



The Art of Game Design



A Deck of Lenses



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1 The Lens of Essential Experience

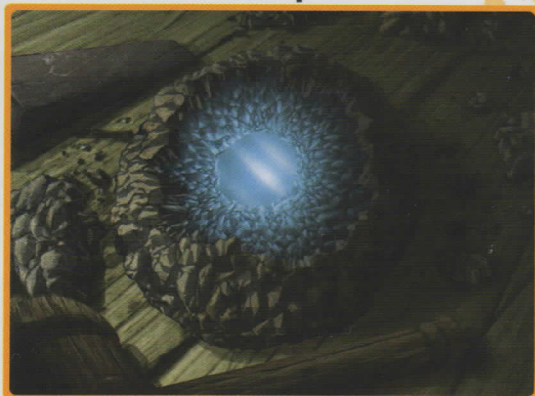


Illustration by Zachary Coe

To use this lens, stop thinking about your game, and start thinking about the experience of the player. Ask yourself these questions:

- What experience do I want the player to have?
- What is essential to the experience?
- How can my game capture that essence?

2 The Lens of Surprise



Illustration by Diana Patton

Surprise is so basic that we can easily forget about it. Use this lens to remind yourself to fill your game with interesting surprises. Ask yourself these questions:

- What will surprise players when they play my game?
- Does the story in my game have surprises? Do the game rules? Does the artwork? The technology?
- Do your rules give players ways to surprise each other?
- Do your rules give players ways to surprise themselves?

3 The Lens of Fun



Illustration by Jon Schulte

Fun is desirable in nearly every game, though sometimes fun defies analysis. To maximize your game's fun, ask yourself these questions:

- What parts of my game are fun?
- What parts need to be more fun?

4 The Lens of Curiosity

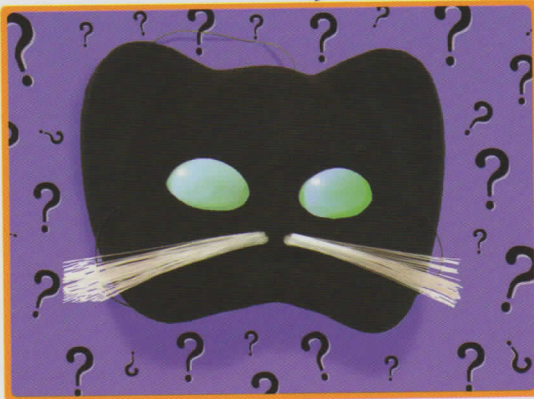


Illustration by Emma Backer

To use this lens, think about the player's true motivations - not just the goals your game has set forth, but the reason the player wants to achieve those goals. Ask yourself these questions:

- What questions does my game put into the player's mind?
- What am I doing to make them care about these questions?
- What can I do to make them invent even more questions?

5 The Lens of Endogenous Value



Illustration by Melanie Lam

To use this lens, think about your player's feelings about items, objects, and scoring in your game.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What is valuable to the players in my game?
- How can I make it more valuable to them?
- What is the relationship between value in the game and the player's motivations?

6 The Lens of Problem Solving



Illustration by Cheryl Ceol

Every game has problems to solve. To use this lens, think about the problems your players must solve to succeed at your game.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What problems does my game ask the player to solve?
- Are there hidden problems to solve that arise as part of gameplay?
- How can my game generate new problems so that players keep coming back?

7 The Lens of The Elemental Tetrad

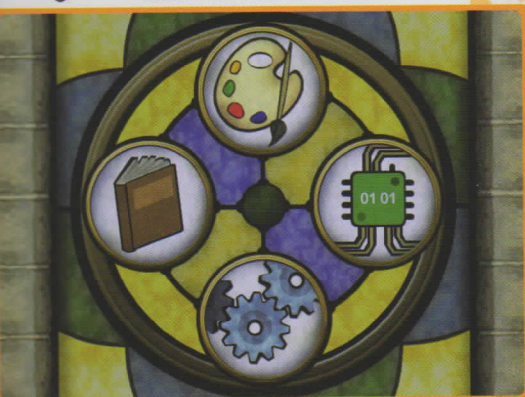


Illustration by Reagan Heller

To use this lens, take stock of what your game is truly made of. Consider each element separately, and then all of them together as a whole.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Is my game design using elements of all four types (Aesthetics, Technology, Mechanics and Story)?
- Could my design be improved by enhancing elements in one or more of the categories?
- Are the four elements in harmony, reinforcing each other, and working together toward a common theme?

8 The Lens of Holographic Design



Illustration by Zachary Coe

To use this lens, you must simultaneously see your game structure and the player experience. You may shift your focus from one to the other, but it is far better to view your game and experience holographically.

- What elements of the game make the experience enjoyable?
- What elements of the game may detract from the experience?
- How can I change game elements to improve the experience?

9 The Lens of Unification



Illustration by Diana Patton

To use this lens, consider the reason behind it all. Ask yourself these questions:

- What is my theme?
- Am I using every means possible to reinforce that theme?

10 The Lens of Resonance



Illustration by Nick Daniel

To use the Lens of Resonance, you must look for hidden power. Ask yourself these questions:

- What is it about my game that feels powerful and special?
- When I describe my game to people, what ideas get them really excited?
- If I had no constraints of any kind, what would this game be like?
- I have certain instincts about how this game should be. What is driving those instincts?

11 The Lens of Infinite Inspiration

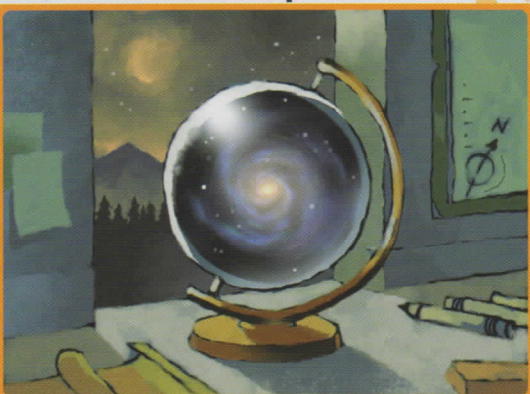


Illustration by Sam Yip

When you know how to listen, everybody is the guru.
-Ram Dass

To use this lens, stop looking at your game, or games like it. Instead, look everywhere else. Ask yourself these questions:

- What is an experience I have had in my life that I want to share with others?
- In what small way can I capture the essence of that experience and put it into my game?

12 The Lens of The Problem Statement



Illustration by Cheryl Ceol

To use this lens, think of your game as the solution to the problem. Ask yourself these questions:

- What problem, or problems, am I really trying to solve?
- Have I been making assumptions about this game that really have nothing to do with its true purpose?
- Is a game really the best solution? Why?
- How will I be able to tell if the problem is solved?

13 ⚡ The Lens of The Eight Filters



Illustration by Chris Daniel

To use this lens, you must consider the many constraints on your design. Your design is only finished when it can pass through all eight filters without requiring a change. Ask yourself these questions:

- Does this game feel right?
- Will the intended audience like this game enough?
- Is this a well-designed game?
- Is this game novel enough?
- Will this game sell?
- Is it technically possible to build this game?
- Does this game meet our social and community goals?
- Do the playtesters enjoy this game enough?

15 🎲 The Lens of The Toy



Illustration by Camilla Kydland

To use this lens, stop thinking about whether your game is fun to play, and start thinking about whether it is fun to play **with**. Ask yourself these questions:

- If my game had no goal, would it be fun at all? If not, how can I change that?
- When people see my game, do they want to start interacting with it, even before they know what to do? If not, how can I change that?

14 ⚡ The Lens of Risk Mitigation

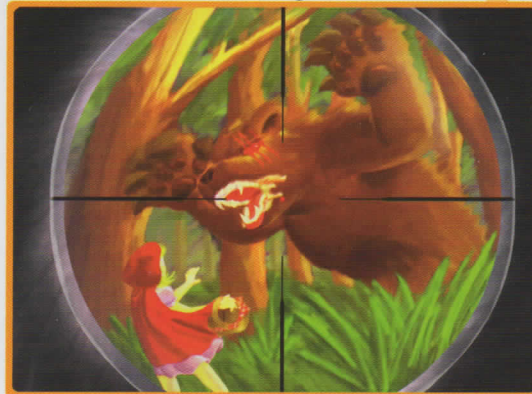


Illustration by Chris Daniel

To use this lens, stop thinking positively, and start to seriously consider the things that could go horribly wrong with your game. Ask yourself these questions:

- What could keep this game from being great?
- How can we stop that from happening?

