# Chapter 3: Scenes

**Written Assignments**

1. Choose a game that you've played recently or are familiar with, and describe the most important verbs in the game, with a focus on how the game develops these verbs. How is each of these verbs introduced to the player? How does the player learn to use the verb? How does the verb develop: are there moments in the game where the player has to use the verb more carefully, with precise timing or more nuanced decision-making? What about combinations of verbs: when and how does the player learn about or experiment with using verbs together, and what role does each verb play in shaping the player's experience?

2. Choose a game to play, and play through at least one scene of the game. If the scenes are short, or if you're not sure where one scene ends and the next begins, play for at least fifteen or twenty minutes. Next, write about your experiences during play: what happened? What was your experience of the shape of the scene: wide-open, with lots of room for many choices? Narrow, with crucial moments of decision and pressure? Was there a climax or a twist to your experience, and what aspects of the game created these moments? What do you think the purpose of this scene was, in the context of the rest of the game? Describe what the most important or interesting choice you made was, and talk about how it affected your experience.

3. Think about a game you've played recently, or one that's especially beloved or memorable for you. Think about a sequence of scenes from this game, and play it again if you need to (or watch a video of someone playing, if available). Next, draw what you think the shape of this scene might look like if it was represented by lines on paper, with the scene taking shape and changing from left to right, representing the player's experience over time. (Re-read the Discussion Activities at the end of Chapter 2, as well as the section on Shape and Pacing, if you're not sure how to think about this.) Exchange drawings with another classmate, without telling each other what game you were thinking about during drawing, and think about the shape they've drawn for you. In writing, describe a scene in a game that could fit this shape: it could be any kind of game, since you probably won't be able to guess the exact game your partner was thinking of! Describe what happens as the shape changes, and the kinds of decisions the player is faced with. Finally, share what you've written and reveal the games that originally inspired the drawings.

**Project Ideas**

1. Play some games made with *Knytt Stories*, the game-creation tool described at the end of Chapter 2. These could be games created in your class, or one of the many free *Knytt Stories* games you can find online. Pick one of your favorite moments from playing, and make some notes on exactly what elements of *Knytt Stories* (objects, power-ups, enemies, save points, foreground and background decorations, etc.) were used to help create that moment. Next, make your own story with the editor, and see if you can do all of the following:
    * Introduce the elements that the player needs to understand in order to create the kind of moment that you picked; this might be one or two objects, or it could involve multiple objects and the dynamic interactions between them and the avatar.

- Create a moment of inversion or unexpected change in your story; do something surprising that the player doesn't expect, where the shape of the game turns around or alters.
- Create a scene that uses layering of objects to produce a more complex situation where different visual elements or object behaviors overlap and intersect.

2. Choose a game that you enjoy or know a lot about. Evaluate how much elements of chance play a role in this game—how much does randomness determine the outcome? Is the game you chose a highly random game (*Chutes & Ladders*) or a game with no randomness (chess) or somewhere in between (poker)? (If the answer seems really unclear, try the same exercise with a different game.)

   Now, design a new version of the game you chose, but adjust how much randomness is involved. If you picked a highly random game, create some new rules that decide random events in the game in a less random way: instead of rolling a die, what if players were required to use skill instead? If you picked a game with very little or no randomness, introduce or change some rules so that more randomness is involved: this could involve a random number generator for digital games, or elements like dice and drawing cards for an analog game. If your game is in the middle, choose either of the above approaches. What do you think of the modified version of the game you've created? Is it more fun or less fun? Is it still practical to play? If you decide it's unplayable or no longer fun, make some more drastic changes to see if you can fix the problem without going back to the game's original level of randomness. What else do you have to change to make the new amount of randomness work?

3. As a second project after creating scenes or entire stories with a tool like *Knytt Stories*, play another student's game and take notes on the shape of the scene or scenes, what you thought worked well or less well, how difficult various moments in the game were, and what kinds of design decisions you might do differently. Make a copy of the game you just played, and make the changes you described in your notes, creating your own version of their game. Finally, have a third student play both games, and discuss the pros and cons of each version as a group.