

Cycle of Life: The Future of Mobile Gaming

Raph Koster



Let's start by telling you something you
already know.





New platforms always start
out with wide open spaces.

Refugees from other markets show up because the old market is too expensive and locked up.



A decorative pattern of black leaf silhouettes on the left side of the slide, arranged in a curved, flowing shape.

New markets are cheap to get going in.



The first stuff isn't native – it imitates.



Eventually someone masters the native idiom
of the new platform





Some of them get rich.

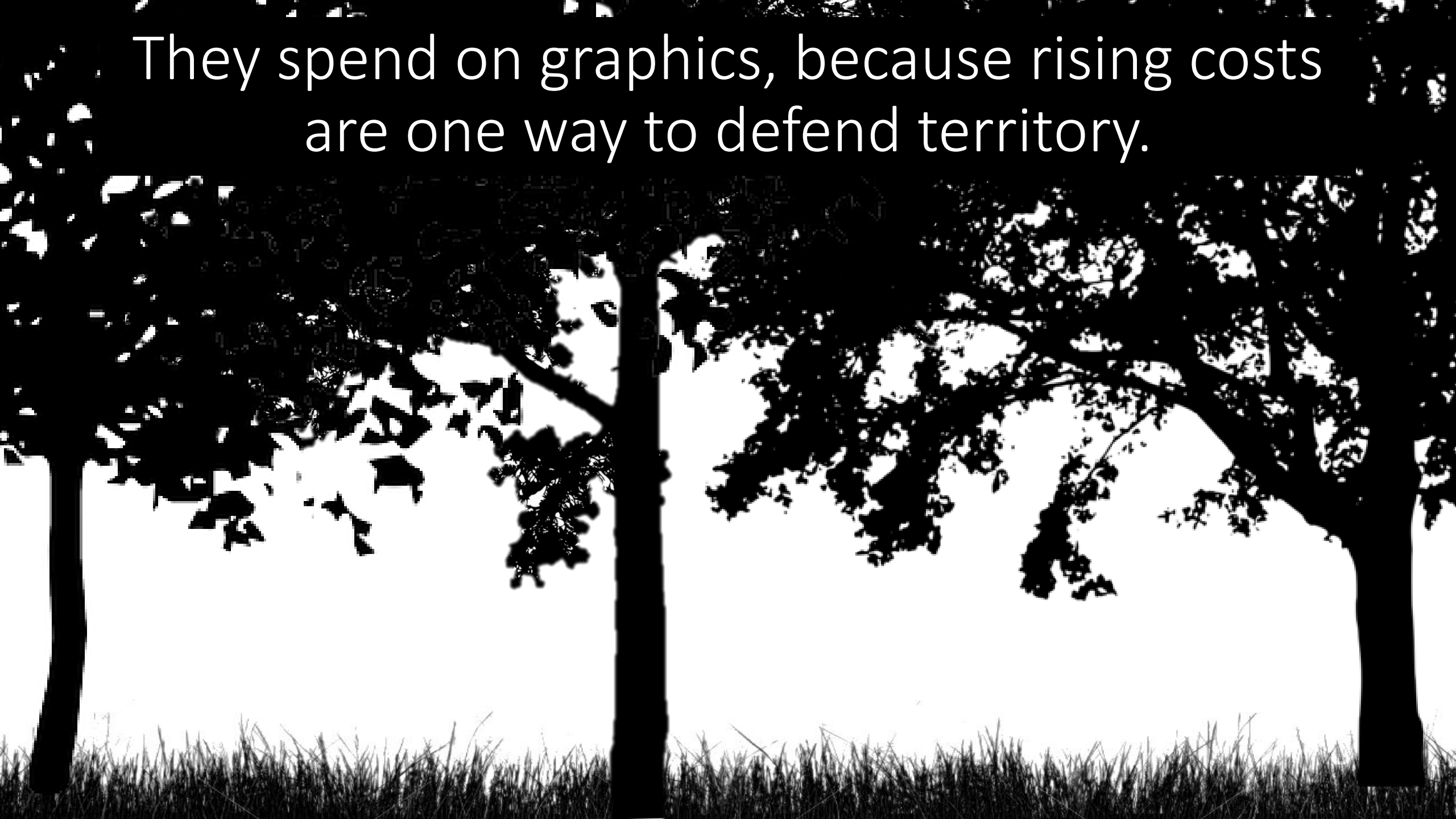
And then they start doing the smart thing
from a business sense.