16 ♟️ The Lens of The Player



Illustration by Nick Daniel

To use this lens, stop thinking about your game, and start thinking about your player. Ask yourself these questions about the people who will play your game:

- In general, what do they like?
- What don't they like? Why?
- What do they expect to see in a game?
- If I were in their place, what would I want to see in a game?
- What will they like or dislike about my game in particular?

17

The Lens of Pleasure



Illustration by Jim Rugg

To use this lens, think about the kinds of pleasure your game does and does not provide. Ask yourself these questions:

- What pleasures does my game give to players? Can these be improved?
- What pleasures are missing from my game's experience? Why? Can they be added?

18

The Lens of Flow



Illustration by Diana Patton

To use this lens, consider what is holding your player's focus. Ask yourself these questions:

- Does my game have clear goals? If not, how can I fix that?
- Are the goals of the player the same goals I intended?
- Do parts of the game distract players so they forget their goal? If so, can these distractions be reduced, or tied into the game goals?
- Does my game provide a steady stream of gradually increasing challenges?
- Are the player's skills improving as expected? If not, how can I change that?

19

The Lens of Needs



Illustration by Chuck Hoover

To use this lens, stop thinking about your game, and start thinking about what basic human needs it fulfills. Ask yourself these questions:

- On which levels of Maslow's hierarchy is my game operating?
- How can I make my game fulfill more basic needs than it already is?
- On the levels my game is currently operating, how can it fulfill those needs even better?

20

The Lens of Judgment

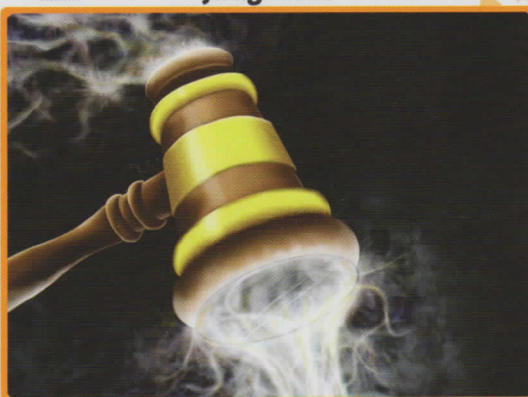


Illustration by Joseph Grubb

To decide if your game is a good judge of the players, ask yourself these questions:

- What does my game judge about the players?
- How does it communicate this judgment?
- Do players feel the judgment is fair?
- Do they care about the judgment?
- Does the judgment make them want to improve?

21 The Lens of Functional Space



Illustration by Cheryl Ceol

To use this lens, think about the space in which your game really takes place when all surface elements are stripped away. Ask yourself these questions:

- Is the space of this game discrete or continuous?
- How many dimensions does it have?
- What are the boundaries of the space?
- Are there sub-spaces? How are they connected?
- Is there more than one useful way to abstractly model the space of this game?

22 The Lens of Dynamic State

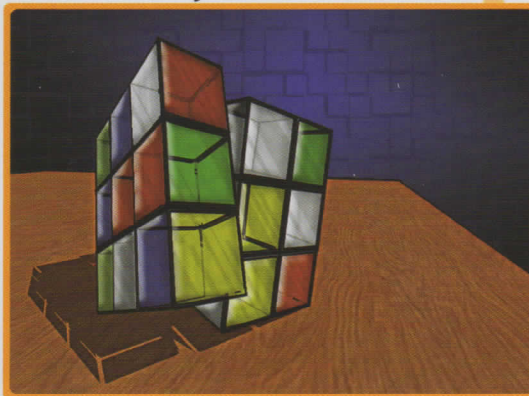


Illustration by Chuck Hoover

To use this lens, think about what information changes during your game, and who is aware of it. Ask yourself these questions:

- What are the objectives in my game?
- What are the attributes of the objects?
- What are the possible states for each attribute? What triggers the state changes for each attribute?
- What state is known by all players?
- What state is known by some players, but not others?
- Would changing who knows what state improve my game in some way?

23 The Lens of Emergence



Illustration by Reagan Heller

To make sure your game has interesting qualities of emergence, ask yourself these questions:

- How many verbs do my players have?
- How many objects can each verb act on?
- How many ways can players achieve their goals?
- How many subjects do the players control?
- How do side effects change constraints?

24 The Lens of Action



Illustration by Nick Daniel

To use this lens, think about what your players can do and what they can't, and why. Ask yourself these questions:

- What are the operational actions in my game?
- What are the resultant actions?
- What resultant actions would I like to see? How can I change my game in order to make those possible?
- Am I happy with the ratio of resultant to operational actions?
- What actions do players wish they could do in my game that they cannot? Can I somehow enable these, either as operational or resultant actions?

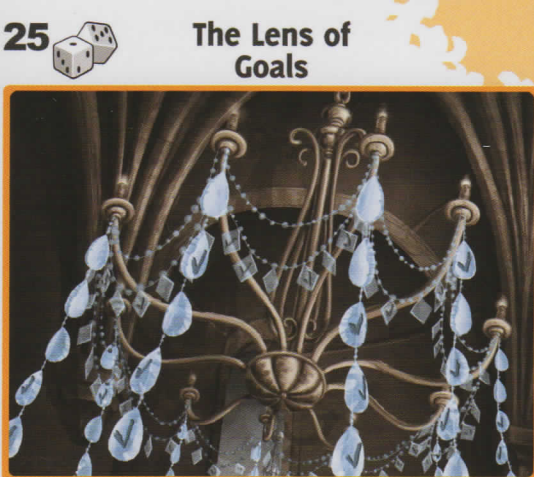


Illustration by Zachary Coe

To ensure the goals of your game are appropriate and well-balanced, ask yourself these questions:

- What is the ultimate goal of my game?
- Is that goal clear to players?
- If there is a series of goals, do the players understand that?
- Are the different goals related to each other in a meaningful way?
- Are my goals concrete, achievable and rewarding?
- Do I have a good balance of short and long term goals?
- Do players have a chance to decide their own goals?
- Do the playtesters enjoy this game enough?



Illustration by Joshua Seaver

To use this lens, look deep into your game until you can make out its most basic structure. Ask yourself these questions:

- What are the foundational rules of my game? How do these differ from the operational rules?
- Are there "laws" or "house rules" that are forming as the game develops? Should these be incorporated into my game directly?
- Are there different modes in my game? Do they make things simpler, or more complex? Would the game be better with more or less modes?
- Who enforces the rules?
- Are the rules easy to understand, or are they confusing? If confusing, should I change the rules or explain them more clearly?

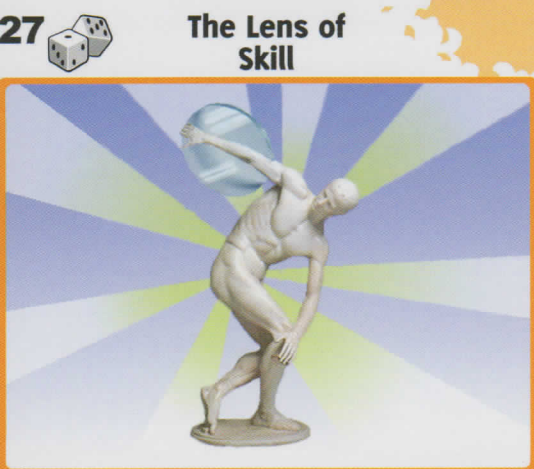


Illustration by Emma Backer

To use this lens, stop looking at your game, and start looking at the skills you are asking of the players. Ask yourself these questions:

- What skills does my game require from the player?
- Are there categories of skill that this game is missing?
- Which skills are dominant?
- Are these skills creating the experience I want?
- Are some players much better at these skills than others?
- Does this make the game feel unfair?
- Can players improve their skills with practice?
- Does this game demand the right level of skill?

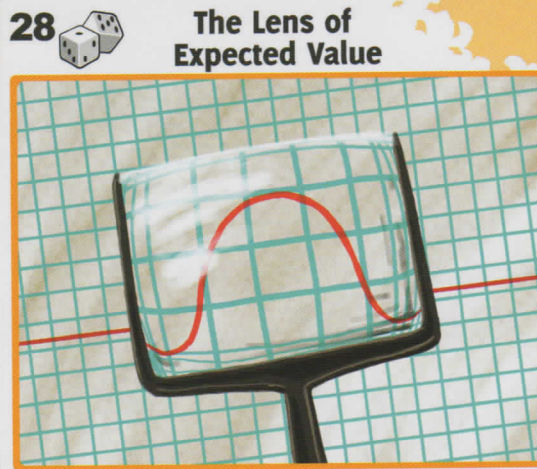


Illustration by Nick Daniel

To use this lens, think about the chance of different events occurring in your game, and what those mean to your player. Ask yourself these questions:

- What is the actual chance of a certain event occurring?
- What is the perceived chance?
- What value does the outcome of that event have? Can the value be quantified? Are there intangible aspects of value that I am not considering?
- Each action a player can take has a different expected value. Am I happy with these values? Do they give the player interesting choices? Are they too rewarding, or too punishing?

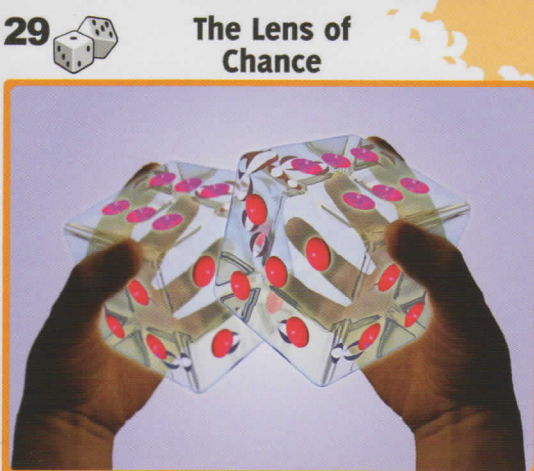


Illustration by Joshua Seaver

To use this lens, focus on the parts of your game that involve randomness and risk, keeping in mind that those two things are not the same.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What in my game is truly random? What parts just feel random?
- Does the randomness give the players positive feelings of excitement and challenge, or negative feelings of hopelessness and lack of control?
- Would changing my probability distribution curves improve my game?
- Do players have the opportunity to take interesting risks?
- What is the relationship between chance and skill in my game?

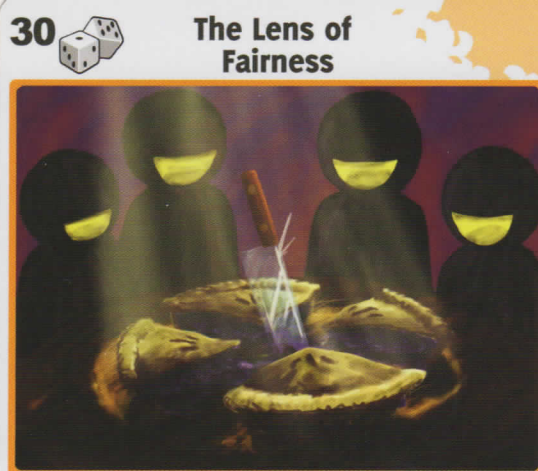


Illustration by Nick Daniel

To use this lens, evaluate the game from each player's point of view and skill level. Find a way to give each player a chance of winning that each will consider to be fair.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Should my game be symmetrical? Why?
- Should my game be asymmetrical? Why?
- Which is more important: that my game is a reliable measure of who has the most skill, or that it provide an interesting challenge to all players?
- If I want players of different skill levels to play together, what means will I use to make the game interesting and challenging for everyone?

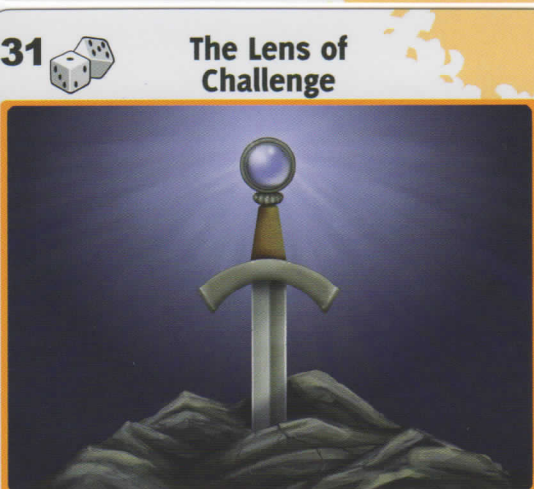


Illustration by Reagan Heller

Challenge is at the core of almost all gameplay. You could even say that a game is defined by its goals and challenges. When examining the challenges of your game, ask yourself these questions:

- What are the challenges in my game?
- Are they too easy, too hard, or just right?
- Can my challenges accommodate a wide variety of skill levels?
- How does the level of challenge increase as the player succeeds?
- Is there enough variety in the challenges?
- What is the maximum level of challenge in my game?

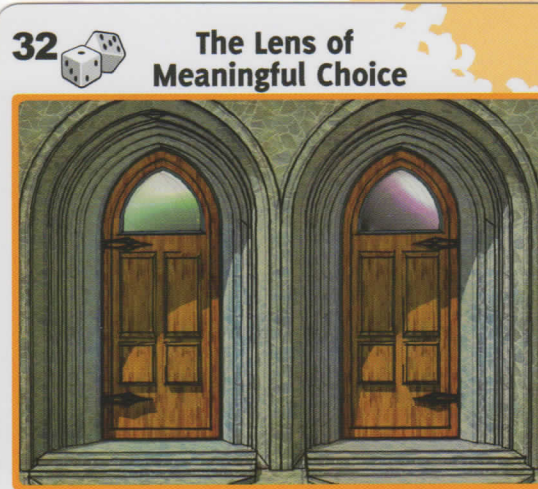



Illustration by Chuck Hoover

When we make meaningful choices, it lets us feel like the things we do matter. To use this lens, ask yourself these questions:

- What choices am I asking the player to make?
- Are they meaningful? How?
- Am I giving the player the right number of choices? Would more make them feel more powerful? Would fewer make the game clearer?
- Are there any dominant strategies in my game?

33  **The Lens of Triangularity**

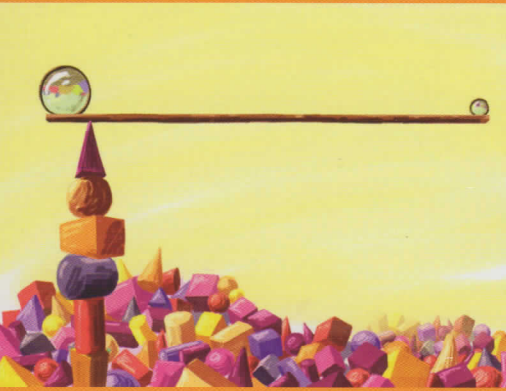



Illustration by Nick Daniel

Giving a player the choice to play it safe for a low reward, or to take a risk for a big reward is a great way to make your game interesting and exciting. To use this lens, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I have triangularity now? If not, how can I get it?
- Is my attempt at triangularity balanced? That is, are the rewards commensurate with the risks?

34  **The Lens of Skill vs. Chance**





Illustration by Nathan Mazur

To help determine how to balance skill and chance in your game, ask yourself these questions:

- Are my players here to be judged (skill), or to take risks (chance)?
- Skill tends to be more serious than chance: Is my game serious or casual?
- Are parts of my game tedious? If so, will adding elements of chance enliven them?
- Do parts of my game feel too random? If so, will replacing elements of chance with elements of skill and strategy make the players feel more in control?

35  **The Lens of Head and Hands**

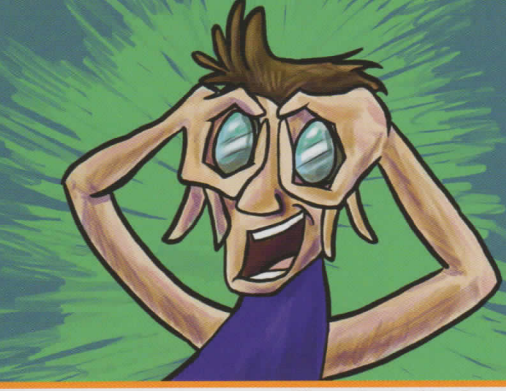


Illustration by Lisa Brown

To make sure your game has a good balance of mental and physical elements, use this lens. Ask yourself these questions:

- Are my players looking for mindless action, or an intellectual challenge?
- Would adding more places that involve puzzle-solving in my game make it more interesting?
- Are there places where the player can relax their brain, and just play the game without thinking?
- Can I give the player a choice - either succeed by exercising a high level of dexterity, or by finding a clever strategy that works with a minimum of physical skill?
- If "1" means all physical, and "10" means all mental, what number would my game get?

