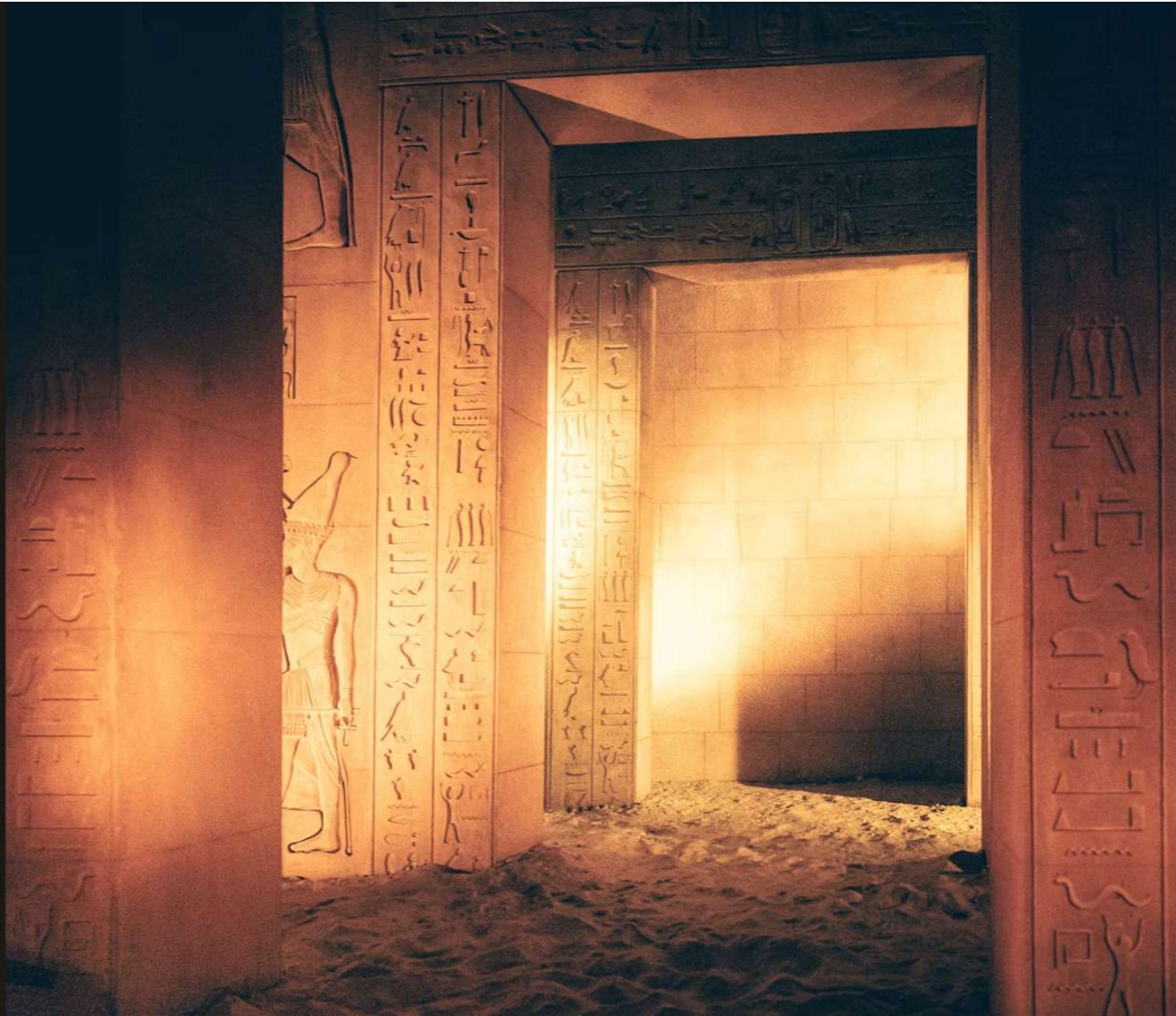


Puzzling Tales

**How storytelling through puzzles
builds better games and happier
customers**

Arcturus — August 2026





	House 1	House 2	House 3	House 4	House 5
Color					
Nationality					
Drink					
Cigar					
Pet					



Puzzles & Story

A Confession





Goals

Plot

Setting

Mood

Tension

What is story?