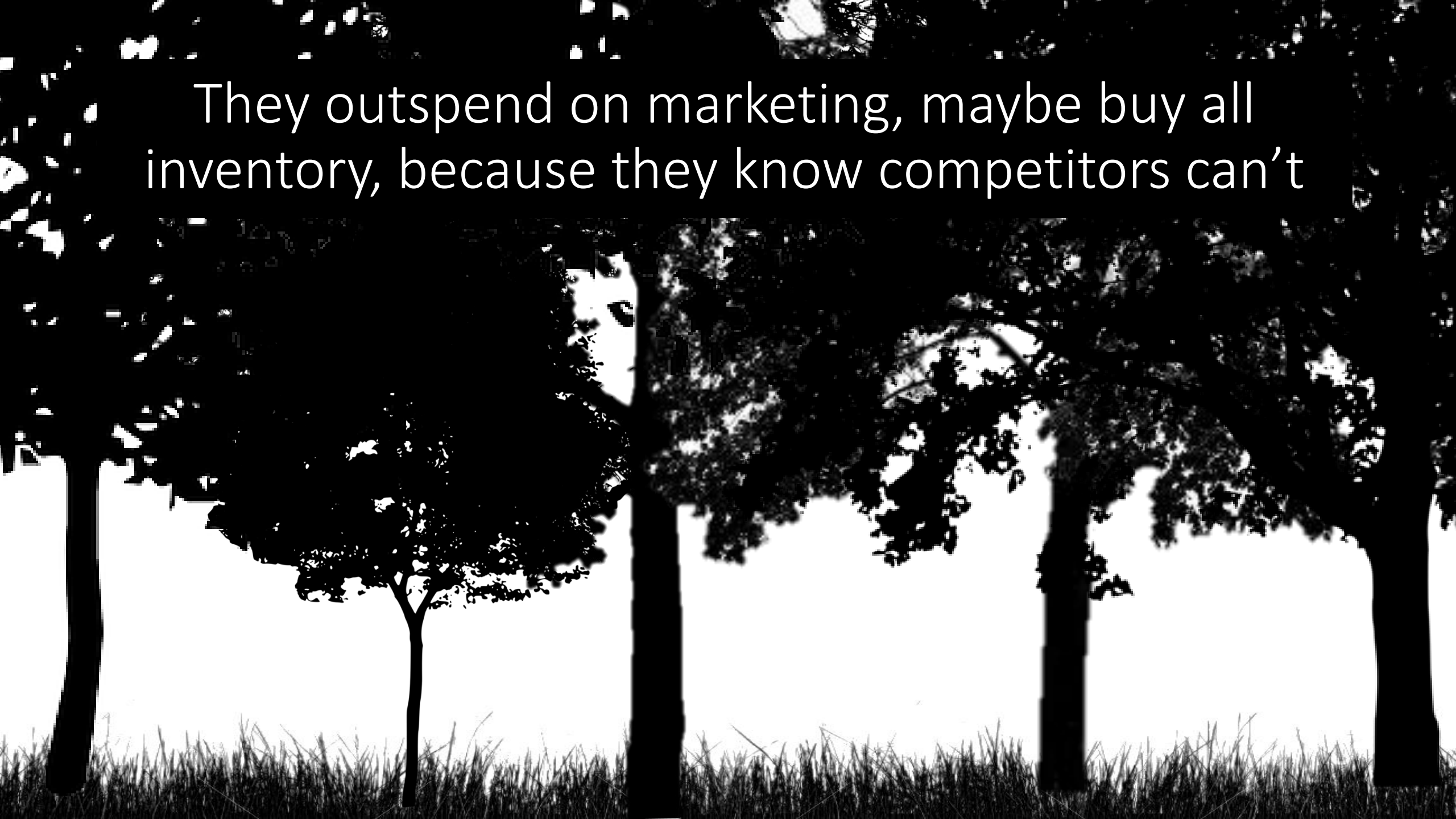
They start closing out the little guys.



They spend on graphics, because rising costs
are one way to defend territory.



