

Module Guide

Game Design

Games are systems carefully designed to evoke specific emotions in their participants. Political regimes in the real world are in fact also such systems, albeit for different ends. What can the craft of game design teach us that is applicable to politics? In this module, you'll learn some game design theory from the commercial games industry, and also get hands-on experience of making game-design decisions.

Module Leader: Sam Ballard

Sam has been designing digital experiences for over a decade, with an emphasis on user orientated design thinking methodologies to solve both creative challenges & system design. He is currently a designer at ZA/UM, the studio behind Disco Elysium.

- sam@sunlightafterdark.com
 - 07825760526 (WhatsApp)
-

How do I take part in this module?

Join the WhatsApp Community

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/FAgD8ebTQQg7P0UjgmIvby>

Attend Game Design Workshops

Approx monthly sessions where you'll get hands on experience trying to turn bad games into good games.

Details will be published in WhatsApp, via [webcal://newspeak.house/api/events.ics](https://newspeak.house/api/events.ics), and below:

Session 1: Moida Mansion

Thursday, November 21, 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

<https://lu.ma/0k34ltm9>

Session 2: Experience Design

Friday, March 7, 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

<https://lu.ma/efnpjwc4>

Read, Play, Watch

- <https://kodiqi.itch.io/idle-breakout>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rr2BHf8wTJs>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludonarrative_dissonance
- <https://schellgames.com/art-of-game-design/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8uE6-vli1rQ>
- https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLc38fcMFcV_vToz9Nvc_YQTNH8hkIQ2uC
- <https://www.raphkoster.com/games/essays/a-story-about-a-tree>
- <https://www.raphkoster.com/games/essays/declaring-the-rights-of-players>
- <https://www.raphkoster.com/games/essays/the-man-behind-the-curtain>
- <https://www.raphkoster.com/games/essays/a-community-cookbook>
- <https://www.raphkoster.com/2019/01/30/what-drives-retention>
- https://store.steampowered.com/app/221910/The_St Stanley_Parable
- <https://www.raphkoster.com/games/presentations/wikipedia-is-a-game>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYaDXZ2MI-k>
- <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/videogame-yanis-varoufakis-used-study-eurozone/>
- <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Games-Properly-Explained-Reiner-Knizia/dp/0973105216>

There are also many books about game design in the library; have a browse, or ask and I'll recommend you one.

Share your relationship with games

Some of you might have never played any games, whereas others are lifelong gamers, deeply immersed in game culture. Some of you might have already made games yourselves.

It's also an huge and varied medium - arguably many mediums! Not just videogames, but boardgames, sports, mobile games, party games, tabletop roleplaying games, and more:

Poker, CounterStrike, Stardew Valley, Football, Assassin's Creed, Wordle, Undertale, Dungeons & Dragons, Magic: The Gathering, Zelda, Candycrush, Minecraft, Chess, FarmVille, Pokemon Go, Darts, Portal, Tetris, Settlers of Catan, World of Warcraft; *these are all games that were designed.*

Take 15 minutes now and share a bit about your relationship with games below:

Claddagh NicLochlainn

What are some games that you've played a lot? What did you like about them?

Chess and backgammon. I like the social element of backgammon, and like the chance chess offers to learn and test new strategies and approaches in a relatively relaxed environment

What do you think are the best designed games you've ever played? What did you like about them?

Chess. See above

What are some games you've played that you thought were poorly designed? What didn't you like about them?

n/a

Have you ever tried making games, or modding games, or changing the rules of games that you're playing?

I've played modified versions of backgammon that work across several boards.

Richard Kemp

What are some games that you've played a lot? What did you like about them?

Final Fantasy 8+10 (great storytelling), Rayman (felt very tactile, gave a sense of exploring, difficulty balance was good), Trackmania (addictive!), Unreal Tournament series (variety of weapons and maps forced variety of strategies), GTA series (so much to do, easy to do something else if you're bored), Monopoly (hah), Magic The Gathering (potentially a very deep game, also amazingly well-designed as a money factory), texas hold'em Poker (simple but perfect, psychological element, real risk), Utopia (a text-based MMO - playing in a team

with other people over a long-period of time adds a social element), Dungeons and Dragons (storytelling, teamwork), Twilight Struggle. Also recently played Disco Elysium.

