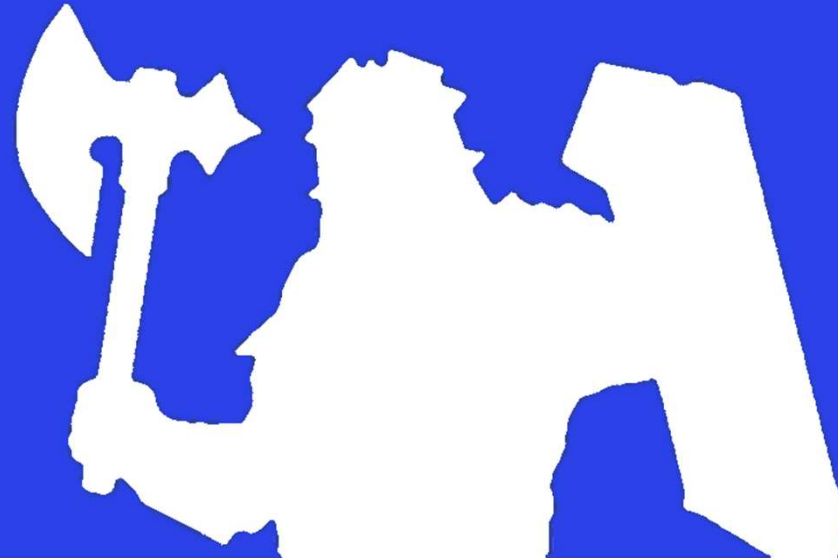


Elegant

ENCOUNTER
DESIGN



Elegant encounter design

Encounters are the motor of your storytelling. The way they are structured contributes the most to your table top experience.

Elegance communicates style and ingenuity. Your encounters should feel different and fresh compared to run-in-the-mill encounters, whatever that comparison point for you is.

The art of design is essential. However, how to design is not as obvious as one may think, especially with elegance and flair.

This is what I hope to help you in this publication to develop: your ability to design elegant encounters.

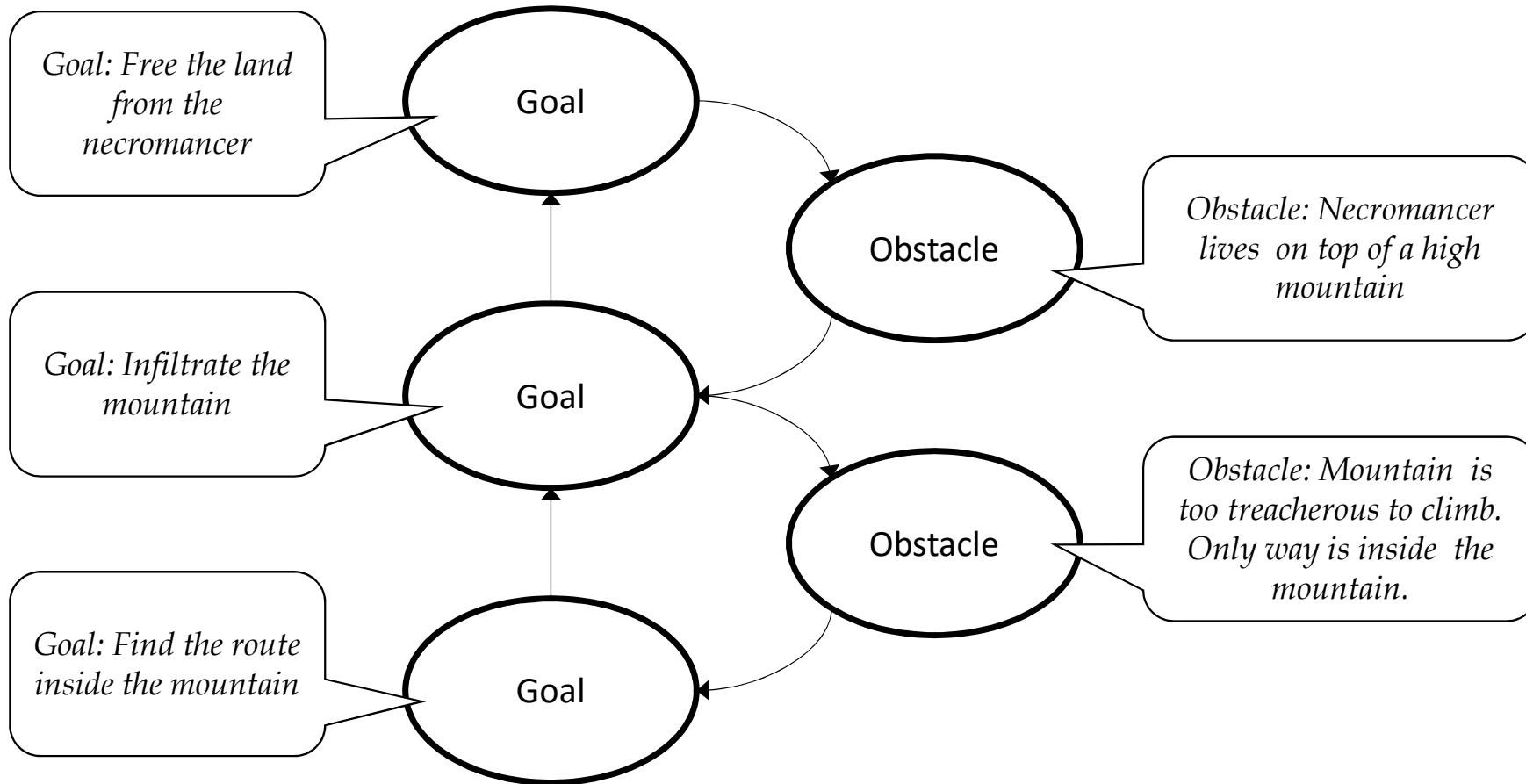
SECTION I: GOALS AND OBSTACLES

Goal and obstacle pairing and chaining

Big goals are tackled in a series of smaller goals, each more difficult to achieve than the previous. Goals represent progress and standing between you and your goal is an obstacle.

Each obstacle is a goal as well on its own right. Overcoming the obstacle is a goal.

This results in a chain of goal-obstacle-goal-obstacle pairs that form the basic structure of the narrative.

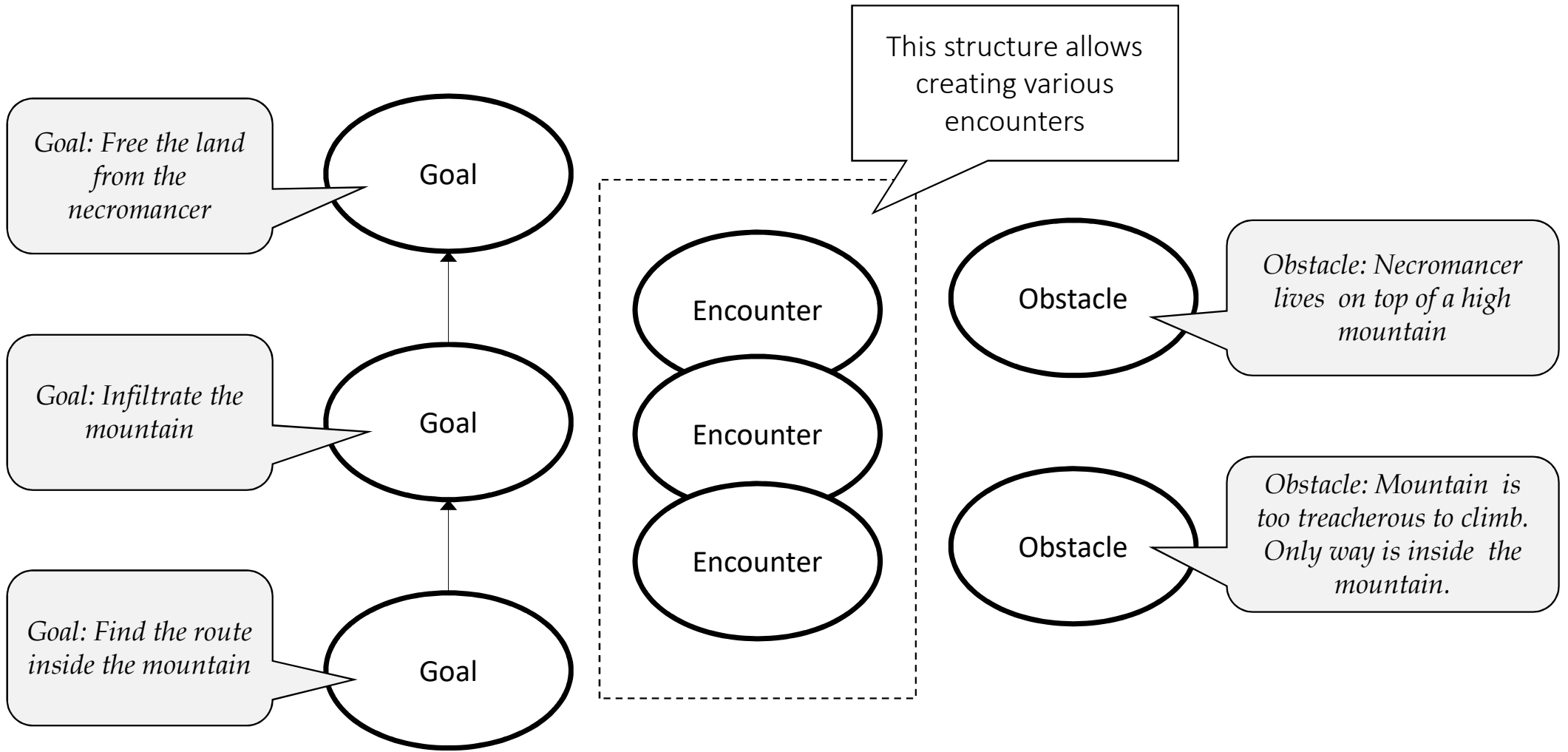


Scenes and encounters spring from goals and obstacles

Goals are the reasons why to get involved. They put the protagonist on the move.

