

Don't Hate the Player

Designing Board Games for Divergent Play Experiences

I am a board game designer!



"When I don't like a game I play it until I know why people enjoy it
because they're not wrong." Richard Garfield





PLAYERS ARE
DIFFERENT

Types of Play

1. Dramatic Tension
2. Mastering a Framework
3. Creative Thinking & Expression
4. Relaxed Repetition
5. Hero Spotlight
6. Social Dynamic
7. Norm-Breaking
8. Worldbuilding & Storytelling
9. Time Pressure
10. Tactility & Movement

1: Dramatic Tension



1: Dramatic Tension Characteristics

- Strong, visible emotions

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- High randomness

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- Dramatic reversals of fortune

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- High focus/attention
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Game examples: Rap Godz

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- Strong, visible emotions
- High focus/attention
- Dramatic reversals of fortune

Game examples: Rap Godz, Jenga, Poker, Fireball Island, Quacks of Quedlinburg.



1: Why Dramatic Tension Gets Hate

“It’s too chaotic.”

1: Designing For Dramatic Tension

- Dramatic reveals



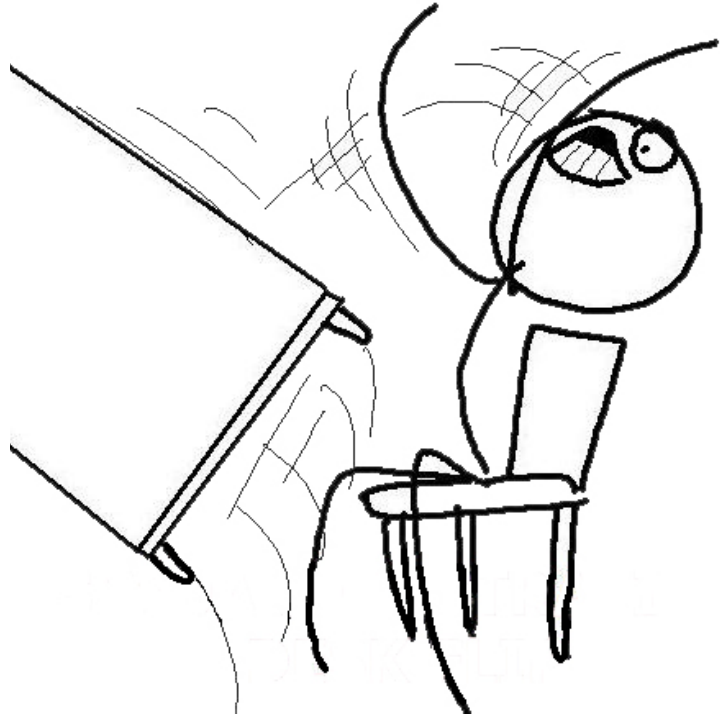
1: Designing For Dramatic Tension

- Dramatic reveals
- Instant action feedback



1: Designing For Dramatic Tension

- Dramatic reveals
- Instant action feedback
- Emotional investment



2: Mastering a Framework



2: Mastering a Framework Characteristics

- High focus/attention

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- Analysis Paralysis (AP)

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Game Examples: Magic the Gathering

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- Analysis Paralysis (AP)
- Competitive/tournament play

Game Examples: Magic the Gathering, Chess, Onitama, Xia, Wingspan



2: Why Mastering a Framework Gets Hate

“It’s too thinky.”

