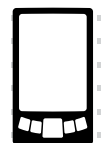


Usability Lessons From Mobile Board Game Conversions

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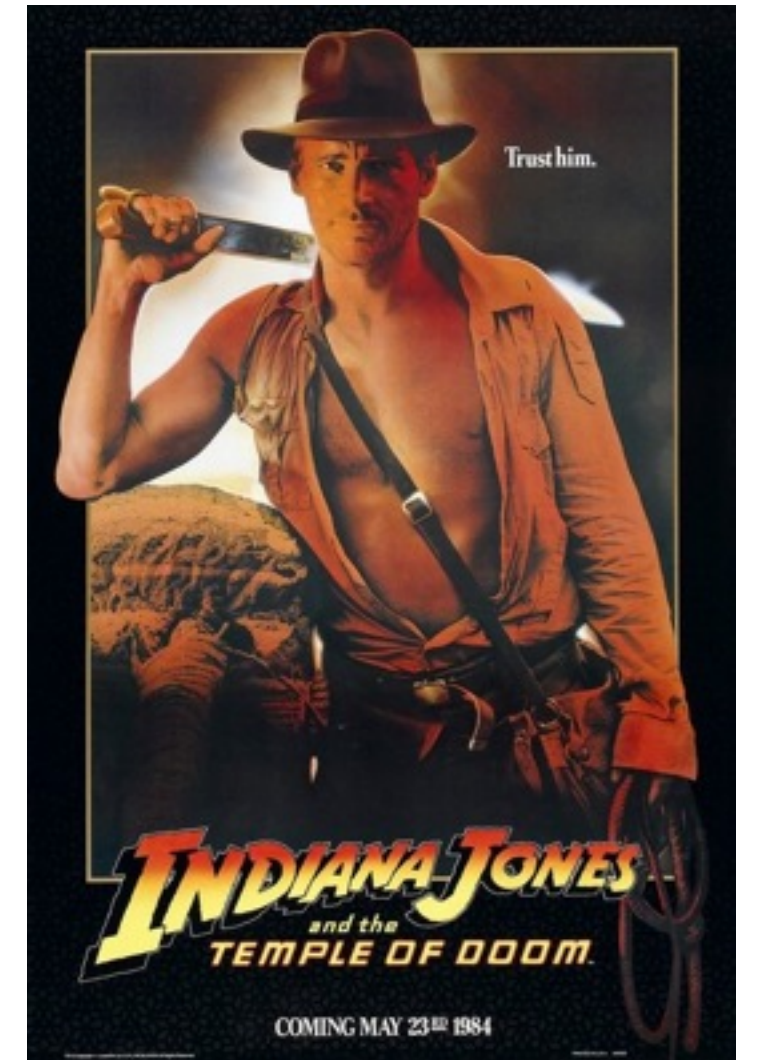
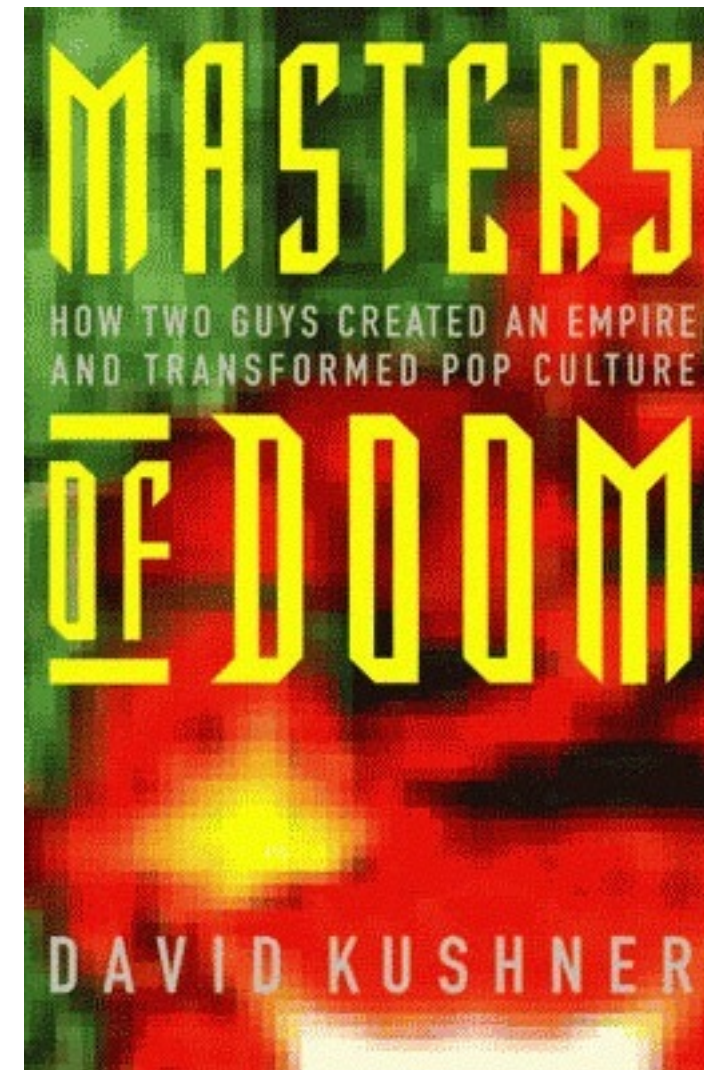
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The best games stick with us.