Pursuing a goal and tackling the obstacle it presents is the frame for encounters. All encounters have a link to a goal.

Goal is the guiding principle of an encounter. It explains what different parties are attempting to accomplish and how within the encounter and why they partake in the first place.

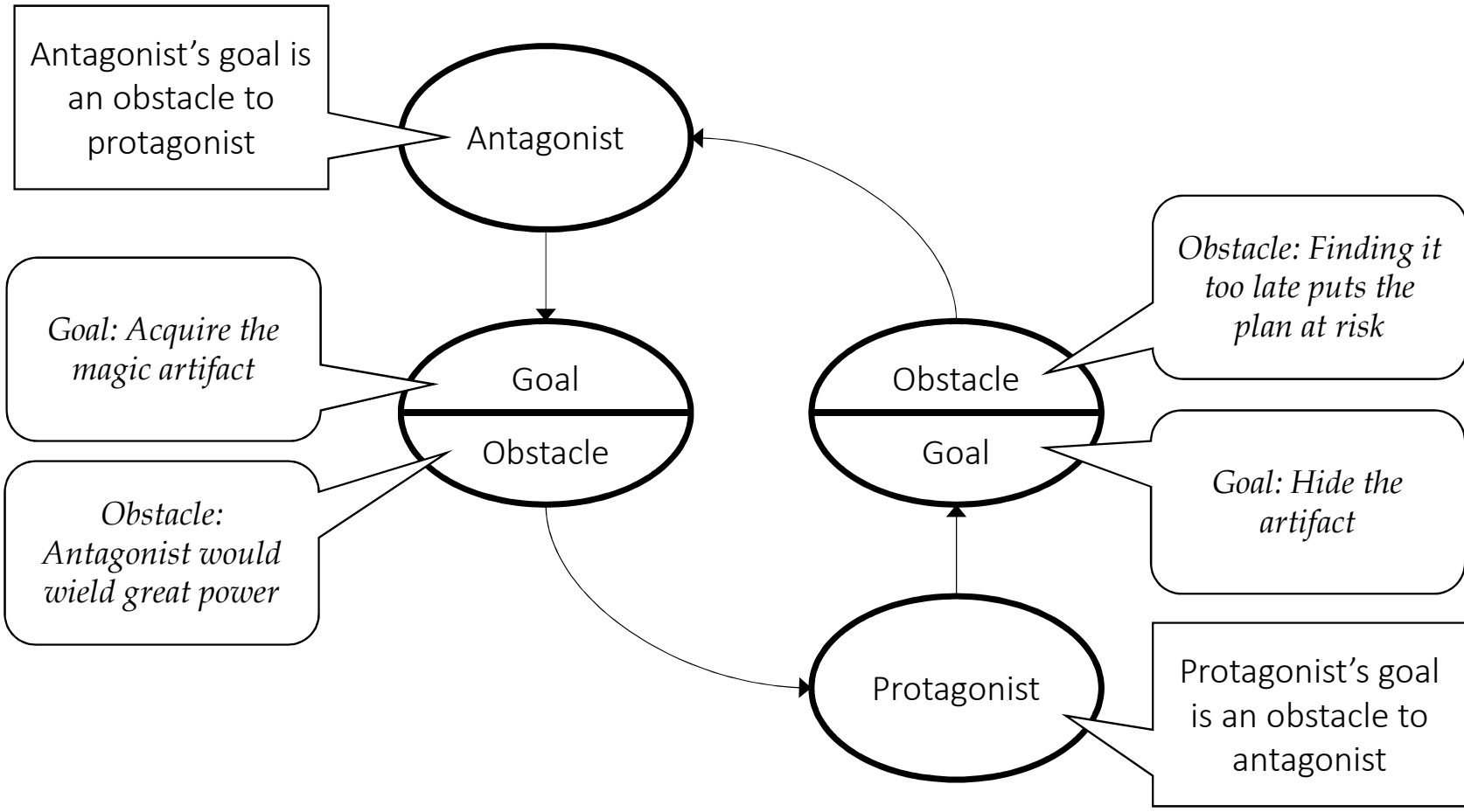


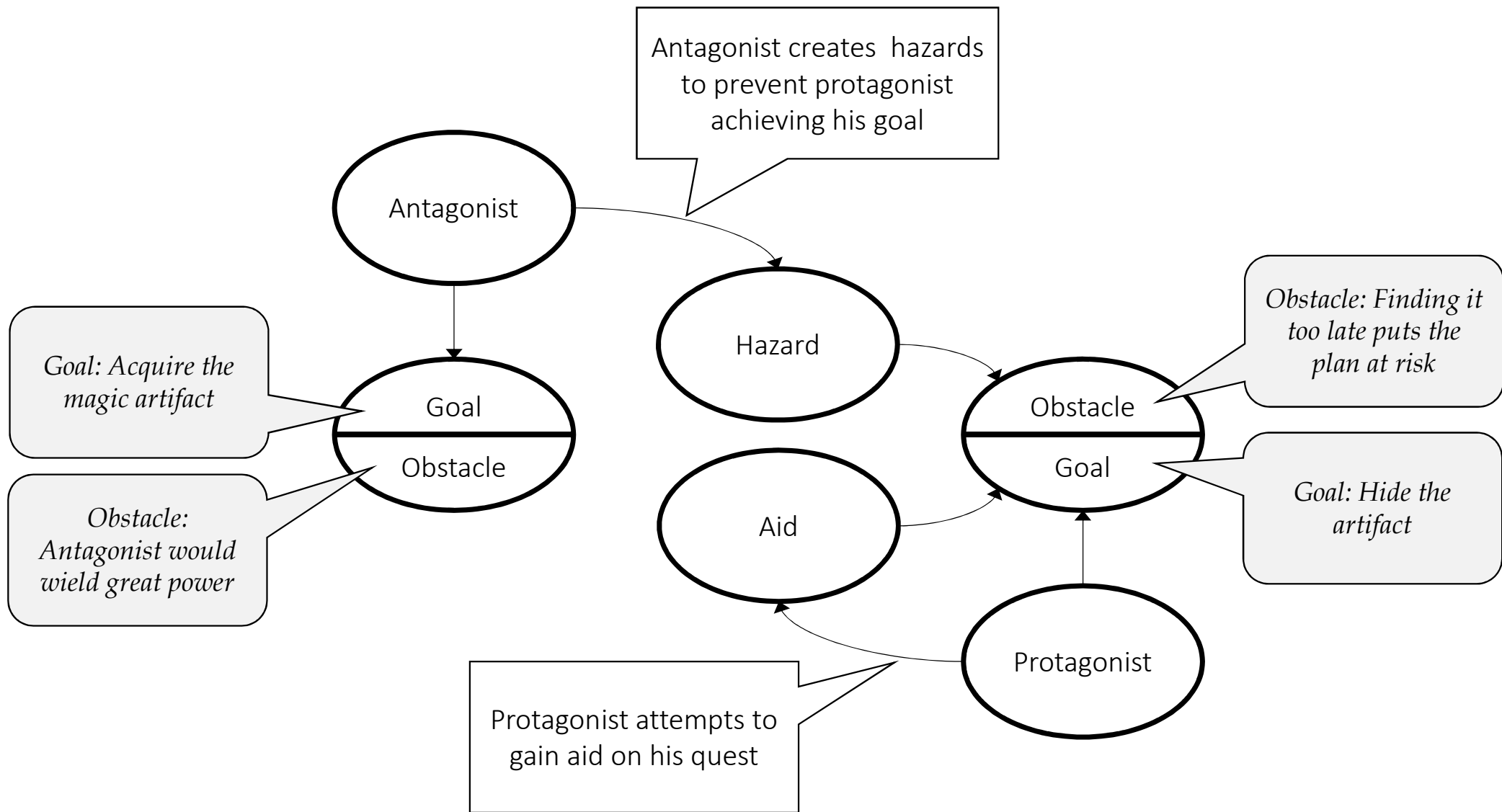
Antagonist's goal is protagonist's obstacle and vice versa

Protagonist and antagonist are on opposing teams when it comes to their primary goals.

