

worlds, writing stories, creating compelling characters, choosing a visual aesthetic, types of puzzles, issues of balance, and even developing play communities. He details motivational considerations of players with examples like Marc LeBlanc's taxonomy of game pleasures, "interest curves," and the collusion of the game system and the player working together to enact the experience. The book addresses organizational decisions like the use of the spiral model of software development, rapid prototyping, and play testing. It even explains how to create a pitch to sell the game to a client—be it employer or college professor.

Yet, in covering such wide ground, Schell tackles some of the more difficult and contentious issues of game development less adeptly. His discussion of the play desires of boys and girls offers an obvious example. Schell's back-of-the-napkin suggestions about the play interests of males and females might be a handy reference in a general design textbook, but the issues are far more complicated than the text lets on and will probably put off the audience of video game studies scholars likely to pick up the book. *The Art of Game Design* is a guide to producing games with wide appeal, so do not expect to find any particularly challenging concepts hidden in its pages.

Schell incorporates his own experiences as a game designer, sympathizing with newcomers who will face the realities of making concessions while designing within constraints. His conversational tone and anecdotes strengthen the prose, but they sometimes feel out of place in the pages of a textbook. *The Art of Game Design* often reads like three different books—a series of professional anecdotes,

one hundred lenses for overcoming design obstacles, and thirty steps to producing a game—mashed together into an awkward, single work.

The Art of Game Design is a competent introductory textbook that, thanks to its conversational tone, offers a more inviting read than competing books like Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman's *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. But whereas the latter better conforms to the units and topics of a college syllabus, Schell's work demands to be read cover to cover—not because it compels readers to take in every word of every page, but because they would be lost if they attempted to skip around. Schell's book contains sound advice about sources of inspiration, characters and stories, world building, balance and pacing, player feedback, and the trajectory of the game as an experience, but it offers little practical advice on choosing appropriate mechanics and building functioning game systems from the ground up. Though easy to read and full of constructive advice, its convoluted organization prevents it from being a definitive contribution to canon of game design.

—Bobby Schweizer, *Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA*

Fun Inc.: Why Games Are the 21st Century's Most Serious Business

Tom Chatfield

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Despite the impression Tom Chatfield's title

might give, *Fun, Inc.* is not first and foremost a business book. Instead, it is a wide and shallow look at the full spectrum of things in contemporary society that involve play. It touches on play in general and the history and business of video games, both stand alone and networked, as well as their impact on education, psychology, and more. Chatfield interviews a wide variety of experts in the field, some of whom have become well known, some less so.

The first three chapters cover the basics: an introduction to play, games, and fun; a quick history of games; and an overview of the reach and economic power of the gaming industry. The information in these first three chapters will be familiar to anyone with a passing knowledge of the topics, but the people Chatfield chooses to interview, notably Raph Koster in the first chapter and Kristian Segerstrale in the third, do offer valuable insights.

Koster is well known inside the video game industry as one of its more thoughtful designers, having been a lead designer on *Ultima Online*, *Everquest*, and *Star Wars Galaxies*. He is a great speaker who draws standing-room only audiences. His *A Theory of Fun for Game Design* became a hot commodity when it briefly went out of print, selling for up to one hundred dollars a copy on eBay. His insights into play, neurology, video games, and fun are enlightening and entertaining, though he considers fun a weak word. “There isn’t even a consensus across the European languages as to what to exactly call this vague, general feeling that is in English called fun,” says Koster.

Kristian Segerstrale, while less known, heads a successful mobile game company, Playfish. The company’s games had thirty

million monthly players when Segerstrale interviewed for the book in mid-2009, and the numbers have grown since. Particularly helpful to readers in the game industry are his observations about how his company—and others in the mobile game market—have adapted a more agile, flexible approach than the traditional, large, blockbuster, Christmas-season approach. “You don’t have a separate publisher or a crazy crunch at the end to deliver a huge project on a set date,” he explains. “What you want to do is get something out and get a sense of how big it might be. If it’s a dog, you kill it as soon as possible. If it turns out to be a massive success, you add more.”

Throughout the book, Chatfield follows a solid journalistic practice of laying the groundwork for the topic in a chapter then selecting voices from the field to flesh out his initial explanations and descriptions. So, in “A Beautiful Science,” Chatfield examines motivation in games, interviewing Alexy Pajitnov, creator of the OCD-inducing *Tetris* to discuss “non-deterministic polynomial hard” problems, of which his game is a great example. He also invokes Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of flow, talks to Richard Bartle (father of the multiuser dungeon game, the grandfather of today’s *World of Warcraft*, and other massively multiplayer-online games) about Joseph Campbell’s concept of the hero’s journey, and interviews Nicole Lazzaro, XEODesign CEO and expert on player experience, about the role of emotion in games. The book similarly mixes insight and interview to explore topics such as the rise of virtual worlds like *Second Life*, the perceived dangers of video games such as violence and addiction, and the new ways a game like

Guitar Hero enables us to interact with traditional media.

Like any technology, video games can be a good or bad. We use them to spend leisure time killing mythical monsters in Koster's *Everquest II*, create empathy and understanding for others in the games like those promoted by Suzanne Seggerman's organization Games 4 Change, or make a legitimate living from them with, say, *Second Life*. Or we can, say, illegitimately sell off in-game assets like castles and characters via black-market auction houses.

Playing video games, we can live out our whitest or our blackest fantasies. Playing them, we can even meet our soul mates.

Fun, Inc. does a solid job of introducing the outsider to the wide spectrum of topics and issues pertaining to video games. For the novice and outsider seeking a map of the territory, this book is a good place to start.

—Steve Jacobs, *Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY*