialization into different games within one group

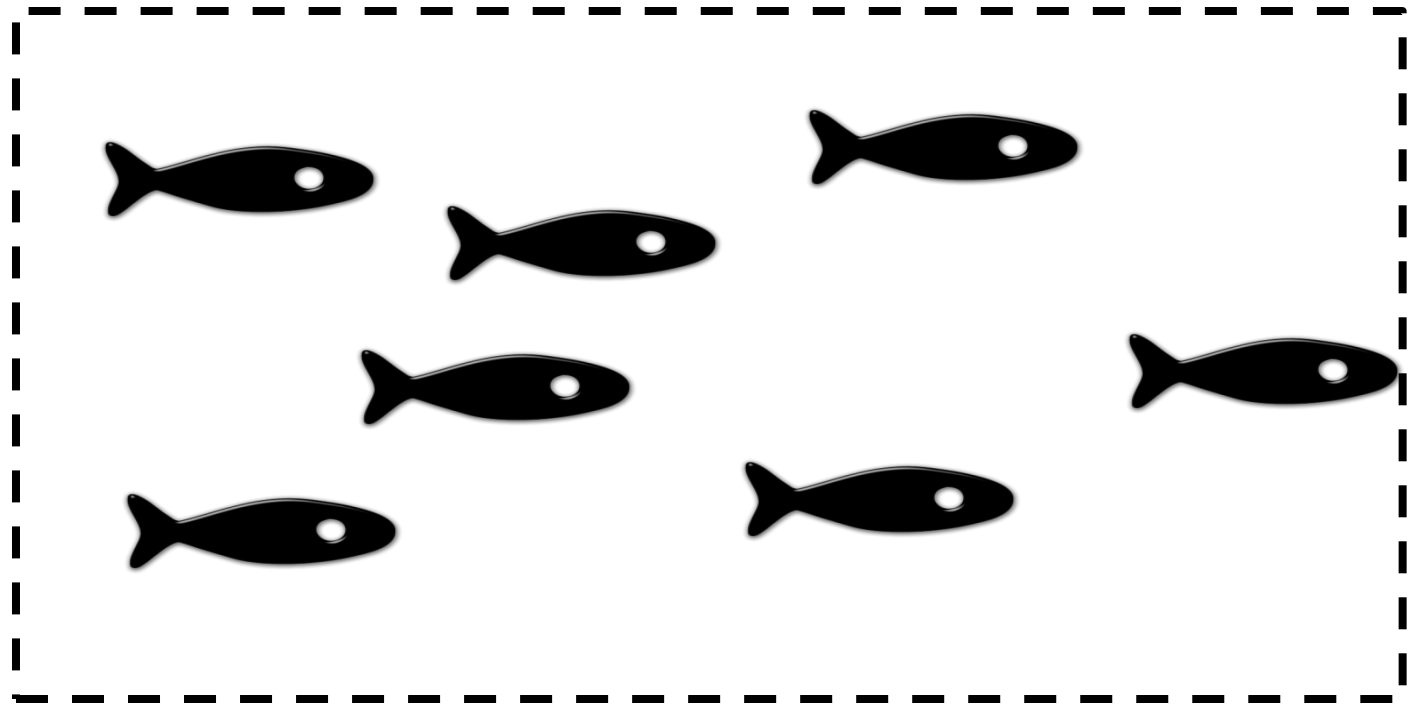


Hot potato/ganging up

Rotation of roles within a multiplayer game (often a brawl), creating ad-hoc groups.

Think of tag...

18

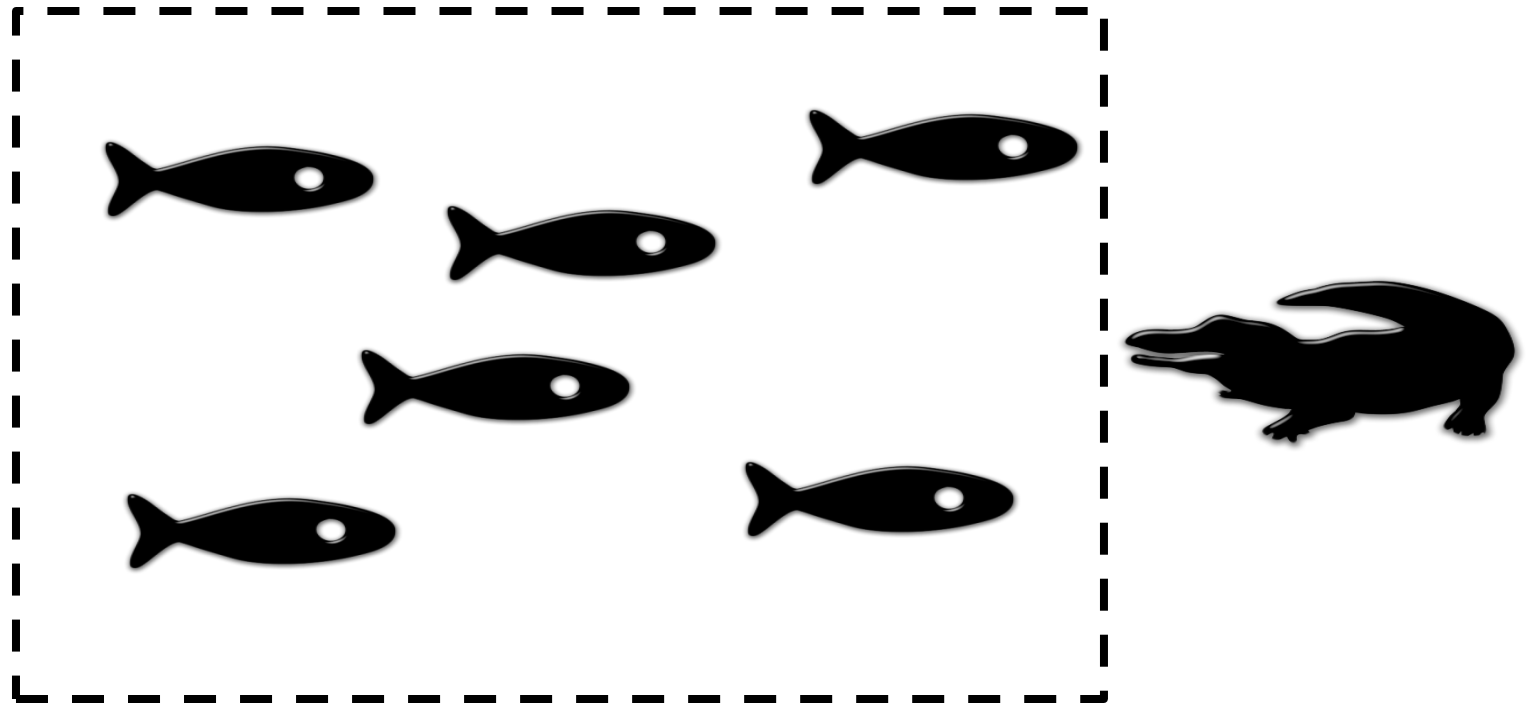


Hot potato/ganging up

Rotation of roles within a multiplayer game (often a brawl), creating ad-hoc groups.

Think of tag...

18



Tag

Layering of multiplayer mechanics gives way to whole new games

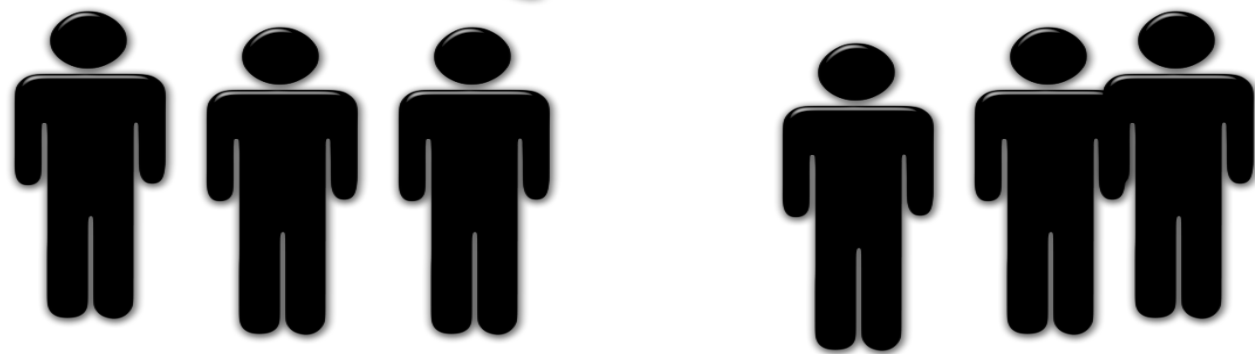
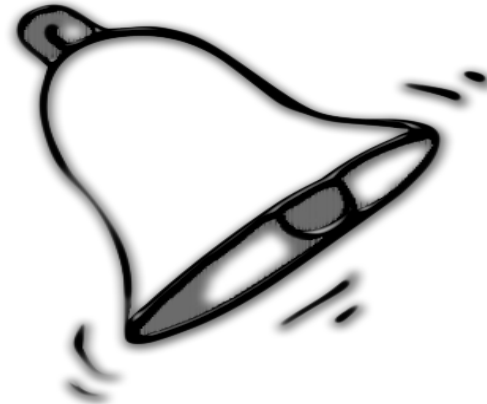
- Add *secrets*: Blind Man's Bluff.
- Add *dot eating*: Duck Duck Goose (compete for the chair)
- Add *flower-picking*: Freeze tag.
- Add *grouping*: Cops and Robbers.

But then there's "Olly Olly Oxen Free!" (or whatever)... what's that about?



Rituals

Ceremonies marking significant role transitions within a social structure.



Rituals

Ceremonies marking significant role transitions within a social structure.



Functionalism

Sociology and anthropology used to see all of group interaction as being about structure: groups as “organs” that make the “body” work.

Today the field has moved on, but it’s a useful lens for multiplayer game designers!



Ritualism and lifecycles

Compare Robert Merton's theory of deviance to player lifecycles:

1. First, users try to *conform* to the rules as they work to understand them.
2. Then they try to *innovate* and reach the goals in new ways.
3. Then they keep doing things “the right way” but stop caring about the objective. This is called *ritualism*, and he has a great Hopi rain dance example.
4. Then they *retreat* and stop caring about the goal *or* the method.
5. Finally, they *rebel* and start doing their own thing.



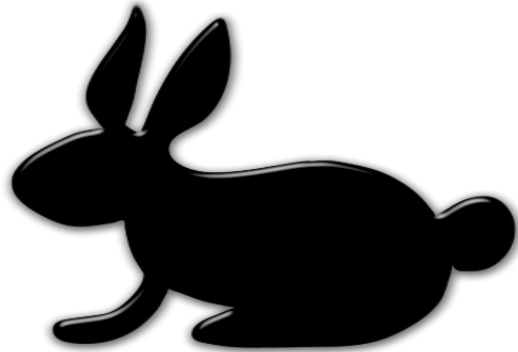
Common rituals

- *Transitions of state* (birth, marriage, death, levelling up)



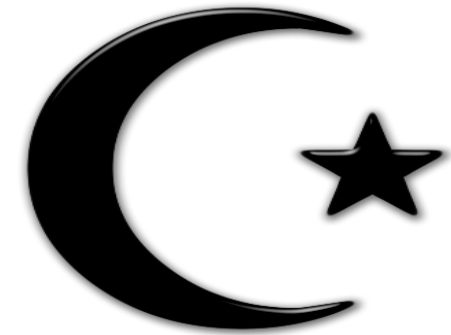
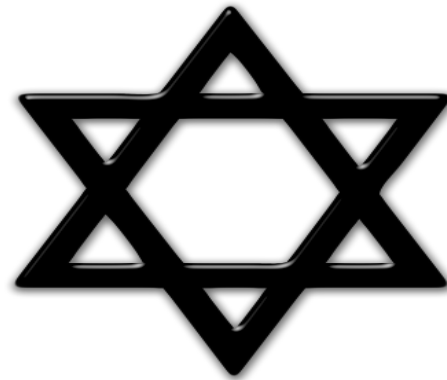
Common rituals

- *Transitions of state* (birth, marriage, death, levelling up)
- *Holidays* (environmental transitions, commemoration of historic or individual transitions of state)



Common rituals

- *Transitions of state* (birth, marriage, death, levelling up)
- *Holidays* (environmental transitions, commemoration of historic or individual transitions of state)
- *Religious* (requests for intervention, comfort)



Common rituals

- *Transitions of state* (birth, marriage, death, levelling up)
- *Holidays* (environmental transitions, commemoration of historic or individual transitions of state)
- *Religious* (requests for intervention, comfort)

These are often marked by mechanics such as

- Changes of uniform
- Gatherings
- But above all... *gifts*.



Common rituals

- *Transitions of state* (birth, marriage, death, levelling up)
- *Holidays* (environmental transitions, commemoration of historic or individual transitions of state)
- *Religious* (requests for... on, comfort)

This one, social games nailed.

Arguably, the biggest reason they are deserving of the name.

