

JESSE SCHELL

**THE ART OF GAME DESIGN:  
A BOOK OF LENSES**

KEYNOTE AT GDC 2009  
IGDA EDUCATION SUMMIT



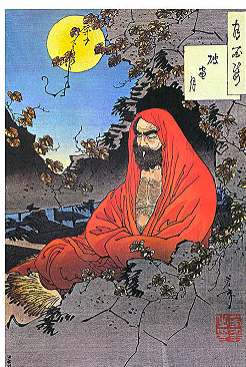
CHAPTER 1: THE DESIGNER

- A game designer must be confident. You become a game designer when you say these magic words:
- “I am a game designer.”



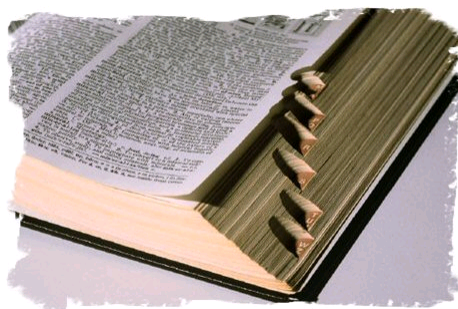
## CHAPTER 2: THE EXPERIENCE

- It is hard to observe an experience you are having while you are having it. But if you practice, you can learn to do it.



## CHAPTER 3: THE GAME

- Defining terms related to gameplay is an exercise that can greatly strengthen your analytic skill. The definitions themselves are unimportant.



## CHAPTER 4: THE ELEMENTS

- Every game has four basic elements:
  - Technology
  - Aesthetics
  - Game Mechanics
  - Story



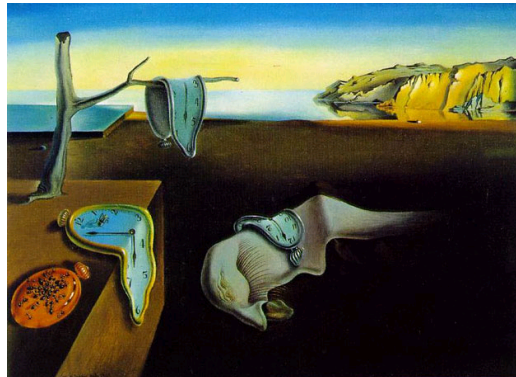
## CHAPTER 5: THEME

- Theming your games unifies them, and gives them meaning.



## CHAPTER 6: IDEA

- Your subconscious mind does most of the actual game design. Respect it.



## CHAPTER 7: ITERATION

- The more iterations, the better the game.



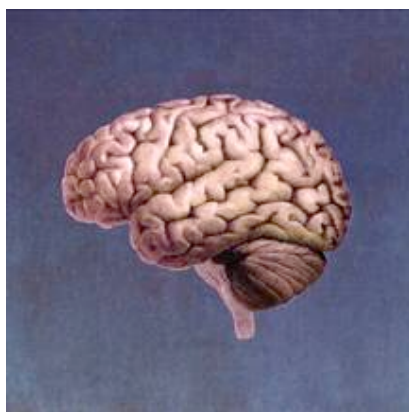
## CHAPTER 8: THE PLAYER

- You must design your game around the player, which means you need to know who that really is.



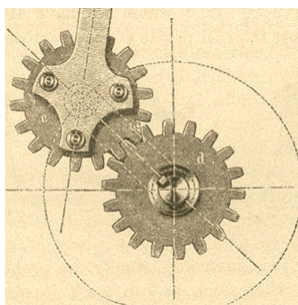
## CHAPTER 9: THE PLAYER'S MIND

- Reality is a construct of the mind. So are games. That's why games are as powerful as reality.



## CHAPTER 10: GAME MECHANICS

- There are only six kinds of game mechanics:
  - Space
  - Objects
  - Actions
  - Rules
  - Skill
  - Chance



## CHAPTER 11: BALANCE

- Balancing a game is nothing but asking this question: “Does my game feel right?”



## CHAPTER 12: PUZZLES

- A puzzle is nothing but a game with a dominant strategy.



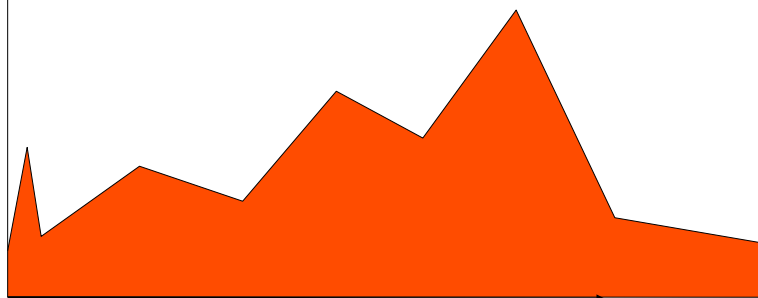
## CHAPTER 13: INTERFACE

- The player's mind enters the game, and the game enters the player's mind. The interface is the only thing that separates them.