FEEL

Conflict

Characterization

How is the escape room
format special?

Immersion!



Player Narrative



Player Narrative $\neq$ Plot



Player Narrative ≠ Plot



"Control Room"



Player Narrative ≠ Plot



Player Narrative



Plot....??? (not really)



Player Narrative $\neq$ Plot

What if you don't define the player narrative?
Your players will define it for themselves!

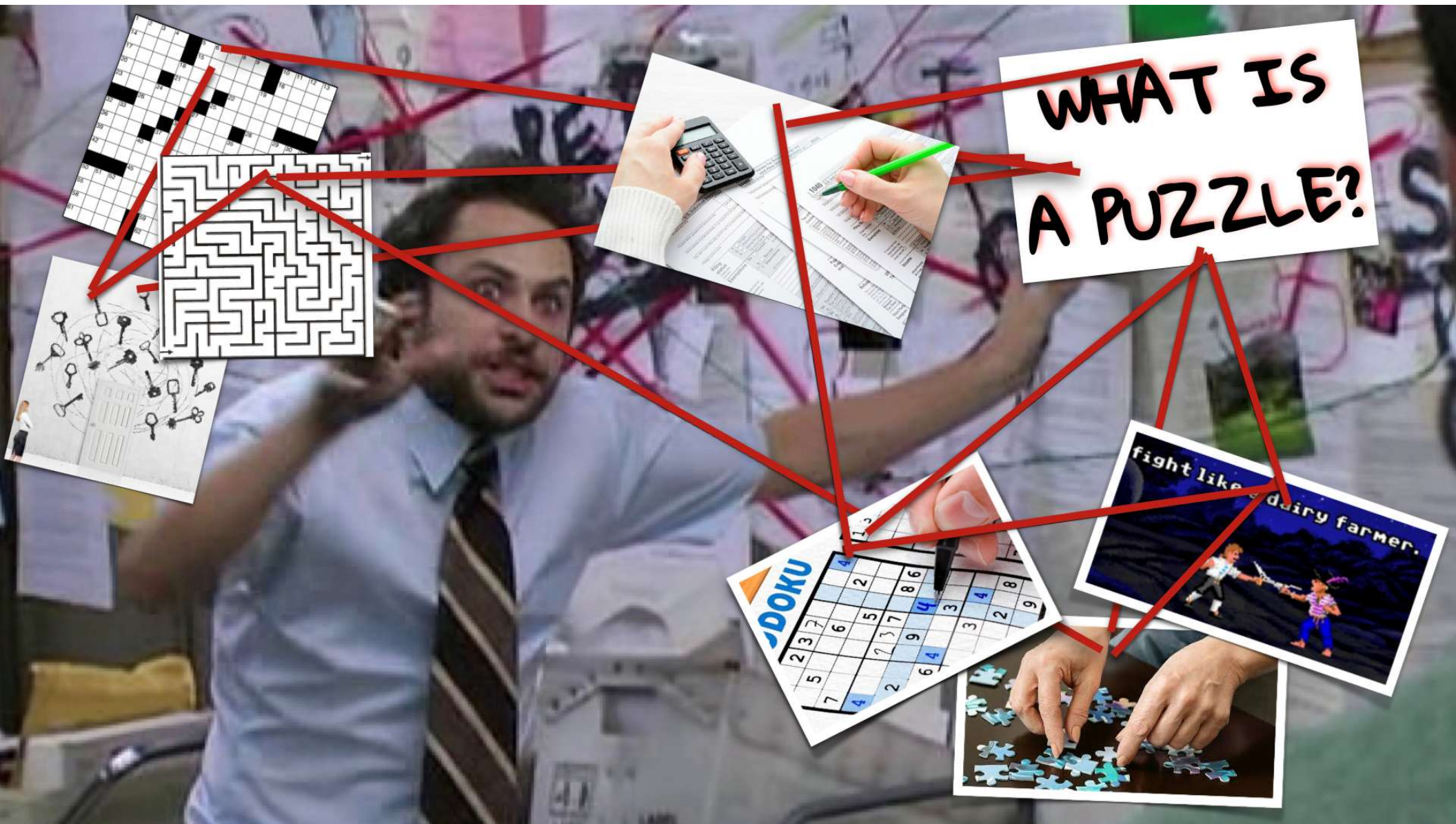
...and you may not like it.