36  **The Lens of Competition**



Illustration by Elizabeth Barndollar

Competitive games can satisfy the basic human urge to determine who is the most skilled. Use this lens to ensure that people want to win your game. Ask yourself these questions:

- Does my game give a fair measurement of player skill?
- Do people want to win my game? Why?
- Is winning this game something people can be proud of? Why?
- Can novices meaningfully compete at my game?
- Can experts meaningfully compete at my game?
- Can experts generally be sure they will defeat novices?

37 The Lens of Cooperation



Illustration by Sam Yip

Collaborating and succeeding as a team is a special pleasure that can create lasting social bonds. Use this lens to study the cooperative aspects of your game. Ask yourself these questions:

- Cooperation requires communication. Do my players have enough opportunity to communicate? How could communication be enhanced?
- Are my players friends already, or are they strangers? If they are strangers, can I help them break the ice?
- Is there synergy ($2+2=5$) or antergy ($2+2=3$) when the players work together? Why?
- Do all the players have the same role, or do they have special jobs?

38 The Lens of Competition vs. Cooperation

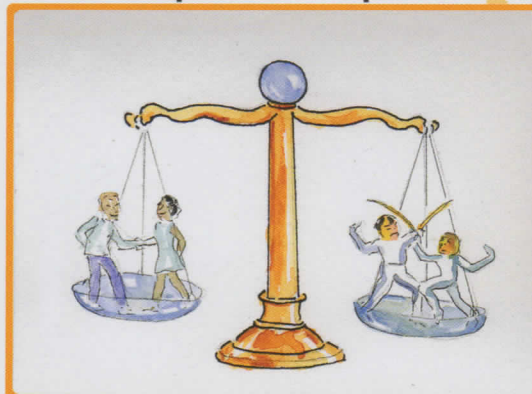


Illustration by Diana Patton

Balancing competition and cooperation can be done in many interesting ways. Use this lens to decide whether they are balanced properly in your game. Ask yourself these questions:

- If "1" is Competition and "10" is Cooperation, what number should my game get?
- Can I give players a choice whether to play cooperatively or competitively?
- Does my audience prefer competition, cooperation, or a mix?
- Is my team competition something that makes sense for my game? Is my game more fun with team competition, or with solo competition?

39 The Lens of Time

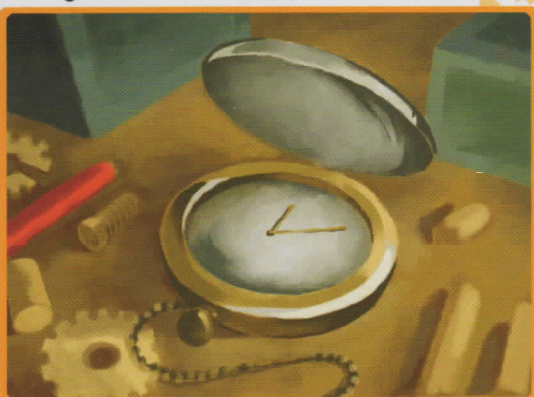


Illustration by Sam Yip

It is said that "timing is everything". Our goal as designers is to create experiences, and experiences are easily spoiled when they are too short or too long. Ask yourself these questions to make yours just the right length:

- What is it that determines the length of my gameplay activities?
- Are my players frustrated because the game ends too early, or bored because the game is too long?
- Setting a time limit can make gameplay more exciting. Is it a good idea for my game?
- Would a hierarchy of time structures help my game?

40 The Lens of Reward

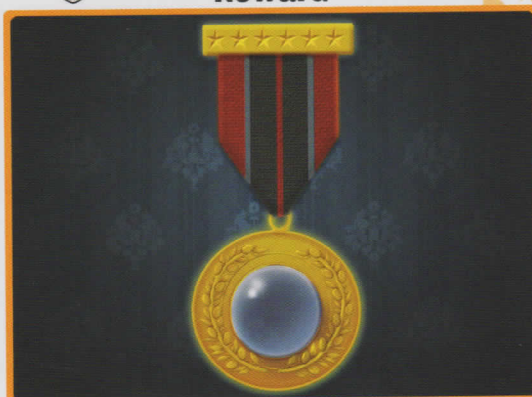


Illustration by Elizabeth Barndollar

Ask these questions to determine if your game is giving out the right rewards in the right amounts at the right times:

- What rewards is my game giving out now? Can it give out others as well?
- Are players excited when they get rewards in my game, or are they bored by them? Why?
- Getting a reward you don't understand is like getting no reward at all. Do my players understand their rewards?
- Are the rewards my game gives out too regular? Can they be given out in a more variable way?
- How are my rewards related to one another? Is there a way they could be better connected?
- How are my rewards building? Too fast, too slow, just right?

41 The Lens of Punishment



Illustration by Chris Daniel

Punishment must be used delicately. Balanced appropriately, it will make your game more meaningful, and provide successful players with a real sense of pride. To examine the punishment in your game, ask yourself these questions:

- What are the punishments in my game?
- Why am I punishing the players? What do I hope to achieve by it?
- Do my punishments seem fair to the players? Why or why not?
- Is there a way to turn these punishments into rewards and get the same, or a better effect?
- Are my strong punishments balanced against commensurately strong rewards?

42 The Lens of Simplicity/Complexity



Illustration by Tom Smith

Striking the right balance between simplicity and complexity is difficult. Use this lens to help your game become one in which meaningful complexity rises out of a simple system. Ask yourself these questions:

- What elements of innate complexity do I have in my game?
- Is there a way this innate complexity could be turned into emergent complexity?
- Do elements of emergent complexity arise from my game? If not, why not?
- Are there elements of my game that are too simple?

43 The Lens of Elegance



Illustration by Joshua Seaver

Most "classic games" are considered to be masterpieces of elegance. Use this lens to make your game as elegant as possible. Ask yourself these questions:

- What are the elements of my game?
- What are the purposes of each element? Count these up to give the element an "elegance rating."
- For elements with only one or two purposes, can some of these be combined into each other, or removed altogether?
- For elements with several purposes, is it possible for them to take on even more?

44 The Lens of Character

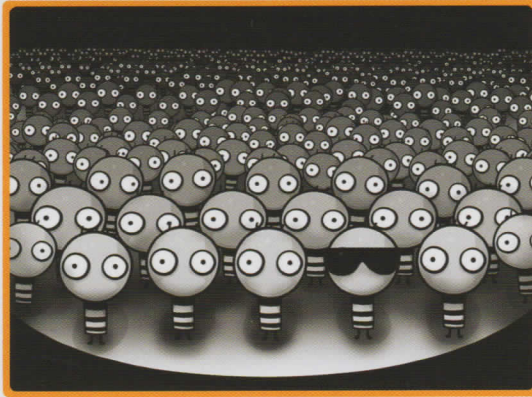


Illustration by Kyle Gabler

Elegance and character are opposites. They are like miniature versions of simplicity and complexity, and must be kept in balance. To make sure your game has lovable, defining quirks, ask yourself these questions:

- Is there anything strange in my game that players talk about excitedly?
- Does my game have funny qualities that make it unique?
- Does my game have flaws that players like?

45

The Lens of Imagination

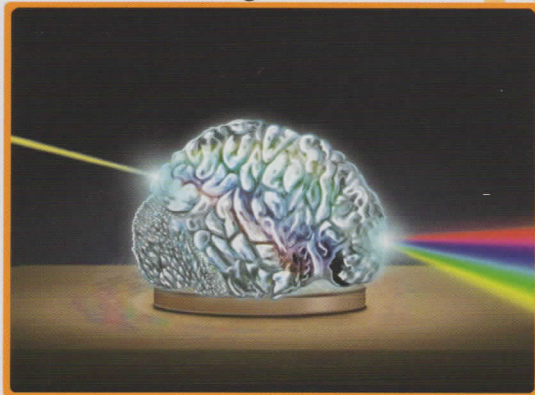


Illustration by Elizabeth Barndollar

All games have some element of imagination, and some element of reality. Use this lens to help find the balance between detail and imagination. Ask yourself these questions:

- What must the player understand in order to play my game?
- Can some element of imagination help them understand that better?
- What high-quality, realistic details can we provide in this game?
- What details would be low-quality if we provided them? Can imagination fill the gap instead?
- Can I give details that the imagination will be able to reuse again and again?
- Which details inspire imagination?
- Which details stifle imagination?

46

The Lens of Economy



Illustration by Sam Yip

Giving a game an economy can give it a surprising depth, and a life all its own. But like all living things, it can be difficult to control. Use this lens to keep your economy in balance:

- How can my players earn money? Should there be other ways?
- What can my players buy? Why?
- Is money too easy to get? Too hard? How can I change this?
- Are choices about earning and spending meaningful ones?
- Is a universal currency a good idea in my game, or should there be specialized currencies?

47

The Lens of Balance



Illustration by Sam Yip

There are many types of game balance, and each is important. However, it is easy to get lost in the details, and forget the big picture. Use this simple lens to get out of the mire, and ask yourself these questions:

- Does my game feel right?

48

The Lens of Accessibility

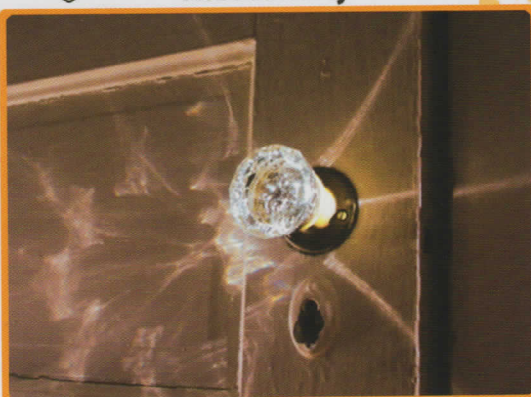


Illustration by Karen Phillips

When you present a puzzle (or a game of any kind) to the players, they should be able to clearly visualize what their first few steps would be. Ask yourself these questions:

- How will players know how to begin solving my puzzle, or playing my game? Do I need to explain it, or is it self-evident?
- Does my puzzle or game act like something they have seen before? If it does, how can I draw attention to that similarity? If it does not, how can I make them understand how it behaves?
- Does my puzzle or game draw people in, and make them want to touch it and manipulate it? If not, how can I change it so that it does?

49 The Lens of Visible Progress

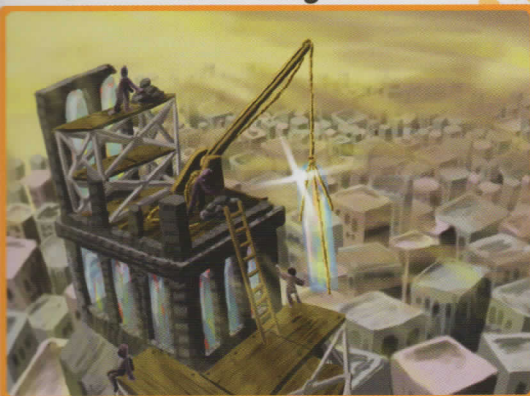


Illustration by Nick Daniel

Players need to see that they are making progress when solving a difficult problem. To make sure they are getting this feedback, ask yourself these questions:

- What does it mean to make progress in my game?
- Is there enough progress in my game? Is there a way I can add more interim steps of progressive success?
- What progress is visible, and what progress is hidden? Can I find a way to reveal what is hidden?

50 The Lens of Parallelism



Illustration by Nick Daniel

Parallelism in your puzzle brings parallel benefits to the player's experience. To use this lens, ask yourself these questions:

- Are there bottlenecks in my design where players are unable to proceed if they cannot solve a particular challenge? Could parallel challenges help?
- Are my parallel challenges different enough from each other to give players the benefit of variety?
- Can my parallel challenges be connected somehow? Is there a way that making progress on one can make it easier to solve the others?

51 The Lens of The Pyramid

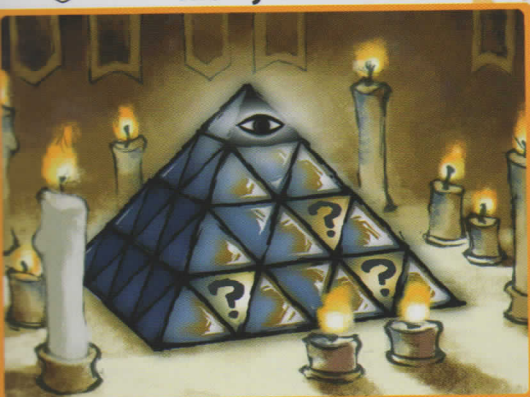


Illustration by Sam Yip

Pyramids fascinate us because they have a singular highest point. To give your puzzle the allure of the ancient pyramids, ask yourself these questions:

- Is there a way all the pieces of my puzzle can feed into a singular challenge at the end?
- Big pyramids are often made of little pyramids - can I have a hierarchy of ever more challenging puzzle elements, gradually leading to a final challenge?
- Is the challenge at the top of my pyramid interesting, compelling, and clear? Does it make people want to work in order to get to it?

52 The Lens of The Puzzle



Illustration by Elizabeth Barndollar

Puzzles make the player stop and think. To ensure your puzzles are doing everything you want to shape the player experience, ask yourself these questions:

- What are the puzzles in my game?
- Should I have more puzzles, or less? Why?
- Which of the ten puzzle principles apply to each of my puzzles?
- Do I have incongruous puzzles? How can I better integrate them into the game?

53

The Lens of Control

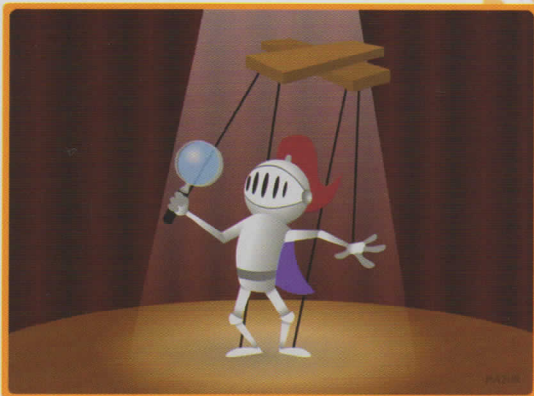


Illustration by Nathan Mazur

This lens has uses beyond just examining your interface, since meaningful control is essential for immersive interactivity. To use this lens, ask yourself these questions:

- When players use the interface, does it do what they expected? If not, why not?
- Intuitive interfaces give a feeling of control. Is my interface easy to master, or hard to master?
- Do my players feel they have a strong influence over the outcome of the game? If not, how can I change that?
- Feeling powerful = feeling in control. Do my players feel powerful? Can I make them feel more powerful somehow?

54



The Lens of Physical Interface



Illustration by Zachary Coe

Somehow, the player has a physical interaction with your game. Copying existing physical interfaces is an easy trap to fall into. Use this lens to be sure that your physical interface is well suited to your game by asking these questions:

- What does the player pick up and touch? Can this be made more pleasing?
- How does this map the actions in the game world? Can the mapping be more direct?
- If I can't create a custom physical interface, what metaphor am I using when I map the inputs to the game world?
- How does the physical interface look under the Lens of the Toy?
- How does the player see, hear and touch the world of the game? Is there a way to include a physical output device that will make the world become more real in the player's imagination?

55



The Lens of Virtual Interface



Illustration by Chris Daniel

Designing virtual interfaces can be very tricky. Ask these questions to make sure that your virtual interface is enhancing player experience as much as possible:

- What information does a player need that isn't obvious just by looking at the game world?
- When does the player need this information?
- How can this information be delivered to the player in a way that won't interfere with the player's interactions with the game world?
- Are there elements of the game world that are easier using a virtual interface (like a popup menu) than direct interaction?
- What kind of virtual interface is best suited to my physical interface?

56



The Lens of Transparency

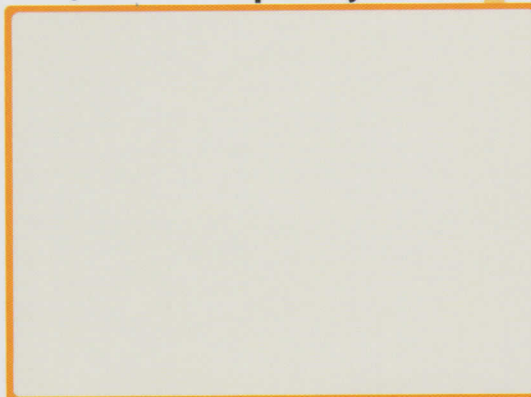


Illustration by Jesse Schell

The ideal interface becomes invisible to the player letting the player's imagination be completely immersed in the game world. To ensure invisibility, ask yourself these questions:

- Does the interface let the players do what they want?
- Do new players find the interface intuitive?
- Can players learn to use it without thinking?
- Is the interface over-confusing?
- Can players continue to use the interface well in stressful situations?
- Does something confuse players about the interface? On which of the six interface arrows is it happening?