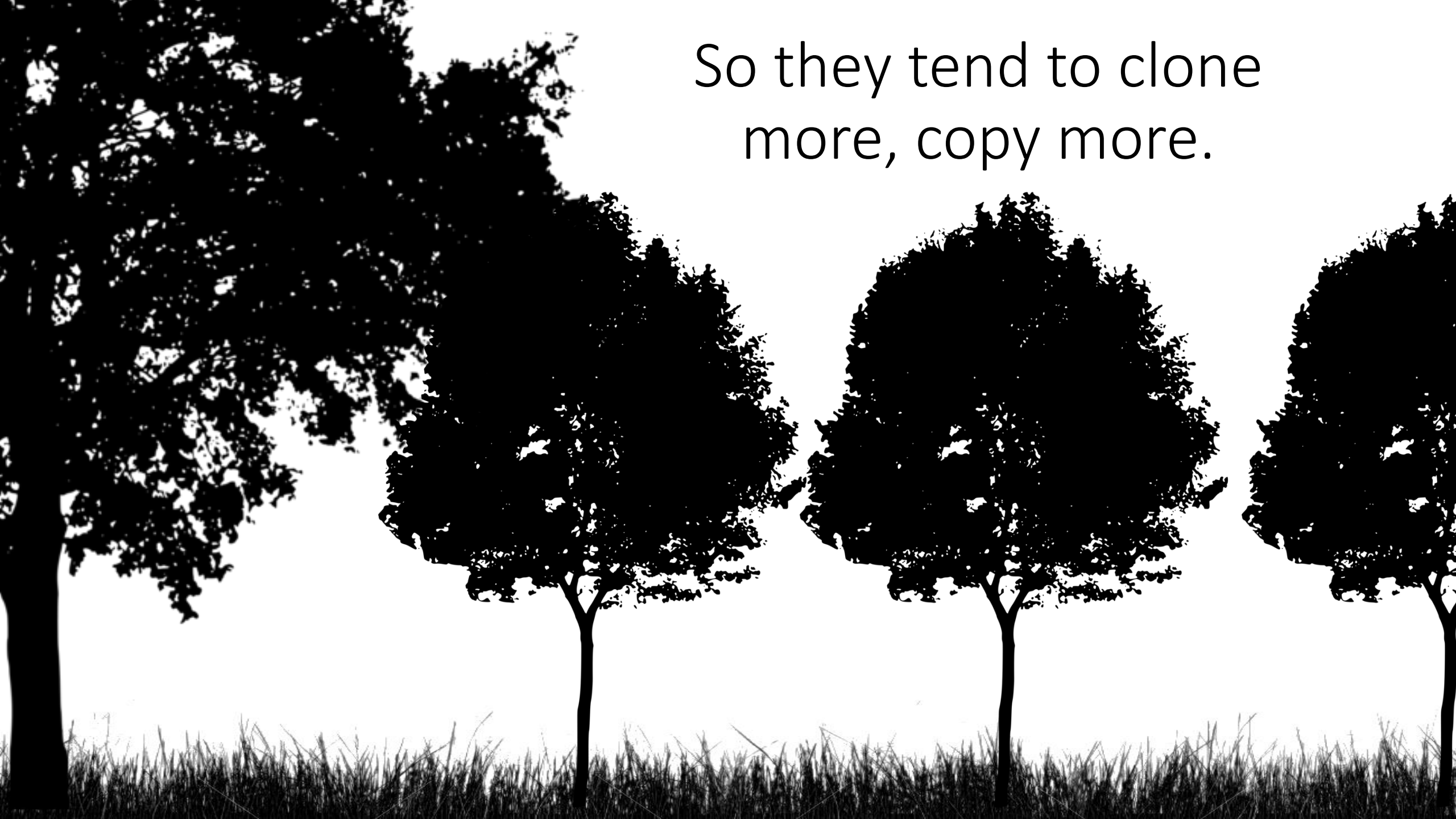
They outspend on marketing, maybe buy all inventory, because they know competitors can't





They also grow more conservative because
every game is a bigger bet.

So they tend to clone
more, copy more.



They quickly realize that mechanics aren't very defensible; it's art and story and characters that are.



In a word: brand.



Soon brands from other markets show up



But the king, historically in videogames, is usually a homegrown brand.



Small shops sometimes see success,
but it's mostly through luck coupled
with great execution.



Lots of great games die on the vine.



We're there, and
you know it --



Already plenty of smart people are casting around
for the new blue ocean, the next field that isn't
overgrown.



Here's the
thing though
– sometimes
markets
grow
saturated
before they
actually
reach their
fruition.