2: Designing for Mastering a Framework

- Multiple ways to win



2: Designing for Mastering a Framework

- Multiple ways to win
- Meaningful choices

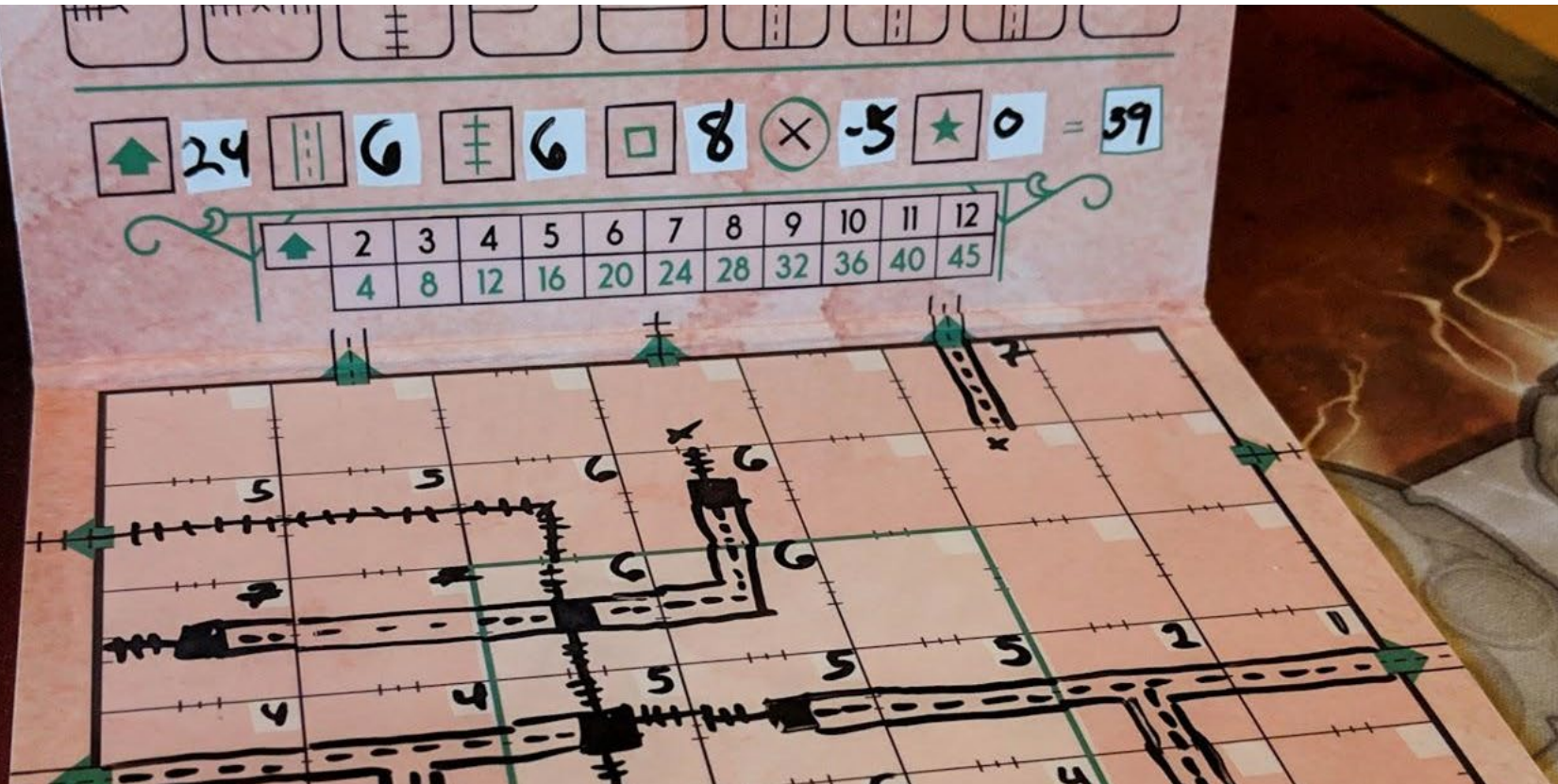


2: Designing for Mastering a Framework

- Multiple ways to win
- Meaningful choices
- Decision trees



3: Creative Thinking & Expression



3: Creative Thinking & Expression

Characteristics

- Infinite play space

3: Creative Thinking & Expression

Characteristics

- Infinite play space
- Players draw, act, or write

3: Creative Thinking & Expression

Characteristics

- Infinite play space
- Players draw, act, or write
- Unexpected results

3: Creative Thinking & Expression

Characteristics

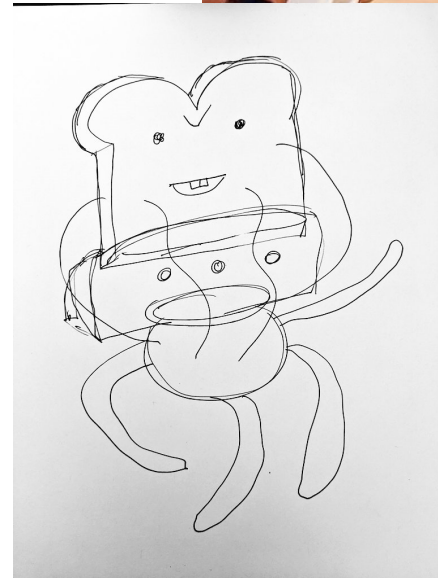
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Game examples: Railroad Ink

3: Creative Thinking & Expression Characteristics

- Infinite play space
- Players draw, act, or write
- Unexpected results

Game examples: Railroad Ink, Fake Artist Goes to New York, MonsDRAWsity, Just One



3: Why Creative Thinking & Expression Gets Ha

“I’m not artistic.”

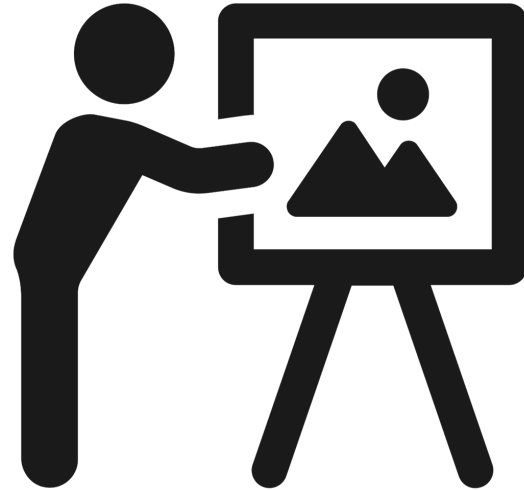
3: Designing for Creative Thinking & Expression

- Encourage creative thinking



3: Designing for Creative Thinking & Expression

- Encourage creative thinking
- Players modify the game or components



3: Designing for Creative Thinking & Expression

- Encourage creative thinking
- Players modify the game or components
- Take into account people's frustration



4: Relaxed Repetition



4: Relaxed Repetition Characteristics

- Simple, repetitive actions

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- Game is still fun if players are distracted

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Game Examples: Illimat

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Game Examples: Illimat, Go Fish, Uno, Azul, Candyland, Mahjong



4: Why Relaxed Repetition Players Gets Hate

“It’s too simple.”

4: Designing for Relaxed Repetition

- Provide low choice or obvious “right” choice



4: Designing for Relaxed Repetition

- Provide no choice or obvious “right” choice
- Pattern making and pattern recognition



4: Designing for Relaxed Repetition

- Provide no choice or obvious “right” choice
- Pattern making and pattern recognition
- Drop in/drop out play



5: Hero Spotlight



5: Hero Spotlight Characteristics

- Each player gets to be the center of attention

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- Often involves judging

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Game Examples: Dragon's Breath

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Game Examples: Dragon's Breath,
Charades, Team 3, Codenames