By realizing their goal they would create an obstacle for the other party.

In their individual pursuit, both parties are seeking to maximize their chances by using aides and hampering the opposition with further obstacles and hazards.





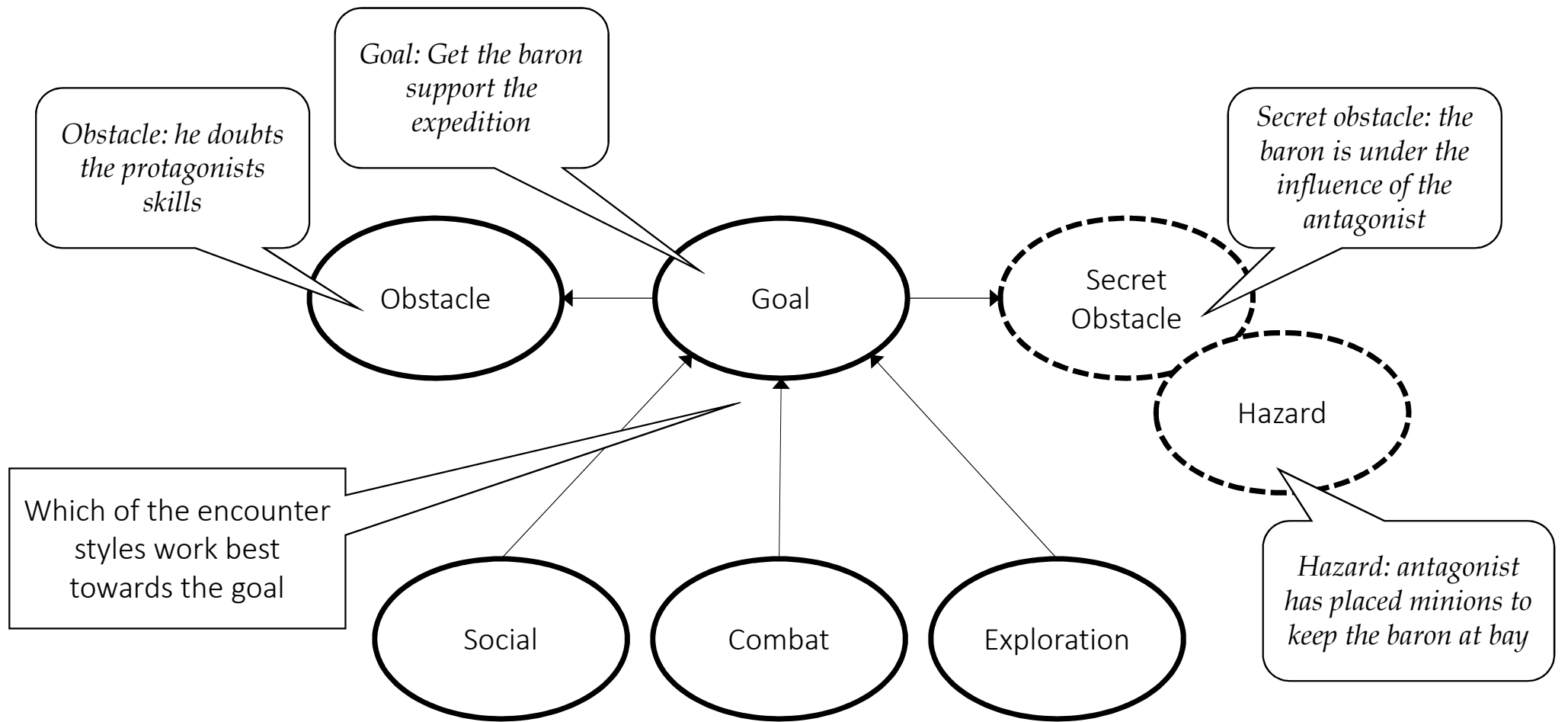
SECTION II: ENCOUNTERS

Encounters and multiple obstacles

Choosing how to pursue a goal or to deal with an obstacle comes down to a selection of various approaches. These approaches are essentially the source of encounter types.

Some goals have multiple obstacles attached to them, all requiring to be solved to unlock the goal.

Some of the obstacles may be hidden at first. They are secret. However, secret is no secret unless there are hints about its existence beforehand.

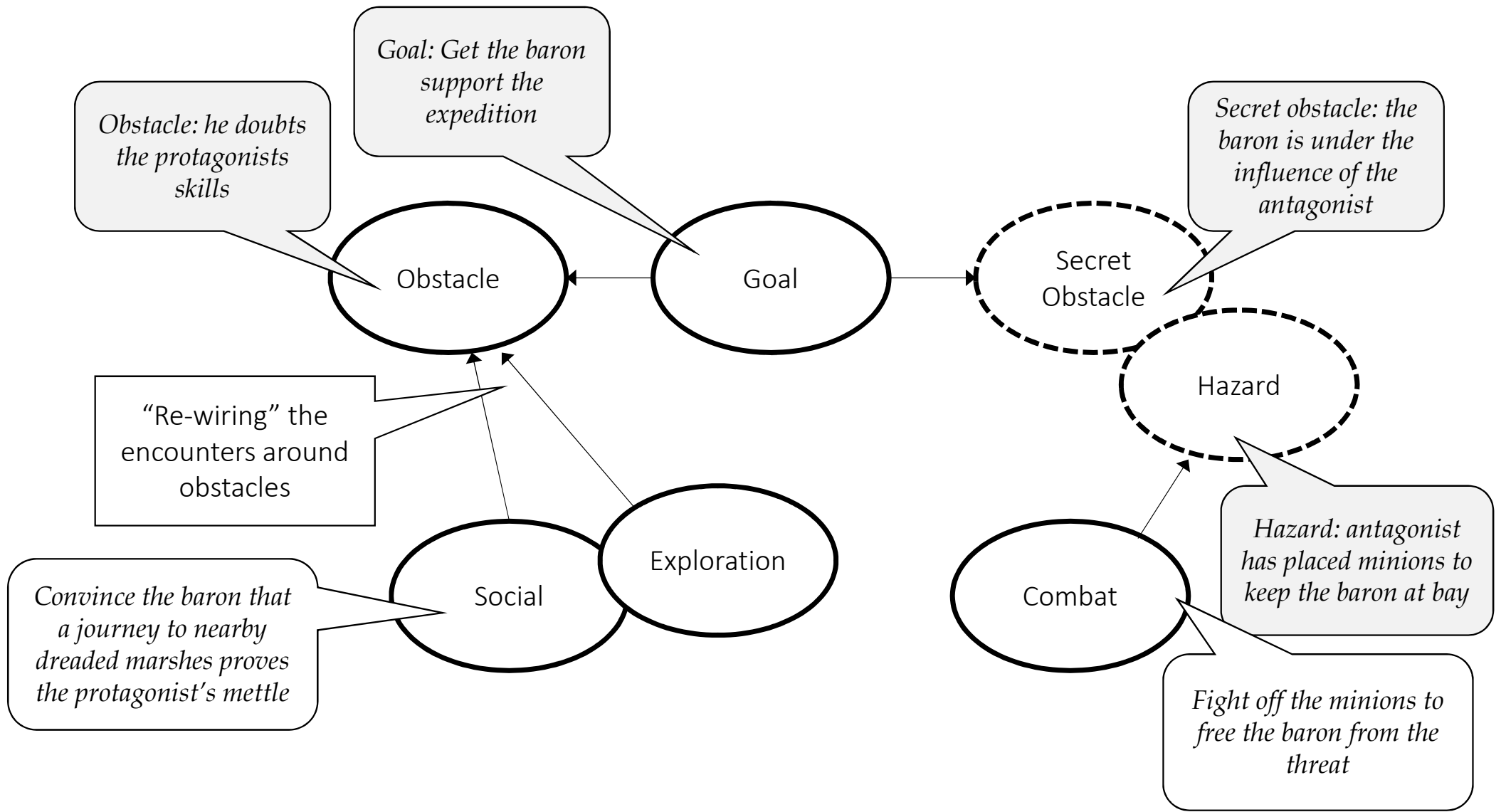


Connecting encounters to correct obstacles

Encounters are primarily about addressing a conflict or shaking the status quo.

Obstacles are inherently definition of a potential conflict.

Having encounters be targeted towards the goal but being in content about an obstacle helps to realize their fullest potential.

