

# Connecting Worlds



MARIO  
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● × 00

WORLD  
1-1

TIME

WORLD 1-1

 × 3

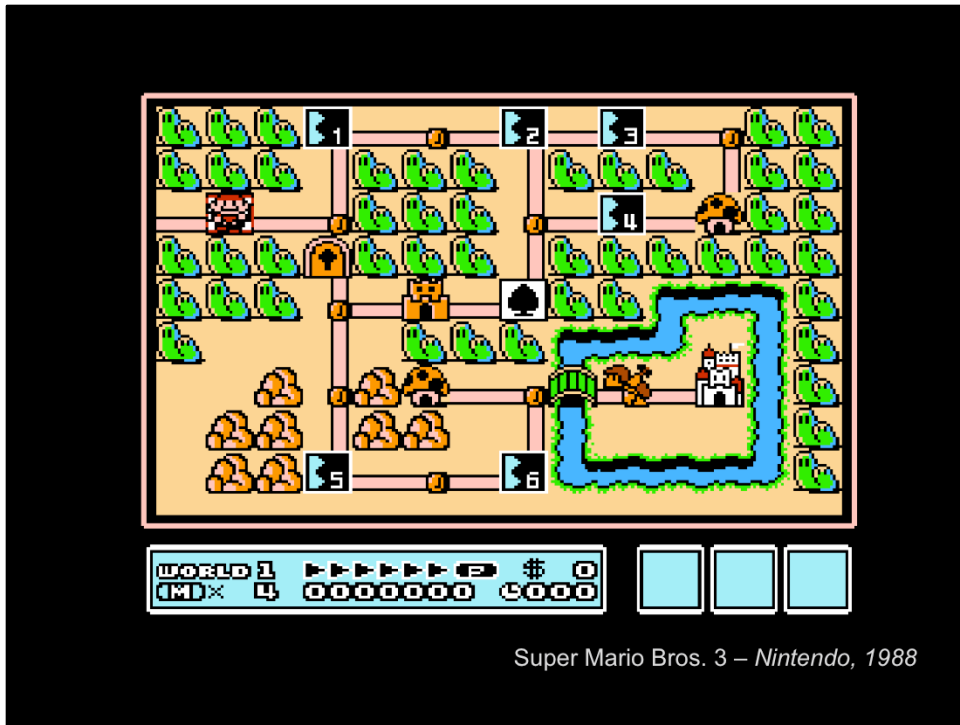
INTRODUCTION



Super Mario Bros. does not have a world map  
One level follows the other  
No means to break out of the strict linearity



This is the closest thing to a world map in *Super Mario Bros.*  
But Warp Zones hardly qualify as maps  
Selection capabilities are limited  
Warp zones are only accessible as hidden areas in certain levels  
-> More cheat codes than gameplay feature



Super Mario Bros. 3 – Nintendo, 1988

- Super Mario Bros. 3 is the first Mario game with a proper world map
- Levels can be played out-of-order
- Player progress is visible on the world map
- Items can be used on the map
- Different locations besides normal levels are available

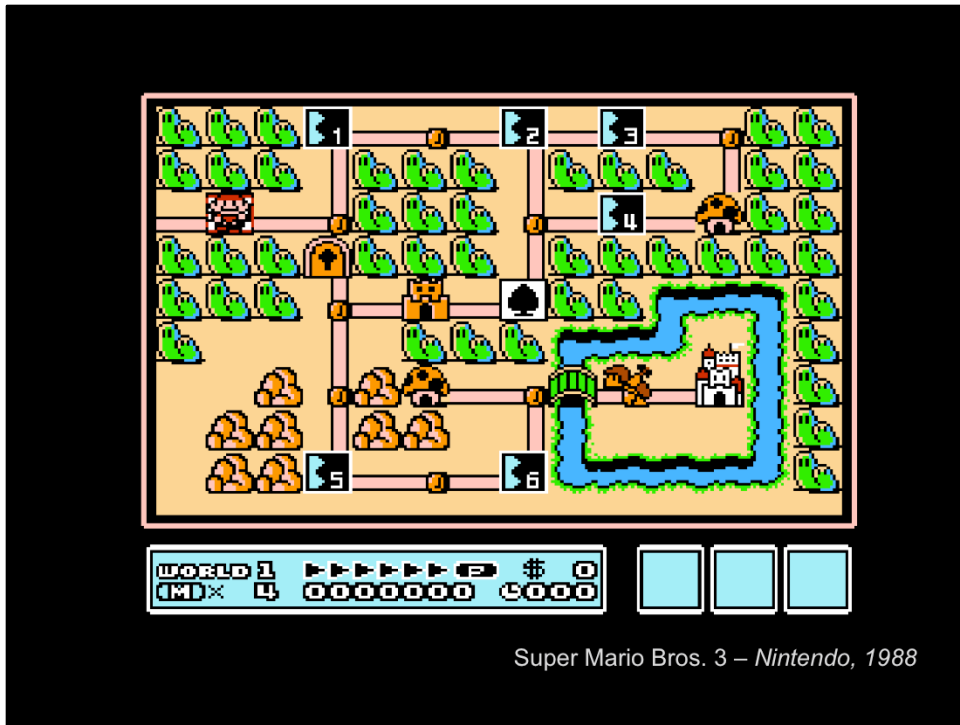




Super Mario Bros. 3 – Nintendo, 1988

Most people don't.