...just like the best books or movies.

*The difference between movies and books and games is **interactivity**.*

*Usability is a way to think about the relative **difficulty of interactivity**.*

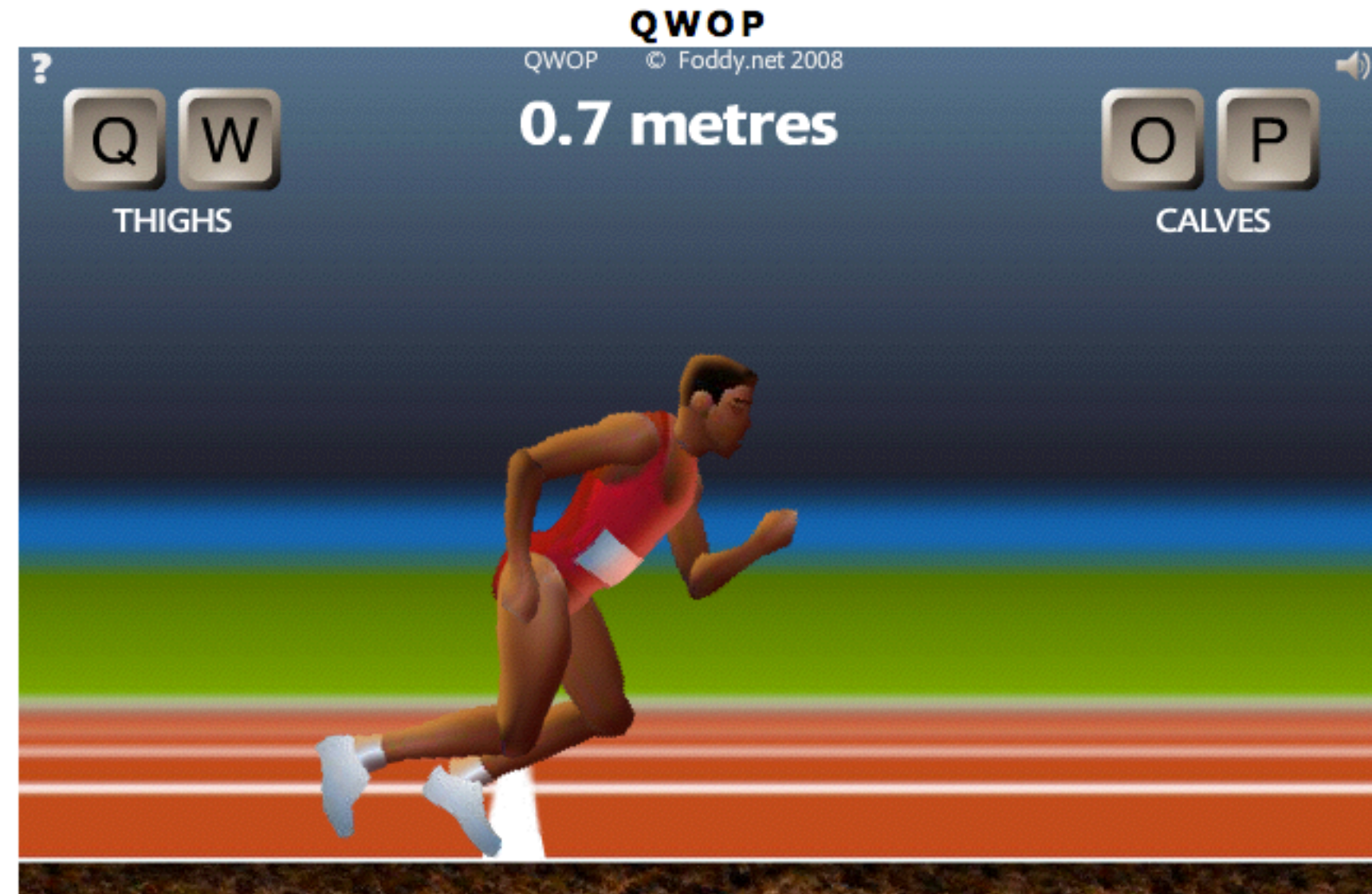
The best usability is not remembered.