Hey wait, what about the puzzles?

Where do puzzles fit in?





WHAT IS
A PUZZLE?

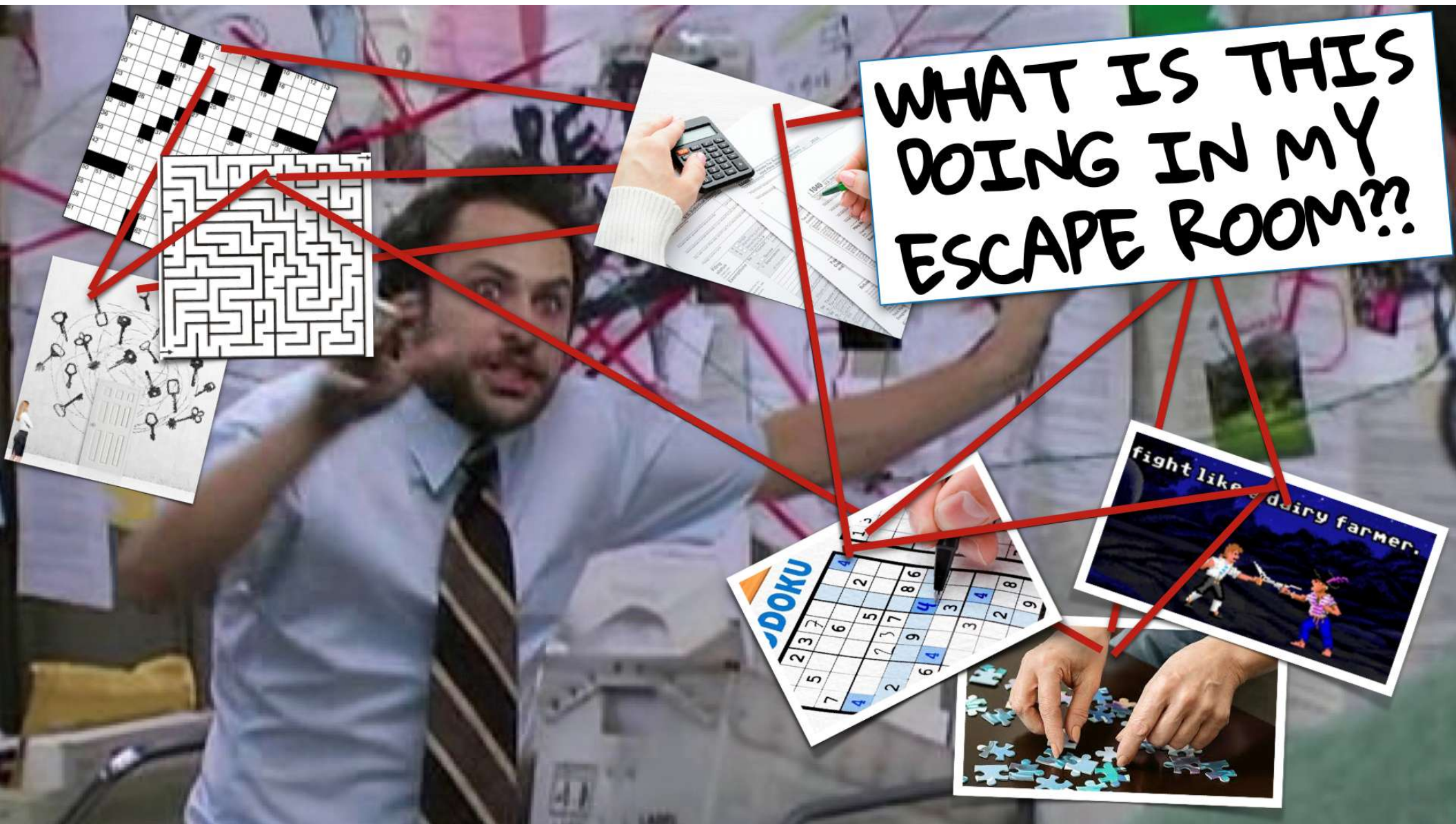
fight like
a dairy farmer.

