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BA COMPUTER GAMES DESIGN

GAME THEORY & DESIGN

The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect



Richard Rouse III: The Player's Expectations (Part 2)

- Recap: What do players want?
- What do players expect?





GAME THEORY & DESIGN

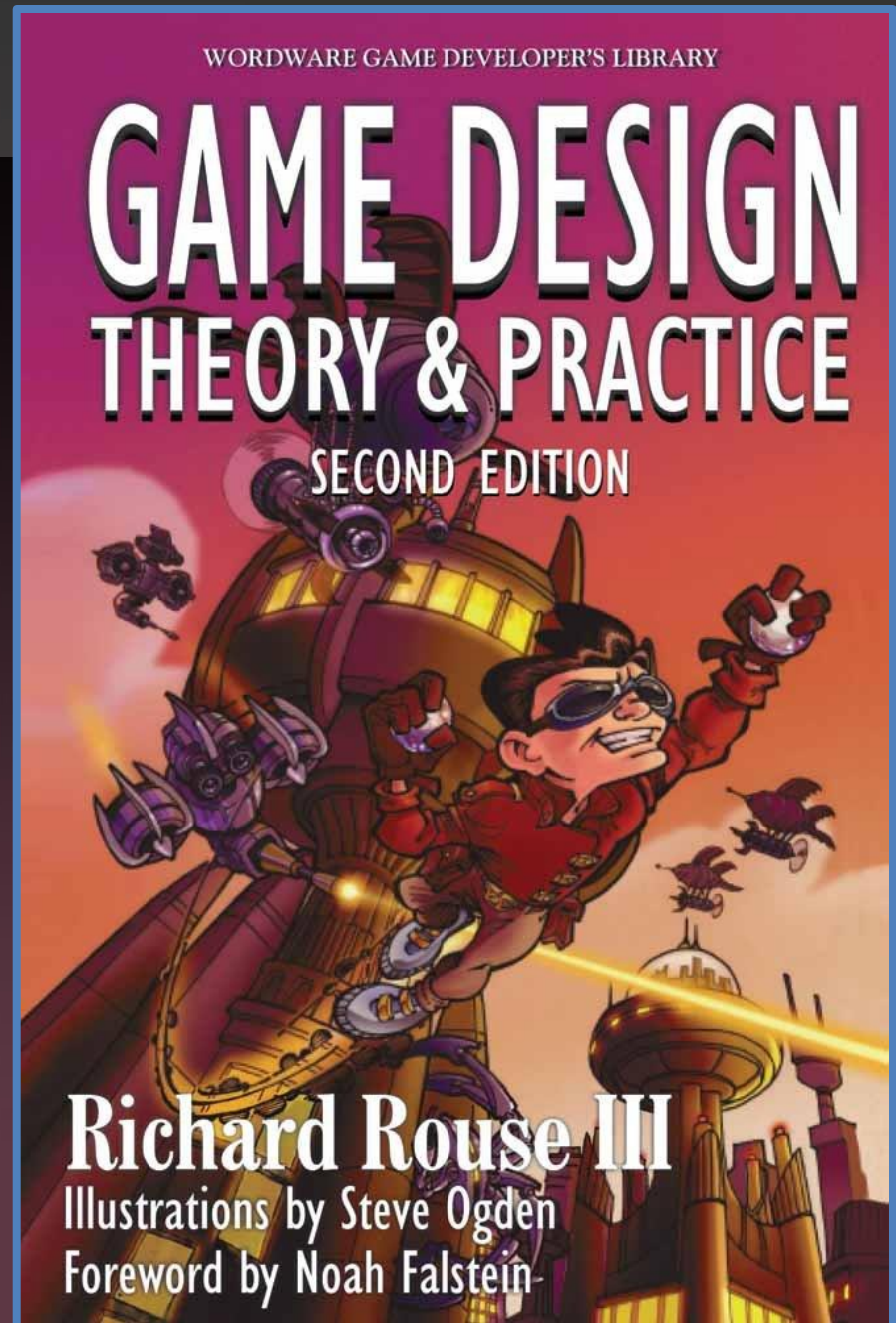
The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Further reading:

The Player's Expectations

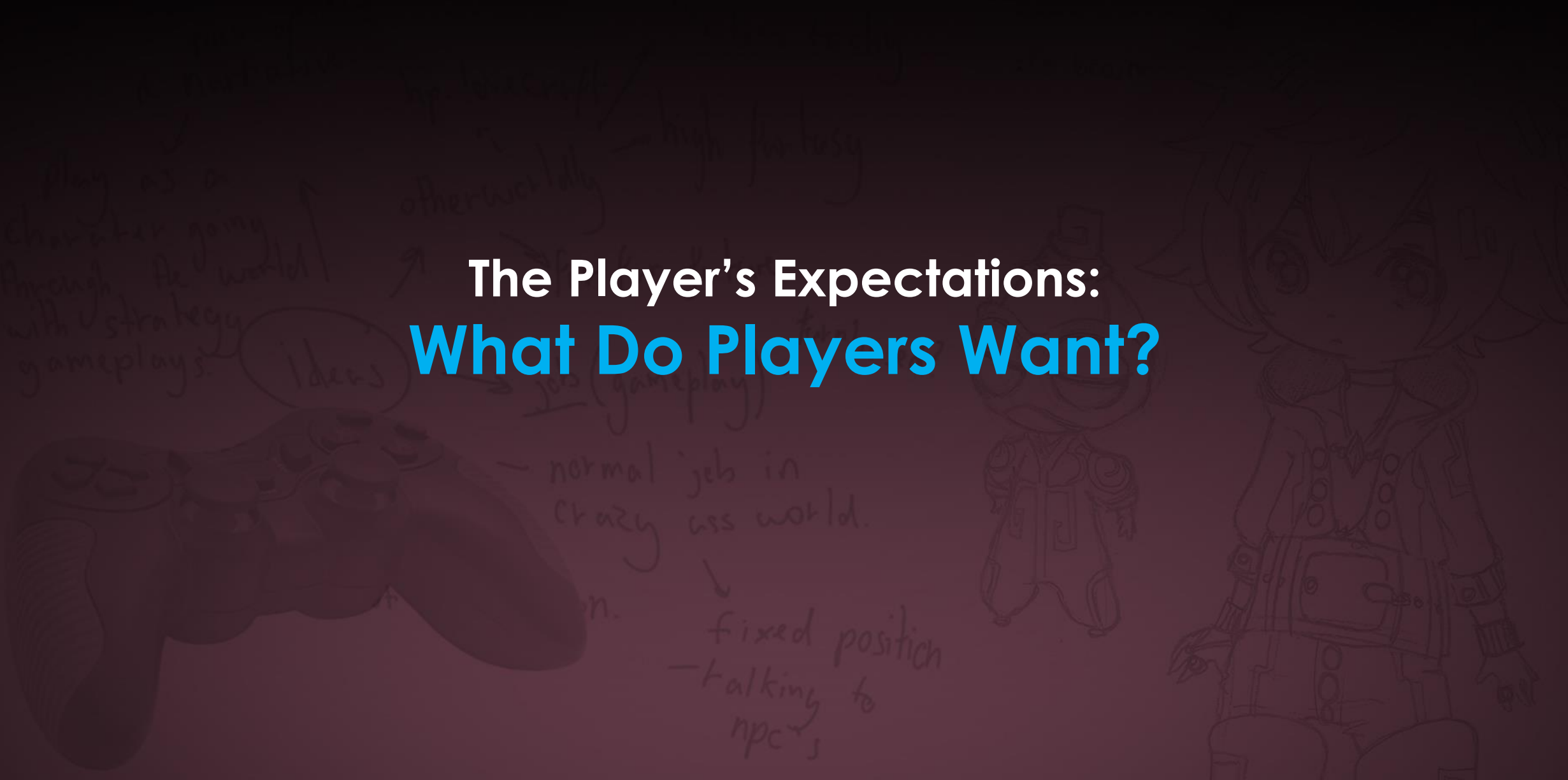
Richard Rouse III, Game Design Theory & Practice

(Available in **Y Fforwm Library**, SA1)