This is what it looks like.



Super Mario Bros. 3 – Nintendo, 1988

There is no incentive to ever visit 1-4:  
World can be beaten without visiting either 1-3 or 1-4  
The guarded area houses a bonus room and the boss retreats here if not  
beaten on first try  
However, it is enough to beat 1-3 to open the area, leaving no reason to ever  
visit the (arguably more difficult) 1-4



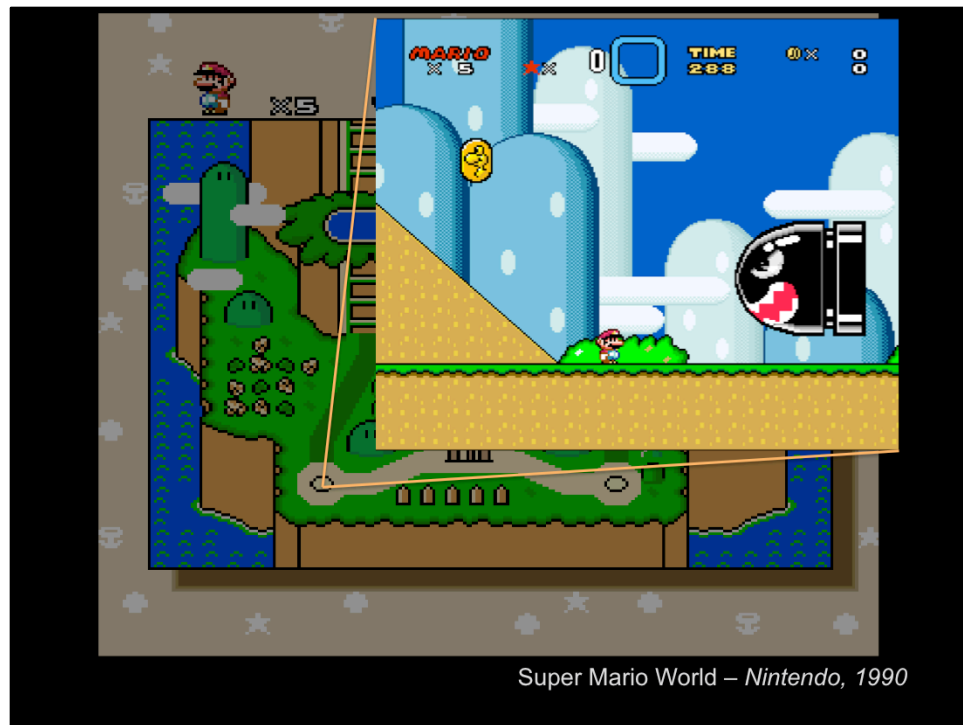


*Super Mario World* addresses the problem.  
At the very beginning of the game the player is given a choice to walk either left or right  
Left is a dead-end, but unlike SMB3, it is a rewarding one



Super Mario World – Nintendo, 1990

Same question as before: Who remembers *Yoshi's Island 1*?



Super Mario World – Nintendo, 1990

Arguably one of the most iconic levels of the whole game.

So what is so different about SMW world map that avoids the level from being shut off?



Super Mario World – Nintendo, 1990

A couple of clues:

- We start in the middle between two levels, the arrows above Yoshi's House indicating that either way is fine to proceed
- The right level is labeled *Yoshi's Island 2*, indicating that we skipped something if we go here first
- Beating the left level opens a path to...



Super Mario World – Nintendo, 1990

...Yellow Switch Palace, one of the most powerful upgrades in the game.



Also, from up here we get a glance of the full world map without having to beat all of world 1

This is a powerful moment in the game, as it presents the full scale of the adventure to the player for the first time



The initial branch in the map of World 1 teaches the player an important lesson:

The quickest path is not always the best!

SMW is above all else a game about *exploration*

It is important that the player realizes early on that they are encouraged to look for alternative paths

Unlike SMB3, levels are not locked after beating them. Players are encouraged to revisit levels and look for secrets



Super Mario 64 – Nintendo, 1996

In *Super Mario 64* the world map is a level just like any other

More than in any other Mario game before, the player is encouraged to explore the world

You move around freely like in a normal level, you even have a health bar and can die





And just like any other level, the world map comes with its challenges

There are coins to collect and doors to unlock, the environment can be transformed and many puzzles and secrets are hidden throughout the castle

The distinction between the game levels and the world level is no longer clear



With each new generation, the player gains additional freedom to move around in the game

The world maps reflect this by encouraging the player to explore the world on their own



The simplest form of functionality provided by a world map is the selection of worlds.