What do you think are the best designed games you've ever played?

DnD, Poker, Magic The Gathering, Twilight Struggle.

What did you like about them?

Relatively simple rules permit huge complexity: DnD via creativity, Poker via uncertainty plus meaningful differences between even very close points in outcome-space, MTG via the large number of possible cards allowing every game to be played starting from a slightly different strategic situation, Twilight Struggle has excellent replayability, and does a great job of capturing the feeling of one's actions being futile or sometimes being net harmful even though they are necessary (also, good two-player board games are fairly rare).

What are some games you've played that you thought were poorly designed? What didn't you like about them?

Monopoly is terrible! It took me shamefully long to realise how simple the algorithm for optimal play is, it doesn't leave much room for creativity. Also losing players stop playing before the end, and it is often obvious quite far in advance who will win.

Have you ever tried making games, or modding games, or changing the rules of games that you're playing?

When playing simple card games at school we would often modify the rules between games to increase the variety and difficulty, or even have certain cards permit changing the rules mid-game.

Tristan Spill

What are some games that you've played a lot? What did you like about them?

Oh boy, Where do we start?



SimCity 4 (2003)

Learn about city planning and explore ways of growing. **Simulate** economic zones. Open ended with **no win state**.



Spore (2008)

Play **evolution**. **Replayed** this many times with my daughter. Had so much fun **building** new creatures and seeing how they survive. Has various modular build methods that make combining elements fast and fun.



World of Tanks Blitz (2014)

Drive a Tank and **progress to new tanks**. **Easy to learn**, hard to master. Play through history against others online. **Cooperative** shooter with emphasis on strategy. There was always a pack mentality that rewarded map knowledge and good communication between teams. This was an avoidant game that would make everything around me dissolve.



Sid Meier's Civilization VI (2016)

Build cities that grow and last over time. Lots to **learn** and **explore**. Sandbox fun that **tests geopolitics** over history.



Genshin Impact (2020)

It plays through all the layers I like:

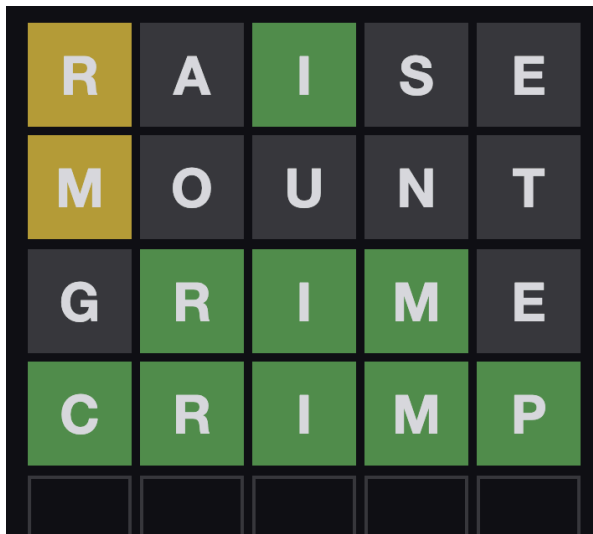
- * Smasher, Survivalist, Upgrader, Explorer
- * Collector, Competitor, Cooperator, Artist, Guru

Smash, upgrade & explore are all fully catered to. The survival aspect is not as important. **Death is merely an inconvenience** as there are seemingly multiple methods to keep play alive.

The real dampener on progression are the limited rare materials needed to **upgrade**. These can be mined, fished, caught, and found in treasure chests and in battle. Some even work outside the game world as forms of currency, as rewards for completing complex tasks. Some of this abstract currency replenishes over time and is required for some prize fights which limits combat farming.