Often, usability is asked to be:

- transparent / intuitive / natural / learnable
(*easy to learn, recognize, perform*)

Of course some games do have memorable usability.

(Dexterity games.)



The more you do something, the easier it should be to do. ~ Lund

But why should you care?

Thinking about your digital game from the perspective of **physical interactions** has the potential to improve your user experience.

Of the "actions" performed in your game, which require physical interactions?

- In-game examples:
 - rotate piece
 - move piece left/right
 - drop piece
- Meta-game examples
 - start new game
 - view leaderboard
 - change difficulty/mode

Shout out to Arnold Lund!

- List of “expert” usability maxims from 1997
- Applicable to any sort of HCI (Human Computer Interaction)
- Very nice list to start from

Don't overwhelm the user. ~ Lund

On making things intentionally

- Just like any other part of development, you can plan your Usability, or it will just be there without your planning.



Usability lessons for the
Game Screen:

Effectively communicating game
information to your player.

*The information for the decision needs
to be there when the decision is needed.
~ Lund*

Highlight possible actions.

- Before, show how to begin an action
- Mid-action, highlight action targets
- Show non-targets by disabling or hiding
- Common techniques include: color borders, shadows, pulsing or animated buttons, “pointers” after inactivity



Ascension: Chronicle of the Godslayer, Playdek

You should always know how to find out what to do next. ~ Lund

Clearly show whose turn it is.

- In Carcassonne, the current player is shown in three places.
- Common techniques:
 - player color (possibly in a game screen element)
 - show the board from the current player's perspective



Color is information. ~ Lund

Carcassonne, The Coding Monkeys

Always animate AI turns.

- No AI player animations, makes for an extremely jarring user experience.
- Extra context is also important in turn-based multiplayer, where the last action is not always easily remembered.



Ticket to Ride, Days of Wonder

The user should always know what is happening. ~ Lund

Hide “extra” information.

- Slide-out drawers
- Popovers or “modal” windows
- Double-tap for extra contextual information
- (Obviously you have to define “extra”.)



*Eliminate unnecessary decisions,
and illuminate the rest. ~ Lund*

Provide linear context.

- Highlight the single last turn by a player.
- A game log or history.



Suburbia, Jeremiah Maher

Minimize the need for a mighty memory. ~ Lund

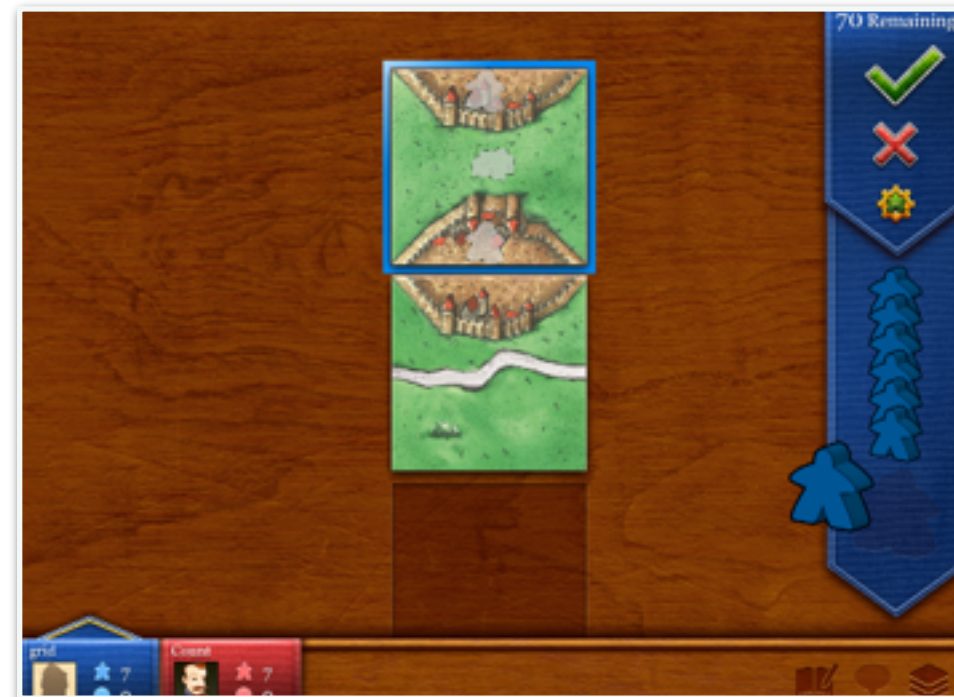
Usability lessons for the
Game Screen:

UI - Tips for the player effectively
communicating with the game.

*Everything in its place, and
a place for everything.
~ Lund*

Primary Input: Tap & Drag

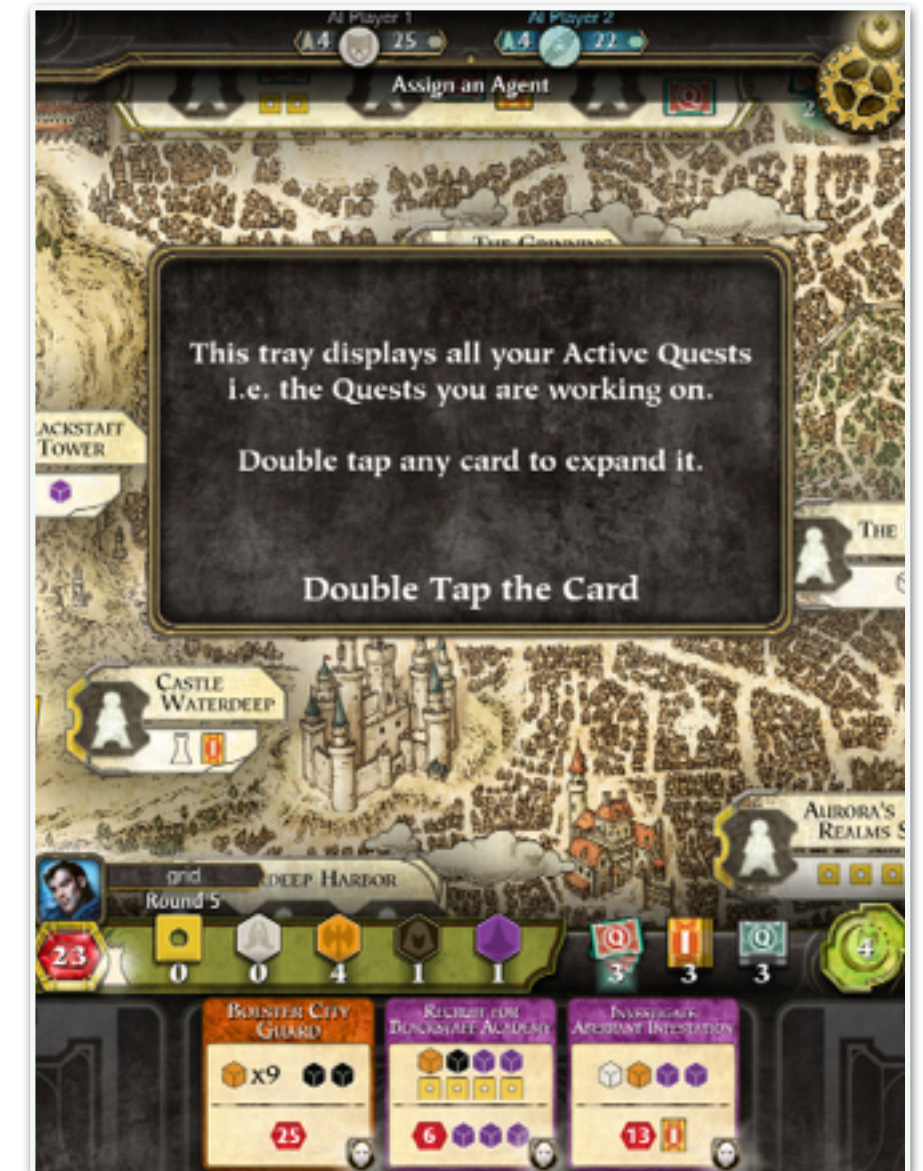
- Always show feedback.
- Drag or Tap to move?
 - The answer is both.
 - Show a highlighted state for tap.



Every action should have a reaction. ~ Lund

Secondary Touch Input

- Teachable:
 - Double-Tap
 - Long-Press
 - Swipe
- Do not use:
 - Triple (or more) Tap
 - Multi-finger drag/swipe



Lords of Waterdeep, Playdek

The user should control the system. The system shouldn't control the user. ~ Lund

Provide a confirmation step for complex actions.