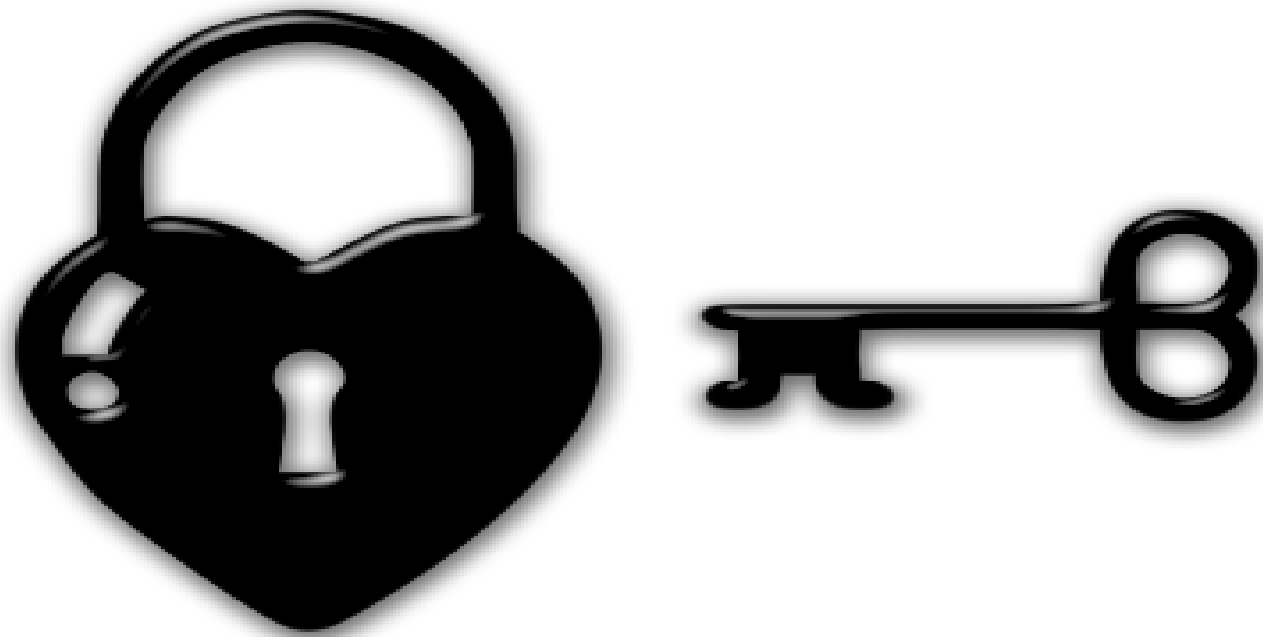
These are... by mecha

- Change... uniform
- Gatherings
- But above all... *gifts*.



Gifts are ubiquitous

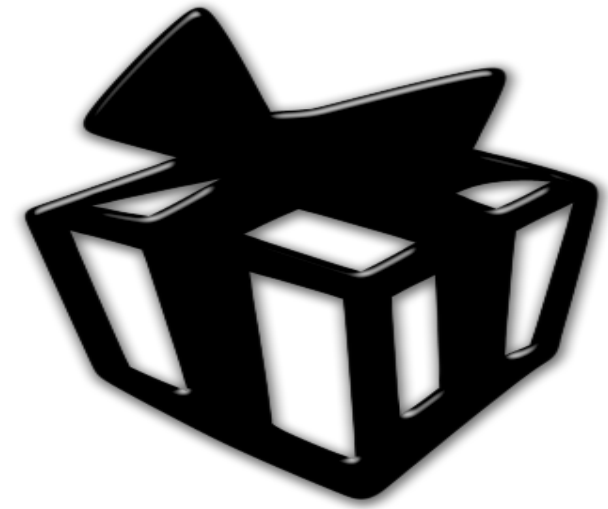
We “give away” the bride



Gifts are ubiquitous

We “give away” the bride

We give gifts at major holidays



Gifts are ubiquitous

We “give away” the bride

We give gifts at major holidays

We gift the land with a bride at solstice



Gifts are ubiquitous

We “give away” the bride

We give gifts at major holidays

We gift the land with a bride at solstice

We give gifts to the dead to take with them



Gifts are ubiquitous

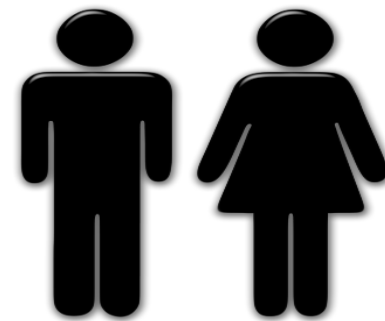
We “give away” the bride

We give gifts at major holidays

We gift the land with a bride at solstice

We give gifts to the dead to take with them

We give gifts at weddings



Gifts are ubiquitous

We “give away” the bride

We give gifts at major holidays

We gift the land with a bride at solstice

We give gifts to the dead to take with them

We give gifts at weddings

We give gifts to babies



Gifts are ubiquitous

We “give away” the bride

We give gifts at major holidays

We gift the land with a bride at solstice

We give gifts to the dead to take with them

We give gifts at weddings

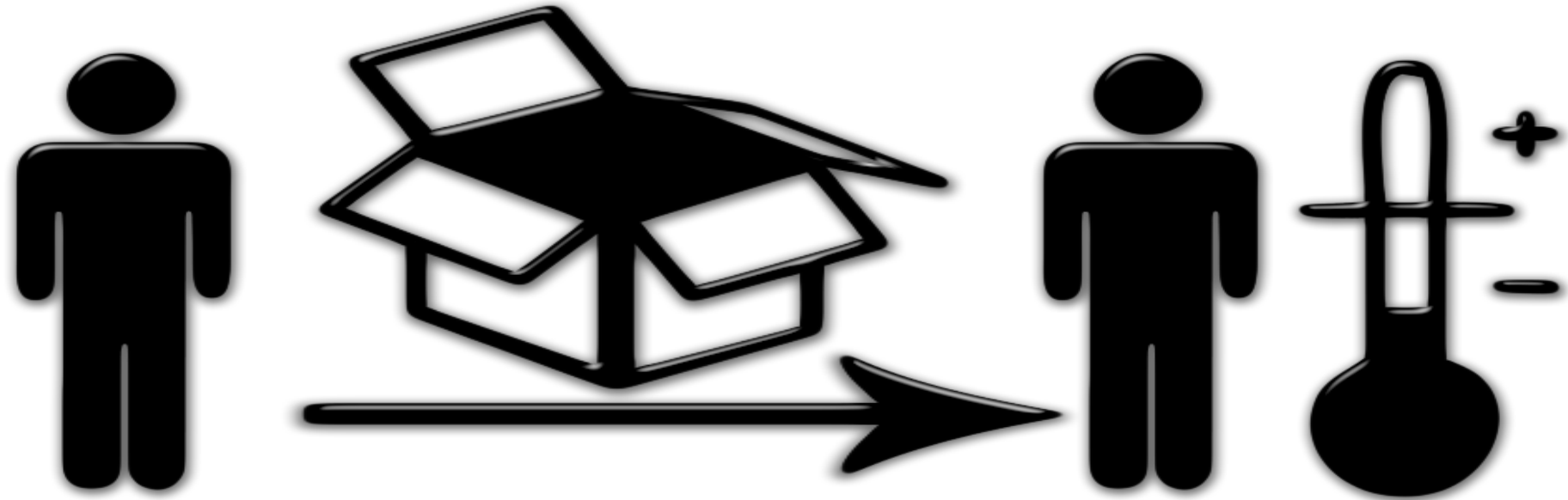
We give gifts to babies

We throw t-shirts at hockey games



Gifts

Transferring a rivalrous good to another actor in order to increase their status.



20



Gifts

Transferring a rivalrous good to another actor in order to increase their status.



20



Gift theory

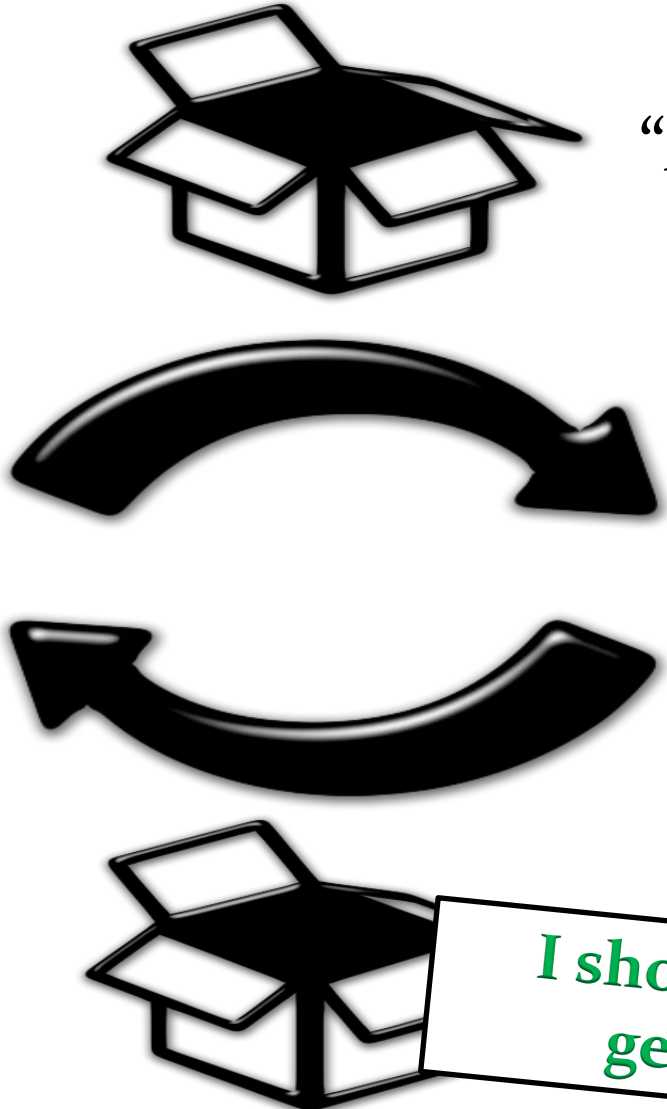
Marcel Mauss in “*Essai sur le Don*”

- Gifts are never “free” to either party.
- Reciprocal exchange is typical.
 - Failure to return a gift in Polynesia costs you *mana*.
- There are three steps: give, receive, reciprocate. Each can fail and each can have consequences.

Gifts are *inalienable*... they always retain their source.



Kashmiri anecdote



“A Kashmiri tale tells of two Brahmin women who tried to fulfill their obligations for alms-giving simply by giving alms back and forth to one another. On their deaths they were transformed into two poisoned wells from which no one could drink, reflecting the barrenness of this weak simulacrum of giving.”

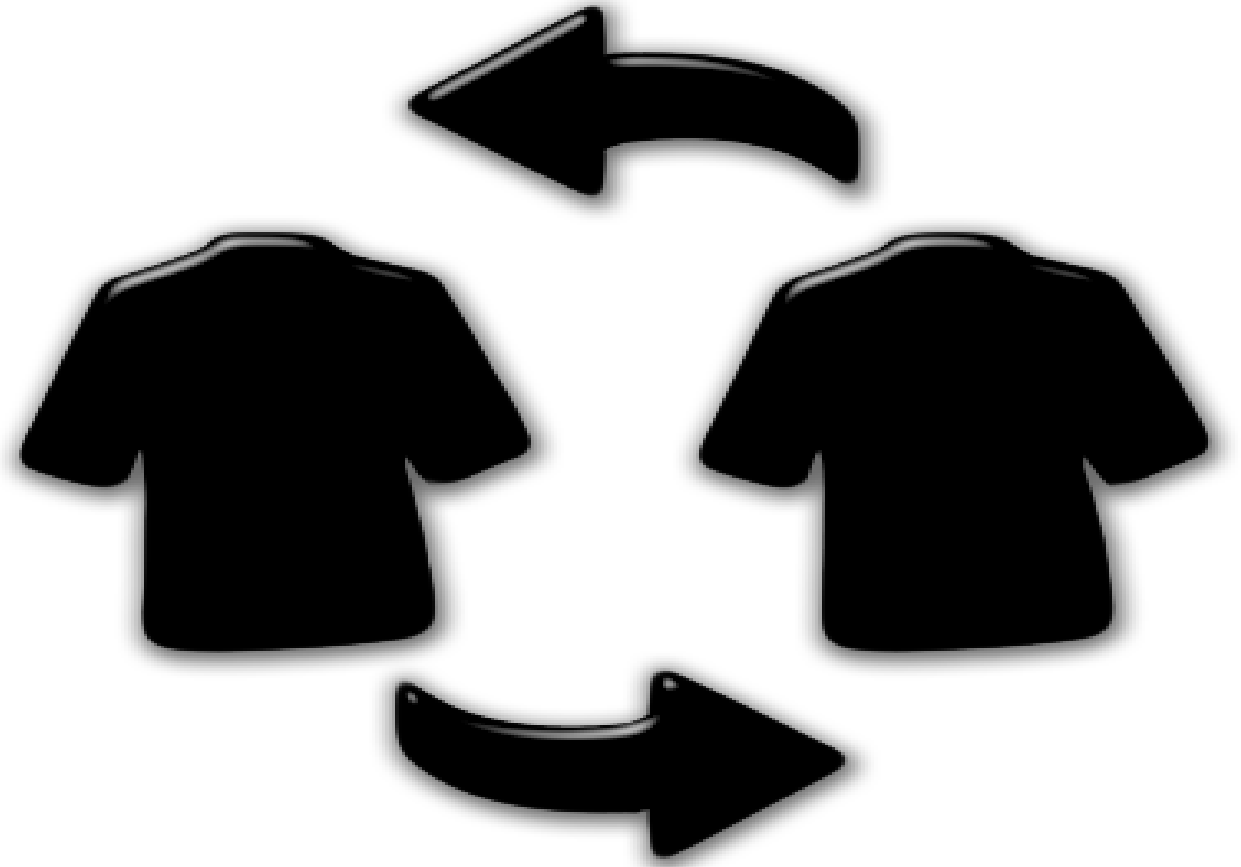
-- Wikipedia, summarizing an anecdote itself summarized in Lewis Hyde's *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, who got it from who knows where

I should have cut this slide, it's pure academic geekery, and I'm going to run out of time



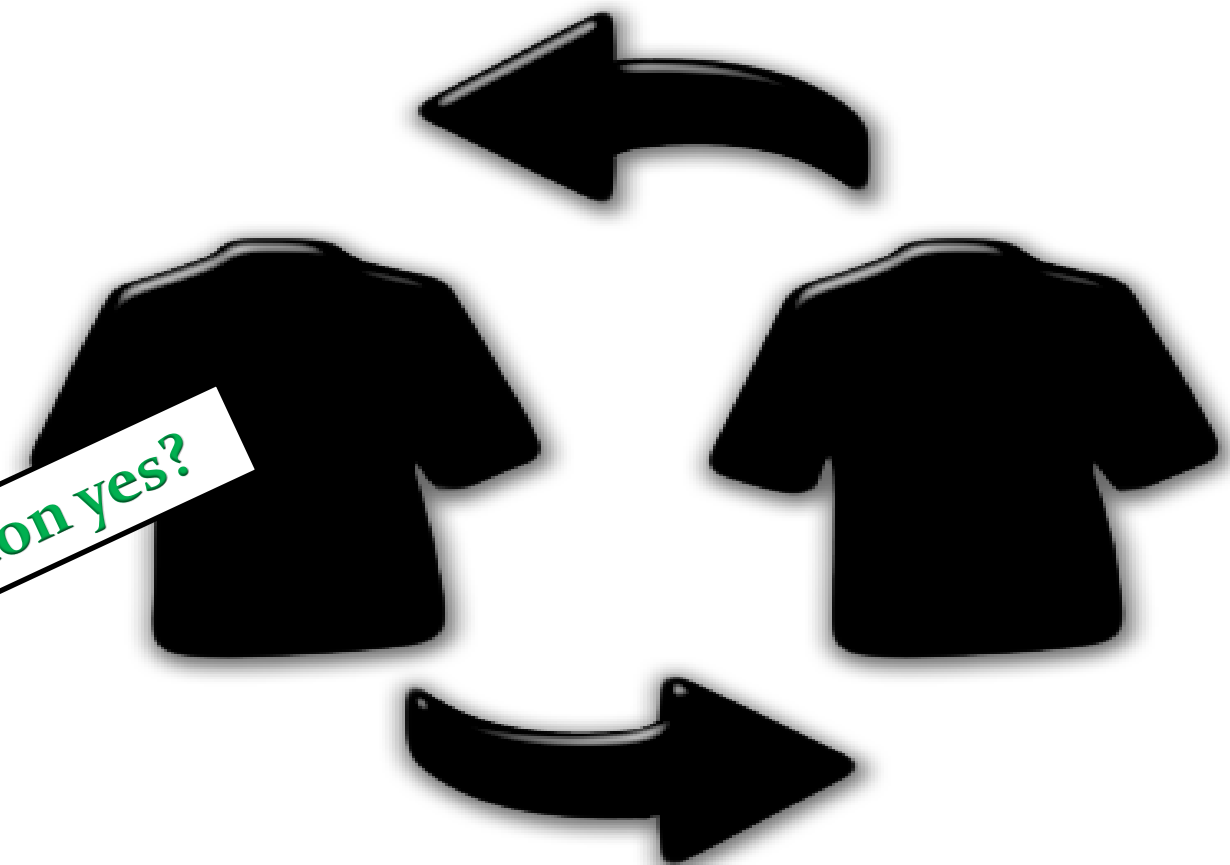
Reciprocity

In an iterative simulation, the social expectation of a future return of a gift.



Reciprocity

In an iterative simulation, the social expectation of a future return of a gift.



You do have a "return gift" button yes?



Tiers of economy

Non-market economies: no concept of price

Generalized reciprocity: just give, whee, no expectations!

- Reciprocity resides in satisfaction, social closeness. In western society this tends to be gifting between family members, etc

Balanced reciprocity: expectation of a return gift at an undefined future date.

- Still pretty informal. This is where social game gifting tends to reside.

Negative reciprocity: barter systems, which enable transactions between strangers.

- A way to establish friendly relations when meeting strangers.

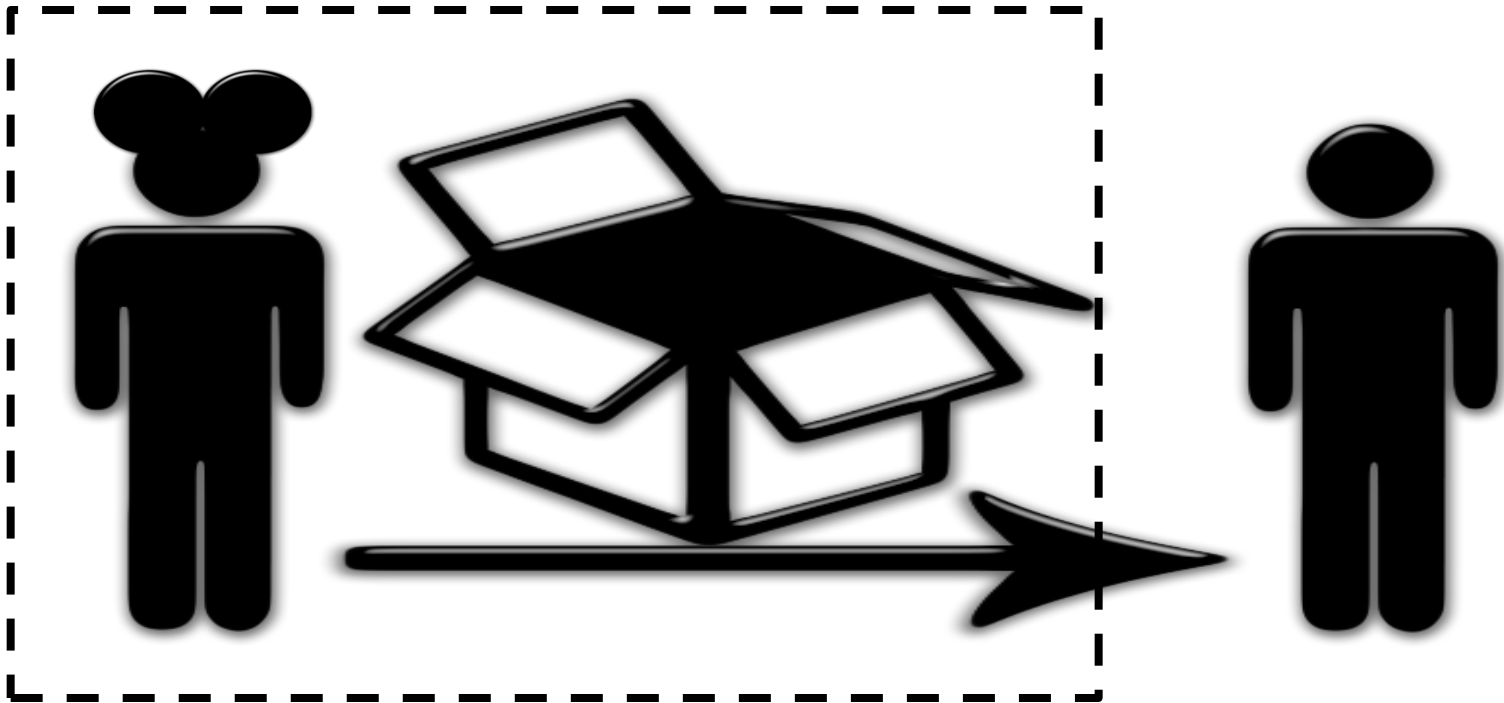


22

Mentoring & twinking

Onboarding and socializing group members via the gifting of rivalrous or non-rivalrous goods.

- Giving a car at graduation
- Or Mickey Mouse ears when you join Disney.



An asymmetric exchange: I get *social obligation*, you get *value*.

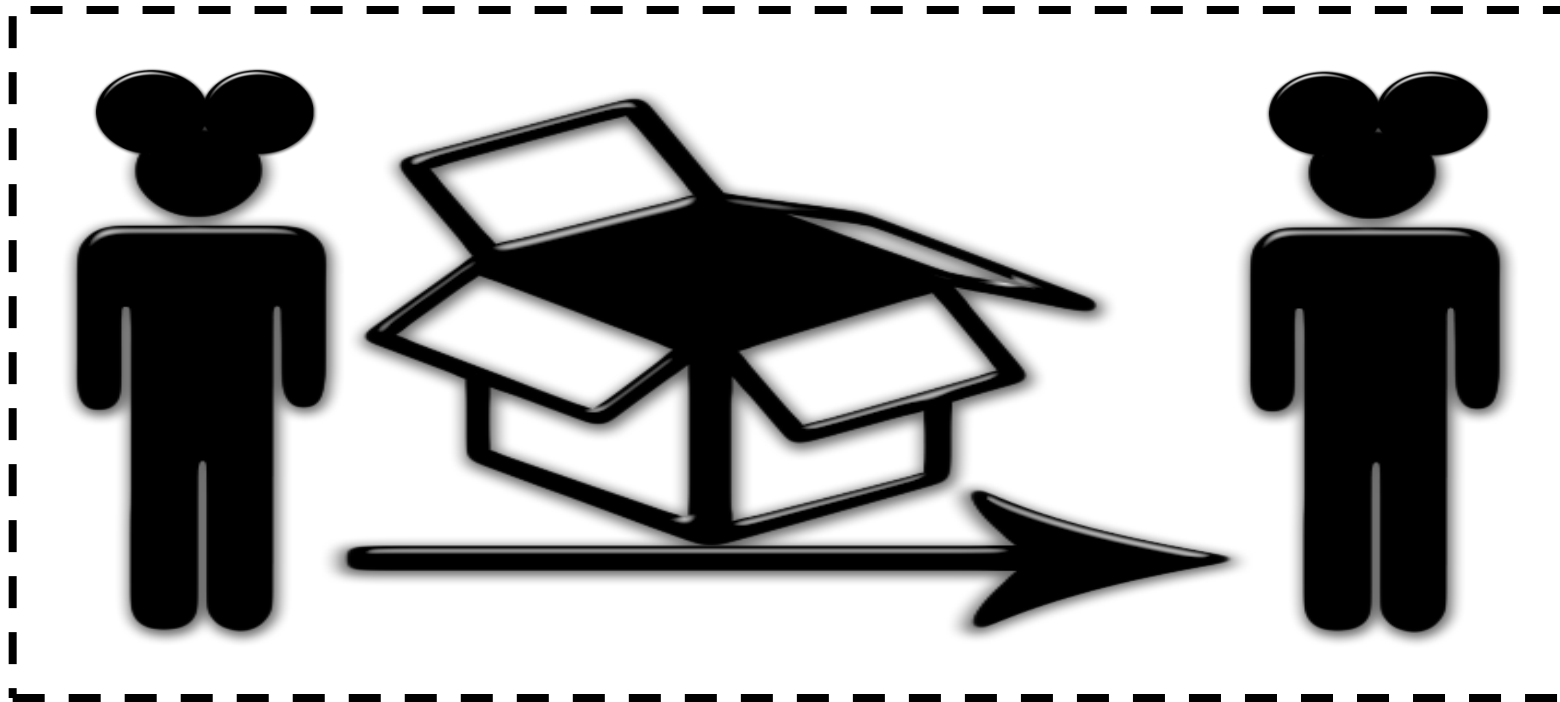


22

Mentoring & twinkling

Onboarding and socializing group members via the gifting of rivalrous or non-rivalrous goods.

- Giving a car at graduation
- Or Mickey Mouse ears when you join Disney.



An asymmetric exchange: I get *social obligation*, you get *value*.



22

Mentoring & twinkling

Onboarding and socializing group members via the gifting of rivalrous or non-rivalrous goods.

- Giving a car at graduation
- Or Mickey Mouse ears when you join Disney.

Would likely speed player content consumption, but strengthens community ties

An asymmetric exchange: I get *social obligation*, you get *value*.



Identity

Means of displaying status and role via rivalrous goods.

- Extremely important with groups, from skins vs shirts to class gear, etc.