In many games the world map is indeed nothing more than a pretty menu for selecting which part to play next.



Unlike the Mario games, *Yoshi's Island* uses a completely linear world map, allowing for no interaction besides selecting a level

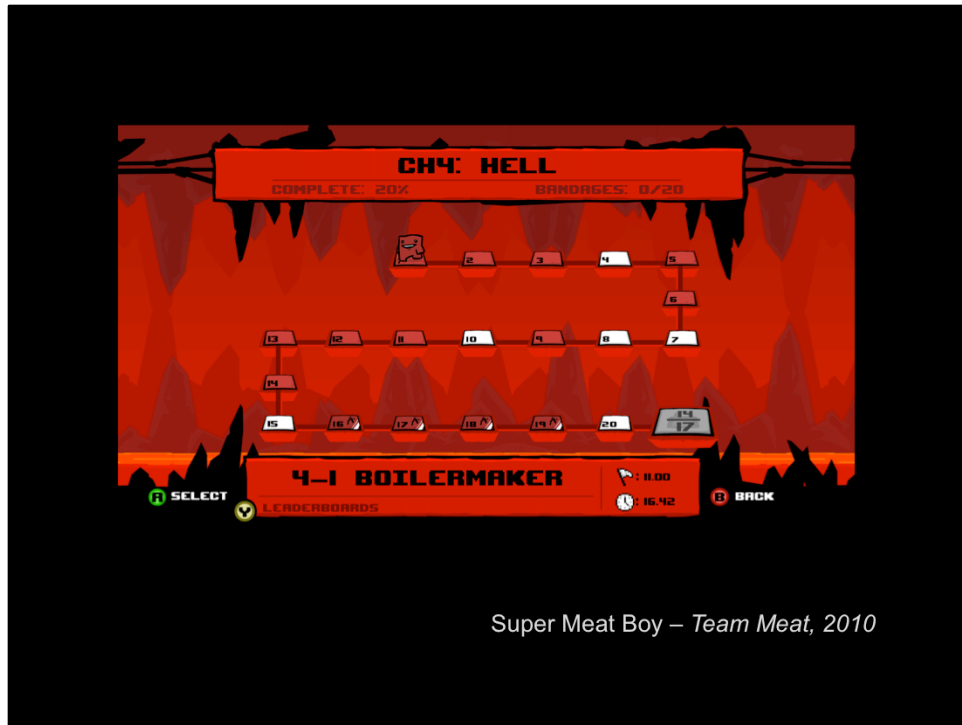
Why doesn't it follow the same trend towards more openness as Miyamoto's other games?



Because unlike Mario World, *Yoshi's Island* is not about exploration

Its replay value comes from collecting bonus items

The world map is streamlined to support this: Tracking which items have been collected in each world is the primary purpose.



Super Meat Boy – *Team Meat*, 2010

A modern day equivalent is *Super Meat Boy*.

Again the map's primary purpose is to track how well the player did on each level

*Other examples for games where menu-like hubs are appropriate?*



The one thing that every good world map should provide:

Set the mood for what is to come



Loading screens are the simplest form of this

They give a first glimpse of what lies ahead

This is the video game equivalent of an Establishing Shot in film

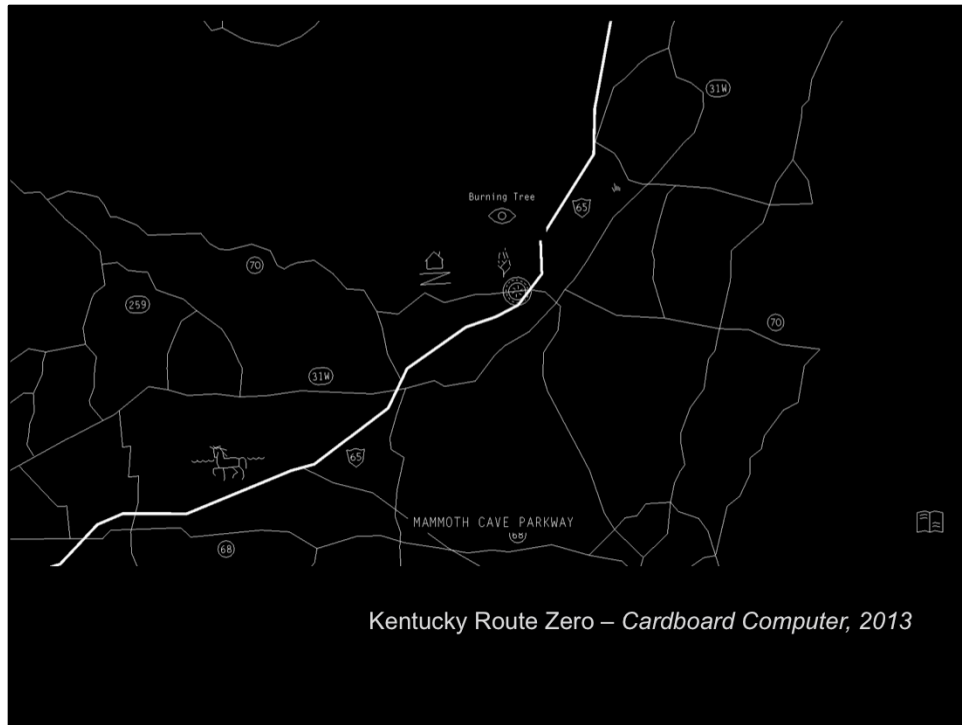




Titan Souls – *Acid Nerve*, 2015

World maps allow for interaction

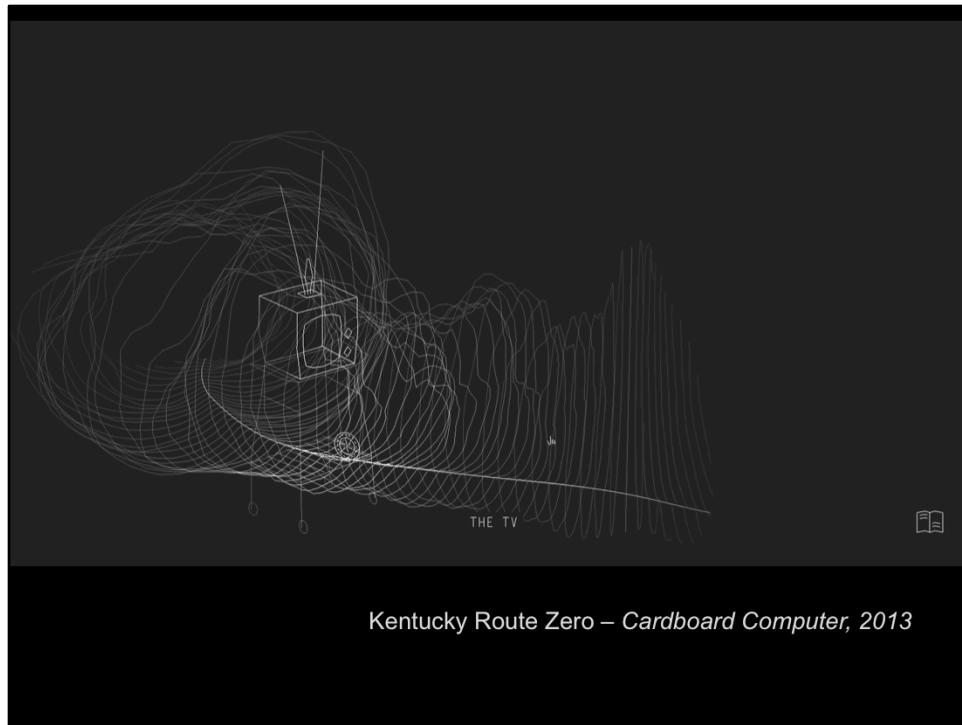
Where would you go and why? What would you expect to find in the different areas reachable from here?



KRZ offers two very different maps, reflecting the nature of the worlds that they represent

The overworld map is a minimalist's interpretation of a roadmap

Some of the landmarks are a bit weird, but nothing compared to...



### The Zero

A Lynchian underground highway that is one big circle surrounded by bizarre landmarks

The landmarks change with every round and with every change in direction

Reflects the surreal quality of the locations it connects



*Braid* provides a smooth transition from title screen to world map to levels

The extinguishing of the flames that form the title provides one of the most memorable moments of the game

And sets the tone for everything that follows

*Other examples for mood setting through menus?*



Spelunky – Derek Yu, 2009

Spelunky provides a menu that controls just like the rest of the game maintaining at all times the theme of an explorer in an underground cave



Even complex interactions like resetting the save game are modeled through ingame mechanics