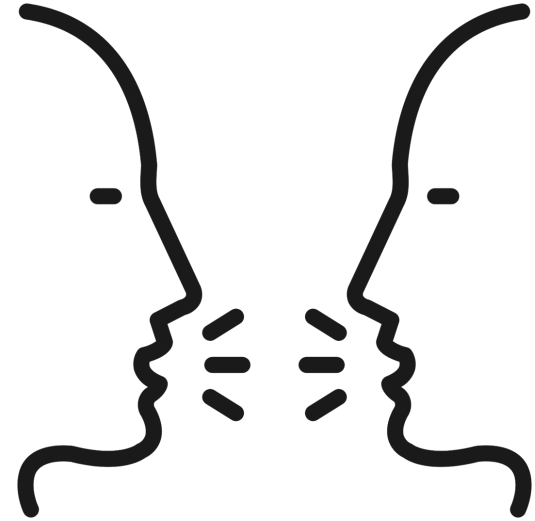


5: Why Hero Spotlight Gets Hate

“I don’t want to be the center of attention.”

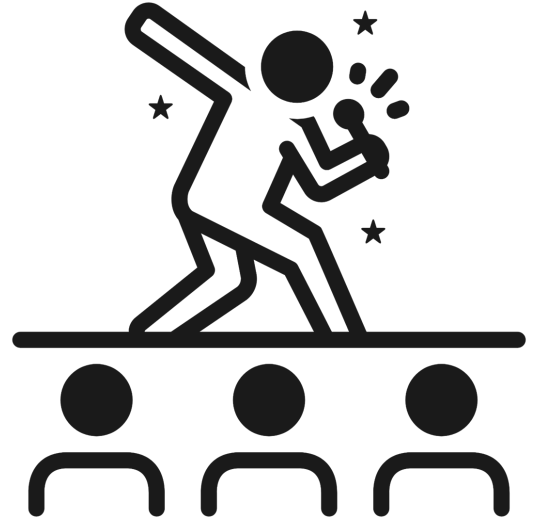
5: Designing for Hero Spotlight

- Actions are heavily structured (call and response)



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- Actions are heavily structured (call and response)
- Include a performance aspect



5: Designing for Hero Spotlight

- Actions are heavily structured (call and response)
- Include a performance aspect
- Techniques for making “hero” a comfortable role



6: Social Dynamic



6: Social Dynamics Characteristics

- Players negotiate, discuss, plan

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- Players synergize or antagonize

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Game examples: Rising Sun

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Game examples: Rising Sun, Pandemic, The Resistance, Sidereal Confluence, The Mind, Werewolf/Mafia

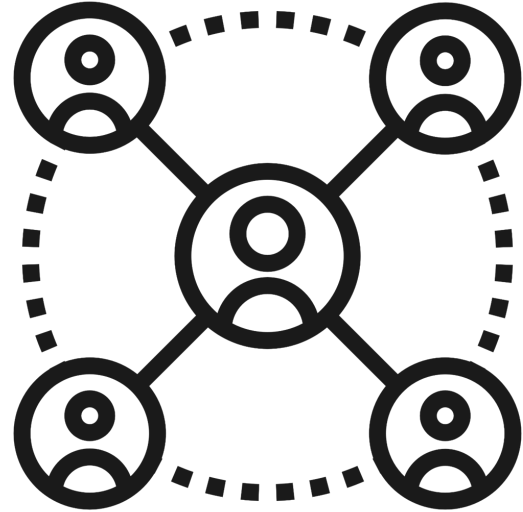


6: Why Social Dynamic Gets Hate

“Too much drama.”

6: Designing for Social Dynamic

- Player decisions impact other players



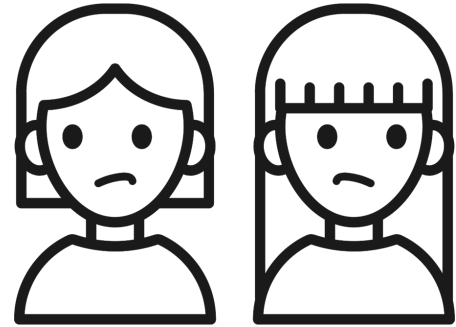
6: Designing for Social Dynamic

- Player decisions impact other players
- Communication as a core part of play



6: Designing for Social Dynamic

- Player decisions impact other players
- Communication as a core part of play
- Understand human social dynamics



7: Norm Breaking



7: Norm-Breaking Characteristics

- Players do things that go against societal norms.

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- Magic circle provides a temporary safe zone

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Game examples: Terror in Meeple City

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Game examples: Terror in Meeple City, BANG, Dragoon, legacy games



7: Why Non-Breaking Gets Hate

“Rule-breaking is wrong.”

7: Designing for Non-Breaking

- Players can destroy things or lie



7: Designing for Normal-Breaking

- Players can destroy things or lie
- Think of other ways to modify “normal” behavior



7: Designing for Norm-Breaking

- Players can destroy things or lie
- Think of other ways to modify “normal” behavior
- Understand personal boundaries



8: Worldbuilding & Storytelling



8: Worldbuilding & Storytelling Characteristics

- Players take on a role

8: Worldbuilding & Storytelling Characteristics

- Players take on a role
- Players tell a story

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- Players tell a story
- Aesthetics and theme are as important as mechanics.

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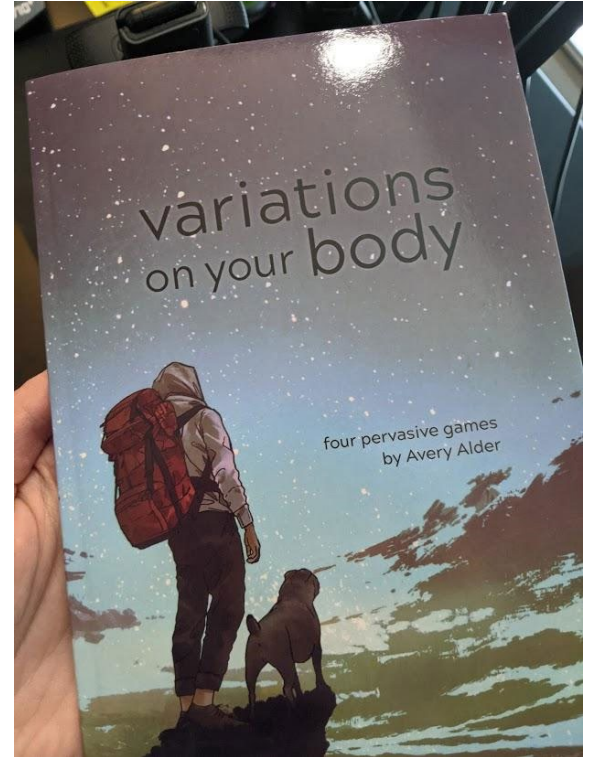
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Game examples: FATE

8: Worldbuilding & Storytelling Characteristics

- Players take on a role
- Players tell a story
- Aesthetics and theme are as important as mechanics.

Game examples: FATE, Fiasco, The King is Dead, Variations on Your Body, Escape the Dark Castle



8: Why Worldbuilding & Storytelling Gets Hate

“The play is too open-ended.”

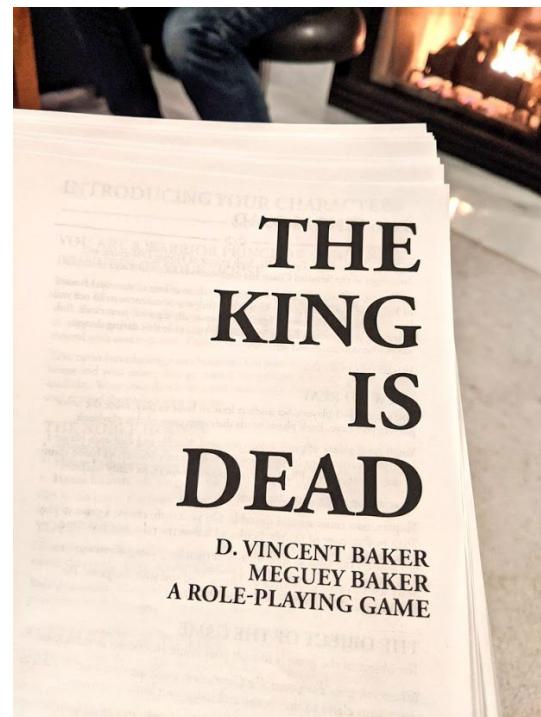
8: Designing for Worldbuilding & Storytelling