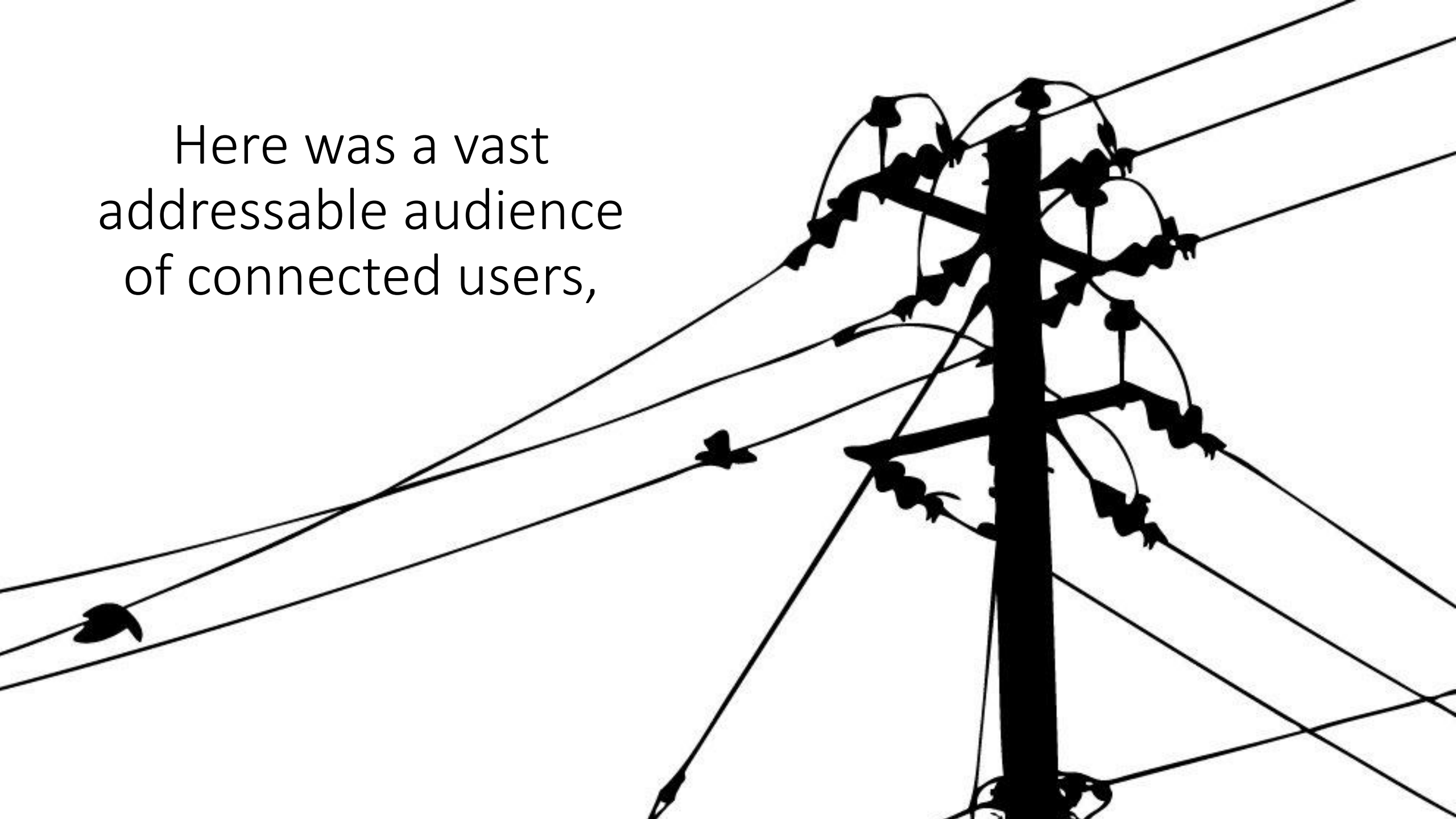


Every platform has a unique proposition, a thing they bring to the table that no other platform can do.

No better example exists than Facebook:



Here was a vast
addressable audience
of connected users,



...and we made truly massive single player
games with it.