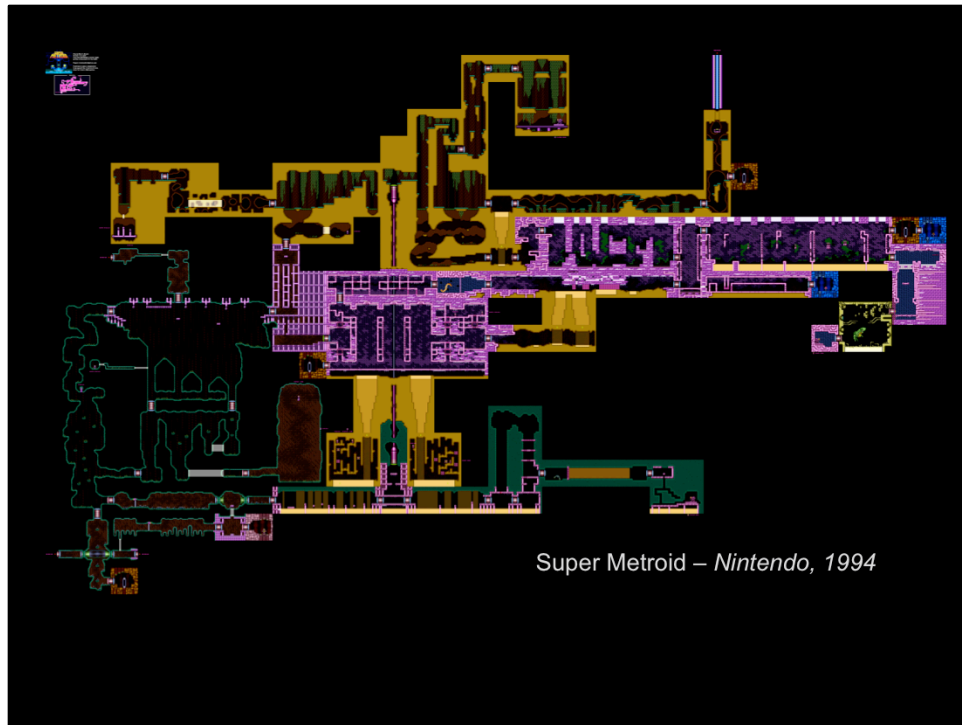
Traditional Hub worlds are simply structured:

One area that provides access to a set of secluded play areas



Where is the Hub?



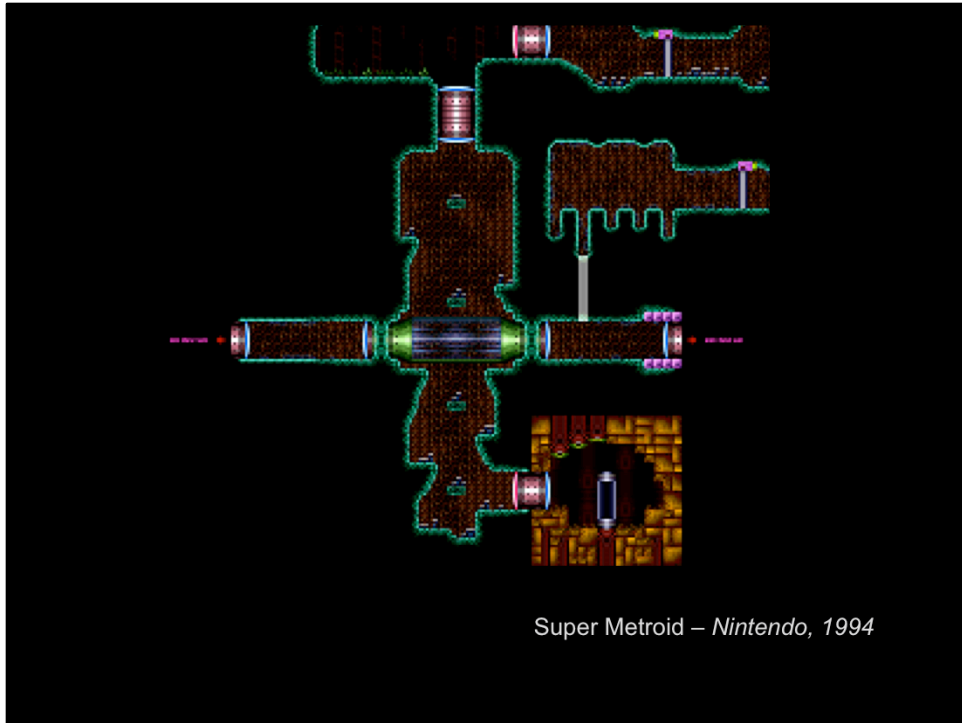


Metroidvanias are often masterful examples for connecting different areas seamlessly without using a distinctive hub

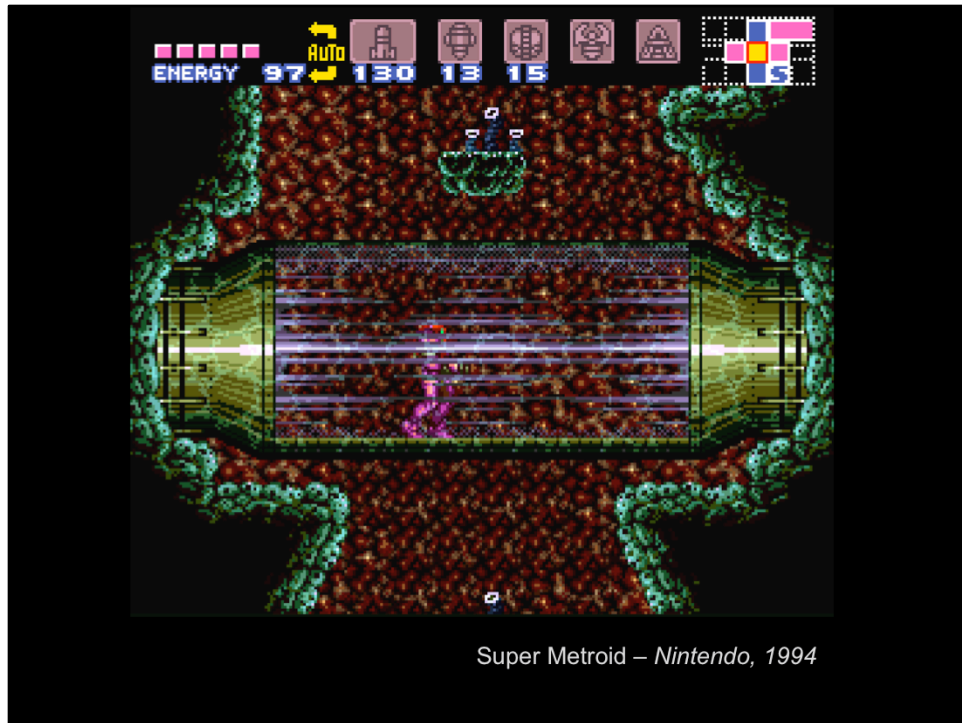
Maridia offers multiple entry points from different adjacent areas