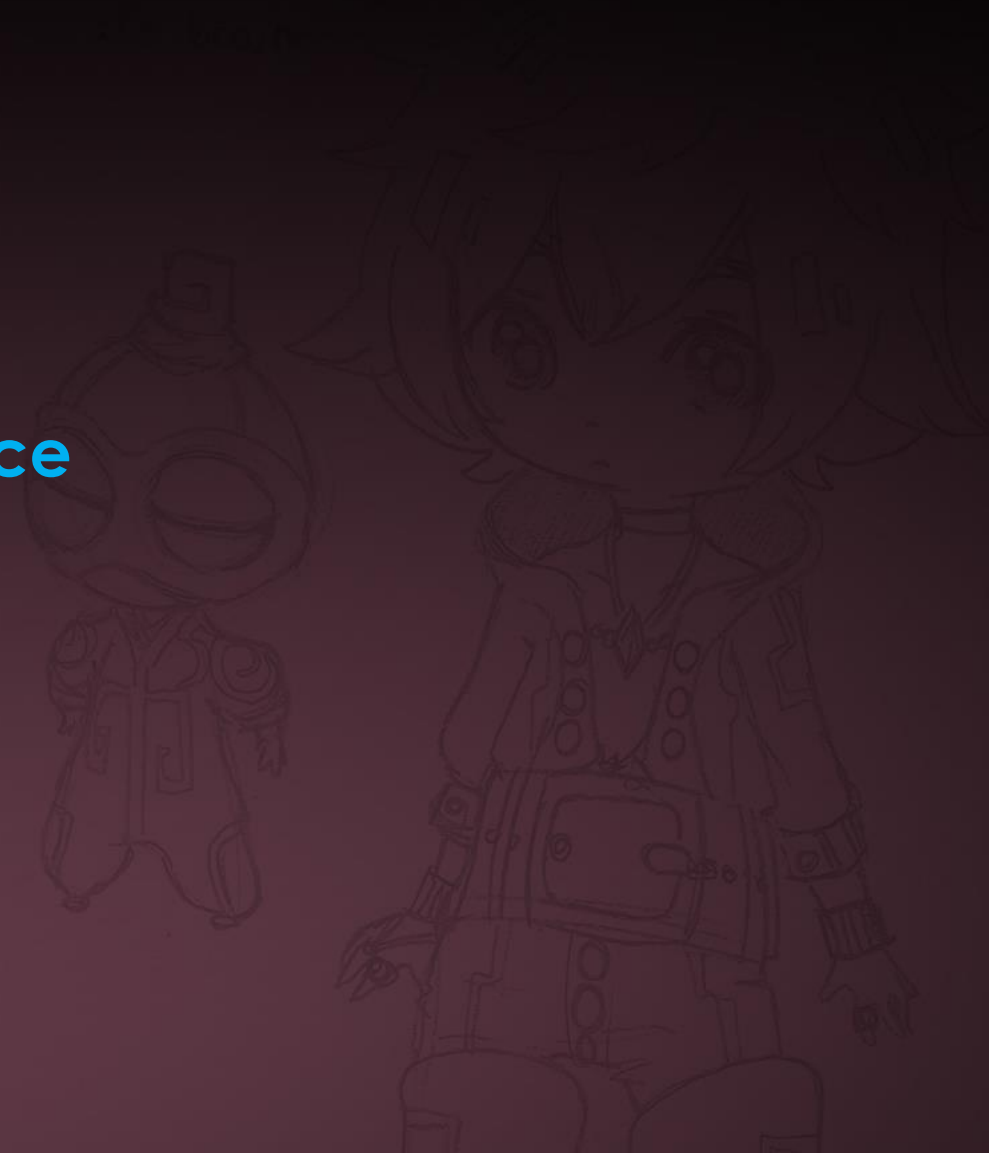
The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Want?





What do players want? (Recap)

- Players want a **challenge**
- Players want to **socialize**
- Players want a **dynamic solitary experience**
- Players want **bragging rights**
- Players want an **emotional experience**
- Players want to **explore**
- Players want to **fantasize**
- Players want to **interact**





The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?





Once players have decided they want to play a game, **they will have expectations** for the game itself.

If these expectations are not met they will soon become **frustrated** and find another game to play.



Player frustration is the nemesis of every game designer!

It is important that game designers do everything possible
To **eliminate player frustration!**



The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?





The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?

Players Expect a Consistent World



Players come to understand what actions they can perform in the game world and what those actions will produce.