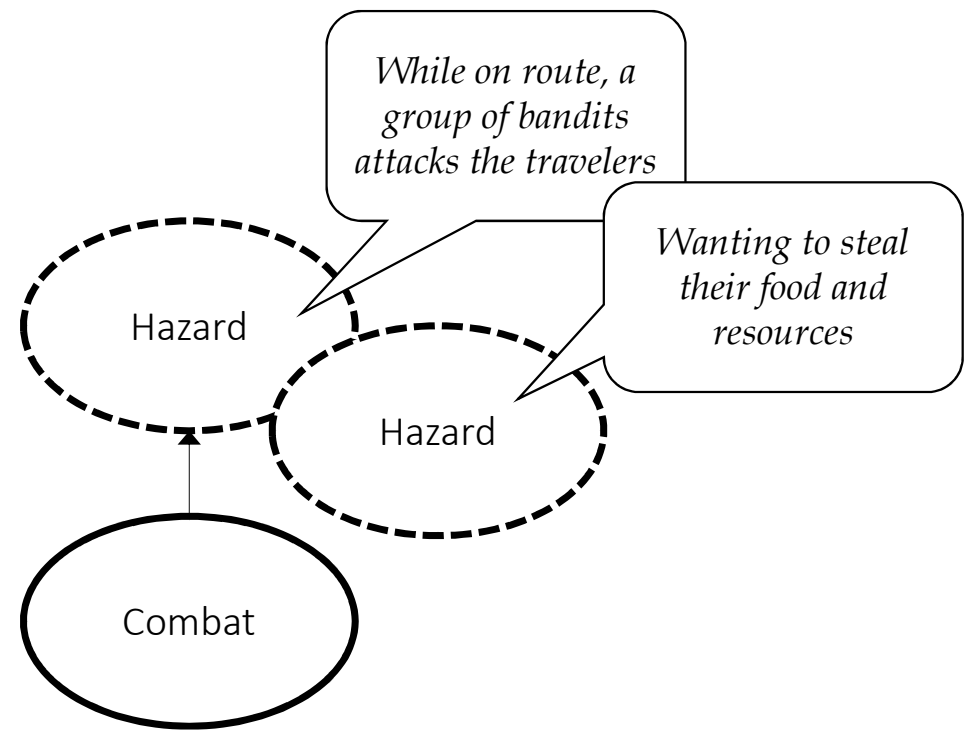
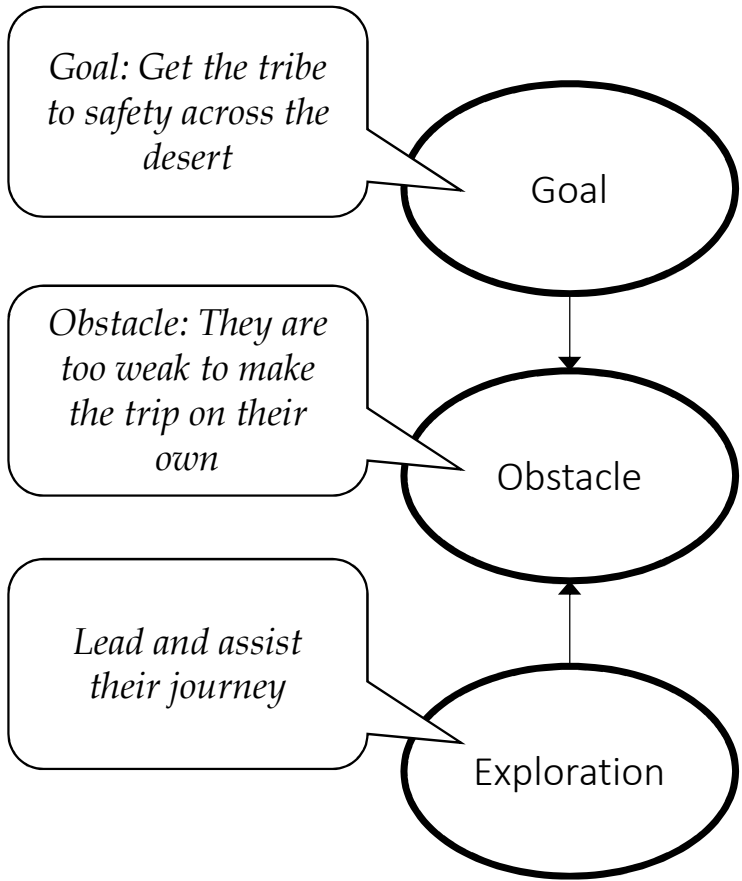


Mixing various types of encounters

Encounter types such as Combat, Social and Exploration are fine on their own.

However, having the lines of these types never blurred will result in predictability and monotonous design.

An encounter within an encounter works as a principle to break the pattern.

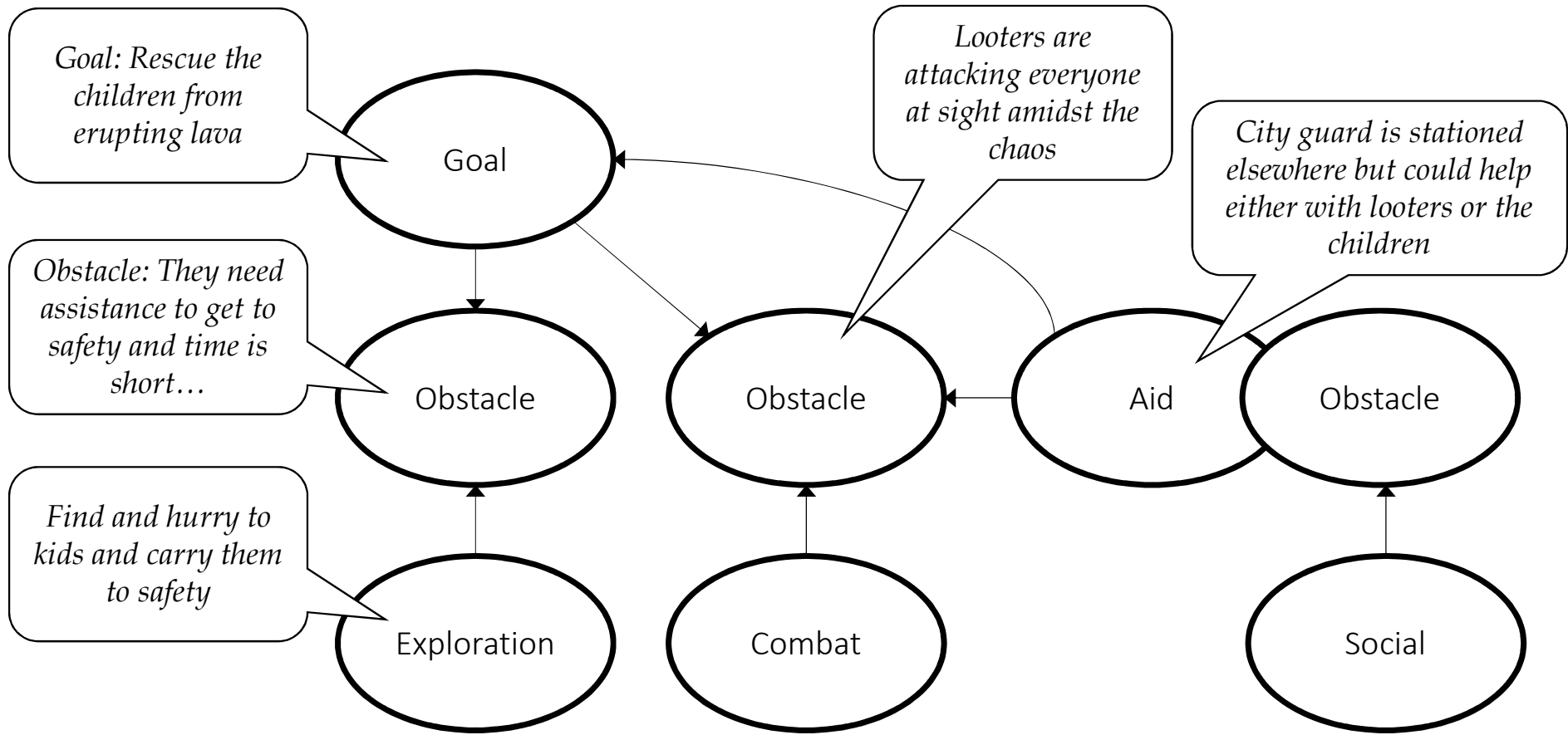


Layering a single scene with multiple encounter types

For truly epic encounters, layers of complexity are suggested.

The more complex the design, the higher comprehension is required. By comprehension I mean that all players understand the encounter in the same way.

Running simultaneously connected goals and obstacles with interdependent sub-encounters requires coordination but delivers the best results when executed correctly.