57 The Lens of Feedback



Illustration by Nick Daniel

The player's feedback from the game comes from many things: judgment, reward, instruction, encouragement, and challenge. Use this lens to be sure your feedback loop is creating the experience you want by continuously asking these questions:

- What do players need to know at this moment?
- What do players want to know at this moment?
- What do I want players to feel at this moment? How can I give feedback that creates that feeling?
- What do the players want to feel at this moment? Is there an opportunity for them to create a situation where they will feel that?
- What is the player's goal at this moment? What feedback will help them toward that goal?

58 The Lens of Juiciness



Illustration by Patrick Mittereder

Juicy interfaces are fun the moment you pick them up. To maximize juiciness, ask yourself these questions:

- Is my interface giving the player continuous feedback for their actions? If not, why not?
- Is second-order motion created by the actions of the player? Is this motion powerful and interesting?
- Juicy systems reward the player many ways at once. When I give the player a reward, how many ways am I simultaneously rewarding them? Can I find more ways?

59 The Lens of Channels and Dimensions

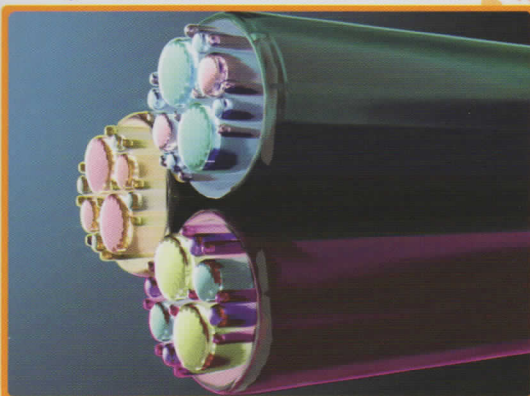


Illustration by Elizabeth Barndollar

Choosing how to map game information to channels and dimensions is the heart of designing your game interface. Use this lens to make sure you do it thoughtfully and well. Ask yourself these questions:

- What data needs to travel to and from the player?
- Which data is most important?
- What channels do I have available to transmit this data?
- Which channels are most appropriate for which data? Why?
- Which dimensions are available on the different channels?
- How should I use those dimensions?

60 The Lens of Modes



Illustration by Patrick Collins

An interface of any complexity is going to require modes. To make sure your modes make the player feel powerful and in control, and do not confuse or overwhelm, ask yourself these questions:

- What modes do I need in my game? Why?
- Can any modes be collapsed, or combined?
- Are any of the modes overlapping? If so, can I put them on different input channels?
- When the game changes modes, how does the player know that? Can the game communicate the mode change in more than one way?

61 The Lens of The Interest Curve



Illustration by Chris Daniel

What captivates the human mind often seems different for every person - but in fact it is remarkably similar for everyone. To see how a player's interest in your experience changes over time, ask yourself these questions:

- If I draw an interest curve of my experience, how is it shaped?
- Does it have a hook?
- Is there gradually rising interest, punctuated by periods of rest?
- Is there a grand finale, more interesting than everything else?
- What changes would give me a better interest curve?
- Is there a fractal structure to my interest curve? Should there be?
- Do my intuitions about the interest curve match the observed interest of the players? If I ask playtesters to draw an interest curve, what does it look like?

62 The Lens of Inherent Interest

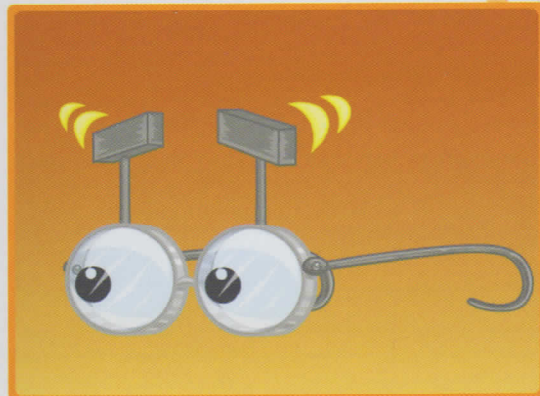


Illustration by Patrick Mittereder

Some things are just interesting. Use this lens to be sure your game has inherently interesting qualities by asking these questions:

- What aspects of my game will capture the interest of a player immediately?
- Does my game let the player see or do something they have never seen or done before?
- What base instincts does my game appeal to? Can it appeal to more of them?
- What higher instincts does my game appeal to? Can it appeal to more of those?
- Does dramatic change and anticipation of dramatic change happen in my game? How can it be more dramatic?

63 The Lens of Beauty



Illustration by Kyle Gabler

We love to experience things of beauty. Use this lens to make your game a joy forever by asking yourself these questions:

- What elements make up my game? How can each one be more beautiful?
- Some things are not beautiful in themselves, but are beautiful in combination. How can elements of my game be composed in a way that is poetic and beautiful?
- What does beauty mean within the context of my game?

64 The Lens of Projection



Illustration by Kyle Gabler

One key indicator that someone is enjoying an experience is that they have projected their imaginations into it. To examine whether your game is well suited to induce projection from your players, ask yourself these questions:

- What is there in my game that players can relate to? What else can I add?
- What is there in my game that will capture a player's imagination? What else can I add?
- Are there places in the game that players have always wanted to visit?
- Does the player get to be a character they could imagine themselves to be?
- Are there other characters in the game that the players would be interested to meet (or spy on)?
- Do the players get to do things that they would like to do in real life, but can't?
- Is there any activity in the game that once a player starts doing, it is hard to stop?

65 The Lens of The Story Machine

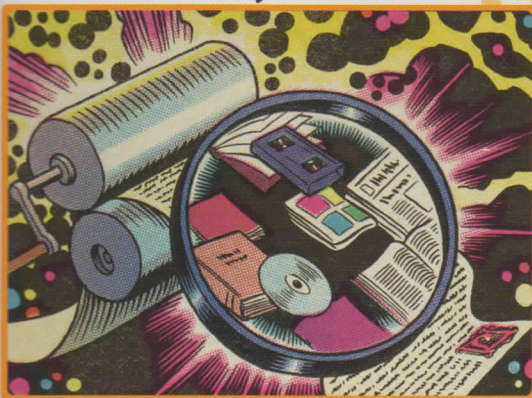


Illustration by Jim Rugg

A good game is a machine that generates stories when people play it. To make sure your story machine is as productive as possible, ask yourself these questions:

- When players have different choices about how to achieve goals, new and different stories can arise. How can I add more of these choices?
- Different conflicts lead to different stories. How can I allow more types of conflict to arise from my game?
- When players can personalize the character and setting, they will care more about story outcomes. How can I let players personalize the story?

66 The Lens of The Obstacle

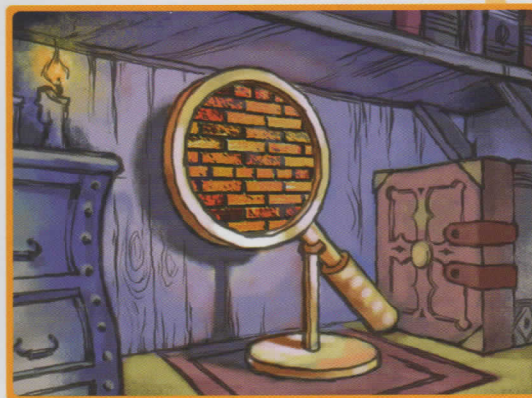


Illustration by Sam Yip

A goal with no obstacles is not worth pursuing. Use this lens to make sure your obstacles are ones that your players will want to overcome.

- What is the relationship between the main character and the goal? Why does the character care about it?
- What are the obstacles between the character and the goal?
- Is there an antagonist who is behind the obstacles? What is the relationship between the protagonist and the antagonist?
- Do the obstacles gradually increase in difficulty?
- Some say "The bigger the obstacle, the better the story". Are your obstacles big enough? Can they be bigger?
- Great stories often involve the protagonist transforming in order to overcome the obstacle. How does your protagonist transform?

67 The Lens of Simplicity and Transcendence



Illustration by Nick Daniel

To make sure you have the right mix of simplicity and transcendence, ask yourself these questions:

- How is my world simpler than the real world? Can it be simpler in other ways?
- What kind of transcendent power do I give to the player? How can I give them even more without removing challenge from the game?
- Is my contribution of simplicity and transcendence contrived, or does it provide my players with a special kind of wish fulfillment?

68 The Lens of The Hero's Journey



Illustration by Chris Daniel

Many heroic stories have similar structure. Use this lens to make sure you haven't missed out on any elements that might improve your story. Ask yourself these questions:

- Does my story have elements that qualify it as a heroic story?
- If so, how does it match up with the structure of the Hero's Journey?
- Would my story be improved by including more archetypal elements?
- Does my story match this form so closely that it feels hackneyed?