Consistency of actions must be maintained – an unpredictable game world will quickly become incredibly frustrating.

fixed position
- talking to
npc's



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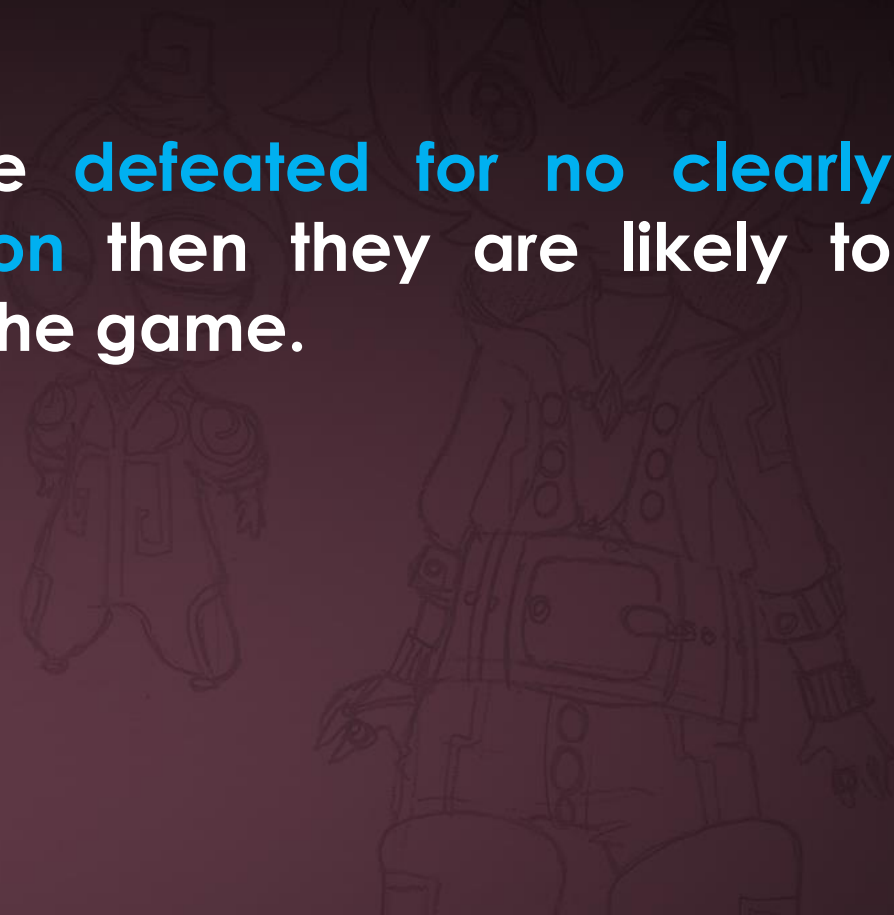
The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Players Expect A Consistent World



If players are **defeated for no clearly defined reason** then they are likely to stop playing the game.

job in
uss world.
↓
fixed position
- talking to
npc's





The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?





The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?