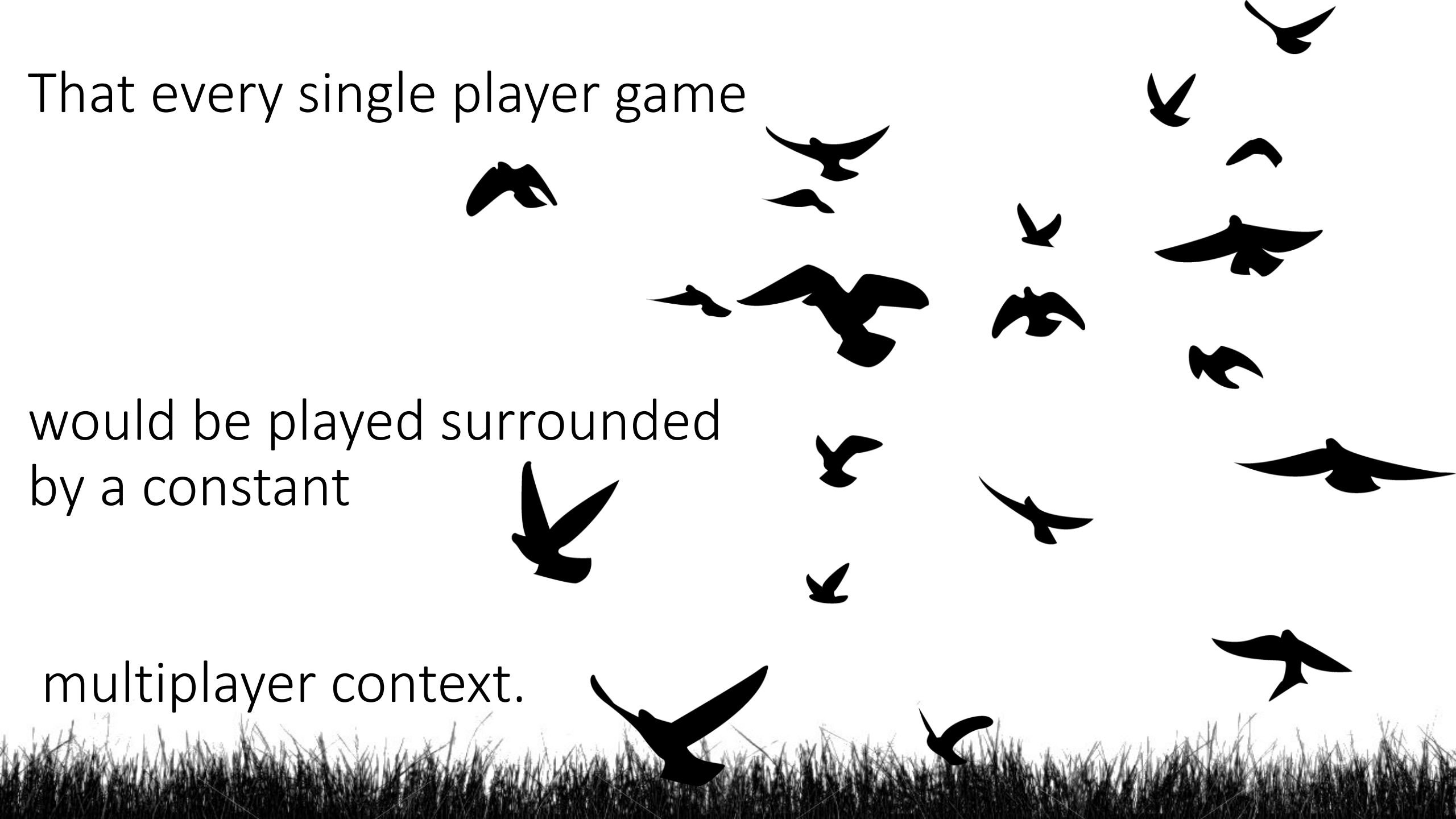
The image features a black and white silhouette of a flock of birds in flight against a white background. The birds are scattered across the upper two-thirds of the frame, with some in the top left, others in the center, and a few in the bottom right. At the very bottom of the image, there is a dense, dark silhouette of tall grass or reeds, creating a horizon line. The overall composition is minimalist and evocative.

Long ago, I said that
single player gaming
was dead...