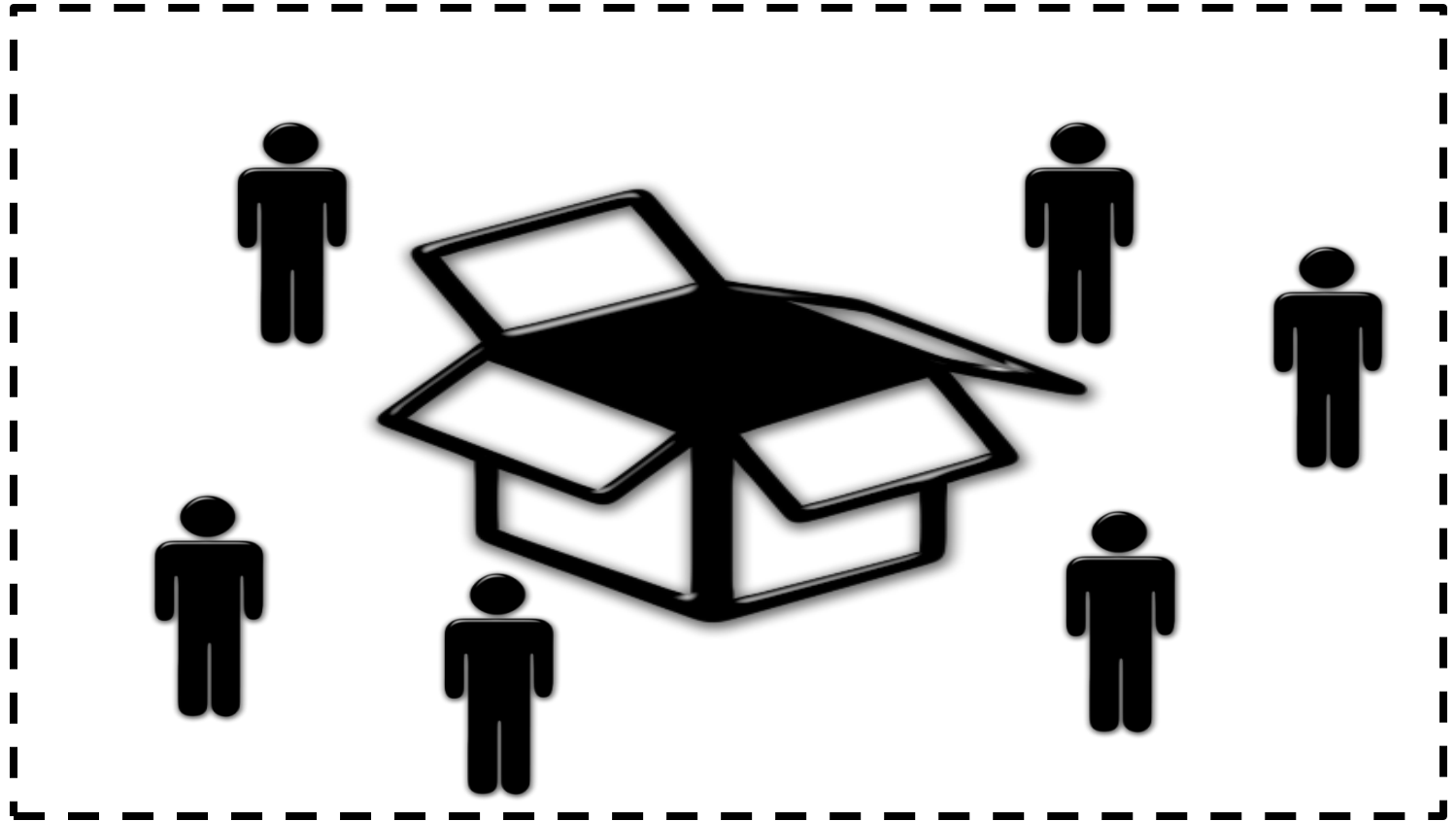


23



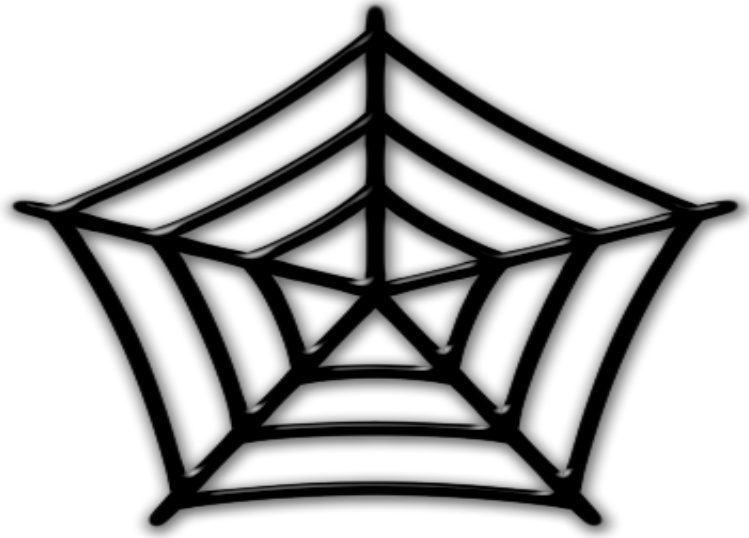
Ostracism

Group removal via denial of common resources.



24





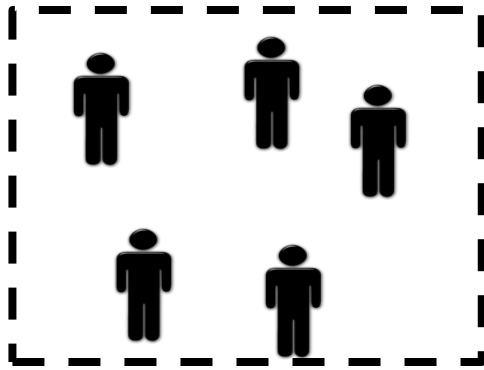
Networks

Scale-free social structures



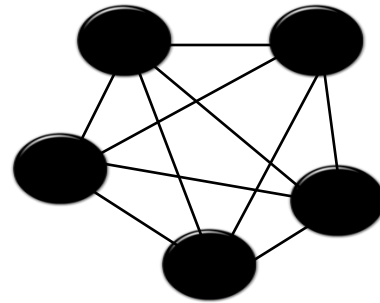
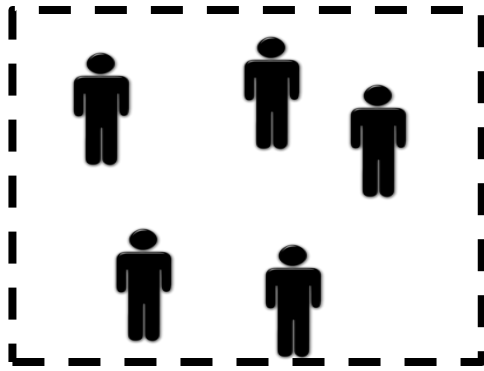
Clustering

Until now we have talked about groups, which kind of look like this:



Clustering

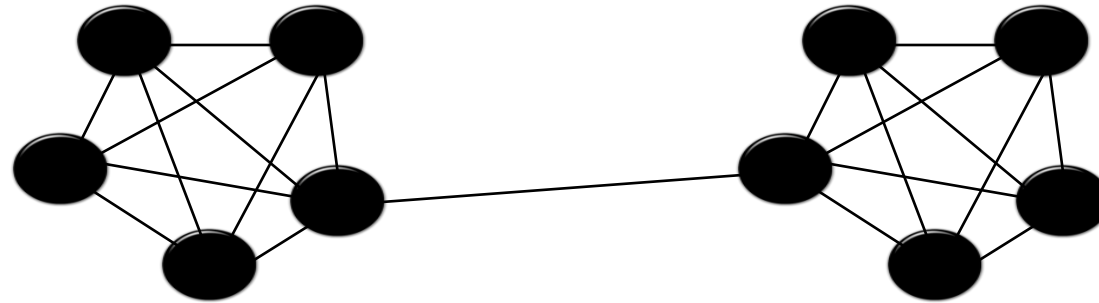
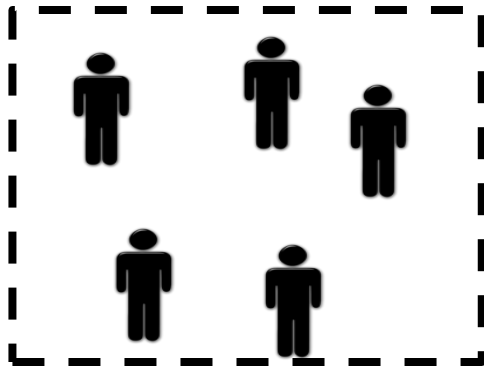
Until now we have talked about groups, which kind of look like this:



In social networking theory, these are called *clusters*.

Clustering

Until now we have talked about groups, which kind of look like this:

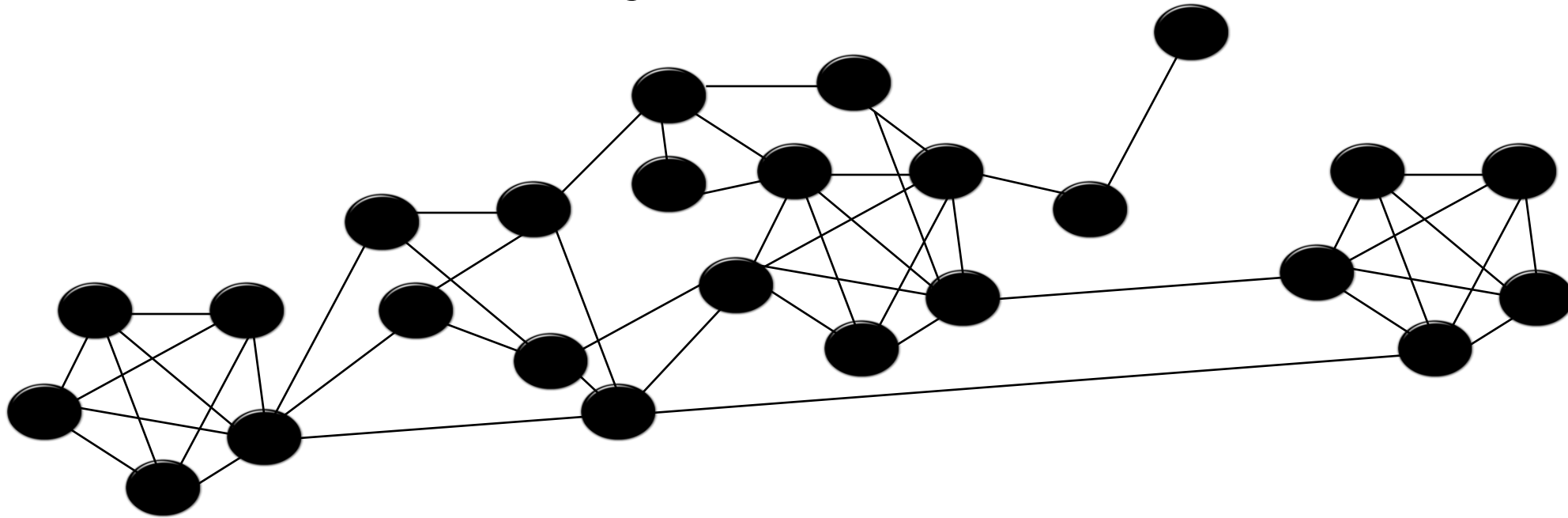


In social networking theory, these are called *clusters*.

- And they often have *weak ties* to other clusters.

Networks

Technical term: *scale-free networks*.

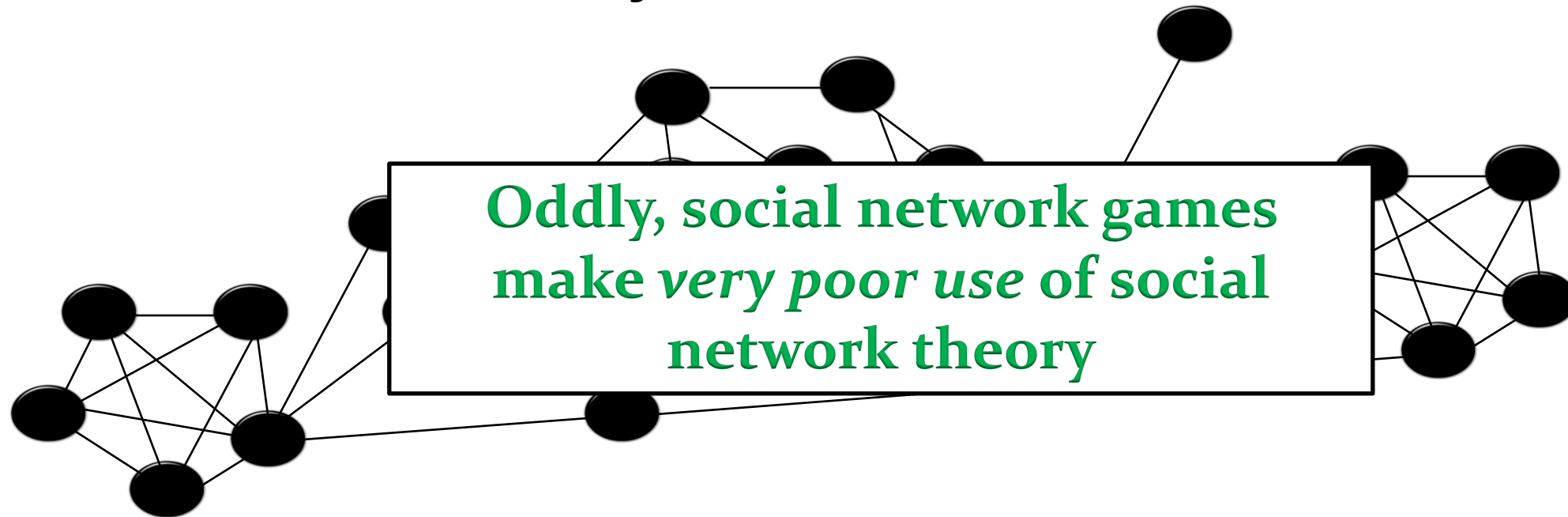


A very particular sort of structural pattern – and universal in human society.



Networks

Technical term: *scale-free networks*.



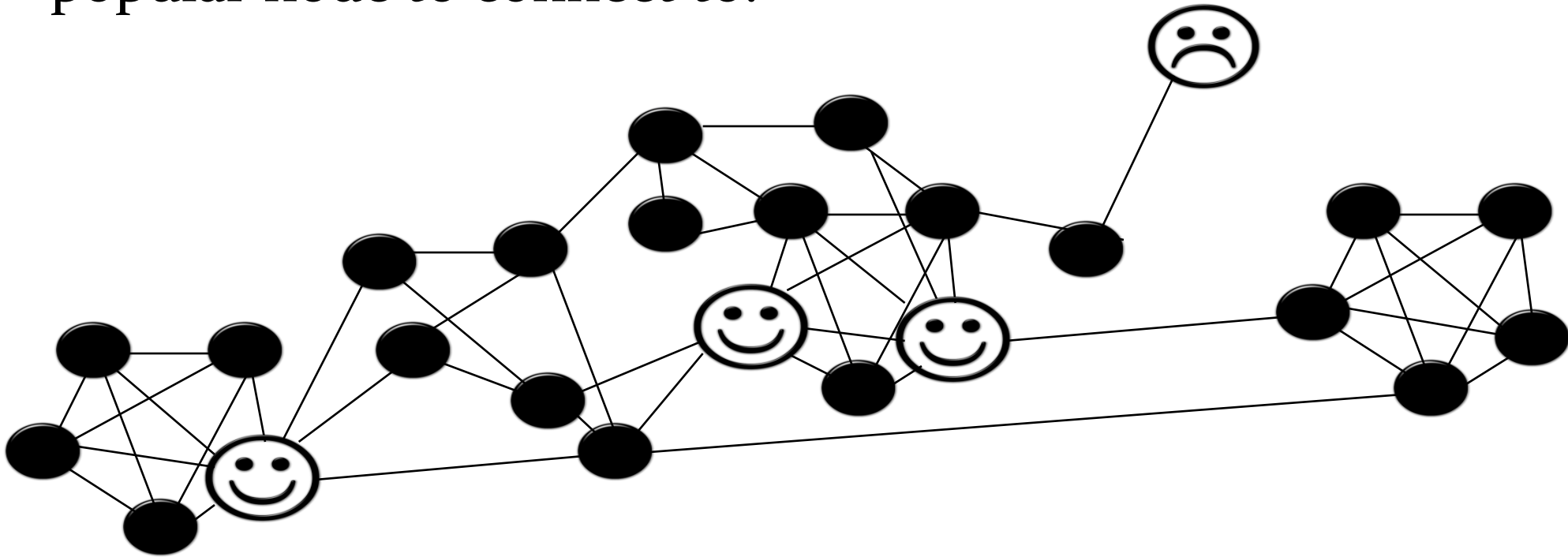
A very particular sort of structural pattern – and universal in human society.