SECTION III: ELEGANCE

Locations and people as obstacles, aides and hazards

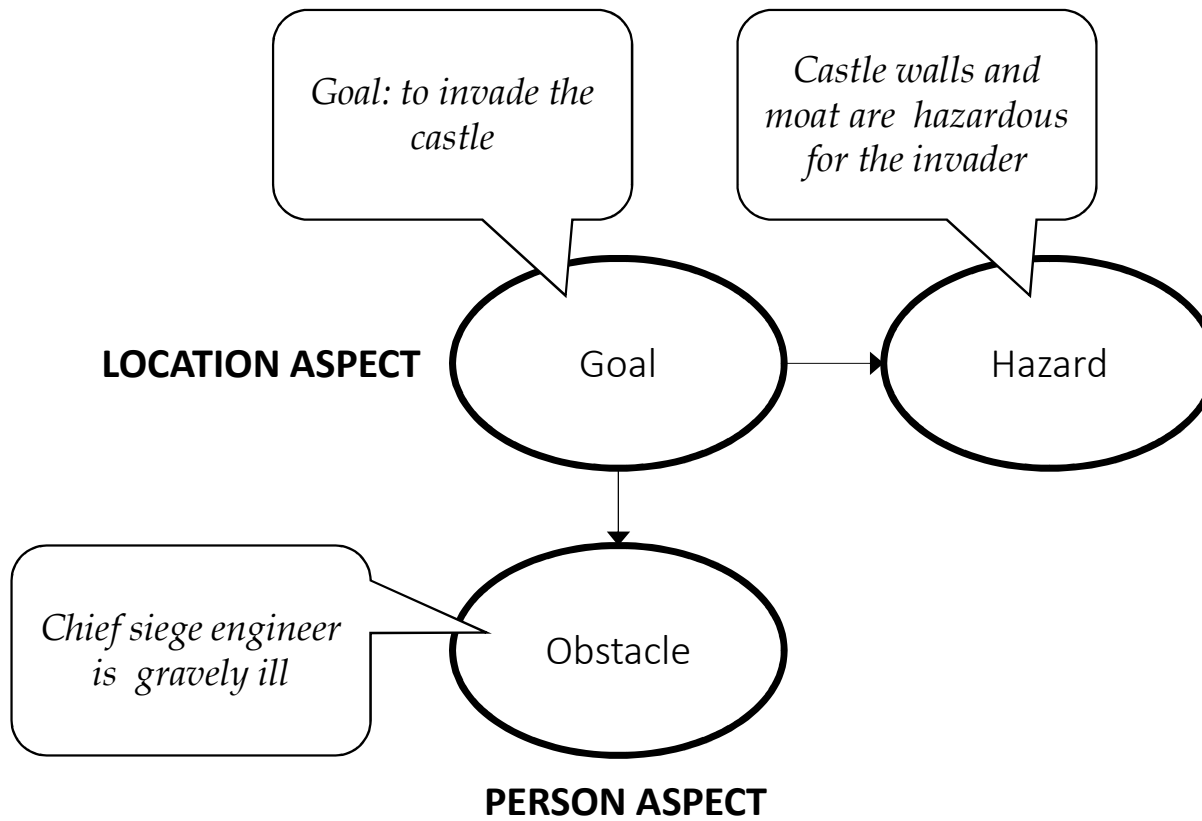
Locations and people are assets of the game world. They work for or against the protagonist or the antagonist.

Locations and people are not goals. Getting to them may be.

As obstacles, they stand in the protagonist's way, preventing him to reach his goal.

As hazards, they try to harm the protagonist.

As aides, they are beneficial to protagonist's cause, helping to overcome the obstacles.

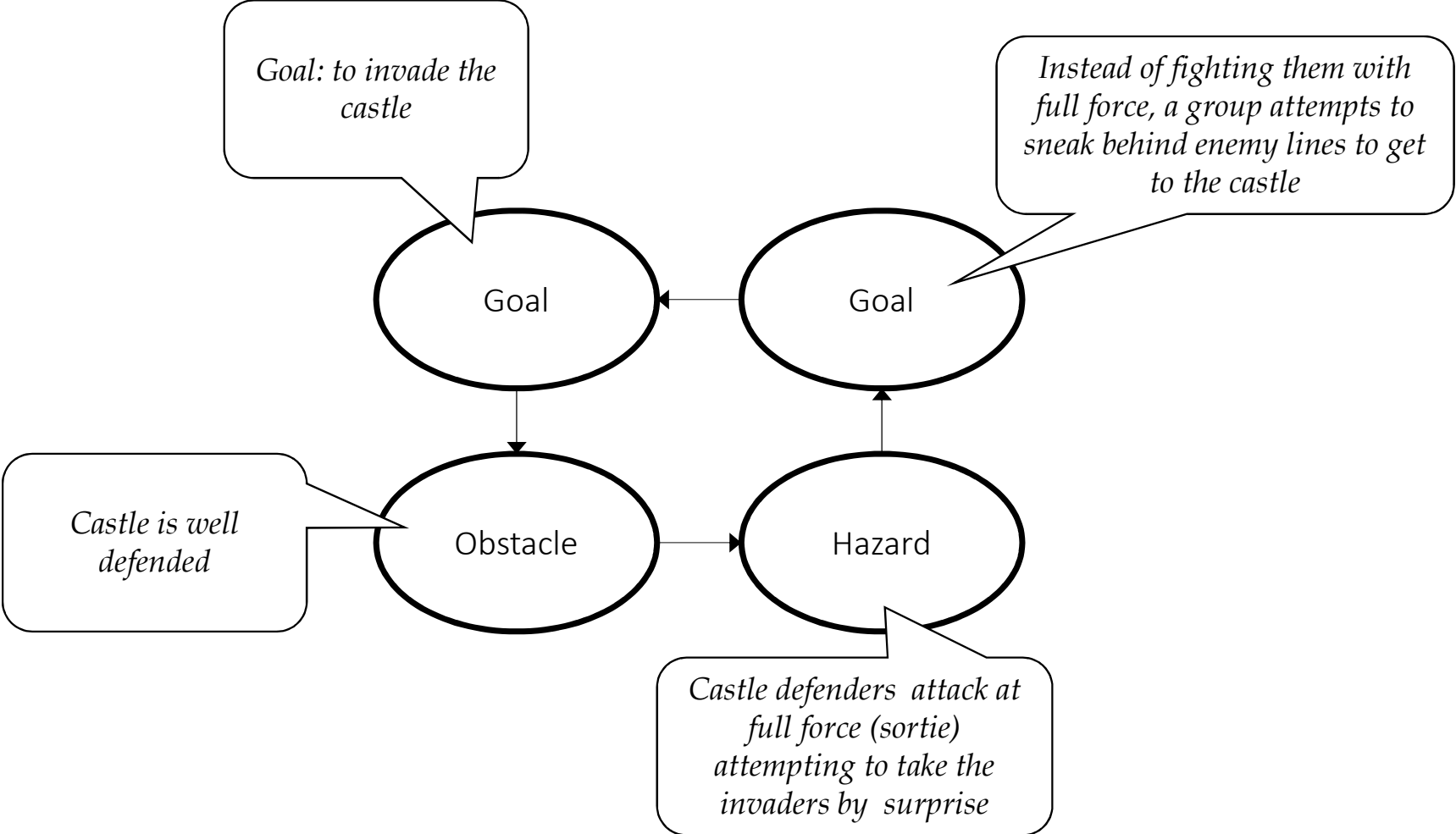


Using hazards to set goals

The purpose of hazards is to defeat, weaken or slow down the opposition.

All hazards require resources and tactics and they may be countered.

As with obstacles, hazards can present an opening and a new goal. This goal may be linked to the original goal or replace the original goal altogether.