What is a puzzle?

A miserable little pile of secrets!







WHAT IS THIS
DOING IN MY
ESCAPE ROOM??

fight like
dairy farmer.

Anatomy of a Puzzle

Observation+ Action= Change



Anatomy of a Puzzle



OBSERVE



OBSERVE



ACT



CHANGE



Anatomy of a Puzzle



OBSERVE



ACT



CHANGE



Anatomy of a Puzzle

Puzzles are about **ACTIONS**
that make up the
PLAYER NARRATIVE.



The Stakeout

MIT Mystery Hunt 2025



WHO STOLE THE SHADOW DIAMOND?

Solve the case of
the Shadow Diamond

WHERE IS THE MISSING DIAMOND?

Interview witnesses
to find the diamond

EVENT SCHEDULE

Making Contact
With an Informant
Friday 1/17, 7:00-8:00 PM
La Sala

Tailing a Lead
Saturday 1/18, 10:40-11:25 AM
Lobby 7

Navigating High
Society
Saturday 1/18, 3:00-4:00 PM
Lobby 1

Seeing the Big
Picture
Saturday 1/18, 8:00-9:00 PM
Lobby 1

STRAY LEADS

Unsorted leads
available to solve



















Boring **Dangerous** **Time-Consuming**
Budget **Laws of Physics** **Laws of Society** **Specialized**
Moral Compass

Not all actions are
a good idea!