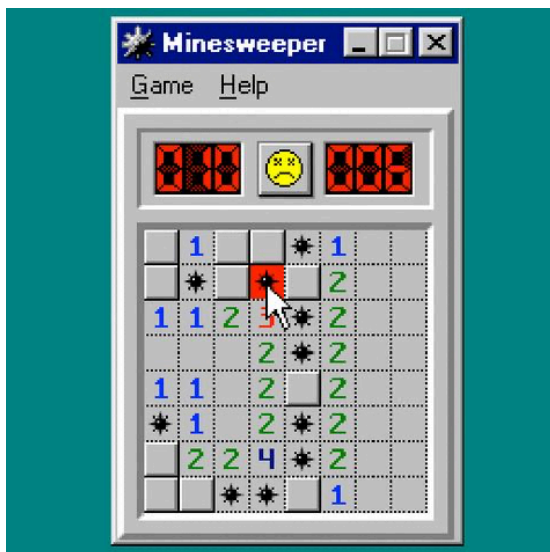
The world is beautifully rendered with lots of voice acting and ongoing storylines. There's plenty to **explore**. My daughter was especially impressed by the various costumes and character designs.

The **collector, cooperator, artist & guru** are also used well in Genshin Impact. Because there is not so much of a survival worry, there is less need to be competing. The raw materials in your world are for you and are not fought for against other players online. When cooperative play is set up it's usually very cooperative with players helping harder battles and sharing tips to progress.



Wordle (2021)

Word game that's **easy to learn**. The sense of **almost getting things right** is such a hook as is the ease of **sharing progress** with **no spoilers**. The **thrill of almost** is like when playing minesweeper in the grid.



Here are some more computer related games. (IGDB)

What do you think are the best designed games you've ever played? What did you like about them?



Geshin Impact (2020)

As above. Easy to get into with lots of surprises and new lands to explore. The animation and music are quite impressive for a free game that doesn't display ads.



Attack from Mars Pinball (1995)

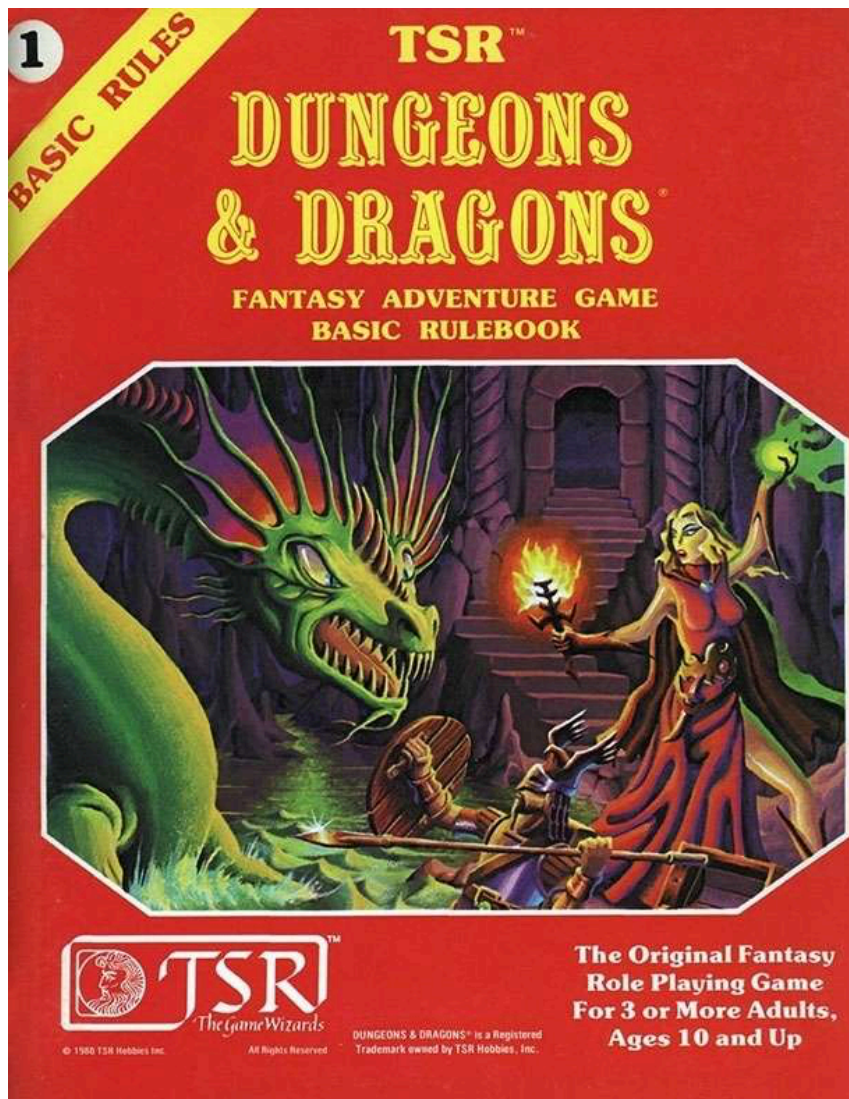
Easy to get lots of things started. Much harder to progress. Great sound and voice acting. Very kitch. Just fun. The ball moves fast and it makes you feel that you can control that.