Areas are guarded by colored gates that can be opened by the matching colored weapon

Nonlinear level design that requires backtracking



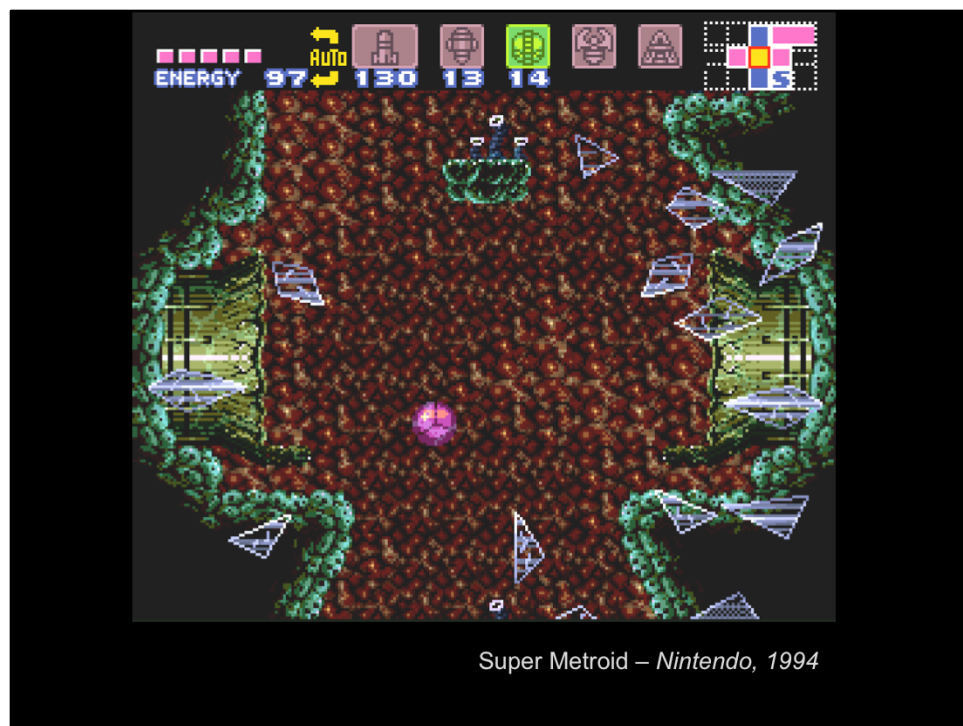
A remarkable part of Maridia is the tube section



Super Metroid – Nintendo, 1994

It can be visited early on from Brinstar and it is heavily foreshadowed that there is more to it than meets the eye

Once the player obtains the Power Bomb much later in the game, the tube can be cracked



Super Metroid – Nintendo, 1994

Revealing an alternative entry to Maridia

This is powerful because it presents a familiar location in a surprising new way

It also emphasizes the notion of a single organic world instead of an artificial hub