That every single player game

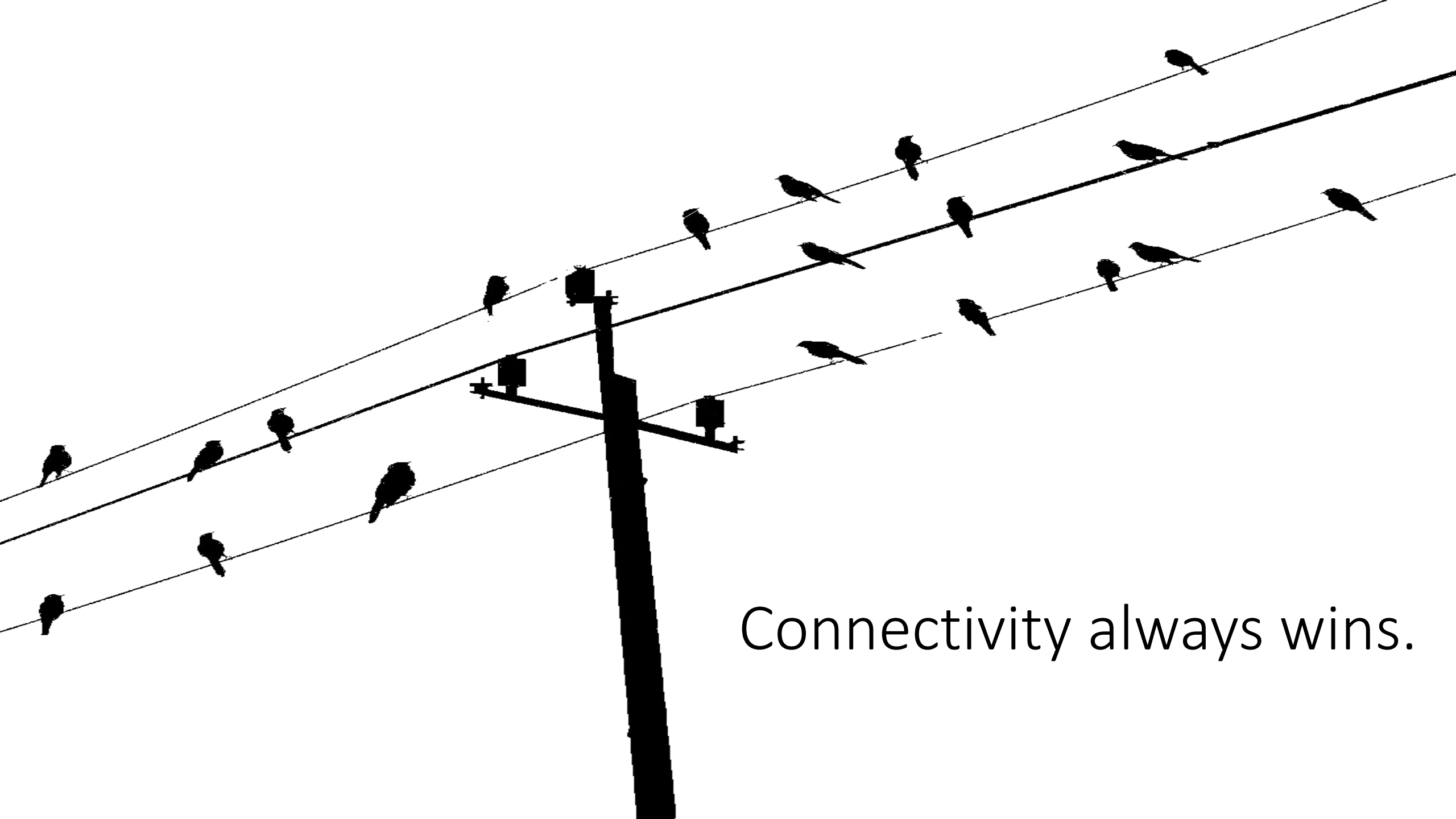
would be played surrounded
by a constant

multiplayer context.





Today, you can't play a single player game on console without getting prompted by things your friends are doing, messages and popups and challenges.



Connectivity always wins.



There has been a
long history of
connected games
that have always
had a dream:
pointing towards
huge immersive
fantastical worlds.

But we know now that concurrency is an issue,
that getting people together is an issue; people
want their entertainment in five minute blocks,
time snatched while on the bus, while standing in
line.



In this new world, MMOs look hopelessly niche, too demanding of time and effort.



The obvious answer mobile has already arrived at
is the asynchronous game: back to taking turns,
more or less!



Funny enough, there had been a neglected genre of game competing with the MMOs, the PHP-based strategy web game.



Today we see Clash of Clans and its children:
games that exploit that social connectivity.



But it's worth realizing
that the MMO model had
a lot more lessons than
immersion.