Star Wars (1983)

A sit down arcade game that excited my love of the movie six years after it came out. The audio clips like "May the force be with you" would send shivers down my spine while playing. The simple vector graphics are similar to the ones used in the movie. The flight controller and the seated position also enhanced the feeling of immersion, of being an x-wing pilot.



Dungeons & Dragons (1977) Creating worlds and characters then having folks play and inhabit these things is such a joy. So much fun as a young teen playing this, then introducing this to my kid. storytelling, planning, making up voices and safely exploring myths.

What are some games you've played that you thought were poorly designed? What didn't you like about them?



Dungeons & Dragons (1977)

It's fun, but it's also very complicated and has too many rules, tables and dice. Games should move fast and not need you to stop to read the rules constantly.

Have you ever tried making games, or modding games, or changing the rules of games that you're playing?



Mega Evolution Monster Battle (2015)

Yes. I made a collaborative game with my kid when she was 4 years old. It's called **Mega Evolution Monster Battle** - Role Playing Game ... it was a make your own pokemon type game. As we went we would draw more evolved versions of our creatures. There was so much joy in trying to figure out what the other player was going to come up with and how to counter it with our newly evolved creation.

"In every job that must be done, there is an element of fun. You find the fun, and the job's a game."

— Mary Poppins

Yung-Hsuan Wu

What are some games that you've played a lot? What did you like about them?

I really like to play Bridge (the poker card game)! I equally love Spicy and Monopoly Deal.

I used to be obsessed with Tetris Battle on Facebook. I'm not obsessed with it anymore simply because they took it down.

I also enjoy Werewolf (or Mafia) and Avalon, even though I'm not very good at lying.

For one-person games, I loved Wordscapes. It was easy to play on my phone, and the reward mechanism (seeing scores go up with every word I discovered) was great.

I mostly like games that have rather simple rules but endless combinations of strategies, like Tetris Battle. I also like games that involve guessing another person's hand (hence bridge) and communicating (non-verbally and through signaling, hence bridge).

What do you think are the best designed games you've ever played? What did you like about them?

In terms of atmosphere, I used to love Spore as a kid; I love the world-building nature of it, and I am creating and nurturing a life--so as opposed to the empire-building type of games, cultivating a civilization and helping a species evolve seems way more appealing to me.

In terms of rules, I'd say Bridge and Tetris Battle are the two best-designed games; the objective of the game was clear and easy to grasp; I could also see a clear relation between the objective and the designed rules. When things are well defined and easy to understand for me, the rest is just figuring out a strategy that works (as opposed to constantly being confused about the rules). And that makes them so addictive!

What are some games you've played that you thought were poorly designed? What didn't you like about them?

Catan. To be fair, I can't speak about the quality of the game, but I've just had so many fights with people when we play it.

Have you ever tried making games, or modding games, or changing the rules of games that you're playing?

I've never!

Simon Wisdom

What are some games that you've played a lot? What did you like about them?

- Backpack Battles
- Timberborn
- Against the Storm
- Slay the Spire
- FTL (Faster Than Light)
- Half Life
- Worms World Party
- Subnautica
- World of Warcraft
- Warcraft III
- Super Smash Brothers
- Star Wars: Jedi Academy
- Pokemon Snap
- Crash Bandicoot
- Ratchet and Clank
- Super Mario Sunshine

Immersive worlds, lots to explore, lots of replayability. Notably not much story.