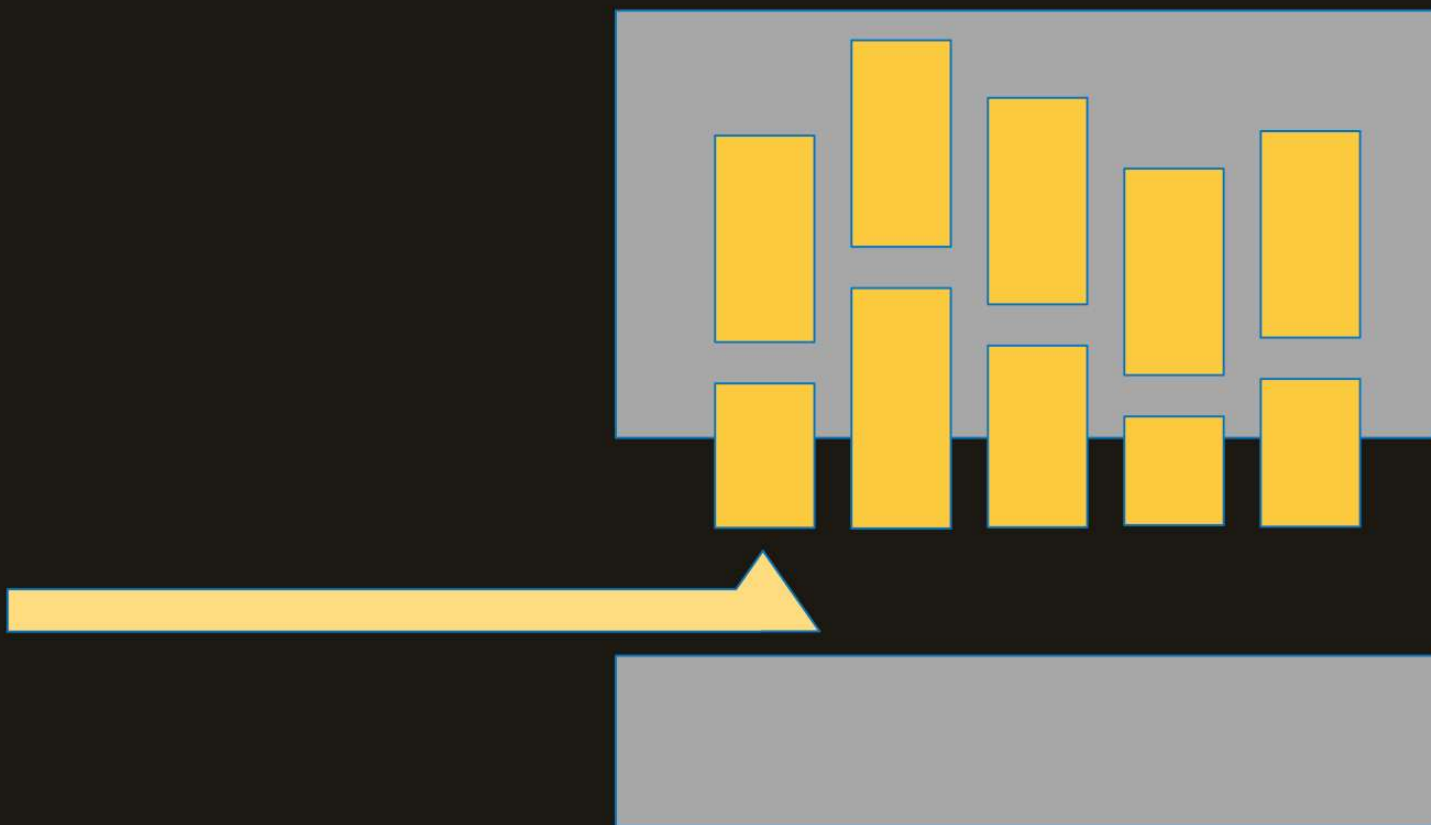
Substitute Other Actions
that

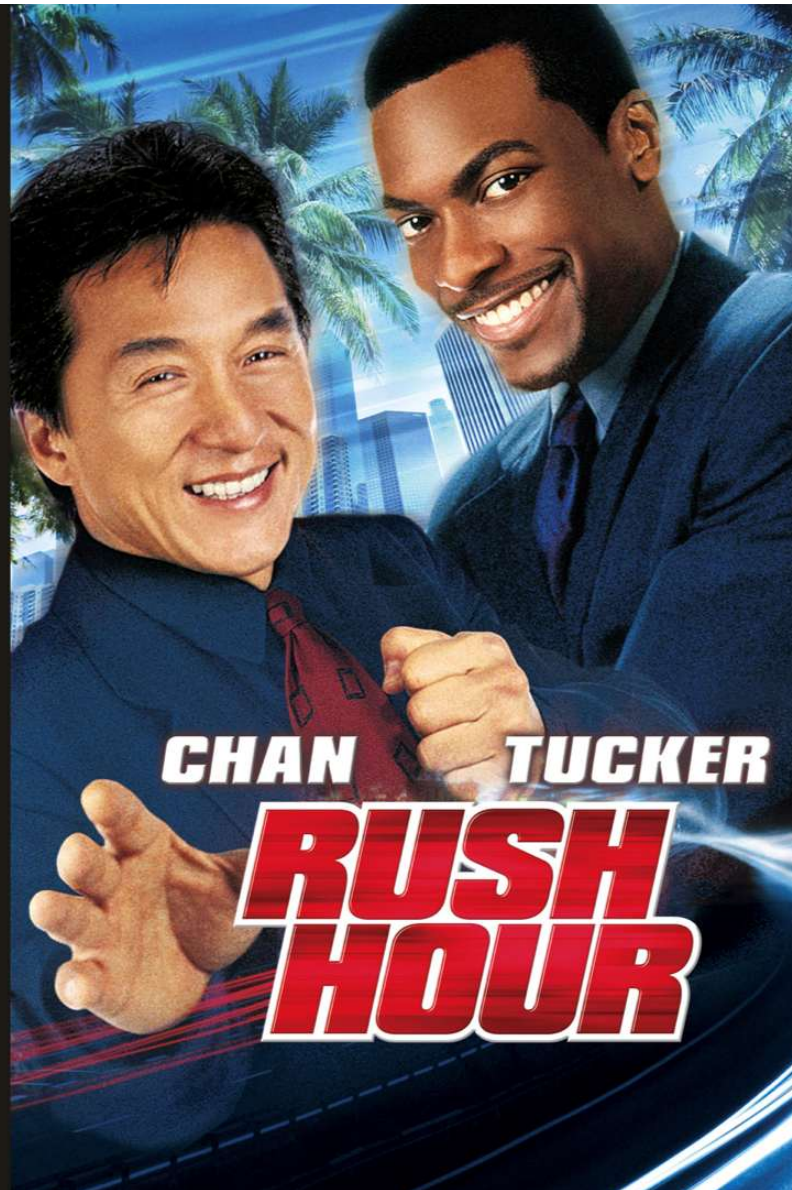