69 The Lens of The Weirdest Thing



Illustration by Reagan Heller

Having weird things in your story can help give meaning to unusual game mechanics, capture the interest of the player, and make your world seem special. Too much weirdness, though, will render your story puzzling and inaccessible. To make sure your story is the good kind of weird, ask yourself these questions:

- What's the weirdest thing in my story?
- How can I make sure that the weirdest thing doesn't confuse or alienate the player?
- If there are multiple weird things, should I maybe get rid of, or coalesce some of them?
- If there is nothing weird in my story, is the story still interesting?

70 The Lens of Story

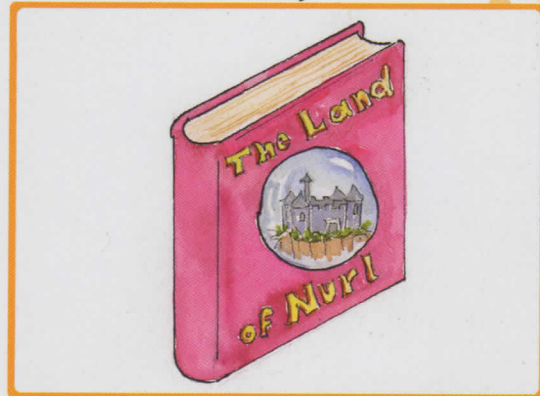


Illustration by Diana Patton

To be sure the story in your game is as good as it can be, ask yourself these questions:

- Does my game really need a story? Why?
- Why will players be interested in this story?
- How does the story support the other parts of the tetrad (aesthetics, technology, mechanics)? Can it do a better job?
- How do the other parts of the tetrad support the story? Can they do a better job?
- How can my story be better?

71 The Lens of Freedom



Illustration by Nathan Mazur

A feeling of freedom is one of the things that separates games from other forms of entertainment. To make sure your players feel as free as possible, ask yourself these questions:

- When do my players have freedom of action? Do they feel free at these times?
- When are they constrained? Do they feel constrained at these times?
- Are there any places I can let them feel more free than they do now?
- Are there any places where they are overwhelmed by too much freedom?


72 The Lens of Indirect Control



Illustration by Cheryl Ceol

Every designer has a vision of what they would like the players to do to have an ideal play experience. To help ensure the players do these things of their own free will, ask yourself these questions:

- Ideally, what would I like the players to do?
- Can I set constraints to get players to do it?
- Can I set the goals to get players to do it?
- Can I design my interface to get players to do it?
- Can I use visual design to get players to do it?
- Can I use in-game characters to get players to do it?
- Can I use music or sound to get players to do it?
- Is there some other method I can use to coerce players towards ideal behavior without impinging on their feeling of freedom?

73  **The Lens of Collusion**




Illustration by Nick Daniel

Characters should fulfill their roles in the game world, but when possible, also serve as the minions of the game designer, ensuring an engaging experience for the player. To make sure your characters are living up to this responsibility, ask yourself these questions:

- What do I want the player to experience?
- How can the characters help fulfill this experience, without compromising their goals in the game world?



74  **The Lens of The World**



Illustration by Nick Daniel

The world of your game is a thing that exists apart. Your game is a doorway to this magic place that exists only in the imagination of your players. To ensure your world has power and integrity, ask yourself these questions:

- How is my world better than the real world?
- Can there be multiple gateways to my world? How do they differ? How do they support each other?
- Is my world centered on a single story, or could many stories happen here?

75   **The Lens of The Avatar**




Illustration by Cheryl Ceol

The avatar is the player's gateway into the world of the game. To ensure your avatar brings out as much of the player's identity as possible, ask yourself these questions:

- Is my avatar an ideal form that will appeal to my players?
- Does my avatar have iconic qualities that let a player project themselves into the character?

76  **The Lens of Character Function**




Illustration by Sam Yip

To make sure your characters are doing everything your game needs them to do, ask yourself these questions:

- What are the roles I need the characters to fill?
- What characters have I already imagined?
- Which characters map well to which roles?
- Can any characters fill more than one role?
- Do I need to change the characters to better fit the roles?
- Do I need any new characters?

77 **The Lens of Character Traits**



Illustration by Nick Daniel

To ensure that the traits of a character show in what they say and do, ask yourself these questions:

- What traits define my character?
- How do these traits manifest themselves in the words, actions, and appearance of my character?

79 **The Lens of The Character Web**

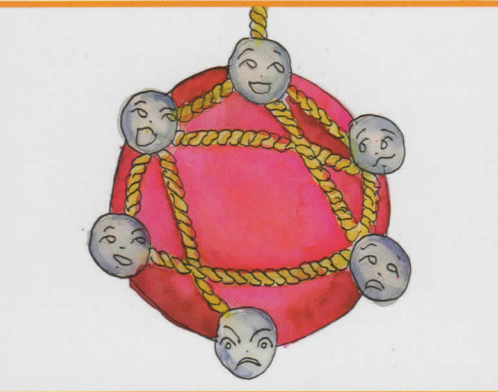


Illustration by Diana Patton

To better flesh out your character's relationships, make a list of all your characters, and ask yourself these questions:

- How, specifically, does each character feel about each of the others?
- Are there any connections unaccounted for? How can I use those?
- Are there too many similar connections? How can they be more different?

78 **The Lens of The Interpersonal Circumplex**

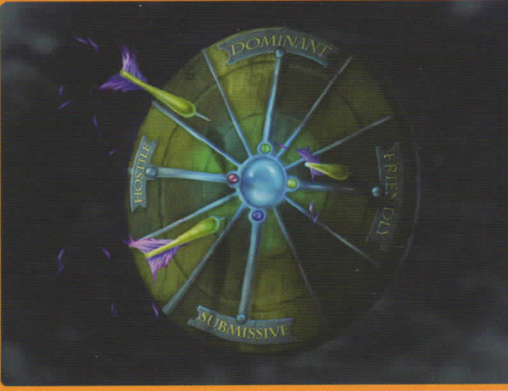


Illustration by Kwame Babb

The relationships between your characters can be understood by creating a graph with one axis labeled hostile/friendly, and the other labeled submissive/dominant. Pick a character, put it in the middle, and plot out where other characters lie relative to that character. Ask yourself these questions:

- Are there any gaps in the chart? Why are they there? Would it be better if the gaps were filled?
- Are there "extreme characters" on the graph? If not, would it be better if there were?
- Are the character's friends in the same quadrant, or different quadrants? What if that were different?

80 **The Lens of Status**




Illustration by Chris Daniel

When people interact, they take on different behaviors depending on their status levels. To make sure your characters are more aware of each other, ask yourself these questions:

- What are the relative status levels of the characters in my game?
- How can they show appropriate status behaviors?
- Conflicts of status are interesting - how are my characters vying for status?
- Changes of status are interesting - where do they happen in my game?
- How am I giving the player a chance to express status?

81

The Lens of Character Transformation



Illustration by Chris Daniel

Powerful stories are able to change their characters. To ensure your characters are transforming in interesting ways, ask yourself these questions:

- How does each of my characters change throughout the game?
- How am I communicating those changes to the player? Can I communicate them more clearly, or more strongly?
- Is there enough change?
- Are the changes surprising and interesting?
- Are the changes believable?

82

The Lens of Inner Contradiction



Illustration by Nick Daniel

A good game cannot contain properties that defeat the game's very purpose. To remove those contradictory qualities, ask yourself these questions:

- What is the purpose of my game?
- What are the purposes of each subsystem in my game?
- Is there anything at all in my game that contradicts these purposes?
- If so, how can I change that?

83

The Lens of The Nameless Quality



Illustration by Chris Daniel

Certain things feel special and wonderful because of their natural, organic design. To ensure your game has these properties, ask yourself these questions:

- Does my design have a special feeling of life, or do parts of my design feel dead? What would make my design more alive?
- Which of Alexander's fifteen qualities does my design have?
- Could it have more of them, somehow?
- Where does my design feel like my **self**?

84

The Lens of Friendship



Illustration by Nick Daniel

People love to play games with friends. To make sure your game has the right qualities to let people make and keep friendships, ask yourself these questions:

- What kind of friendships are my players looking for?
- How do my players break the ice?
- Do my players have enough chance to talk to each other? Do they have enough to talk about?
- When is the moment they become friends?
- What tools do I give the players to maintain their friendships?