What do you think are the best designed games you've ever played? What did you like about them?

Super Mario Sunshine. True masterpiece - engaging variety of level designs that change often to encourage continual exploration without ever feeling like a grind. Joyful whimsical art style. Not difficult. I think these days I prefer more difficult games.

What are some games you've played that you thought were poorly designed? What didn't you like about them?

World of Warcraft - too addictive. Deliberately so - I lost a lot of time to that game.

Have you ever tried making games, or modding games, or changing the rules of games that you're playing?

That was my brother, he would mod them I would be the guinea pig.

Melissa Tranfield

What are some games that you've played a lot? What did you like about them?

I haven't played a lot of games, but I have played Dota and Gris a bit with others. I really loved the design of Gris, it's such a beautiful game with a wonderful message about overcoming grief. I've played Overcooked which is a really fun, social game. As a child I used to play Neopets, Club Penguin and Horse Isle if those count! I was really obsessed with animals and having a pet myself at the time so that's what drew me to those games, as

well as the fun quests you could do and the competitive edge of collecting points. I've also played chess and draughts with friends and family. I like the use of logic in these games.

What do you think are the best designed games you've ever played? What did you like about them?

Gris, the music, visual art and design of the game are very unique and beautiful.

What are some games you've played that you thought were poorly designed? What didn't you like about them?

I don't think I've played any games I thought were badly designed yet.

Have you ever tried making games, or modding games, or changing the rules of games that you're playing?

No, I haven't yet but I'd like to.

David Norton

What are some games that you've played a lot? What did you like about them?

What do you think are the best designed games you've ever played? What did you like about them?

What are some games you've played that you thought were poorly designed? What didn't you like about them?

Have you ever tried making games, or modding games, or changing the rules of games that you're playing?

Dorcas Nyamwaya

What are some games that you've played a lot? What did you like about them?

What do you think are the best designed games you've ever played? What did you like about them?

What are some games you've played that you thought were poorly designed? What didn't you like about them?

Have you ever tried making games, or modding games, or changing the rules of games that you're playing?

Heather McRobie Allansdottir

What are some games that you've played a lot? What did you like about them?

What do you think are the best designed games you've ever played? What did you like about them?

What are some games you've played that you thought were poorly designed? What didn't you like about them?

Have you ever tried making games, or modding games, or changing the rules of games that you're playing?

Ilya Mouzykantskii

What are some games that you've played a lot? What did you like about them?

What do you think are the best designed games you've ever played? What did you like about them?

What are some games you've played that you thought were poorly designed? What didn't you like about them?

Have you ever tried making games, or modding games, or changing the rules of games that you're playing?

Casimir Wanot

What are some games that you've played a lot? What did you like about them?

What do you think are the best designed games you've ever played? What did you like about them?

What are some games you've played that you thought were poorly designed? What didn't you like about them?

Have you ever tried making games, or modding games, or changing the rules of games that you're playing?

Jyotsna Iyer

What are some games that you've played a lot? What did you like about them?

What do you think are the best designed games you've ever played? What did you like about them?

What are some games you've played that you thought were poorly designed? What didn't you like about them?

Have you ever tried making games, or modding games, or changing the rules of games that you're playing?

Ollie Bream McIntosh

What are some games that you've played a lot? What did you like about them?

What do you think are the best designed games you've ever played? What did you like about them?

What are some games you've played that you thought were poorly designed? What didn't you like about them?

Have you ever tried making games, or modding games, or changing the rules of games that you're playing?

Paulina Wisdom

What are some games that you've played a lot? What did you like about them?

What do you think are the best designed games you've ever played? What did you like about them?

What are some games you've played that you thought were poorly designed? What didn't you like about them?

Have you ever tried making games, or modding games, or changing the rules of games that you're playing?

Alex Papadopoulos

What are some games that you've played a lot? What did you like about them?

What do you think are the best designed games you've ever played? What did you like about them?

What are some games you've played that you thought were poorly designed? What didn't you like about them?

Have you ever tried making games, or modding games, or changing the rules of games that you're playing?