FEEL CORRECT

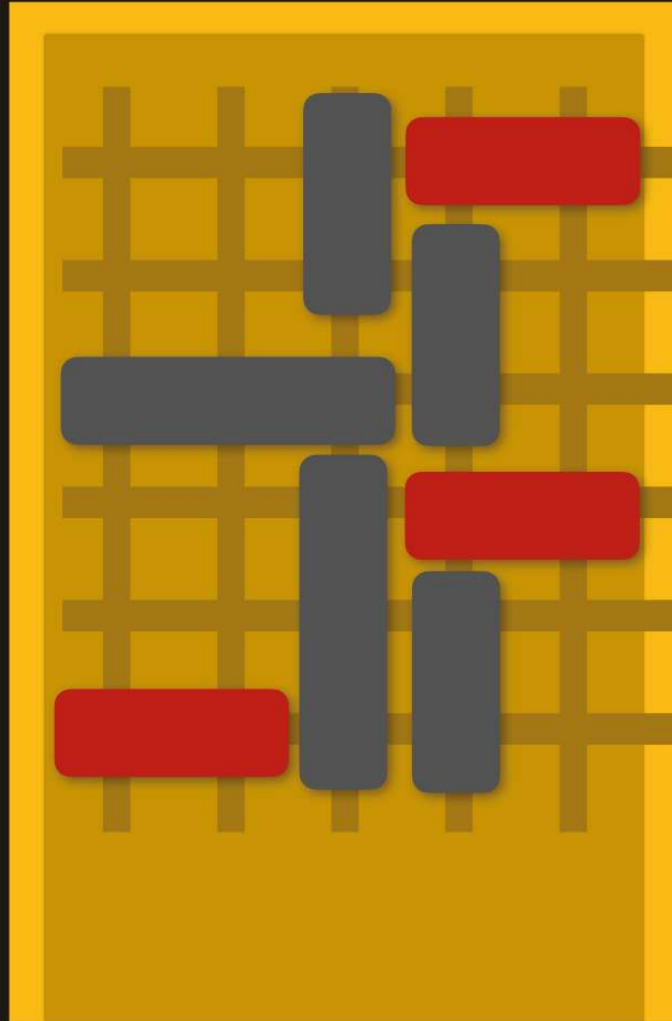
(What does it FEEL LIKE to do X?)