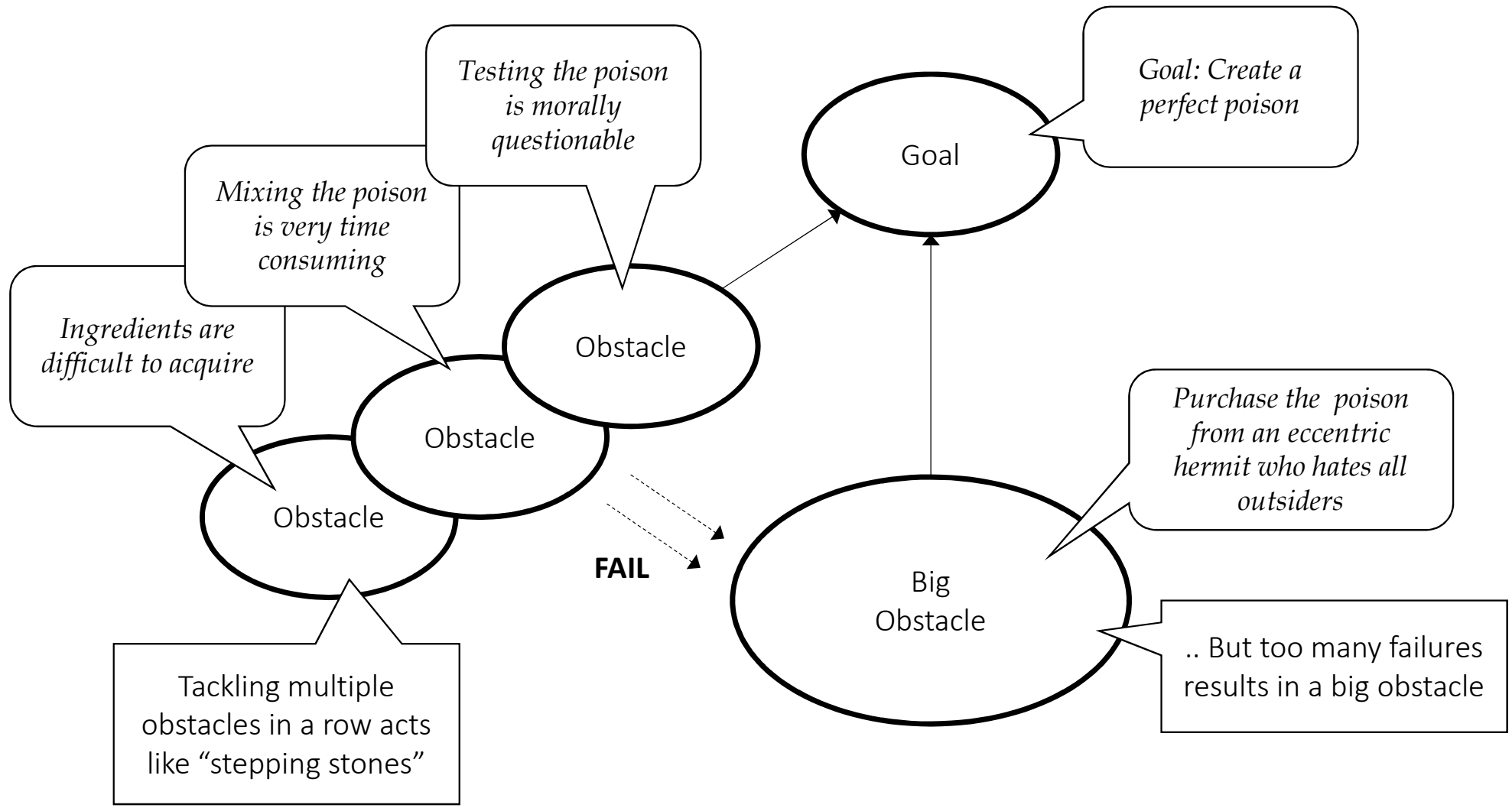


Creating a ladder of obstacles with fallback and contingency

Multiple obstacles may form a 'gauntlet of trials' towards a single goal. They are required to be addressed in sequence with one impacting the other.

Too many failures or a critical failure at a wrong stage may block the path to the goal, requiring the protagonist to seek an alternative strategy.

The alternative strategy, or contingency, is forming an obstacle on its own.

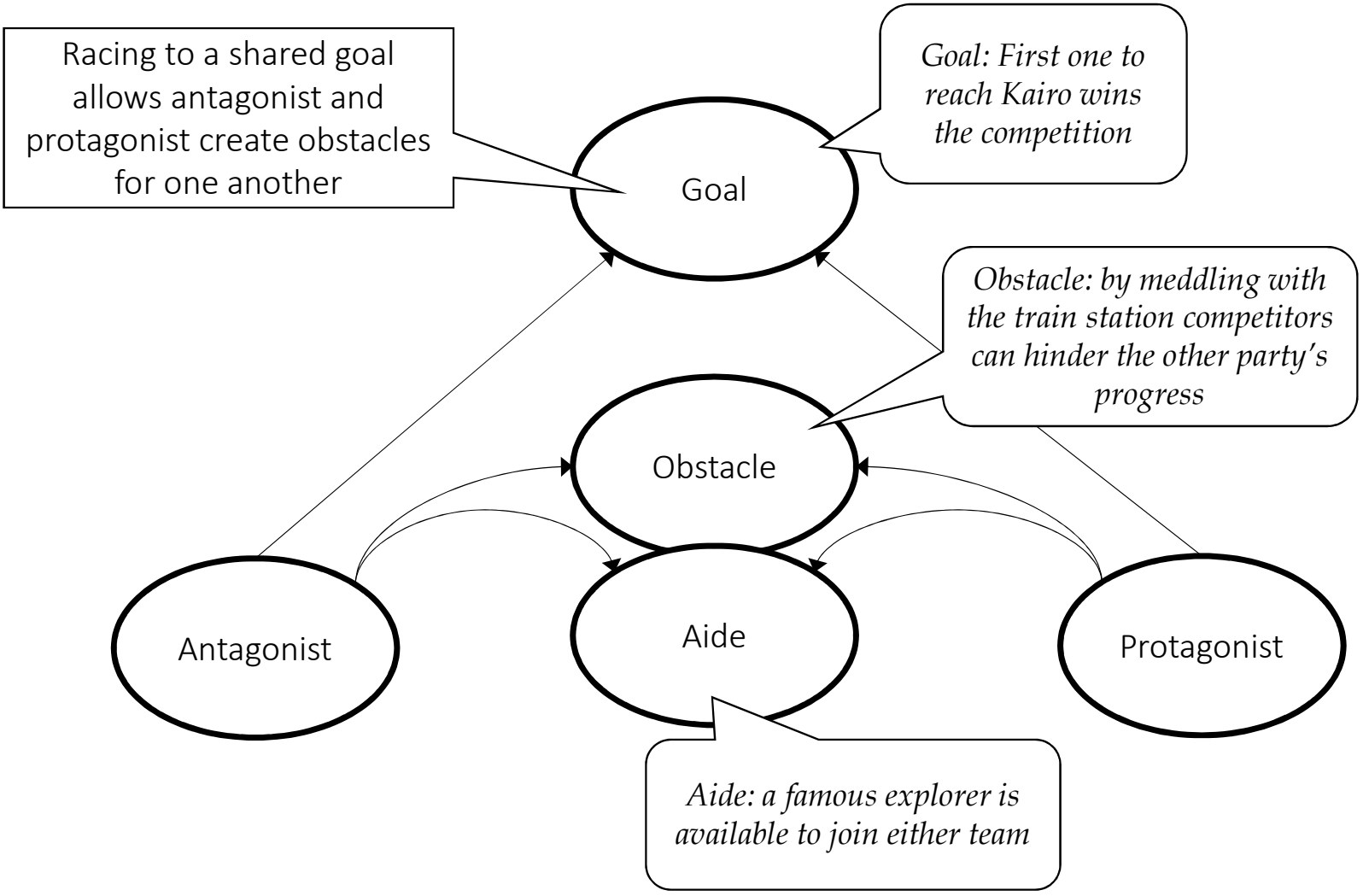


Sharing a goal

If a goal is shared by the protagonist and antagonist, they are racing against each other.

In such situation, improving your party's odds while sabotaging and hampering the opposition is at both parties disposal.

Often the competition may extend to which party can gain access to what aide or create an obstacle first.

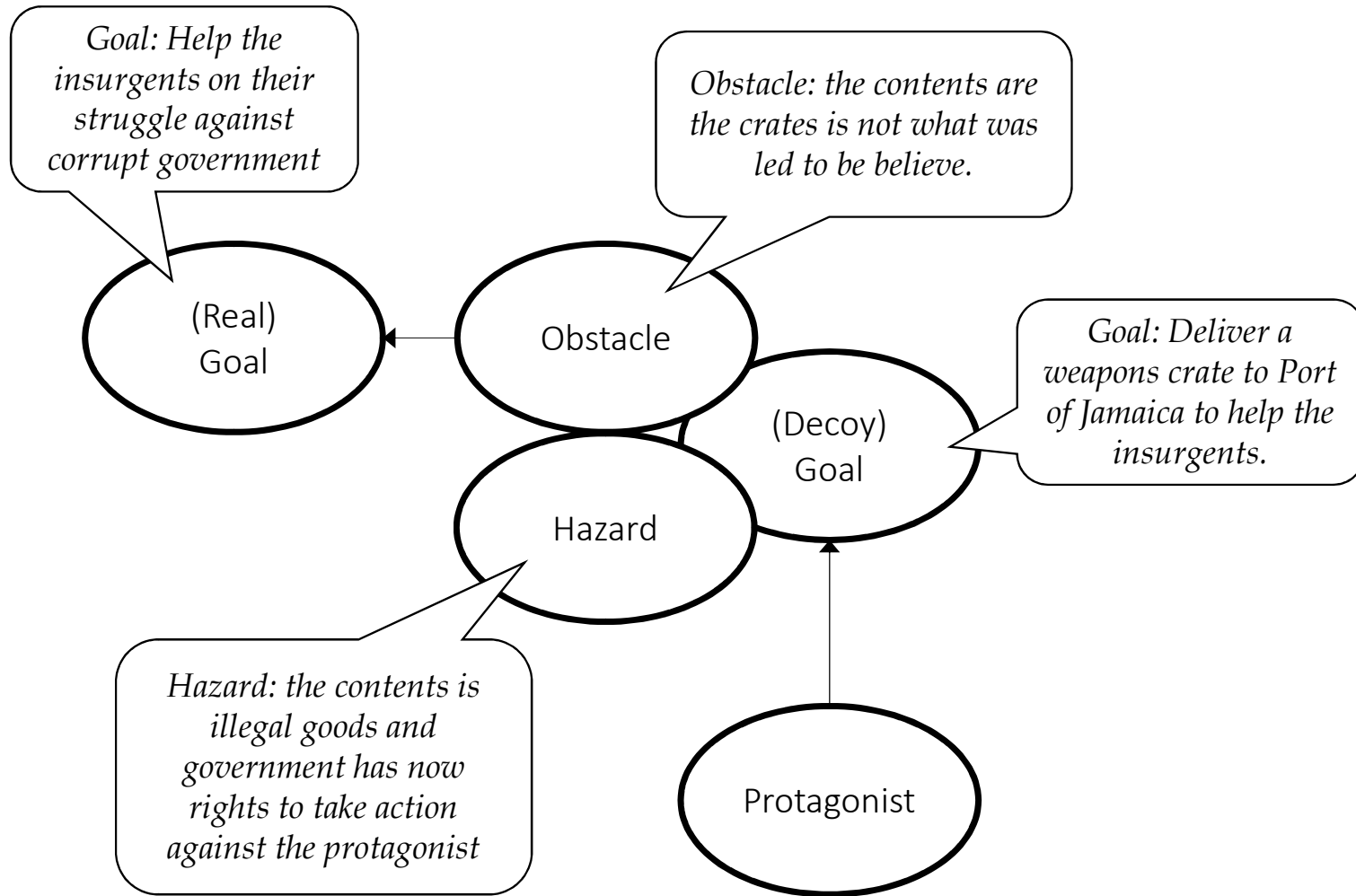


Bluffing and diverting

A goal may be a diversion tactic played by the opposition.