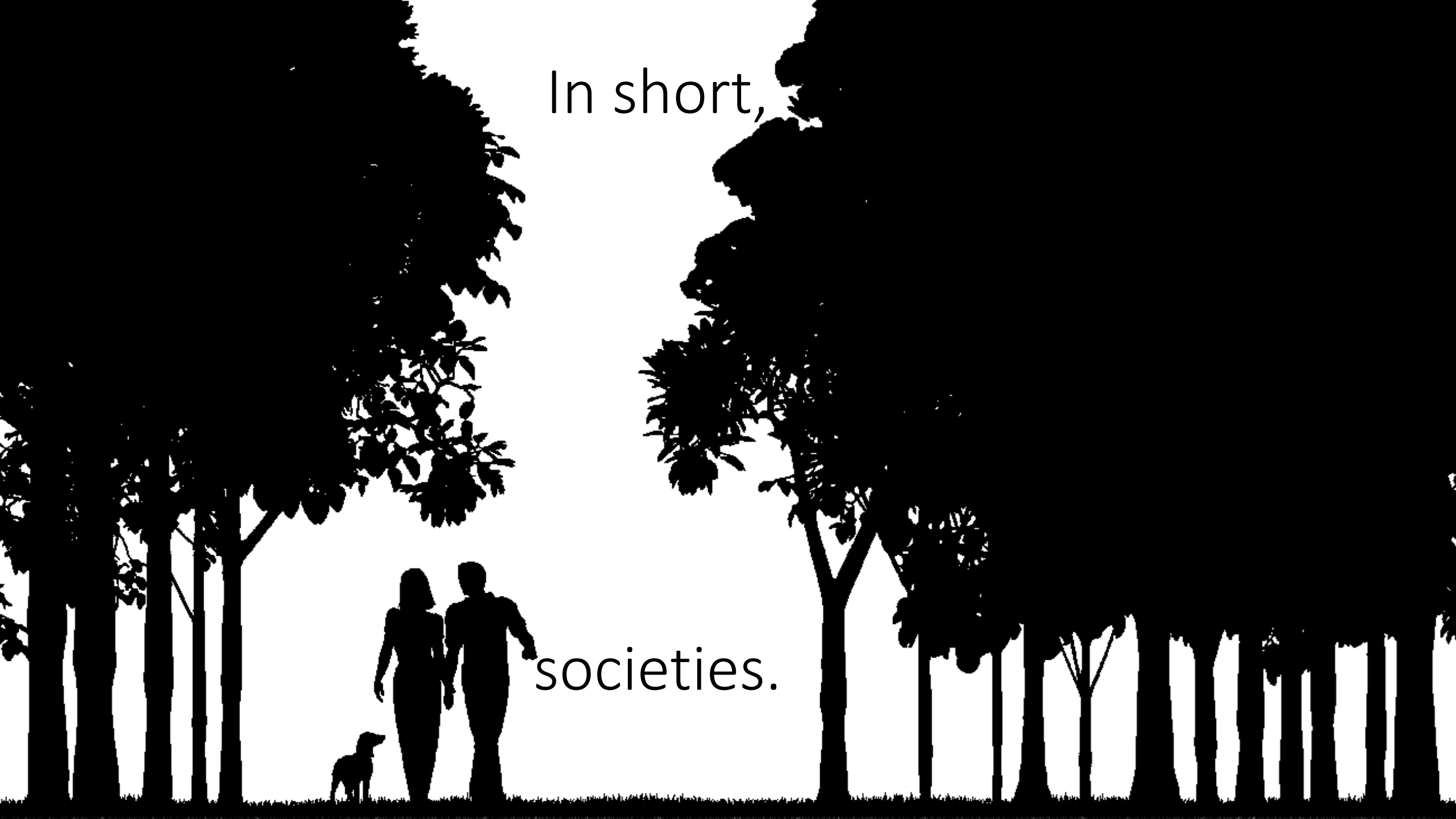


Games as a service
Social networking
Community management
Politics
Economies
User created content



In short,

societies.



Systems that unlock enormous retention and value and create games that run for decades.



As exemplified by the last great MMO to be
created: Minecraft.



Mobile still has a lot of that to explore.



Right now all of those people chasing VR
– where do you think they are going to
end up?



It is still a ways off. Everyone is too focused the rendering, the display, the glasses and the field of view, to realize that the real challenge here is the backend,





The servers that hold our mirror worlds and our
fictional game layers overlaid upon reality,

A high-contrast black and white image featuring silhouettes of birds perched on horizontal power lines. On the left, a palm tree with several fronds is visible. In the bottom right corner, two birds are perched on a diagonal wire. The text is centered on the right side of the image.

The game database that
holds the Internet of
Things you Can Play With.

There is no going backward on this; what made mobile work was that it was pervasive.