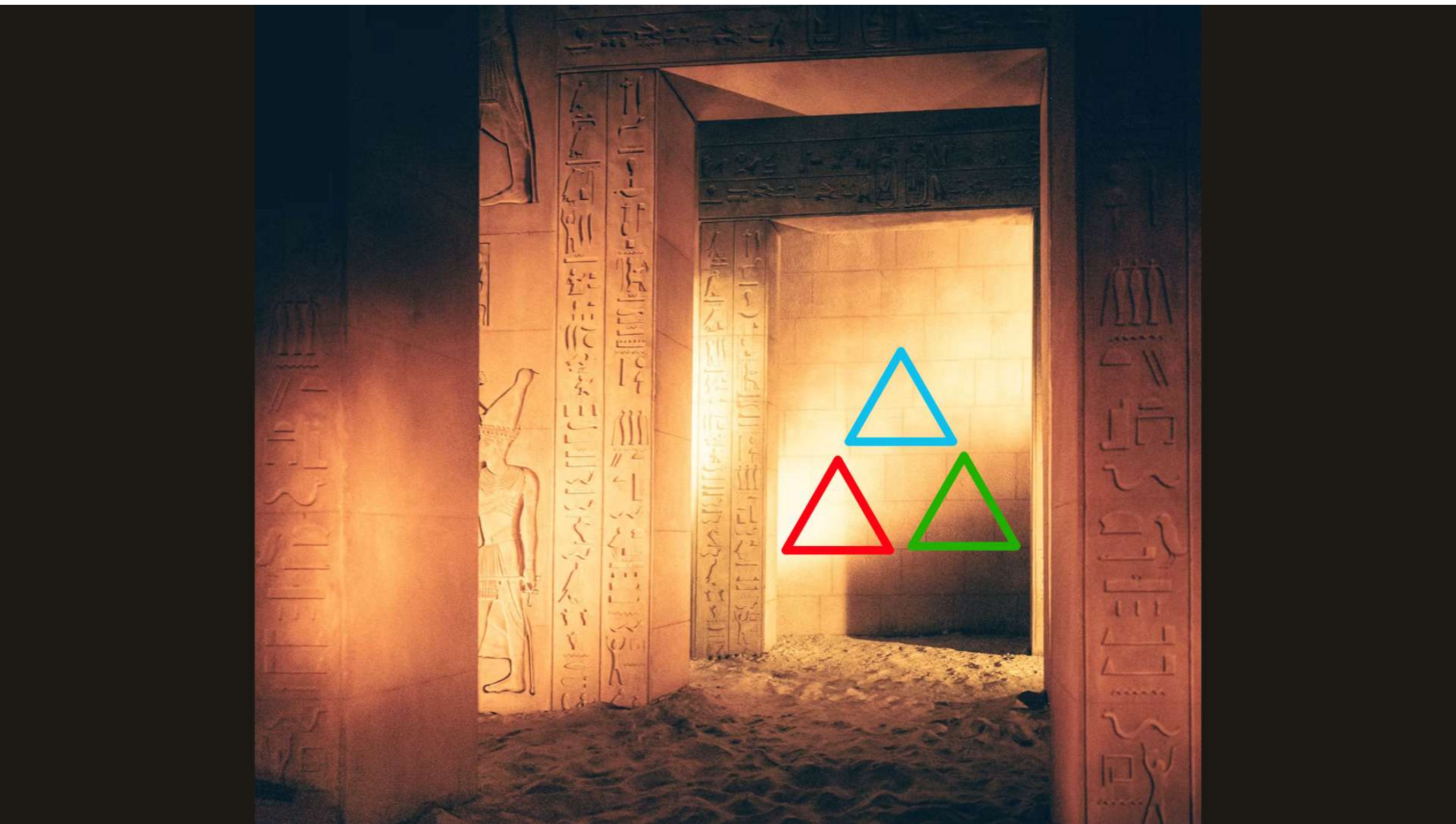












Now what?



Show vs. Tell vs. Do vs. Feel