85

The Lens of Expression

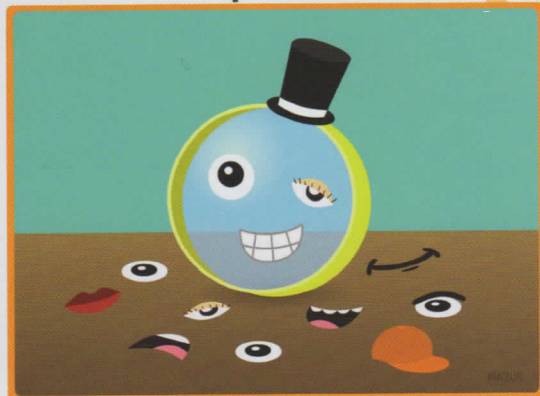


Illustration by Nathan Mazur

When players get a chance to express themselves, it makes them feel alive, proud, important, and connected. To use this lens, ask yourself these questions:

- How am I letting players express themselves?
- What ways am I forgetting?
- Are players proud of their identity? Why or why not?

86

The Lens of Community



Illustration by Diana Patton

To make sure your game fosters strong community, ask yourself these questions:

- What conflict is at the heart of my community?
- How does architecture shape my community?
- Does my game support three levels of community?
- Are there community events?
- Why do players need each other?

87

The Lens of Griefing



Illustration by Nick Daniel

To make sure your griefing is minimized, ask yourself these questions:

- What systems in my game are easy to grief?
- How can I make my game boring to grief?
- Am I ignoring any loopholes?

88

The Lens of Love

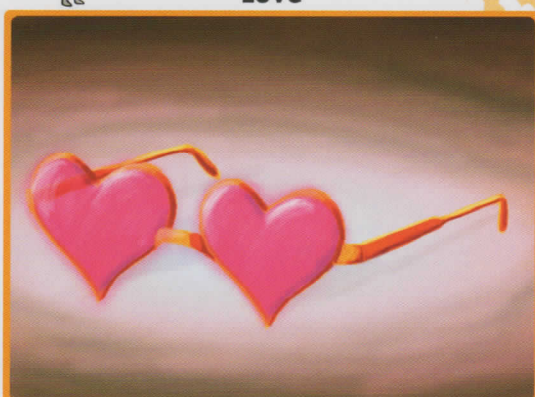


Illustration by Nick Daniel

If the creators of a game do not love it, the game will surely fail. To use this lens, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I love my project? If not, how can I change that?
- Does everyone on the team love the project? If not, how can that be changed?

89 The Lens of The Team



Illustration by Nick Daniel

To make sure your team is operating like a well-oiled machine, ask yourself these questions:

- Is this the right team for this project? Why?
- Is the team communicating objectively?
- Is the team communicating clearly?
- Is the team comfortable with each other?
- Is there an air of trust and respect amongst the team?
- Is the team ultimately able to unify around decisions?

90 The Lens of Documentation

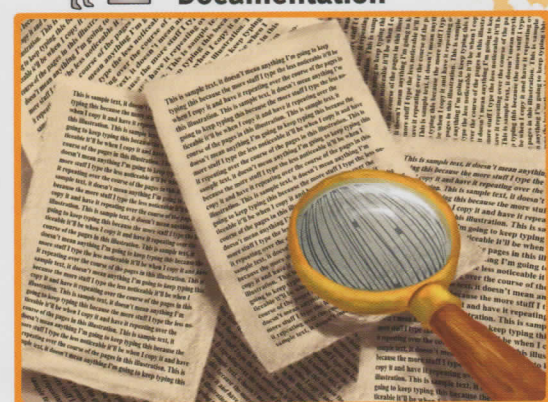


Illustration by Nick Daniel

To ensure you are writing the documents you need, and skipping the ones you don't, ask yourself these questions:

- What do we need to remember while making this game?
- What needs to be communicated while making this game?

91 The Lens of Playtesting



Illustration by Chris Daniel

Playtesting is your chance to see your game in action. To ensure your playtests are as good as they can be, ask yourself these questions:

- Why are we doing a playtest?
- Who should be there?
- Where should we hold it?
- What will we look for?
- How will we get the information we need?

92 The Lens of Technology

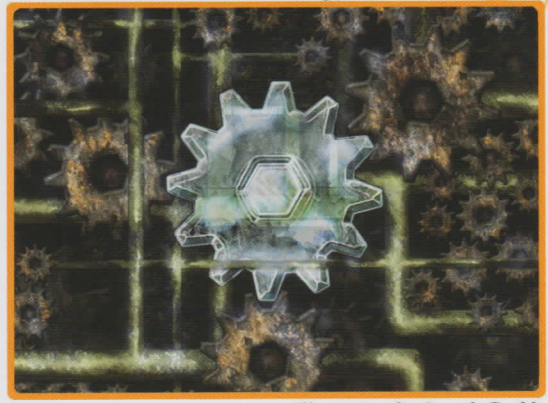


Illustration by Joseph Grubb

To make sure you are using the right technologies in the right way, ask yourself these questions:

- What technologies will help deliver the experience I want to create?
- Am I using these technologies in ways that are foundational or decorative?
- If I'm not using them foundationally, should I be using them at all?
- Is this technology as cool as I think it is?
- Is there a "disruptive technology" I should consider instead?

93 The Lens of The Crystal Ball



Illustration by Diana Patton

If you would know the future of a particular game technology, ask yourself these questions:

- What will _____ be like two years from now? Why?
- What will _____ be like four years from now? Why?
- What will _____ be like ten years from now? Why?

94 The Lens of The Client



Illustration by Kyle Gabler

If you are making a game for someone else, you should probably know what they want. Ask yourself these questions:

- What does the client say they want?
- What does the client think they want?
- What does the client really want, deep down in their heart?

95 The Lens of The Pitch



Illustration by Nathan Mazur

To ensure your pitch is as good as it can be, ask yourself these questions:

- Why are you pitching this game to this client?
- What will you consider "a successful pitch"?
- What's in it for the people you are pitching to?
- What do the people you are pitching to need to know about your game?

96 The Lens of Profit



Illustration by Nick Daniel

Profits keep the game industry alive. Ask these questions to help your game become profitable:

- Where does the money go in my game's business model? Why?
- How much will it cost to produce, market, and distribute this game? Why?
- How many units will this game sell? Why do I think that?
- How many units need to sell before my game breaks even?

97

The Lens of Transformation



Illustration by Nathan Mazur

Games create experiences, and experiences change people. To make sure only the best changes happen to your players, ask yourself these questions:

- How can my game change players for the better?
- How can my game change players for the worse?



98

The Lens of Responsibility

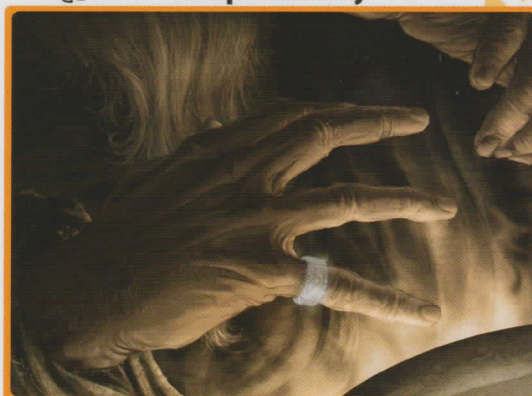


Illustration by Zachary Coe

To live up to your obligations as a game designer, ask yourself this question:

- Does my game help people? How?



99

The Lens of The Raven



Illustration by Tom Smith

To remember to only work on what is important, ask yourself this question:

- Is making this worth my time?



100

The Lens of Your Secret Purpose

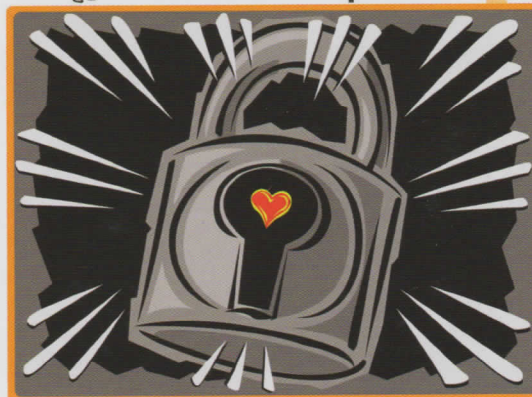


Illustration by Todd Swanson

To make sure you are working towards your one true purpose, ask yourself the only question that matters:

- Why am I doing this?