This makes the target spend time and resources to pursue a worthless or even harmful goal.

Meanwhile, the opposition can progress their own agenda and create more obstacles towards the real, secret goal.



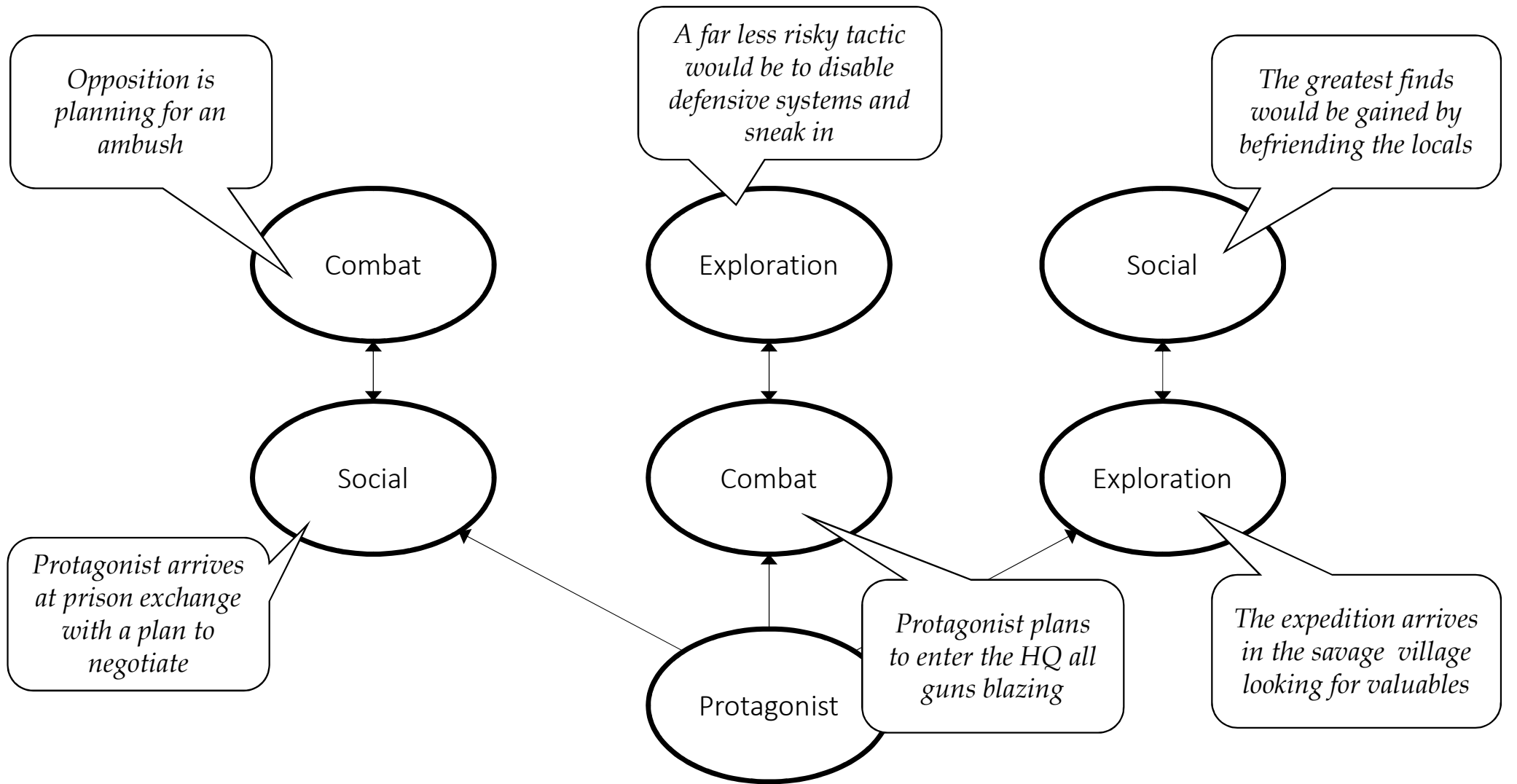
Encounter type conflicts

When encounter type chosen is not fitting, it is conflicted. This requires encounter type to change, on the fly.

Approaching an encounter as a social encounter but it is a combat encounter by design will have the protagonist ambushed.

Going in ready to fight while the other party is interested to talk will put the aggressor at social disadvantage. Unless it may be resolved in violence after all.

Being prepared to explore but not to socialize will make the results of exploration limited.

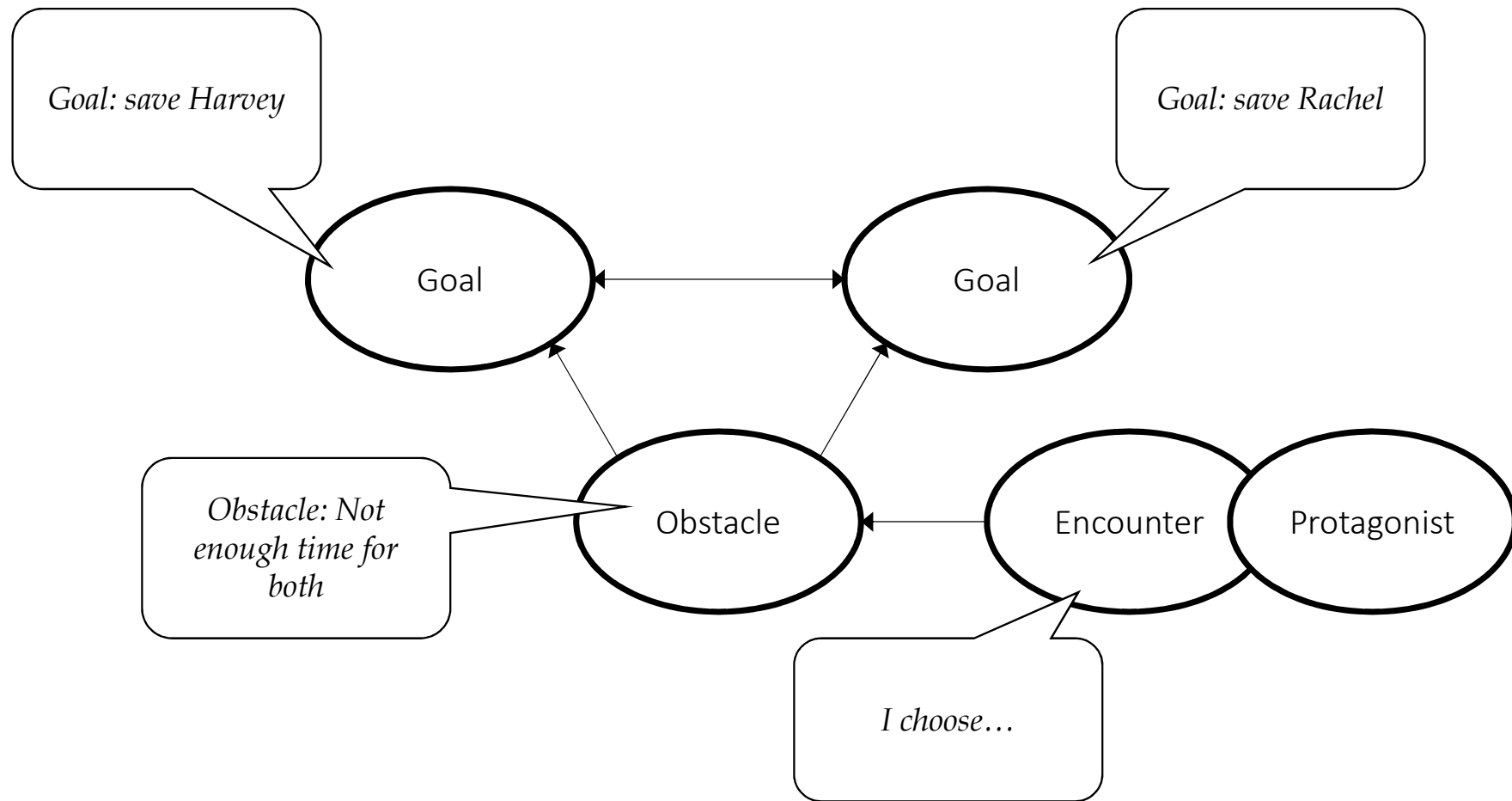


Conflicting goals

Goals that cannot be all achieved invoke decisions and questions about priorities.