Preferential attachment

Rich get richer syndrome

- A new person coming into a network tends to pick the most popular node to connect to.



Preferential attachment

Rich get richer syndrome

- A new person coming into a network tends to pick the most popular node to connect to.



Power laws

The mathematical distribution of “popularity” of link destinations.

There are consequences to this distribution.

- Median lower than the mean
- Unknowability of the network
- Unequal information dissemination
- Network longevity and hub vulnerability



Bose-Einstein condensate

A *phase transition* where a network's power law gets so extremely kinked that a single hub dominates:

- Windows operating system
- Tiger Woods' win-loss record earlier in his career
- The winning kingdom in *Shadowbane*



Channel capacity & sympathy groups

Lots of evidence to suggest that your “knowable” part of the network is limited

- Robin Dunbar, “monkeysphere” etc

This leads to special mechanics when dealing with nodes at different graph distances.

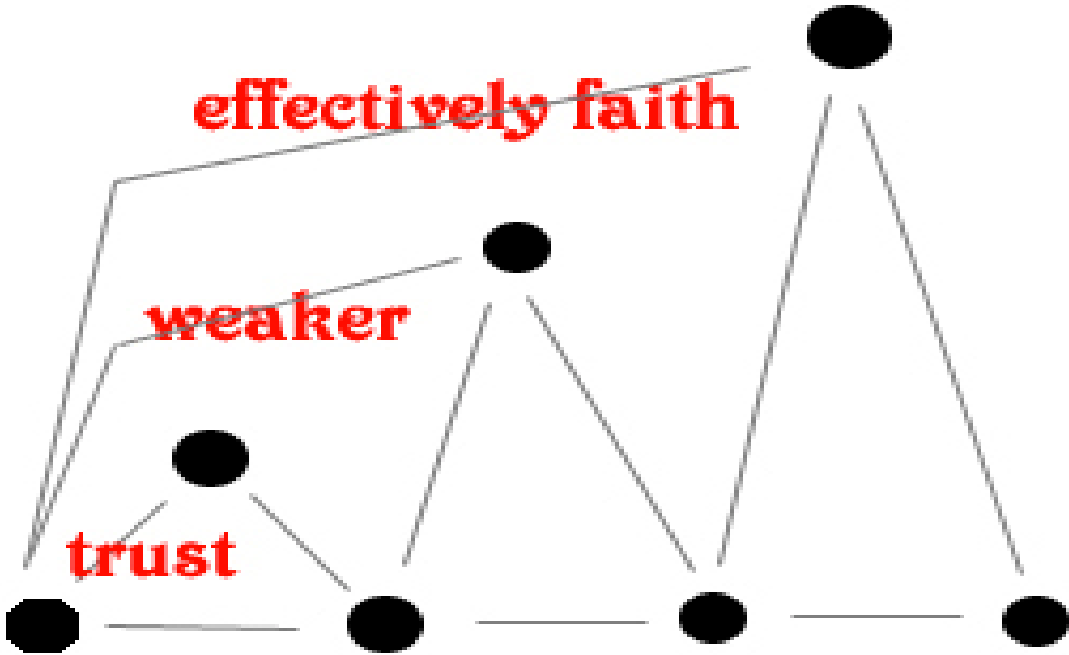


Trust

Trust up close – and it's non-transitive!

Reputation at midrange

Faith at a distance (*aka* social contract)



25



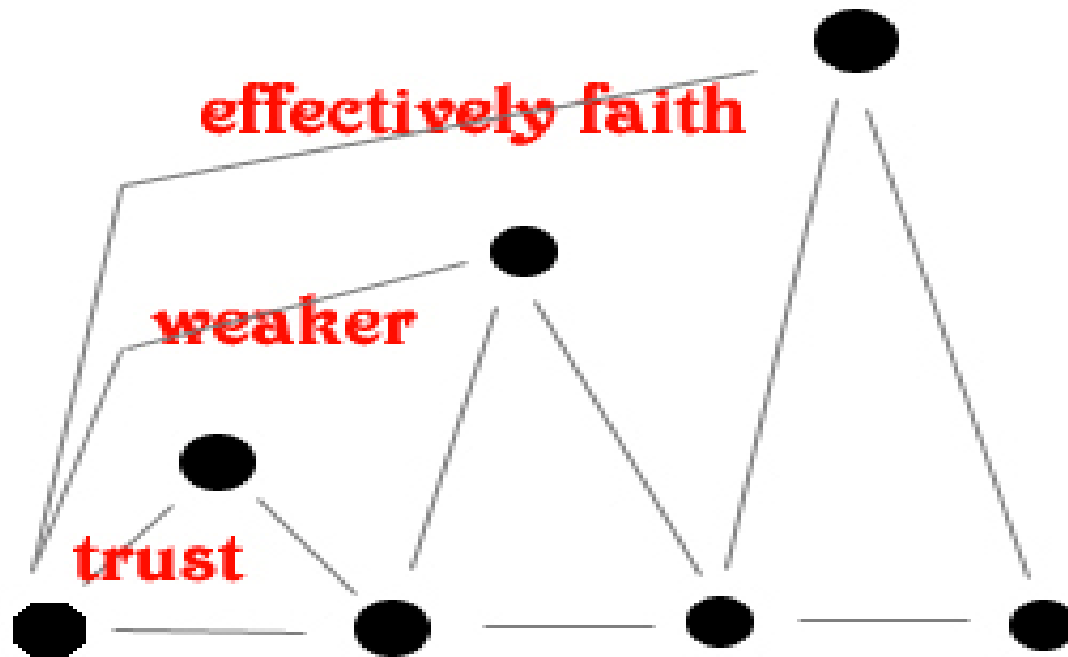
Trust

Trust up close – and it's non-trivial

Reputation at midrange

Faith at a distance (*aka* social contract)

Do players in your game ever need to trust anyone?



Homogeneity

Tightly linked nodes tend to be *homogeneous* – liking the same things

- This also introduces interesting liabilities in gameplay

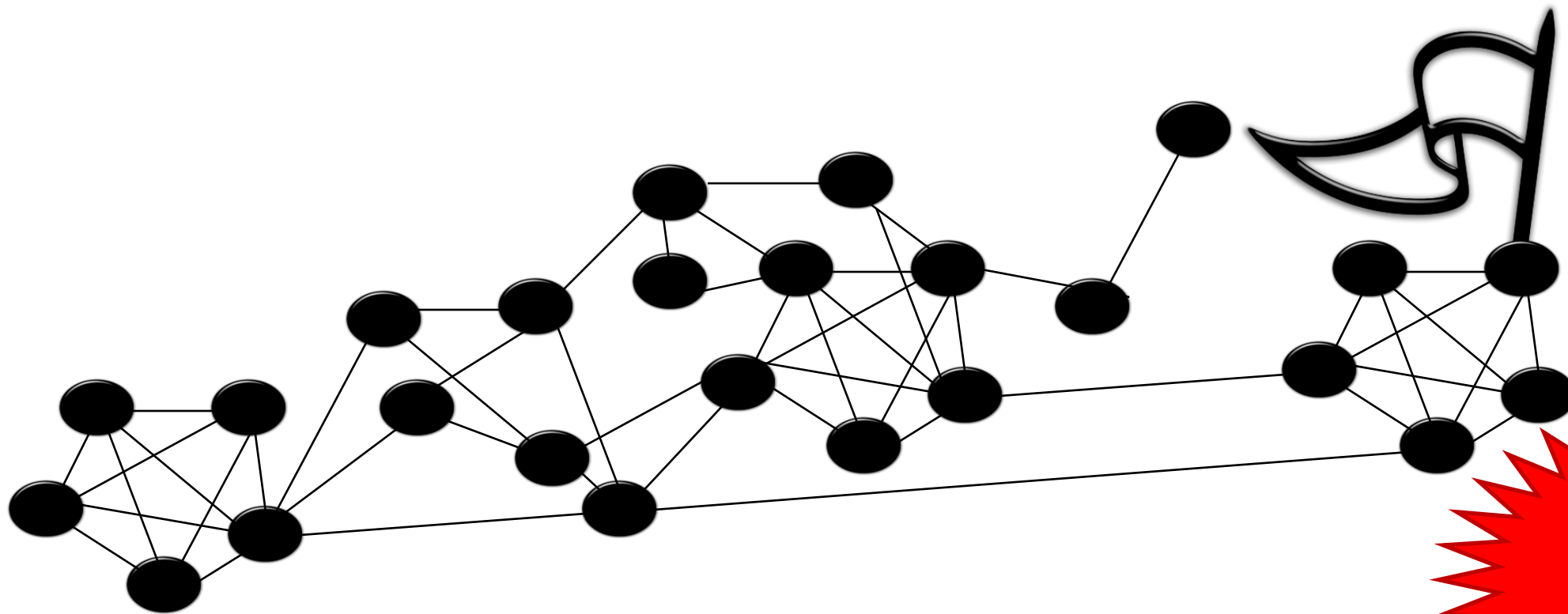
As those with kids know, one's peer group carries more social weight than authority

Combined with trust and other network characteristics, we get...



Guilds/tribes

Association of self-similar nodes into a multi-cluster sub-network with its own social identity



Guilds/tribes

Association of self-similar nodes into a multi-cluster sub-network with its own social identity



**Hugely powerful.
Barely present.**



Guilds vs Neighbor Structures

T. B. Naik specifies these as the identifiers of *tribes*:

- social distance from other tribes
- frequency of contact
- community of interests
- scale
- compactness and self-sufficiency
- politically organized
- customary laws
- multifarious economic pursuits

Keep in mind, these groups are implicitly present on the social graph. We just don't identify or surface them.



Impact of scale

Different social structures at different scales:

Dozens



Hundreds



Thousands

Bands

No fixed home
"Egalitarian" leadership
No real bureaucracy
No laws
Unstratified culture

Tribes

A single home
"Egalitarian" or "big-man"
Organized resource extraction
Still unstratified

Chiefdoms

Many homes
Castes and classes
Cronyism & monarchs
Bureaucracy & laws
Taxes, indentured labor, and slavery
Public architecture
Luxuries for elites



Impact of scale

Different social structures at different scales:

Dozens



Hundreds



Thousands

Bands

- No fixed home
- "Egalitarian" leadership
- No real bureaucracy
- No laws
- Unstratified culture

Tribes

- A single home
- "Egalitarian" or "big-man"
- Organized resource extraction
- Still unstratified

Chiefdoms

- Many homes
- Castes and classes
- Cronyism & monarchs
- Bureaucracy & laws
- Taxes, indentured labor, and slavery
- Public architecture
- Luxuries for elites

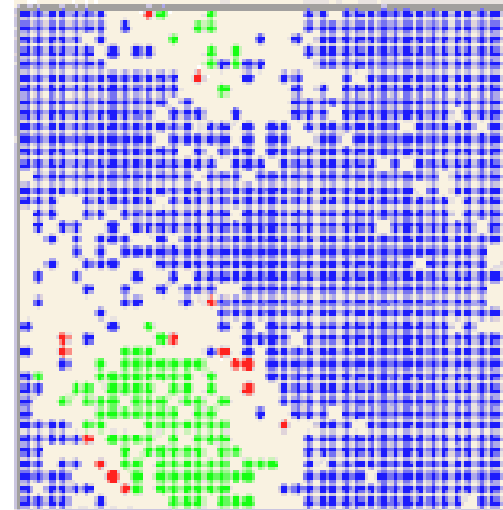
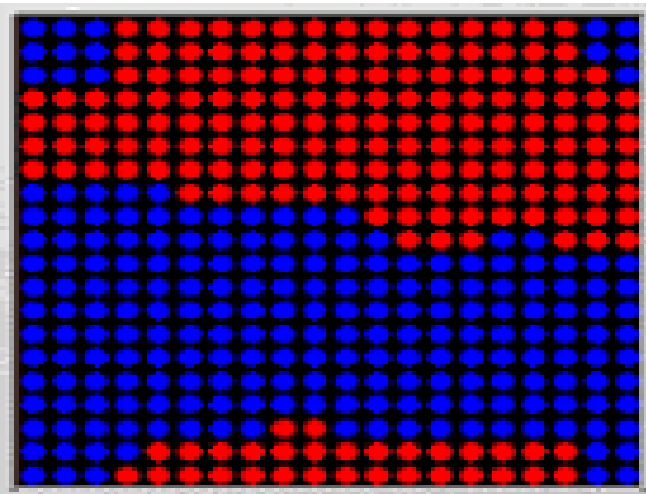
*Look at all this
gameplay we don't do.*



Segregation and genocide

Mathematical simulations show that given a petri dish, tribal structures always

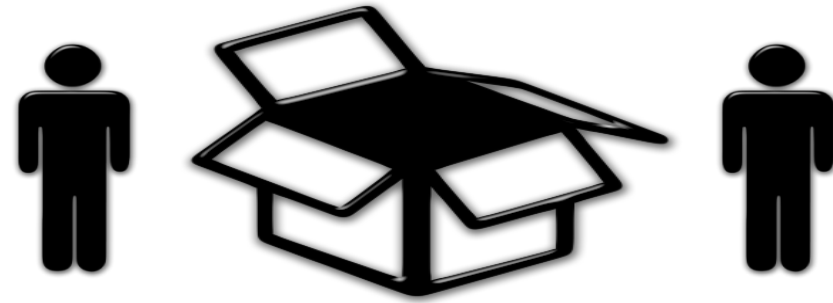
- Self-segregate
- Annihilate each other



Exclusivity

The use of identity and other earlier mechanics to manipulate the *value* of rivalrous and non-rivalrous goods.

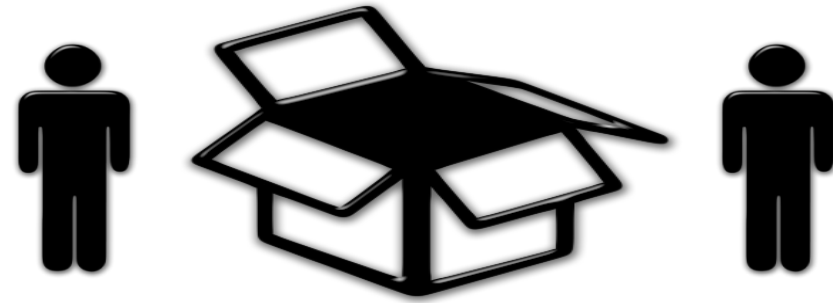
Also known as “velvet rope.”