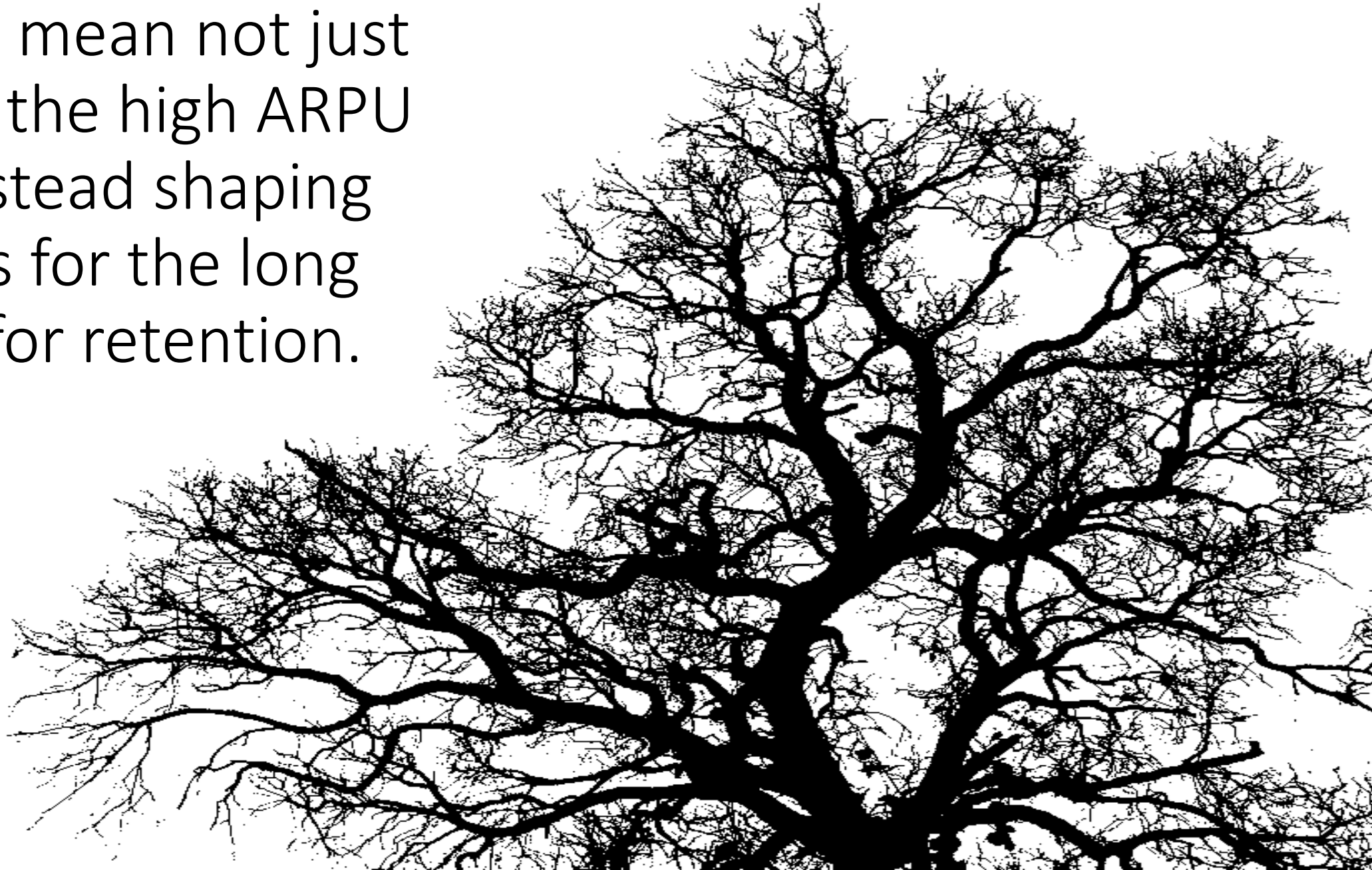
We are headed towards the pervasive game.



And you in this room, because you are here, in this city at this time in history, are the ones who have the choice, the chance, to shape that.



It might mean not just chasing the high ARPU but instead shaping games for the long haul, for retention.





Making the investment that
changes your customers from
mere players to community
members.





It matters, because as we all know, that shift will come again, the forest will get dark and scary and nothing new will be able to grow.

You need that tribe that is loyal to you, that has faith in you, that is the society you built.



Because to survive the darkness, you need those people to come with you, to follow you, blinking and amazed, into the light.