- Delve into the richness of story, location, characters



8: Designing for Worldbuilding & Storytelling

- Delve into the richness of story, location, characters
- Introduce complex scenarios



8: Designing for Worldbuilding & Storytelling

- Delve into the richness of story, location, characters
- Introduce complex scenarios
- Use safety tools



9: Time Pressure



9: Time Pressure Characteristics

- The game has a time limit

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- Players feel pressure to act quickly

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Game Examples: 5 Minute Dungeon

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- Actions happen in real time

Game Examples: 5 Minute Dungeon,
We're Doomed, Happy Salmon, 15
Minutes to Self-Destruct, Spoons



9: Why Time Pressure Gets Hate

“It’s too intense.”

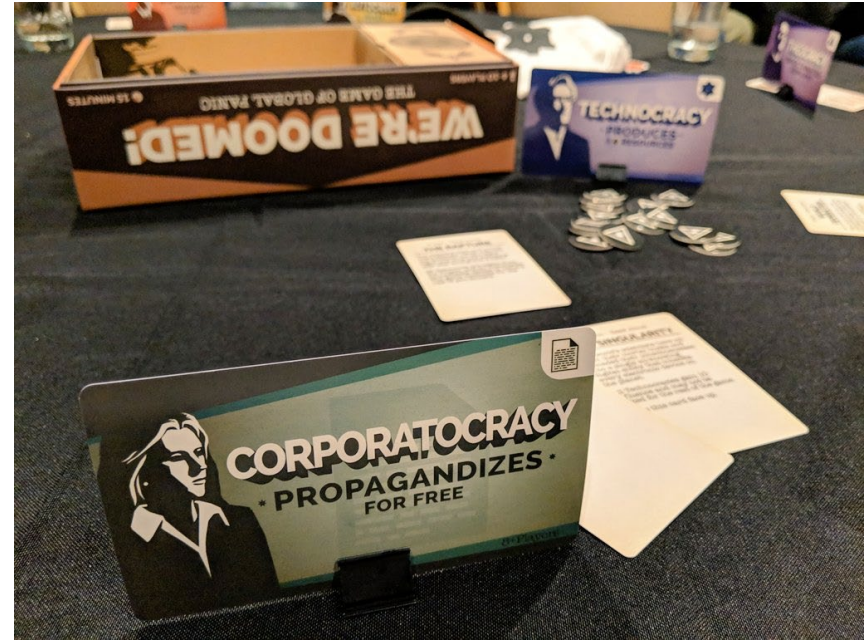
9: Designing for Time Pressure

- Track time in an interesting way



9: Designing for Time Pressure

- Track time in an interesting way
- Reward fast reactions



9: Designing for Time Pressure

- Track time in an interesting way
- Reward fast actions
- Things happen at specified times



10: Tactility & Movement



10: Tactility & Movement Characteristics

- Dexterity

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- Satisfying movement of components

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Game Examples: Crokinole

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- Dexterity
- Satisfying movement of components
- Tactility

Game Examples: Crokinole, X-Wing, Crokinole, Ganz Schoen Clever, Dice Forge, Nyctophobia



10: Why Tactility & Movement Gets Hate

“It’s hard to manipulate space and time.”

10: Designing for Tactility & Movement

- Focus on the “feel” of pieces and actions



10: Designing for Tactility & Movement

- Focus on the feel of pieces and actions
- Consider new ways to play with movement



10: Designing for Tactility & Movement

- Focus on the feel of pieces and actions
- Consider new ways to play with movement
- Accessibility



In Review: Types of Play

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Questions and Contact

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