Players Expect to Understand
The Game World's Bounds



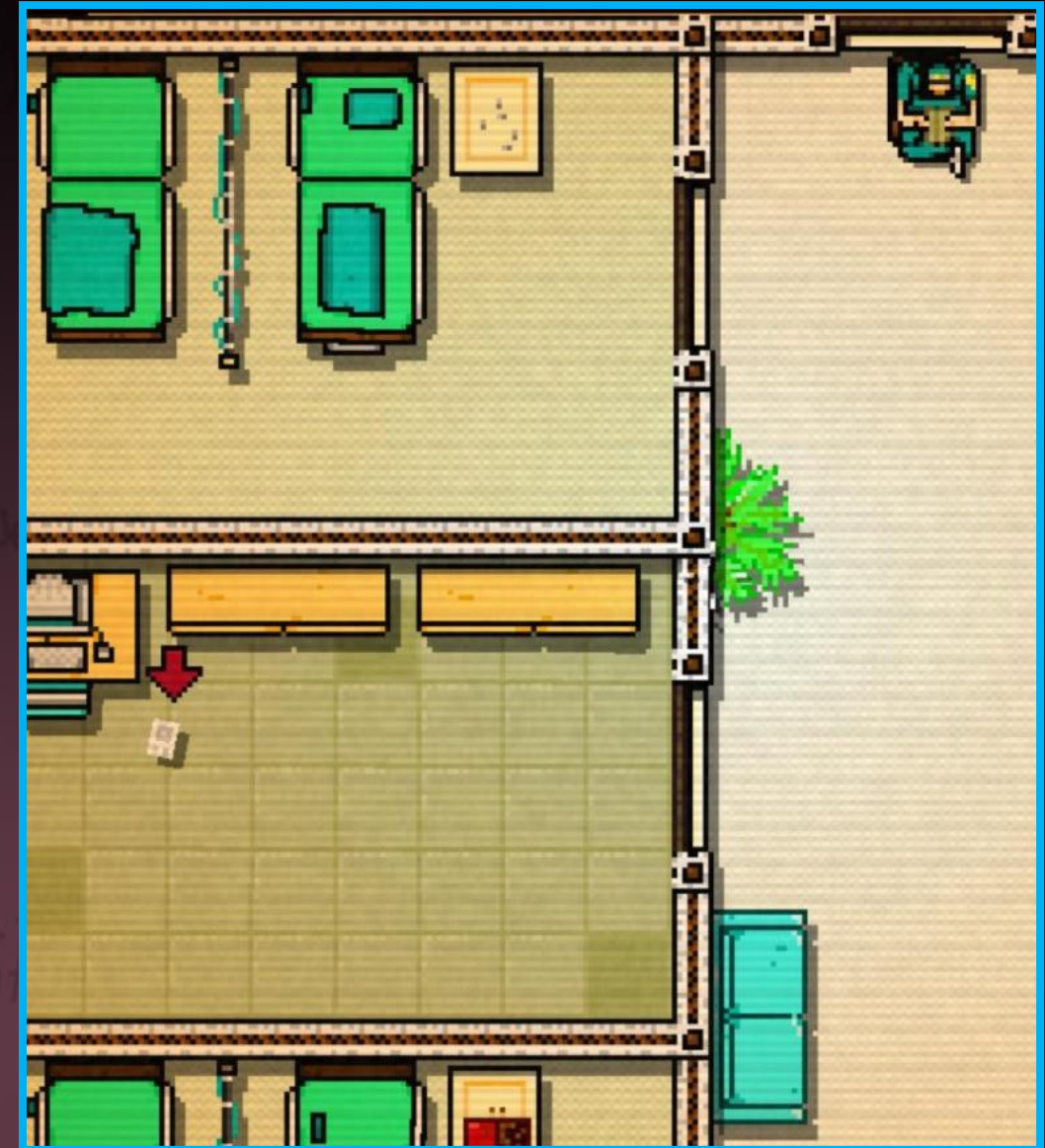
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The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Players Expect to Understand The Game World's Bounds

Players expect to understand which actions are possible and which are not.

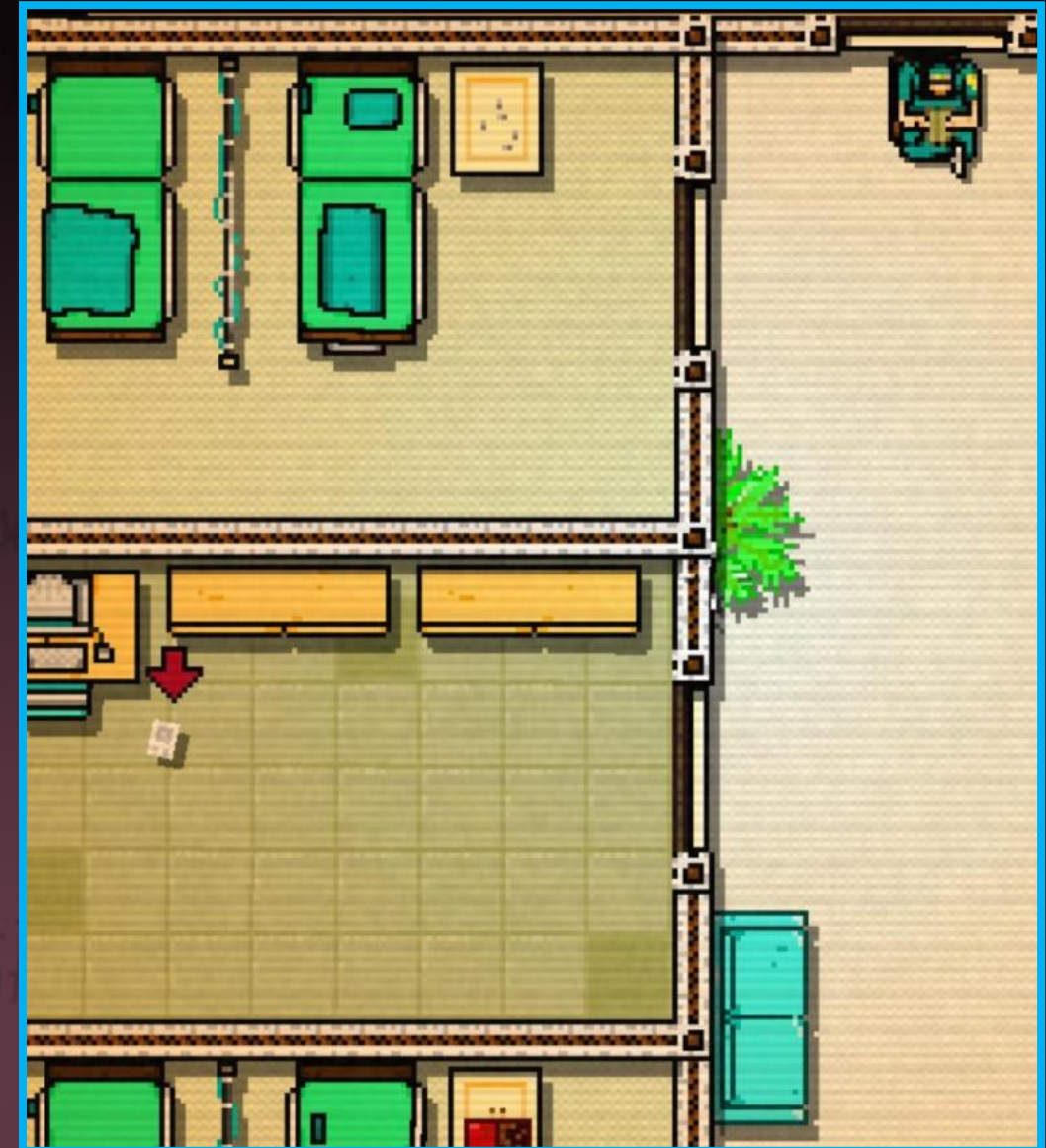
Many games break this design principle, having players performing actions using a certain type of game mechanism and then **inserting new puzzles** that can only be solved using an entirely new one.





The problem is that up until that point, **players have been taught to play** the game in a certain way.

Hotline Miami's 'stealth' level attracted a lot of **criticism from players and reviewers** because it was at odds with the rest of the game's dynamic.





The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?





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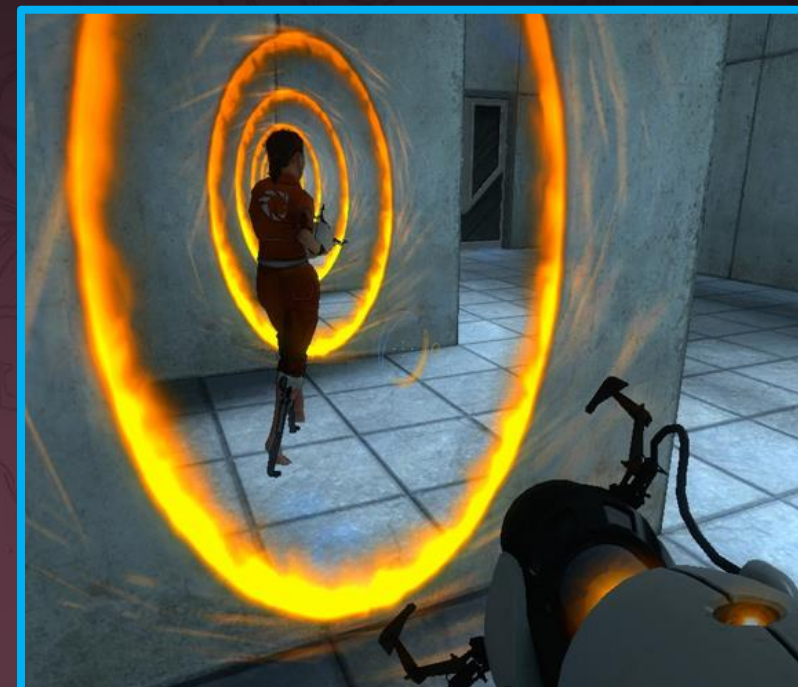
The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?

Players Expect Reasonable Solutions To Work



Once players have spent time playing a game they come to **understand** the bounds of the game world.



