



## ELEMENTS OF GAME DESIGN

ZUBEK, R.: *Elements of Game Design*. Cambridge, London : The MIT Press, 2020. 256 p. ISBN 978-0-262-04391-5.

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Games, and game design, have become a phenomenon in recent decades and one of the fastest growing industries. The creation of games has undergone significant development during this period, and from simple and basic games, we are now entering a world that is referred to as augmented virtual reality. The field of game creation can generally be perceived as a purely technical discipline, taking into account the final product. The games and their design are without doubt areas much deeper and wider than this general view. It is necessary to look at game design as a whole from the very origin of the idea to the final product. And at the same time answer questions such as: why the game, what game, what is its idea (essence), what is its goal, for whom it is intended, what the user expects, what needs we fulfil through the game, what is the desire to fulfil it, what is its rational and emotional value, illusion, fiction or reality, how the resulting product will look, how it will be unique or different from other games (competition), its business model, because the game is the subject of commerce, i.e. trade (games sales), for profit.

The author says: "Games are syntheses of the work of many disciplines, and all parts must work well together to produce a great experience for the player. Interesting and engaging gameplay, visuals and visual design, music and audio design, user experience design for smooth interaction, technical design and implementation, and so on" (p. 14). The elementary level for understanding the problematic is as follows: "We all recognize the familiar, deep pleasure of being immersed in a book, a movie, and a work of art. We seek out the way they enthrall us, confront us, and make us experience the world through another's eyes. Different art forms accomplish it in their own ways, but they all have this mysterious power. Games have this power too, as players know well. A familiar transformation happens when we allow ourselves to get immersed in a game: for a moment we leave ourselves and become someone else, and we experience their life, their world and their story. Games also have an additional power. In games we also gain the ability to act. We can take on a different role in life. We become an adventurer, an explorer, a general – not through empathy, but *actively*. We embody that role, experience what it is like to act as them, to function in their world. We witness firsthand how our actions bring about consequences and learn from experience how that world works. This is a unique power of games, that they allow us to not just observe the world, but inhabit it, act in it – and perhaps change it. This is also our task as game designers and the subject of this book: how do we create these experiences, these worlds for the player to inhabit and interact with?" (p. 21).

In his book, the author reflects on all aspects associated with the game and its design. All key elements and facts are interconnected in logical contexts, which in general give answers to all the questions we can ask about the games and their design. In his book, the author uniquely combines theory and practice and complements the individual parts with a number of examples and case studies. The basis of the book, as stated by the author, is his own lectures in the courses he teaches, and both ideas and facts and texts

make this book an excellent guide to game design. The book consists of seven chapters and a foreword. Rather than being a theoretical work, the volume can be considered guidance and practical training in the area of game design. The text begins by introducing the core model – that of player and designers experiencing the game design differently, and the three levels for thinking about games – and the subsequent chapters elucidate the individual parts of this model.

Chapter one introduces the model. It starts with an introduction and the key sub-chapters are design process (key parts – machines and game design as user-centred process). It also includes deep descriptions of the model (designer's role, designer's process, player's experience, elements of games outside the model, game design, systems design, content design, discipline interactions, formal tools, MDA, the practice of design). Chapter two is about the player experience. In this chapter we can find facts and information about the experience and its relativity, what we enjoy, building naive taxonomy. Following that there are player theories, designer theories, The Bartle Model, and The Koster Model. Also important are the characteristics of user personas and empirical models (The Big Five Personality Model, Yee's Gamer Motivation Profile, Player Motivations and the Big Five). In the second part of the chapter, the author also talks about Questions to Guide to Experience Design and Experience Archetypes and Genres. At the end of this chapter we will find information about Player Psychology and Designer Theories.

The next (third) chapter deals with mechanics, the key parts of this chapter are Mechanics as Building Blocks, Composition of Mechanics, The Language Metaphor. A related topic in this chapter is the topic Games as State Spaces (Game State, State Spaces, Action Spaces, Perceived Action Spaces). The key part is to get acquainted with key techniques (Explicit and Implicit Mechanics, Control Mechanics, Progression Mechanics, Uncertainty Mechanics, Resource Management Mechanics, Beyond the Four Families, Mechanics Design, Design Heuristics, Primary and Derived Mechanics.) Finally, the author introduces us to the History of Mechanics and Taxonomies. The key words of chapter four (Systems) are Game Systems, Setting and Systems, Layering, Thinking in Systems, Mechanic Chains and Loops, Conversion Chains, Calculating Exchange Rates, Conversion Loops, Feedback Loops, Positive Feedback, Negative Feedback, Effects of Positive Feedback, Effects of Negative Feedback, Emergence and Chaos, Emergent Behaviour, Chaotic Systems, Systems Design, From User Stories to System, System Tuning, Approaches and the Role of Tuning in the Production Process.

The theme of the fifth chapter is Gameplay. In this chapter, the author talks about key areas related to Gameplay such as Gameplay Loops, Loop Frequencies, Onion Diagrams, the Core Loop, Layering, Loops and Systems, Player Motivation, Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation, Intrinsic Motivation: Flow and Learning, Flow Theory, Learning and Challenge Escalation, Learning to Overcome Uncertainty, Dominant Strategies and "Solving the Game", Loops and Challenges, Extrinsic Motivation: Work and Rewards, Progression and Rewards, Reward Schedules, Types of Schedules, Game Examples, Changing Workload, Related Topic: Gamification, Gameplay Loop Design Heuristics, From User Stories to Gameplay Loops and Playtesting Loops. Chapter six is called Macrostructure. The key parts of this chapter are Game Fiction, Fantasy, Story, Story and Agency, Consistency, Macrostructure and Content Arcs, the Three-Act Model, Story Arc and Episodes, Three-Act Model and Non-story Games, Narrative Patterns, Linear Narrative, Branching Choices, Branch and Merge, Branching with State, Hub and Spokes, Narrative Composition and Quests, Open Worlds, Open Worlds and Quest Design, Simulated Worlds, Pacing, Metagame, Mastery Metagame, Social Metagame, Game Modding and the Benefits of Metagame. The final seventh chapter deals with Prototyping and Playtesting. The author introduces us to Production Stages, Game Concept, Understanding the Game Idea,

Understanding the Market, Forming and Game Pitch. The section on the concept of From Concept to Prototyping and Kelly Guidelines (Prototyping, Playable Prototypes, Iterative Process, Playtesting, Documenting Design, and Finishing Iteration) and Supporting Portfolio Development follows.

The book completely fulfils the stated goal of the author, i.e. to provide information and guide the issue of creating games to a reader who has no orientation in this area and is basically a 'layman' who is looking for both theoretical information and examples and recommendations. The language the author has chosen is very 'human' and draws the reader into the book so that it is in fact possible to read it all at once. I present this fact as my own personal experience. The field of game design is not entirely my field and my grasp was very close to the above facts. The result is clear; a book that sheds light on the most important aspects associated with game design and shows these with real examples. I also appreciate the authenticity and the own views of the author, which he presents in the book and which are one of the significant elements that give the book its originality. I highly recommend this book to anyone who is interested in games and game design or has a connection with them in their work.

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