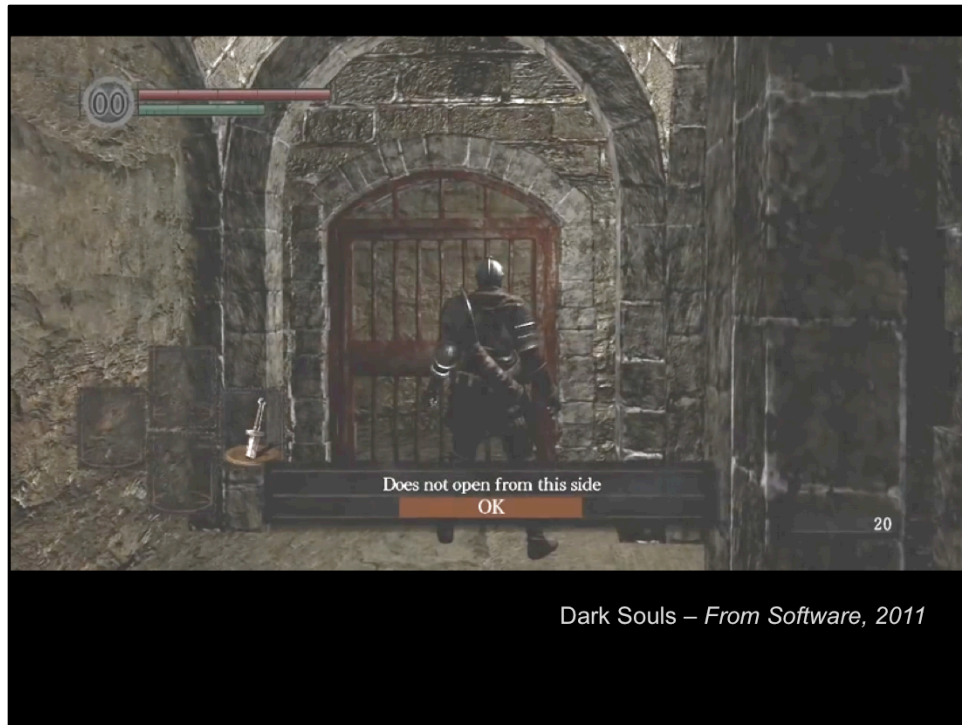
Ico – Team Ico, 2001

*Ico* is set in a large magical castle that can be fully explored.

One-way doors serve as shortcuts to bypass already visited areas

The game is arranged in a circular fashion. In the end, after traversing the whole castle the player again ends up in the room where they started

But they now see it with different eyes




*Dark Souls* also blends together its different worlds

Shortcuts are provided mostly by locked doors that only open from one side or require a key

Areas are visible from the outside and often heavily foreshadowed

The sense of connectedness is very prominent

MARIO  
999999

 x 99

WORLD  
1-5

TIME

WORLD 1-5

 x 3

CASE STUDY:

THE TALOS PRINCIPLE



Actual puzzles are embedded in bigger maps but not fully secluded

Some puzzles deliberately require breaking the separation between areas





The game takes great care of tracking the player's progress

Solved puzzles give color coded sigils

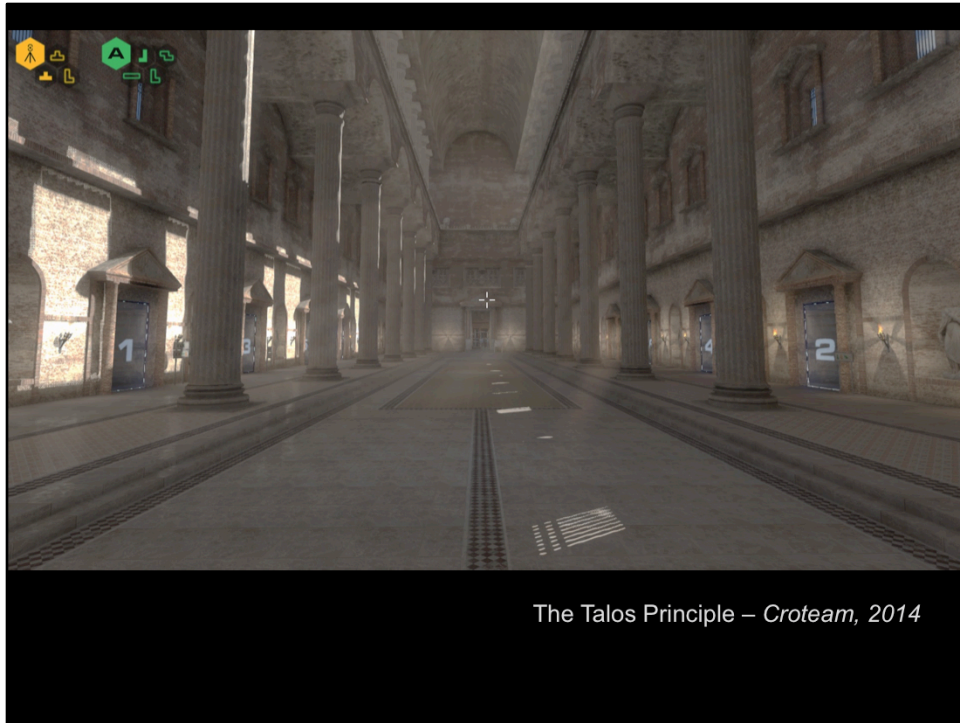
Signposts indicate which puzzles have already been solved