Exclusivity

The use of identity and other earlier mechanics to manipulate the *value* of rivalrous and non-rivalrous goods.

Also known as “velvet rope.”



VIP clubs

27





Massive groups

Designing games at the societal level



OK, I have to stop and say this.

**Social games have the largest game canvas
in all of HISTORY.**

**And yet social games are designed
primarily at the single-player level, with
minor multiplayer mechanics.**

From here on up, it's uncharted territory.

**But it is also the potential
and the future
and the GLORY of social games.**



Swapping models

The functionalist way to look at things is:

Game systems that are “problems of control and coordination at a societal level”

-- Herbert Spencer

Resource distribution, goods production, etc.



Structuralism

The sequel to functionalism! More of an emotional model,
also now out of favor:

“Meaning produced and reproduced via practices and
activities that are systems of signification”

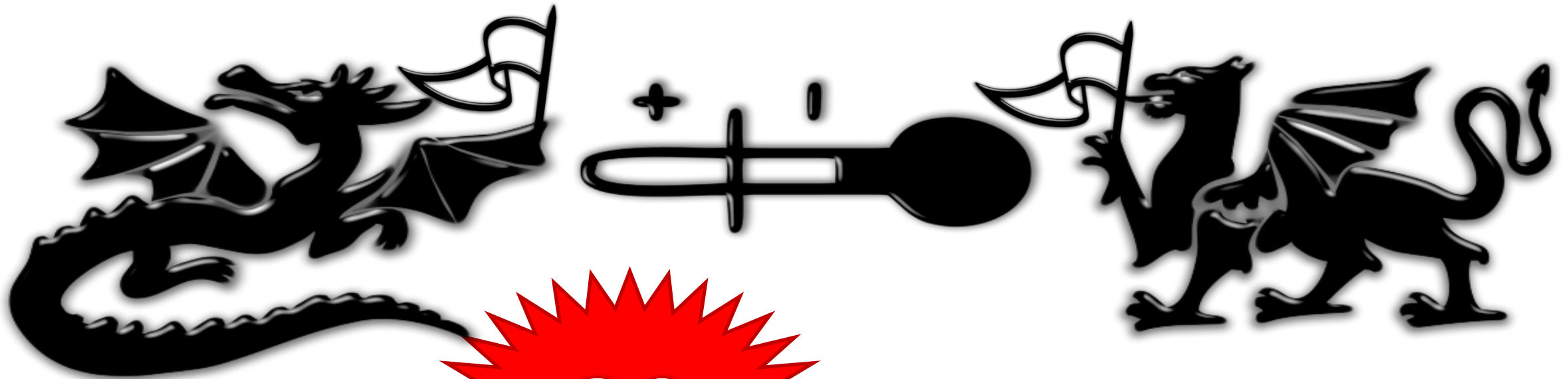
-- Claude Lévi-Strauss

(Such as games)



Guild vs guild

Large-scale interactions using available systems to create competition between social entities

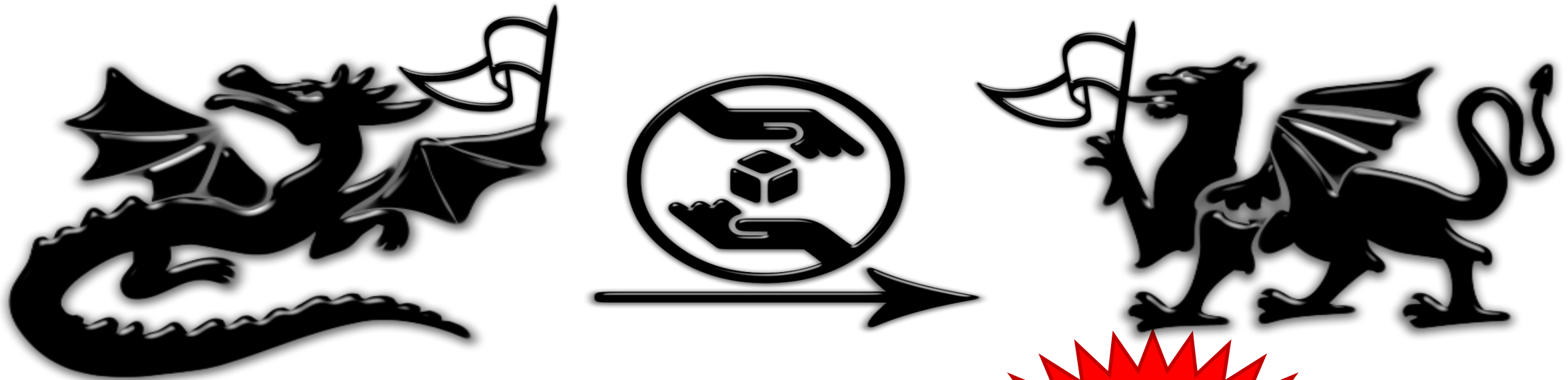


28



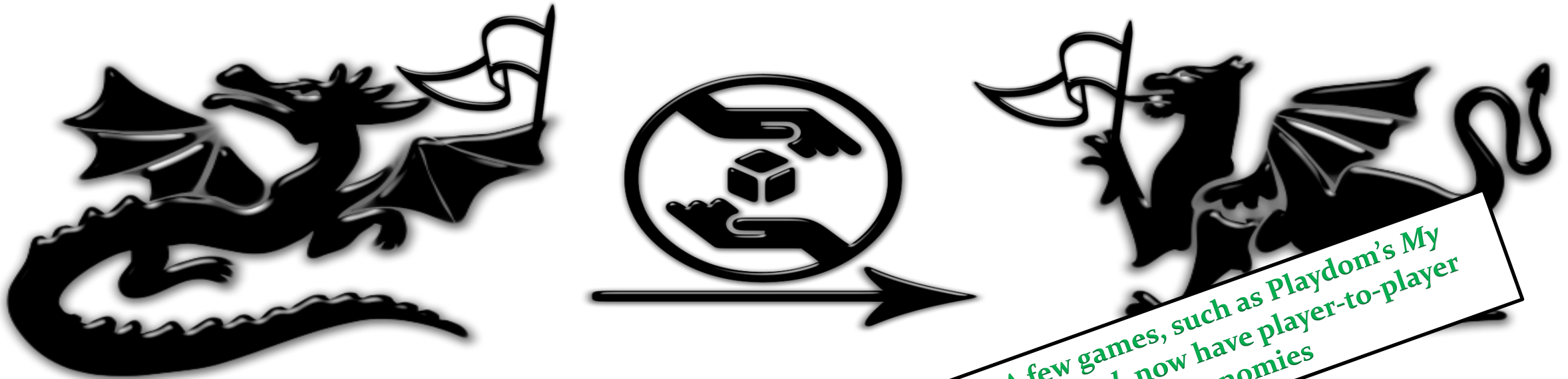
Trade and contract

Formalized means of allowing mutually beneficial interactions between overly-distant nodes on the network



Trade and contract

Formalized means of allowing mutually beneficial interactions between overly-distant nodes on the network



A few games, such as Playdom's My Vineyard, now have player-to-player economies

29

MMOs versus social games

MMOs developed stronger social structures than social games, because they had *shared economic participation*

- despite not having *constancy*.

Social games usually have constancy without shared economic participation!

To add retention and social depth, pool your players' economies.



Anthony Giddens

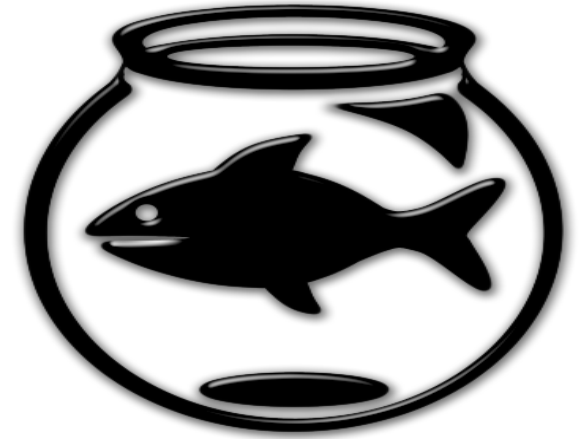
Social structure as game rules

- “Ant farming” or “goldfish bowl”

Structure, Modality, Interaction

- **Structure** is the rules and resources
- **Modality** how structures become action.
- **Interaction** what the actor actually does

This analogizes directly to the forms of rules in *Rules of Play*, or to the MDA framework.



Post-structural thinking

A challenge:

A lot of post-structural thinking is about seeing past dualities and to shades of gray.

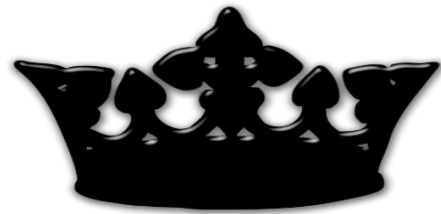
Moving beyond dualities such as neighbor and not, tribe or not.

Games do this poorly. But...



The PASES model

Five general ways of building large, shades-of-gray social structures in multiplayer games:



Politics

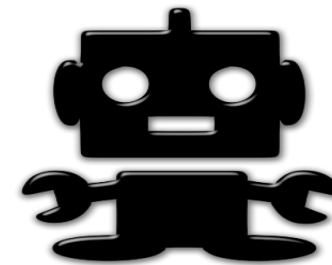


Arts

Science



Economics



Sociology





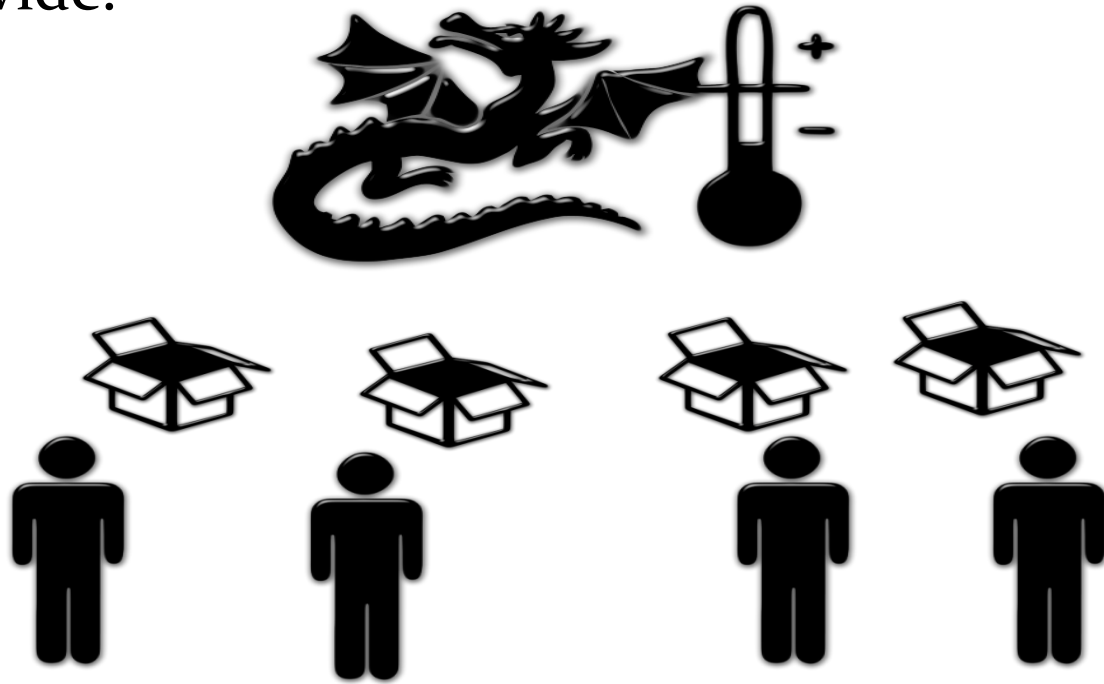
Politics

Influence and social control



Elections

Actors of any distance from the interaction apply a rivalrous good towards an objective metric that applies network-wide.



Politics --
or *American Idol*,
the largest MMO
in the world.



Reputation, influence and fame

Quantified signifiers for social currency, and formalized spending of this rivalrous good.



