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Game design theory books

Some games are timeless for a reason. Many of the best games bring people together like nothing else, transcending boundaries of age, sex and anything else that typically divides. Fun group games for kids and adults are a great way to bring friends and family together for any occasion. Here are 10 reasons games are so good at bringing people together.Teach Each Other New ThingsJust because your friends and family don't know how to play your favorite game doesn't mean you can't play it together. Teaching someone else how to play a game can be a valuable bonding experience, whether they're older or younger than you are.Try Out New Relationship DynamicsYoung kids often love teaching adults how to play new games, but there are other ways games change relationship dynamics. A one-player video game, for example, can be turned into a two-player exercise in trust if the player with the controller relies on the other to guide him or her through the virtual world.Reflect on Fond MemoriesTrivia games for older relatives can be a touchstone for reflecting on memories. The same is true for traditional party games. Scavenger hunt games also encourage a sense of nostalgia, evoking memories of childhood and an accompanying sense of childlike wonder and fun.Create New MemoriesRemembering the past is always fun, but the best games allow you to create brand new memories as a group. Fun games for workplace colleagues are an excellent way to foster a sense of community with fun memories, for example.Encourage HumorNot all groups are naturally inclined to have a laugh together. Serious Bible study groups, for example, may not seem a place for fun and games, but Christian games for adults — especially those with an emphasis on comedy — can greatly enhance the cohesion of such groups. And a strong sense of community and trust feeds directly back into the efficiency of the meetings.Work as a TeamFun games for youth groups, party games for ladies' groups and dress-up games for girls are just a few ways to dissolve tension among internally competitive groups of people. Working as a team, either as a whole group or as subdivisions of that group, naturally brings people closer together.Collective Concentration on a Shared GoalCooperative (non-competitive) puzzle games promote the concept of a shared goal as a way to bring people together. Examples include jigsaw puzzles, crosswords or even word searches. You could also stage a creative singalong.Structure InteractionPeople love to come together, but sometimes they lack a reason to do so. Games are one of the best ways to structure social interaction, from indoor party games for adults to epic games like Risk or Dungeons & Dragons.Relieve Stress and Break the IceWhen times get tough and tensions threaten to split people apart, it may be time to play some fun indoor games for adults. In many cases, players loosen up and give in to the fun.Put Everyone on a Level Playing FieldForget boys' games and girls' games, kids' games and adult games, video games and complicated card games. When you go for a game that's new for everyone involved, everyone starts on a level playing field. This is great for bonding and trust, as ideally no single player has an advantage over any other. MORE FROM QUESTIONSANSWERED.NET Abstract This article discusses when and how game design has become a profession as well as when it has formed enough to be considered as a separate discipline. Also it suggests 7 books that every game designer needs to read and explains what special value those books contain and how they can help one to shape as a professional game designer. Although there are other articles suggesting game design books, the authors of those articles are not suggesting specific order of reading them. Whereas, in this article books are presented in a specific order which enables the reader to enhance game design skills smoothly. Moreover, the order and the reasons for reading these books are thoroughly explained. Disclaimer: This article is not meant to market any of the below mentioned materials, but instead to provide information about where and what to learn. Introduction Playing games has been with humanity for thousands of years. Some of those games we play even today (see Table 1). Not only for humans, but also for many animals play has always been a critical form of self development. Play is teaching vital skills for the rest of their life [1]. Table 1: Games have been with us for 1000s of years Games Date Hunting games from time immemorial Senet 5000+ years old (ancient Egypt) The Royal Game of Ur 4500+ years old Olympic Games 2800 years old Go 2500 years old Chess 1500 years old But when did game development become a profession? How much knowledge and skills have we accumulated until now? How mature is that knowledge? Within this article we will understand when game design has become a profession. And if we want to make gameswhat we need to learn, from which sources to learn? Game Design as a profession In 1950s video games have appeared as a result of pure academic interest. Soon, in 1971 first arcade games have been created (Galaxy Game, Computer Space). In 1972 first game console Magnavox Odyssey has been created which allowed to play video games at home. 1978 is considered to be the beginning of Golden age of arcade video games. [2] So in early 70s people started to make money by creating games. Making games have become profitable