## CHAPTER 14: INTEREST CURVES

- Good experiences are shaped like this:



## CHAPTER 15: STORY

- Games are bad at storytelling because time travel makes tragedy obsolete.





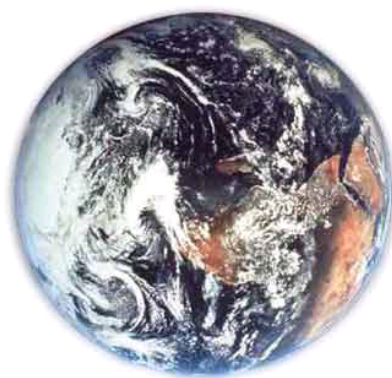
## CHAPTER 16: INDIRECT CONTROL

- The illusion of freedom is better than freedom itself.



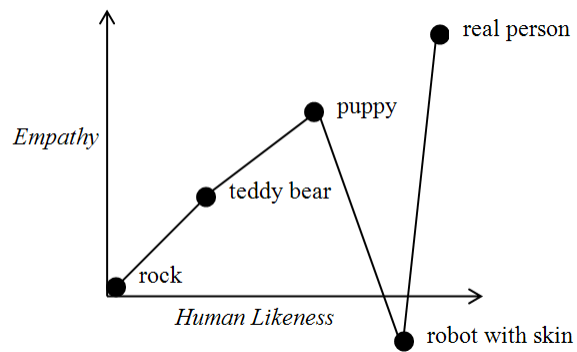
## CHAPTER 17: WORLDS

- Worlds are more powerful than games and stories put together.



## CHAPTER 18: CHARACTERS

- Avoid the uncanny valley.



## CHAPTER 19: SPACES

- Christopher Alexander is the greatest genius of our time.



## CHAPTER 20: AESTHETICS

- Let the artists paint the light, not the engineers.



## CHAPTER 21: OTHER PLAYERS

- No one goes to an amusement park alone.



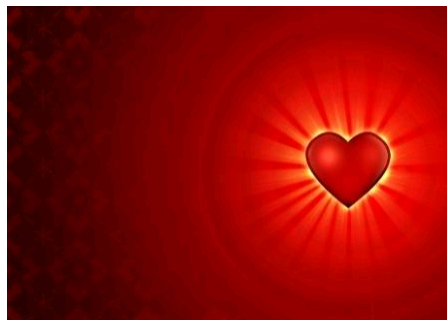
## CHAPTER 22: COMMUNITY

- Conflict is at the heart of all strong communities.



## CHAPTER 23: TEAM

- If the team does not love the project, it will fail.



## CHAPTER 24: DOCUMENTS

- There is no such thing as a “standard game design document.”



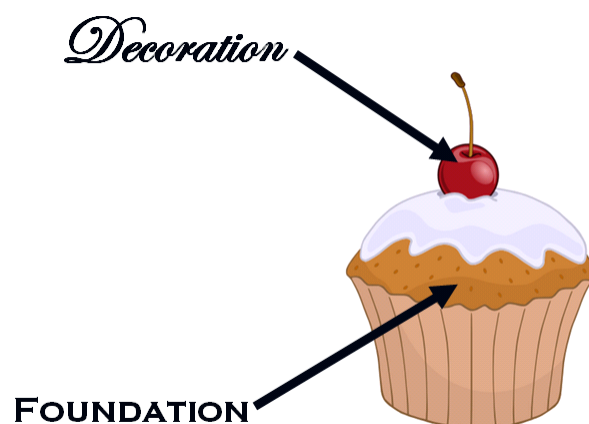
## CHAPTER 25: PLAYTESTING

- A playtest is like an engraved invitation that reads:

*You are cordially invited to tell me why I suck.*

## CHAPTER 26: TECHNOLOGY

- Technology should be like the cake, not the icing.



## CHAPTER 27: THE CLIENT

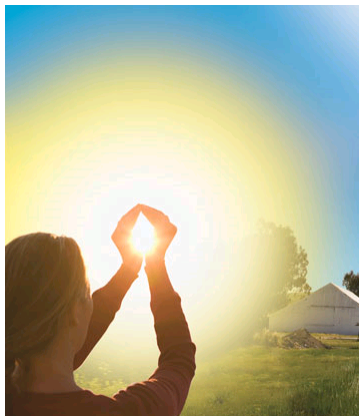
- The stupidest things you have ever heard in your entire life will come from the mouth of your client.



## CHAPTER 28: PITCH

- Power is the ability to get what you want. Remember that you have control over both halves of that:

- the ability to get
- -and-
- what you want



## CHAPTER 29: PROFIT

- Eighty percent of games are sold during the Christmas season.



## CHAPTER 30: TRANSFORMATION

- Games can change people for the better, and for the worse.



## CHAPTER 31: RESPONSIBILITY

- Games will become the literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Today's game designers are defining the thought patterns of the next generation.





## CHAPTER 32: MOTIVATION

- You are going to die soon. Don't waste your time making crap.