31



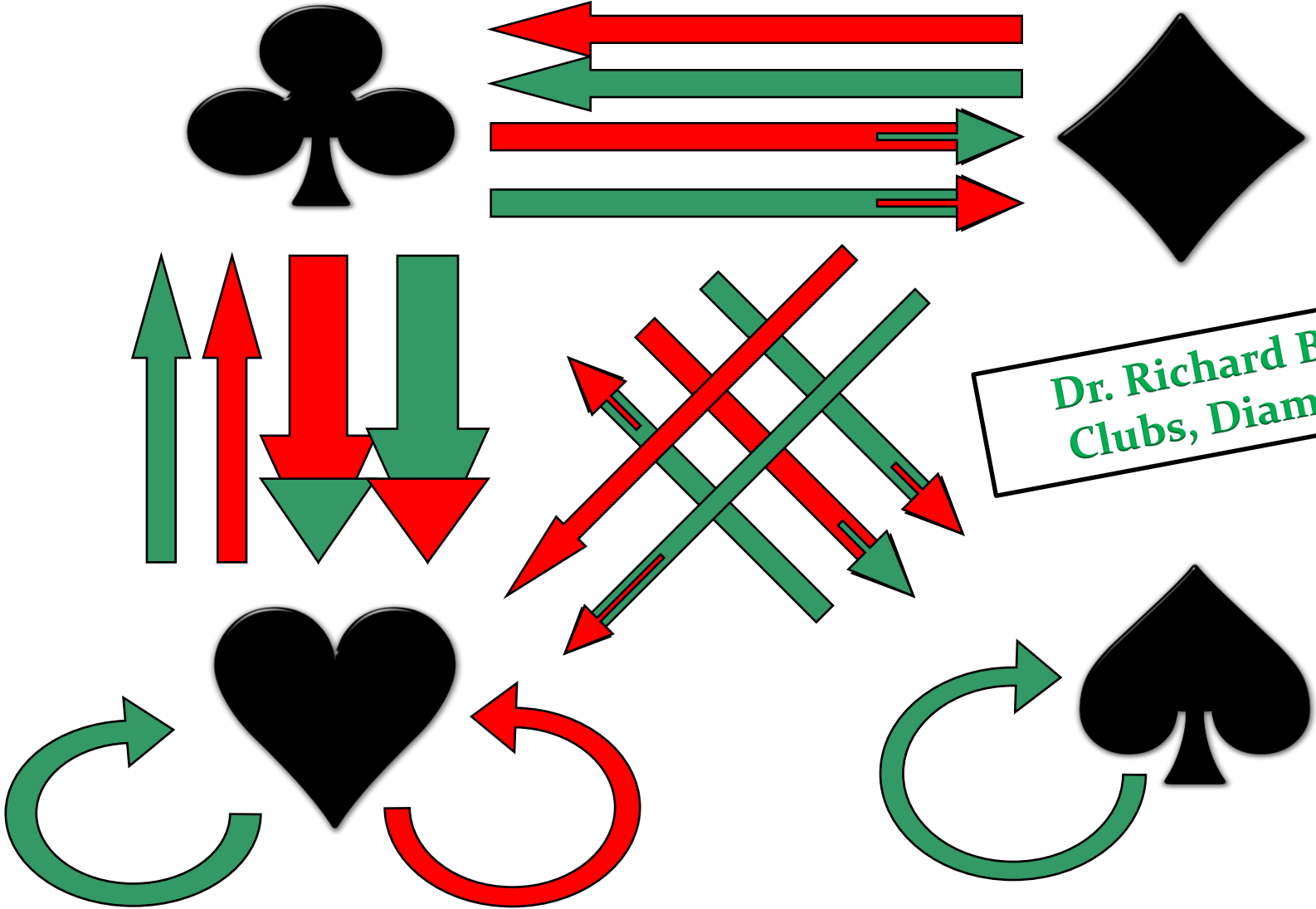
Conflict theory

The European post-structuralism:

“Structures are developed out of conflict between people with differing interests and resources.”



Bartle Types



Dr. Richard Bartle, "Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades"



Structure vs agency

The big question: are we locked into the game design?

- Structure creates *habitus* – a structure of mind, a set of acquired schemata... “what goes without saying” for a group -- Pierre Bourdieu

The same question as socialization vs autonomy.



Structuration

Anthony Giddens in 1984 had an answer:

- Social life is both the small *and* the big
- People constantly reinforce and extend the structure through actions
- And the structure constrains what they can do

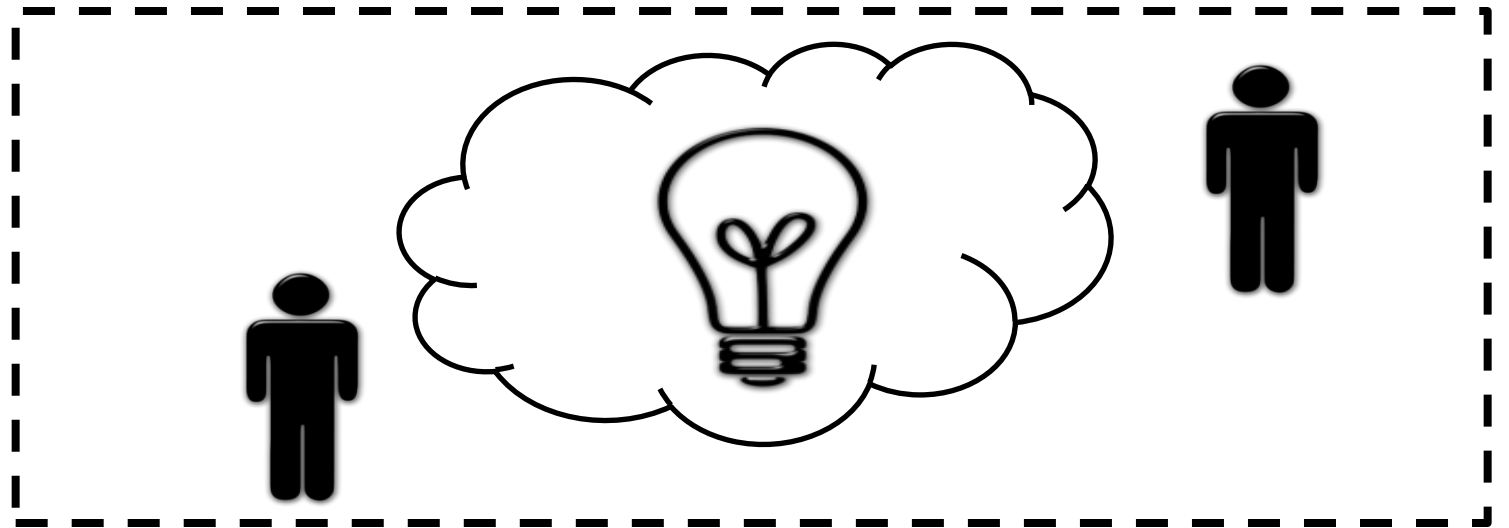
So there's a reflexive action that makes things change overall, slowly.

Which leads to interesting game problems such as...



Public goods

Like a multiple player prisoner's dilemma. Public goods are non-rivalrous, so there is a temptation to enjoy the good with no contribution. For example, breathing. Public parks.

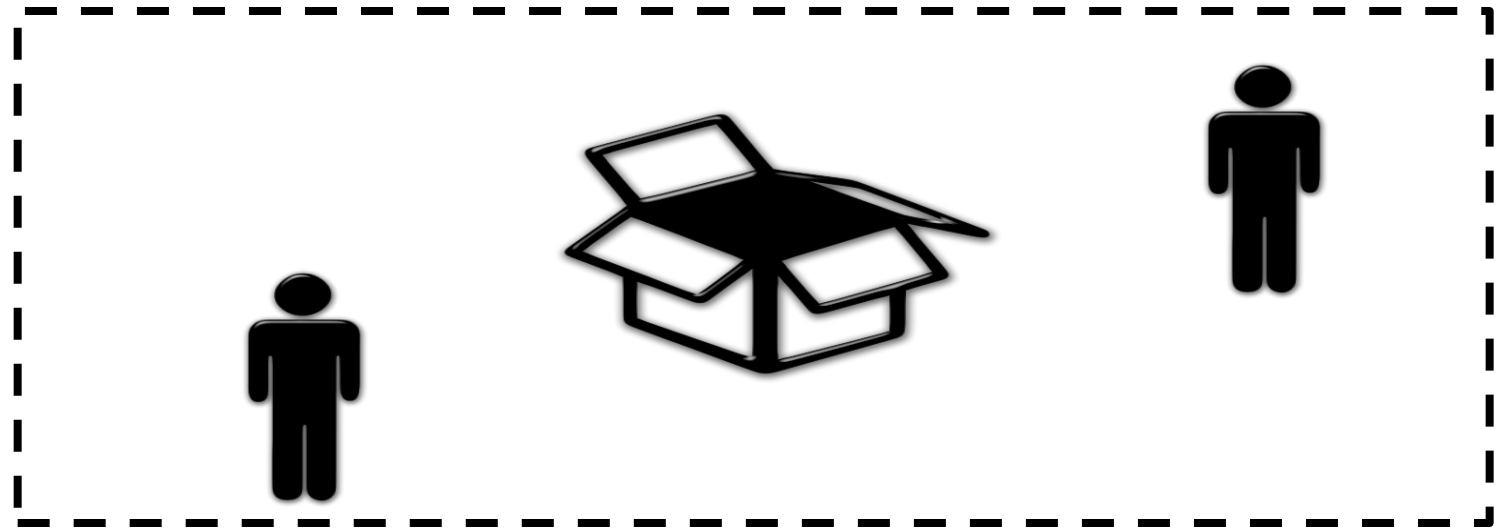


32



Tragedy of the Commons

Flip side of public goods: if they are rivalrous, then they can get used up. Classic example, the commons in a village...
Or spawns, territory, etc. The game is in *solving the unsolvable.*



33



Tragedy of the Commons

Flip side of public goods: if they are rivalrous, then they can get used up. Classic example, the commons in a village... Or spawns, territory, etc. The game is in *solving the unsolvable.*

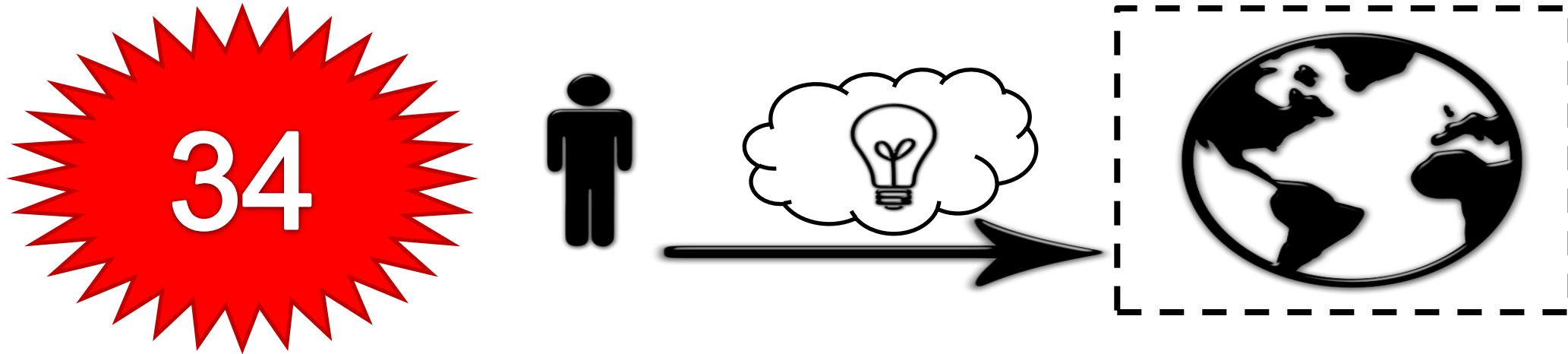


33



Community

Where we start playing games on YOU.



A properly managed community is structuration in action,
and becomes the ultimate political game for users.



Science

Figuring out how things work



ARGs and Puzzles

Ridiculously complex puzzles can be solved by hive brains.

ARG puzzles such as image-based steganography hidden in white noise in a poster. Combat system algorithms in an MMO.

“Underlying logical rules discovered via experimental method”
equals...



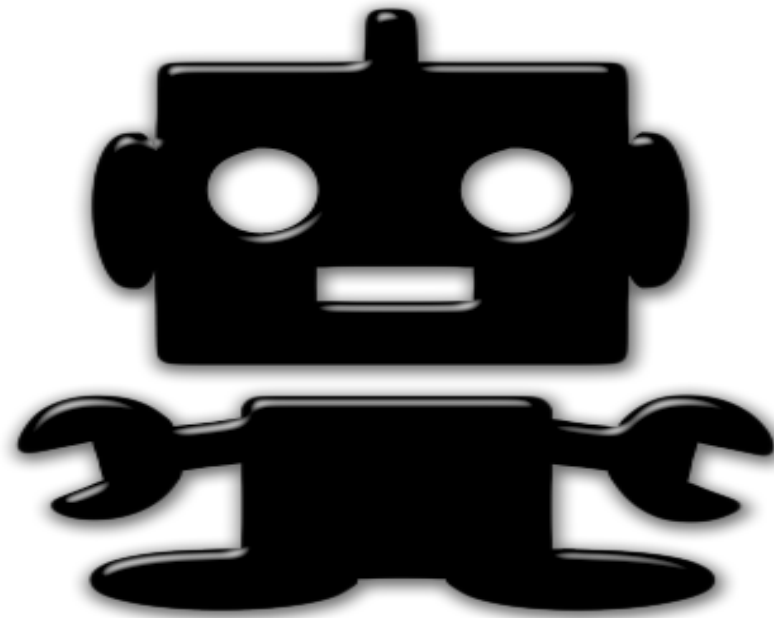
Strategy guides

The transformation of rule-based secrets into a public good.



36





Sociology

The guts of sociability



MLS

Multilevel Selection Theory

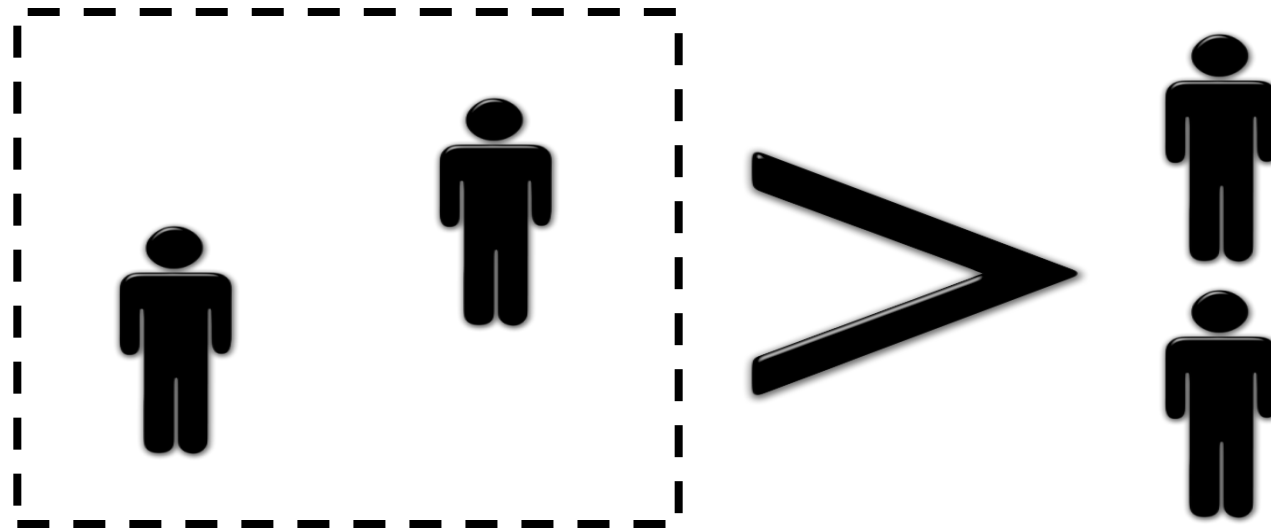
“Natural selection can be affected by cooperation at the group level.”