and, hence, companies needed more professionals who could make them. Thus, the profession of game design is about 50 years old. (As Scott Rogers mentioned in comments, "people have been making money designing games since 1883" but this didn't form a game market where significant number of professionals could work as game developers.) Over time more platforms have been appearing, technology was developing and more people were working as game developers. Naturally, professionals were interested in why some games are more fun to play than the others. How to make better games? Trying to answer these questions accumulated enough knowledge that enabled us to talk about game design not just as a profession, but as a separate discipline. In Image 1 you can see a timeline of important events that contributed to the establishment of game design as a separate discipline. Image 1: Game Design is becoming a separate discipline Here is some data to justify the timeline:First game development conference - GDC has been organized by Chris Crawford in 1988 in his living room with only 27 game designers. The second conference, that was held the same year attracted already about 125 professionals. [3] Game design schools offering game design degrees: Date of Offering Game Design Degree Institution 1998 DigiPen Institute of Technology [4] 2002 School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California [5] 2005 Game Design and Development Program at Michigan State University [6] 2007 Rochester Institute of Technology (first game development courses started in 2001) 2018 University of Utah's Entertainment Arts and Engineering Program (University of Utah offered game design programs as part of a film degree and a computer science degree since 2009 [7]) Game design books and the dates they have originally been published: Originally published Game Design Book, Author 2002 The Art of Interactive Design by Chris Crawford 2003 Chris Crawford on Game Design by Chris Crawford 2003 Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals by Katie Salen, Eric Zimmerman 2004 Chris Crawford on Interactive Storytelling by Chris Crawford 2004 Game Design Workshop: A Playcentric Approach to Creating Innovative Games by Tracy Fullerton 2004 A Theory of Fun for Game Design by Raph Koster 2006 Fundamentals of Game Design by Ernest Adams 2008 Game Feel: A Game Designer's Guide to Virtual Sensation by Steve Swink 2008 The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses by Jesse Schell One might argue that there was a game design school in the world established earlier than 1998 (e.g. LED school in Osaka in 1986 [8]). Or the first game design book was not written in 2002 but much earlier (e.g. The Art of Computer Game Design by Chris Crawford originally published in 1984). But these are exceptions rather than rules. On the timeline it is mentioned the periods when significant number of books have been published, or significant number of schools started to offer game design degrees. By looking at Image 1 one can conclude that structured knowledge and knowledge sources, such as schools and literature, has appeared in the early 2000s. Thus, game design as a discipline was born in early 2000s and it is just 20 years old. This, in its turn, means that there is a vast knowledge and experience accumulated and it is worthwhile to learn the accumulated and structured knowledge that enabled us to increase your chances to make better games. The essence of cultural evolution is that we don't rediscover everything from scratch, but we learn from others' experiences and then we study or invent the rest ourselves. After all if you want to become a doctor, painter, physicist, engineer, musician, filmmaker you first study what is already known and only then you try to broaden the boundaries of knowledge. In fact, some genius game designers such asShigeru Miyamoto (studied industrial design), Will Wright (studied architecture, mechanical engineering), Sid Meier (studied computer science), Hideo Kojima (studied economics) have created a series of brilliant games without any formal education in game design. Nevertheless, thinking that education in game design is useless would be a wrong conclusion. Please consider that today's opportunities were not available to these designers [9]. On the other hand, it is important to mention that, learning from educational materials is only one side of the coin - the theory. Of course, it is necessary to combine the theory and the practice. Playing, analyzing both good and bad games and making your own games is the other side of the coin. And as a game designer you need to do both on a daily basis. 7 Must-read Game Design Books Now let's cover the must-read books that I have selected for this article. The books are ordered by ascending difficulty, i.e. first books are very good for beginners, whereas the later ones provide with advanced or supplementary content. 