- Make it clear when the turn will be passed to the next player.
- If undo is possible...



Don't let people accidentally shoot themselves. ~ Lund

Allow the user to Undo

- If an accidental action can be enough to lose a game, you'd better allow undo!
- Auto-confirmation of actions is made worse with poor UI.



Everyone makes mistakes, so every mistake should be fixable. ~ Lund

Usability Lessons for the
Multiplayer Lobby:

Dealing with conflicting goals —
customization vs simplicity.

Keep it simple. ~ Lund

Pick good defaults

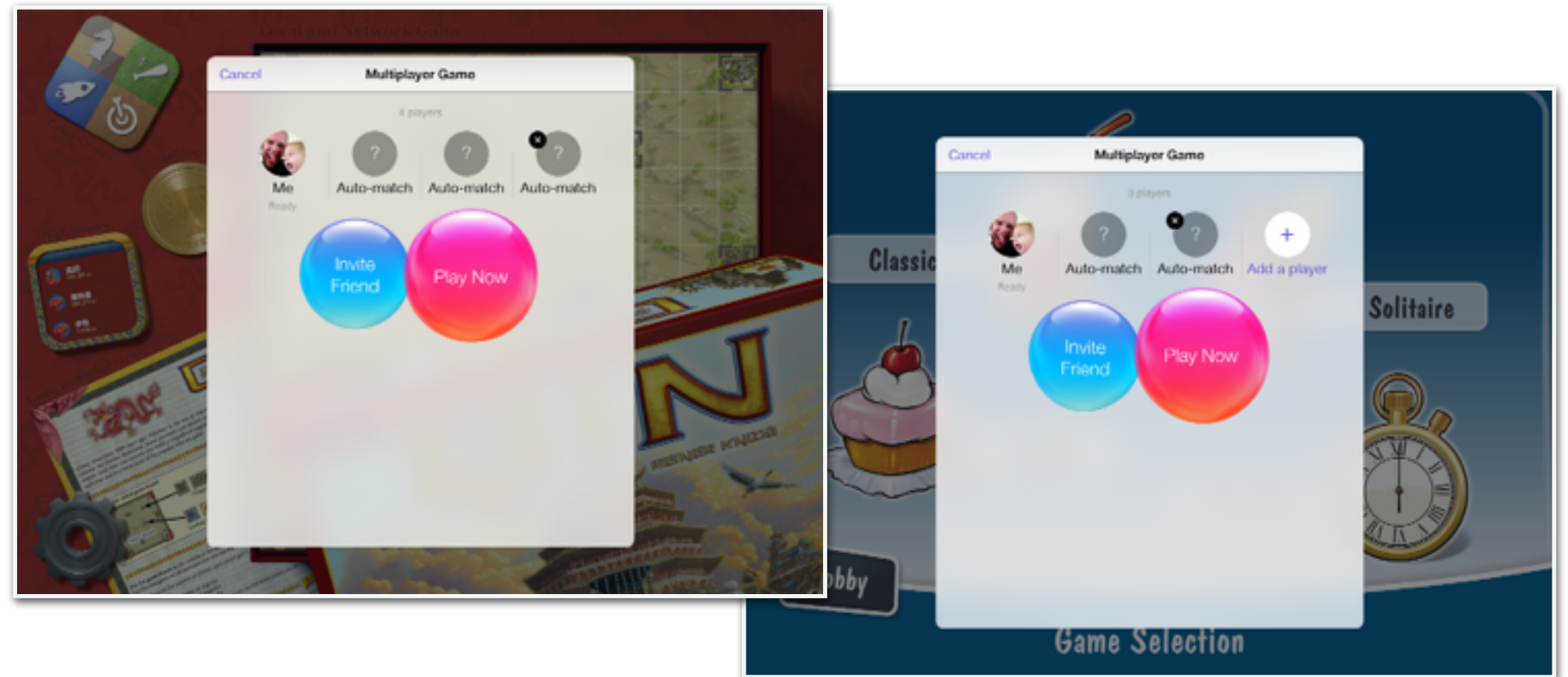
- Make sure "Start Game" is clearly identifiable.
- Provide contextual help.



Even experts are novices at some point. Provide help. ~ Lund

It's not a bad idea to use (or copy) an already existing UI.

- Familiar UI is good UI.
- (Even if it's not especially good UI.)



Things that look the same should act the same. ~ Lund

Summary: Think about Usability. Make better games.

References / notes:

<http://abstractpuzzle.com/gdc2014/>

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