Additional UI elements help keeping track of overall progress



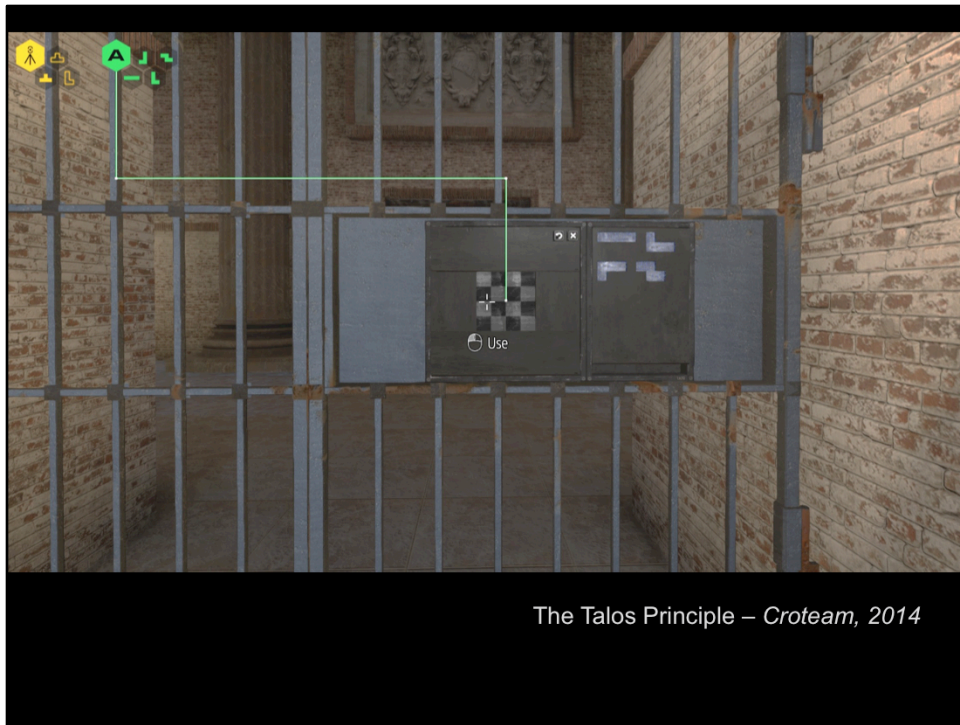
The Talos Principle – Croteam, 2014

Each area offers a central signpost listing all sigils in the area



After the player completes the first number of puzzles they gain access to The Temple, one of three major hub areas

Again the area is littered with signposts



After completing a couple of puzzles from the first two areas, the player can unlock the door to the temple

Note the additional UI guidelines for the gate puzzle

This allows them to enter the central hub

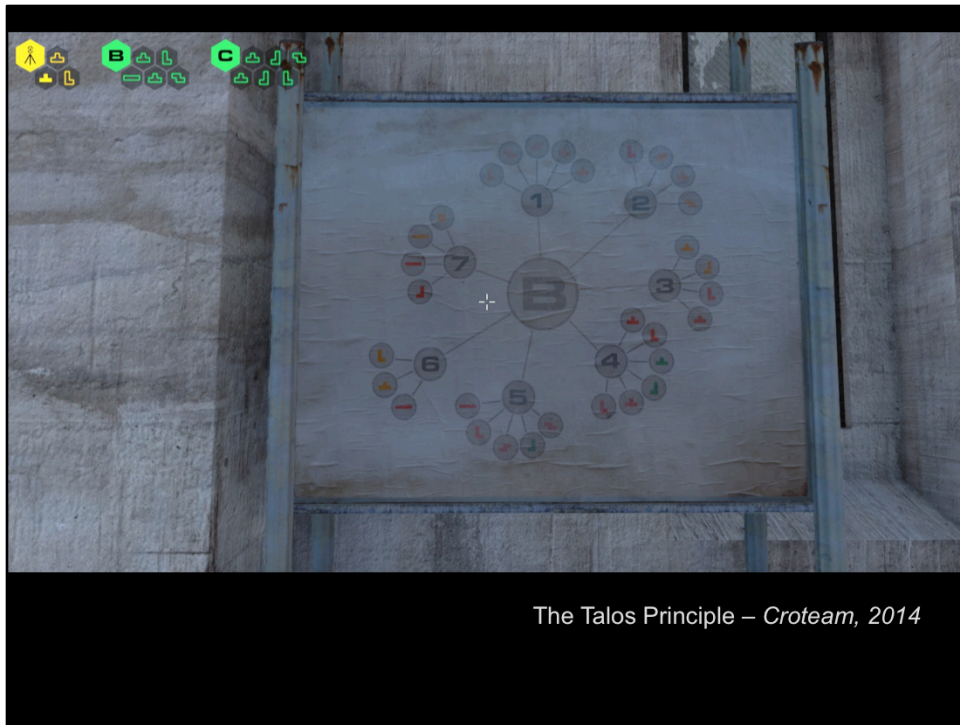


From which the other hub areas can be accessed

Each similar in structure, but different in theme and mood

In the centre is the tower which an NPC declares as off-limits (foreshadowing)

The Hub world contains additional puzzles that require creative thinking to solve



### More signposts

The game really goes to great lengths to ensure that player progress is visible

In other contexts this would feel overly videogame-y but due to Talos' setting in a simulated world

It actually helps emphasizing the story