1) Game Design Workshop: A Playcentric Approach to Creating Innovative Games by Tracy Fullerton Recommended for beginner and intermediate levels This is the best book to start learning game design for a couple of reasons. The author - Tracy Fullerton is a professor in the USC Interactive Media & Games Division and while reading this book there is a feeling that this is a textbook written for her students. The book is written in a very comprehensive language, it is well structured and covers the most important topics necessary for a game designer. It covers everything starting from game designer's role as well as game ideation phase, prototyping, balancing, working as a game designer and so on. In this book you will learn about:Formal elements. These are the elements that structure the game, without them game does not exist. Dramatic elements. These are the elements that give context to gameplay and engage the players emotionally. Prototyping your game correctly Playtesting your games, and analyzing playtesting results Working as a game designer Other extremely valuable things you will find in this book are the special sections called Designer Perspective. Those are a few sections that present different designers, their works and advice. You will notice something unique in each game designer, and you will also see lots of characteristics that is common for all of them. And you will get the feeling of what it means to be a game designer. Plus you will get lots of references to other games, books, articles for your further investigation. 2) The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses by Jesse Schell Recommended for beginner and intermediate levels This book is very similar to the first one in terms that it could be used as a textbook too because this book also covers almost every essential topic that a game designer needs to understand. This book is also very well structured and easy to understand, with very rich content but still suitable for beginners too. One peculiarity of this book is that it gives you 113 lenses. Every lens is a unique perspective to your game considering one particular aspect of a game. On each lens there are several questions that you need to ask yourself to understand if your game conforms to that lens or not, and how you can improve your game in that particular aspect. For example, lens #40 (one of my personal favorites) is called "The Lens of Triangularity" (see Image 2). Almost every good game has triangularity which is basically the balance between risk and reward that gives you a choice to risk for more reward or to play safe for less reward. Image 2: The Lens of Triangularity By the way, the lenses introduced in the book are also collected in a deck and are being sold separately. It is called "The Art of Game Design: A Deck of Lenses" and Image 2 demonstrates one of the lenses from that deck. 3) Game Feel: A Game Designer's Guide to Virtual Sensation by Steve Swink Recommended for intermediate and advanced levels After reading the above mentioned 2 brilliant books, it is time to get in touch with more advanced content. Game Feel is an exceptional book and no other book covers what this book does. This book basically explains how the game feel forms when you play. It explains why two games can be very similar, but one can feel good and the other one can feel bad. You will understandhow human perception works 3 building blocks of game feel (real-time control, polish and simulated space) 6 metrics of game feel (input, response, context, polish, metaphor, rules) Based on that 6 metrics the book will deconstruct several famous games and will explain why these games feel good based on that metrics. Thus, this book is an exceptional work that studies where the perceptions come and which things make us feel good in games. 4) Game Mechanics: Advanced Game Design by Ernest Adams and Joris Dormans Recommended for intermediate and more advanced level book, though very different from the previous one. This book separates two types of games - games of emergence and games of progression. The book covers both aspects of game design nicely, but it is rather concentrated on games of emergence. These are the games that have relatively simple rules but much variation and the game's challenges and its flow of events are not planned in advance but emerge during play. Good examples would be Chess, Go, SimCity, The Sims, Sid Meier's Civilization, etc.Central statement of the book is that the game's outcome should be unpredictable. And there are 3 ways of doing so: using chance (e.g. a throw of a dice or the twirl of a spinner in a board game) choices made by players (e.g. any multiplayer game) complex gameplay created by the game's rules (e.g. Chess) Complex gameplay created by the game's rules is the main topic of this book. The book explains that if we are able to make game mechanics so that our game becomes a game of emergence, it will become interesting and replayable just because of its mechanics (not because of its aesthetics, or story). The book introduces 16 game mechanics design patterns that could be used to make a game of emergence. It also introduces a game design tool named "Machinations framework" authored by Joris Dormans and teaches how to use Machinations to model game mechanics and see how their internal economies work. Now beta version of Machinations framework is available online for free here: and while reading this book you need to learn and use this tool to fully understand the book's content. "Game Mechanics: Advanced Game Design" introduces you to a new way of thinking and understanding game mechanics. It is a huge step forward into abstraction and formalization of building, testing and balancing game mechanics. 