-- David Sloan Wilson and Elliot Sober



Teamwork

The aggregation of social mechanics leading to the emergence of greater across-the-board competence.



Wisdom of Crowds, DPS systems, *Survivor*.

Interdependence and scaling issues

Scale-free networks are highly insulated from failure.

But *collapse* occurs if hubs are suddenly removed.

If your game design has hubs and one breaks...

- (cf *Star Wars Galaxies*, *Pirates of the Burning Sea*)...

This probably happens all the time in social games, and we can't even tell.





Economics



Fundamental multiplayer dilemma

The game equivalent of psychology's *Fundamental Attribution Error*.

The basic premise of economics is mutual improvement and optimal distribution of resources.

It's a way for a group to level up.

This is ***anathema to games.***



Veblen goods

A good where people's preference for buying them increases because of their price.

- Luxury cars
- Limited Edition virtual items



See also: soulbinding, level limits, etc.



Services

Classes and roles can be seen as forms of asymmetric trade.

Even mechanic #1, “helping” is a service!

So are numerous others on the list.

In other cases, mechanics are premised in unequal contributions.

- All of these are *generally non-quantifiable*.



Therefore, cheating

Randy Farmer's KidTrade proposal

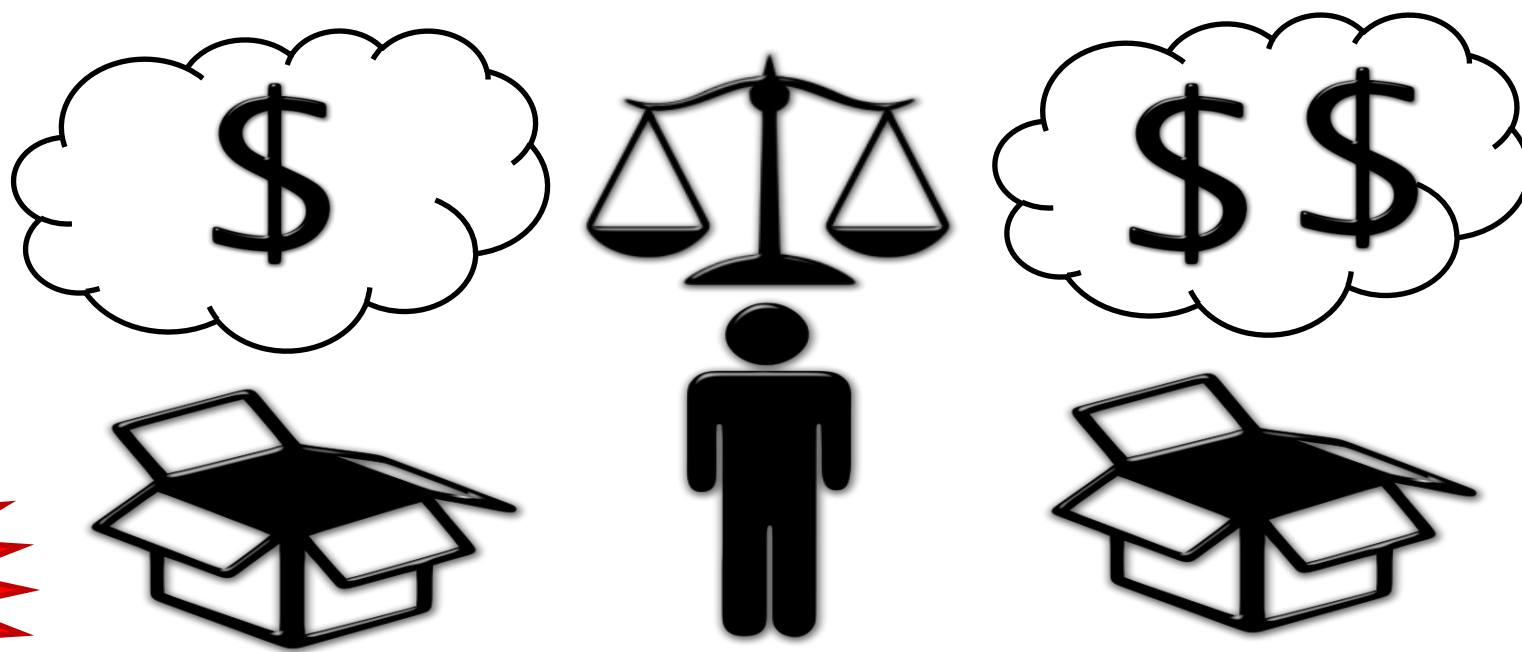
- **Gifting** → Twinking
- **Gifting + Multiple Chars/Server** → Muling
- **Gifting + Messaging + Trust** → Trading
- Trading – Messaging – Trust + **In World Machinery** → Robust Trading
- **Robust Trading + Scarcity + Liquidity** → External Market (eBay)
- External Market – Trust + **In World Machinery** → GOM

Gifts inevitably cause Real Money Trade, which is a form of...



Arbitrage

Allowing unequal quantified valuations of the same good to arise within the system, and permitting trade that exploits them.



Arbitrage

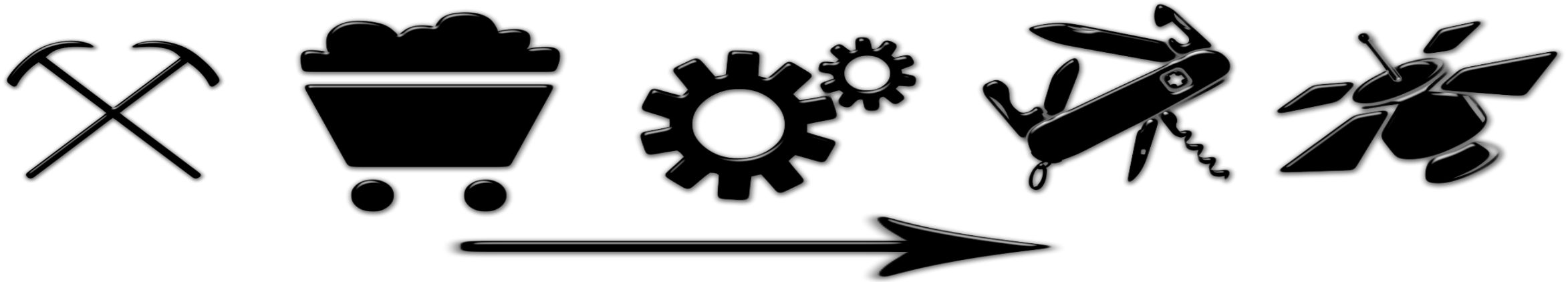
Allowing unequal quantified valuations of the same good to arise within the system, and permitting trade that exploits them.

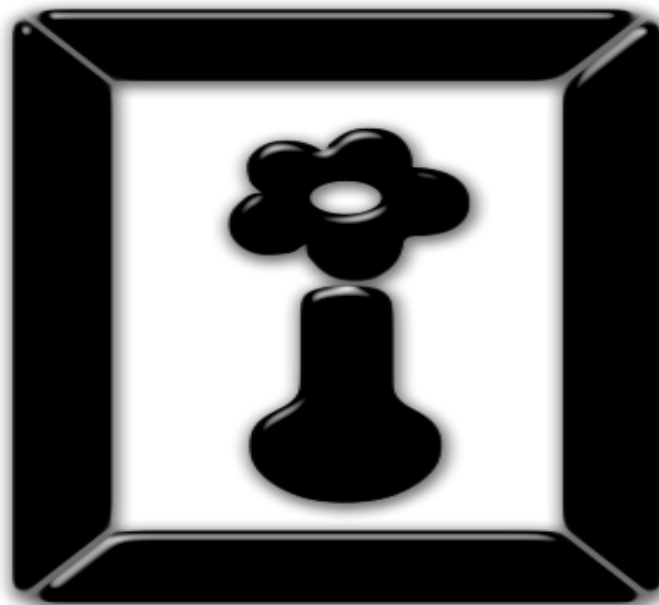




Supply chains

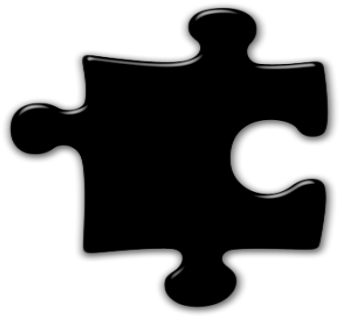
Cascading unequal valuations of goods arranged in sequence.



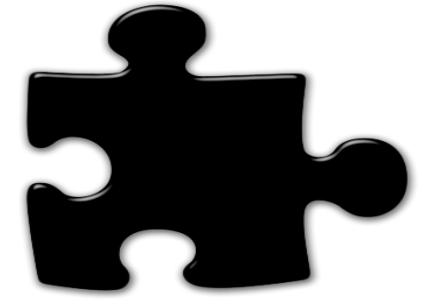


Arts





The act of invention



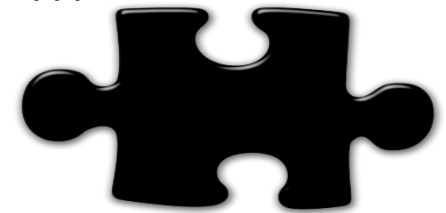
Games Are

“...solving statistically varied challenge situations presented by an opponent who may or may not be algorithmic within a framework that is a defined systemic model.”



-- me

Statistical variations are handcrafted, randomized or...



User generated content

- Forums.
- Character art.
- Roleplay narratives.
- Fan fiction.
- Player conventions.
- Weddings.
- Game maps.



The game has to be designed to encompass and permit this sort of activity.



User generated content

- Forums.
- Character art.
- Roleplay narratives.
- Fan fiction.
- Player conventions.
- Weddings.
- Game maps.



The game has to be designed to encompass and permit this sort of activity.





Deconstruction

Taking it all apart



Remember the quote?

“A good game should focus entirely on it's single-player aspect first and foremost. Then if it's a simple game like a shooter or racer, use the remaining time and space to fit in a multi-player aspect to it... In other words, multi-playing should never take away from the single-player aspect of the game. **Pure multi-player games really should be few and far between.”**

-- the unfortunately named New Troll, Escapist Forums, 23 June 2009



Derrida

“As a turning toward the presence, lost or impossible, of the absent origin, this structuralist thematic of broken immediateness is thus the sad, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauist facet of the thinking of freeplay of which the Nietzschean *affirmation*-the joyous affirmation of the freeplay of the world and without truth, without origin, offered to an active interpretation-would be the other side. *This affirmation then determines the non-center otherwise than as loss of the center.* And it plays the game without security. For there is a *sure* freeplay: that which is limited to the *substitution of given and existing, present, pieces.* In absolute chance, affirmation also surrenders itself to *genetic* indetermination, to the *seminal* adventure of the trace.”

-- “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Human Sciences”



Derrida

“As a turning toward the presence, lost or impossible, of the absent origin, this structuralist thematic of broken immediateness is thus the sad, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauist facet of the thinking of freeplay of which the Nietzschean *affirmation*-the joyous affirmation of the freeplay of the world and without truth, without origin, offered to an active interpretation-would be the other side. *This affirmation then determines the non-center otherwise than as loss of the center.* And it plays the game without security. For there is a *sure* freeplay: that which is limited to the *substitution of given and existing, present, pieces.* In absolute chance, affirmation also surrenders itself to *genetic* indetermination, to the *seminal* adventure of the trace.”

-- “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Human Sciences”

Yeah, I don't know
what that means
either.



Griefing



Griefing can be an act of game literacy: engaging in the ultimate transgressive play with the system,

Or the act of “virtual sociopathy.”





Hidden info



- For brawls and races, see *Characteristics of Multiplayer Games: Lessons from the World of Paper Gaming*, K. Robert Gutschera, GDC2009.
- The MDA framework is described in *MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research* by Hunicke, LeBlanc, and Zubek.
- I recommend *Linked* by Albert-Lazslo Barabasi for an intro to social networks, and *Influence* by Robert Cialdini for more on influence structures. And of course you read *Rules of Play* and *Designing Virtual Worlds* right?
- For more on network structures, I refer you to my GDC2003 presentation *Small Worlds: Competitive and Cooperative Structures in Online Worlds* and its extensive bibliography. There's a series "On Trust" on my blog as well.
- I would start with Wikipedia for reading up on sociology and anthropology.
- You can read Randy Farmer's *KidTrade: A Design for an eBay-resistant Virtual Economy* on his website at <http://habitchronicles.com/Habitat/KidTrade.pdf>
- More on interdependence's issues at <http://www.next-gen.biz/news/what-went-wrong-with-pirates-mmo>
- You can read Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play" at <http://hydra.humanities.uci.edu/derrida/sign-play.html> or in *Writing and Difference*. If you really, really, really want to.

All the art came from <http://icons.mysitemyway.com> in the royalty-free Rounded Glossy Black Icons set.

Special Thanks to John Donham & Jenny Kropko and Patrick Ferland (for PASES)



This presentation and dozens more are available in various formats on my website:

<http://www.raphkoster.com>



All* the multiplayer mechanics

1 v self/system

Helping

1 v 1 parallel

Status

Races

Leaderboards

Tournaments

1v1 opposed

Flower-picking

Dot-eating

Tug of War

Handicapping

Secrets

1 v 1 v 1 v ...

Last man standing

Bidding

Deception and bluffing

3rd party Betting

Prisoner's Dilemma

Gamesmaster

n v n (groups)

Roles

Hot potato

Rituals

Gifts

Reciprocity

Mentoring & Twinking

Identity

Ostracism

Networks

Iterative interaction & trust

Guilds

Exclusivity

Guild vs guild

Trade and contract

Elections

Influence and fame

Public goods

Tragedy of the Commons

Community

Strategy guides

Teamwork (MLS)

Arbitrage

Supply chains

User generated content

Deconstruction

Griefing



PASES:

Politics

Art

Science

Sociology

Economics

**41-50 are left an exercise for the reader*