The obstacle may be about making this decision and it is not an easy one.

Too many unachievable goals simply creates feeling of inadequacy and lessens the engagement.

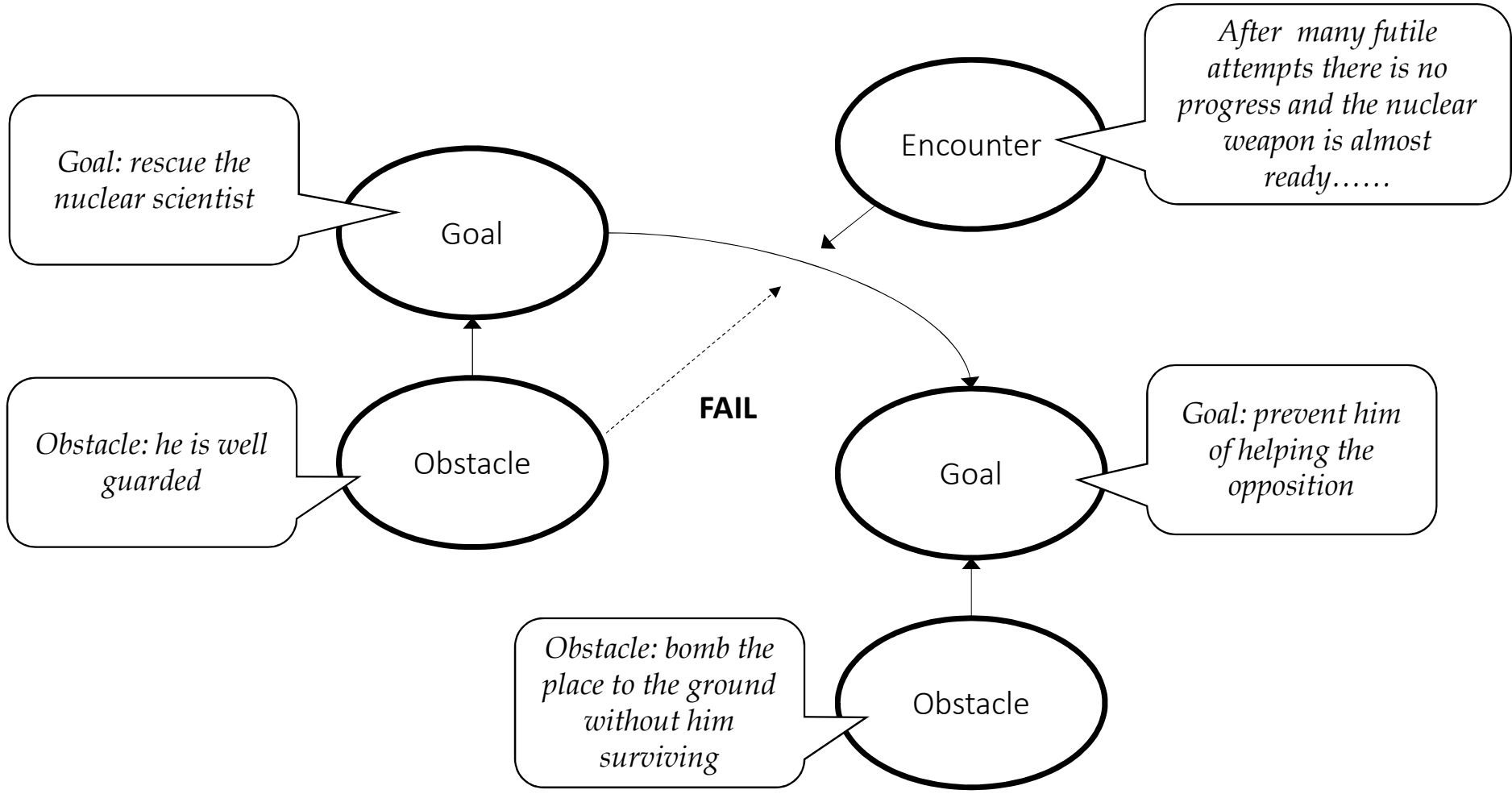


Conditional goals

Not all goals are valid with no expiration date.

Some goals have a condition how long they are worthwhile to pursue. When that condition is reached, a new goal takes its place.

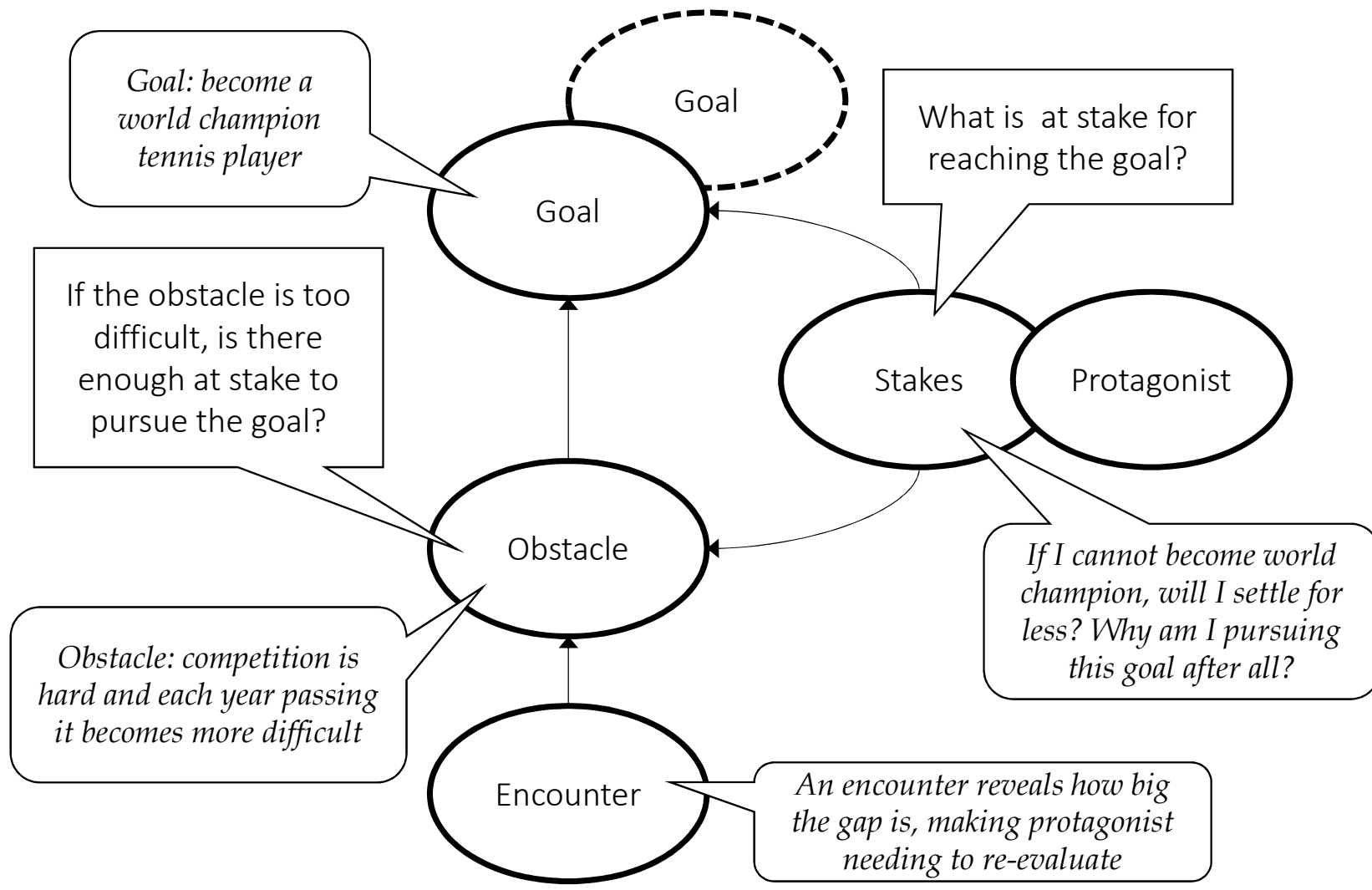
The protagonist may choose when the condition is triggered as he is in charge of the quest. The antagonist or the other cast may second-guess or question this decision to further test the protagonist's agency and volition.



Stakes

The importance of a goal is determined by what is at stake. If the obstacle and related cost rises too high, the scales may tip, forcing the protagonist to re-evaluate.

Stakes also suggest there is a goal behind a goal, the “why” part.



SECTION IV: FINAL WORDS

Final words

All encounters add to the story. Some encounters progress also the plot.

Making decisions and asking what is at stakes invokes a deeper meaning to all actions the protagonist takes.

The game is played inside the encounters. They need to deliver the fun and the excitement. It is about the journey, not the destination.