5) A Theory of Fun for Game Design by Raph Koster Recommended for intermediate and advanced levels This is a brilliant book by Raph Koster. While reading this book I was shocked how unique and powerful this book was and how many important things it contained for a game designer. I wouldn't say this book is very practical though. This book will not give you direct tools for you to apply to your next game, but it will teach you the essence of who is a game designer, how the human brain works, who are the players and what they want why and when games are becoming boring. So it is more about the philosophy of game design and the psychology of human beings as game players that every game designer needs to understand. Though, it is not giving you direct tools, it widens your perspective on games. It can help you while designing game levels to suggest players always something new and interesting and so on. So don't consider this book just a pure and useless theory. It will definitely make you more powerful as a game designer. 6) Level Up! The Guide to Great Video Game Design by Scott Rogers Recommended to read as a supplementary material after the above listed books As the book's title says it is mainly a guide. It is structured more like a reference book - a directory. If it talks about something it describes all possible types of that thing. For example, all possible camera types, all possible camera movements, all possible UI elements in HUD, all cliché video game themes, all possible enemy types and so on. Because of this, honestly, this was quite hard for me to read but it has an immense value. During game design brainstormings very often you will notice that some ideas flesh out in your mind that you have read in this book. So definitely, it is a very useful book to read for a game designer to enrich your bank of game concepts. Plus you will definitely find lots of good advice on how to design your levels, game object sizes, jump heights, and many other things. I mean it is not just a guide, it is much more than that. This book will not give you direct tools but it will teach you the way of True Inspiration by Amy Wallace and Edwin Catmull Recommended to read as a supplementary material after the above listed books Ed Catmull was a former president of Pixar and Walt Disney Animation Studios and this book is basically his life story and the history of Pixar. This is clearly not a game design book. Then why do I think this is a must read book for a game designer? Because game development, and, particularly, game design is a highly creative field. Usually people don't like boring and routine tasks, and they want something more creative. But when they are faced with a creative task, they start to complain, that the task is not clear and they don't know what exactly needs to be done. And this book is for such situations. This book teaches that creativity is about creating something new and useful. And when you do something new, you can't be sure what is the right direction to move. Hence, creativity is always accompanied by uncertainty. And as a game designer you need to have your vision and be able to make decisions within that uncertainty. You need to be able to embrace the uncertainty and move forward within that darkness. Other very important things that you will learn in this book are:How to face challenges About the metamorphosis of an original idea into something beautiful and mature at the end of the project You should believe that team has an intrinsic power of creativity. And with the right approach you can unleash that potential or suppress it. You will learn that failure is not bad, if you do something new, you will fail, and fail many times. You will be safe from failure, only when you do something you have done many times and mastered it - which has nothing to do with creativity. This book is full of good advice, exciting examples from the world's most successful and creative companies such as Lucasfilms, Pixar and Disney. It will give you lots of sense how great products are created which is a very good addition to your arsenal. Bonus Material Recommended for amateurs and professionals In 2018 presented 21 video lectures from Will Wright. It is called "Will Wright Teaches Game Design And Theory". This video course is an amazing inspirational and informative material, that I would definitely recommend not only to professional game designers, but also to people who love games. He is talking about specific problems he has encountered when he was working on The Sims, SimCity, Spore, and many other games. Will Wright tells exciting details and on specific examples he teaches how a game designer should think, should approach to problems and gives practical tools to solve them. Watching a game designer of that caliber for about 4 hours is a great opportunity for every professional game designer. Final thoughts Game design is a fairly new discipline - only 20 years old. And there are so many things in the future that game designers and game scholars will invent, study and share with the community. Although it is a very young discipline, still there is enough knowledge accumulated in forms of books, articles, etc. I have listed 7 must-read books that will allow you to start from scratch and then bring you to the next level as a game designer - a professional who has enough tools to analyze other's games and create his own ones. Again, please note that only reading will contribute very little to your skills if you would not put together enough practice. People learn by doing (and, ironically, by teaching :)). So you need to gradually apply all the precious advice you have learned in these books in your prototypes and games and strive to make every other game at least a bit better than the previous one. References

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