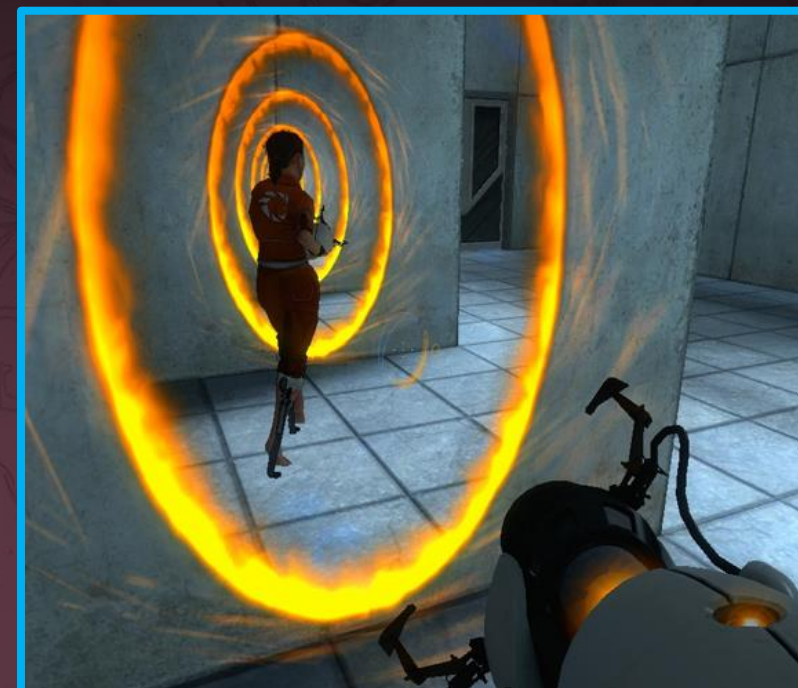


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The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Players Expect Reasonable
Solutions to Work

When faced with a new puzzle later on in the game, players will try what they consider to be a **reasonable** solution.





GAME THEORY & DESIGN

The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Players Expect Reasonable
Solutions to Work

When faced with a new puzzle later on in the game, players will try what they consider to be a **reasonable** solution.

If this fails **for no good reason**, they will be **frustrated** and feel **cheated** by the game.





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The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Players Expect Reasonable
Solutions to Work



A designer always provides at least one solution to a puzzle but **there may be other equally reasonable solutions** discovered by players.

If the designer does not ensure that these alternative plausible solutions work, **players will become irritated** when they try them.



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The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Players Expect Reasonable
Solutions to Work



A designer always provides at least one solution to a puzzle but **there may be other equally reasonable solutions** discovered by players.

If the designer does not ensure that these alternative plausible solutions work, **players will become irritated** when they try them.

A designer should try to anticipate player choices in the game world.



The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?





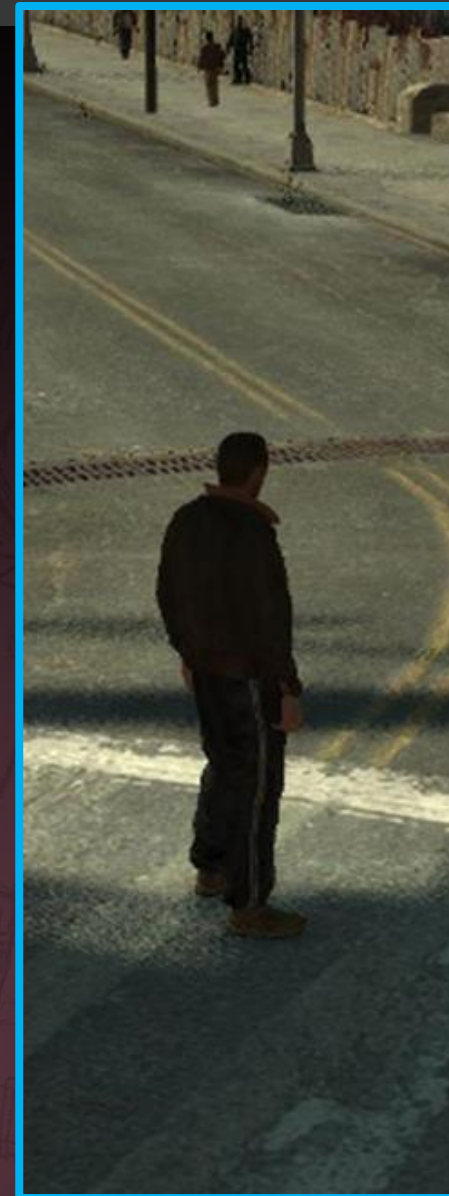
The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?

Players Expect Direction



Good games **let the player do as they please** up to a point, but they need to have some idea of how to accomplish a goal.

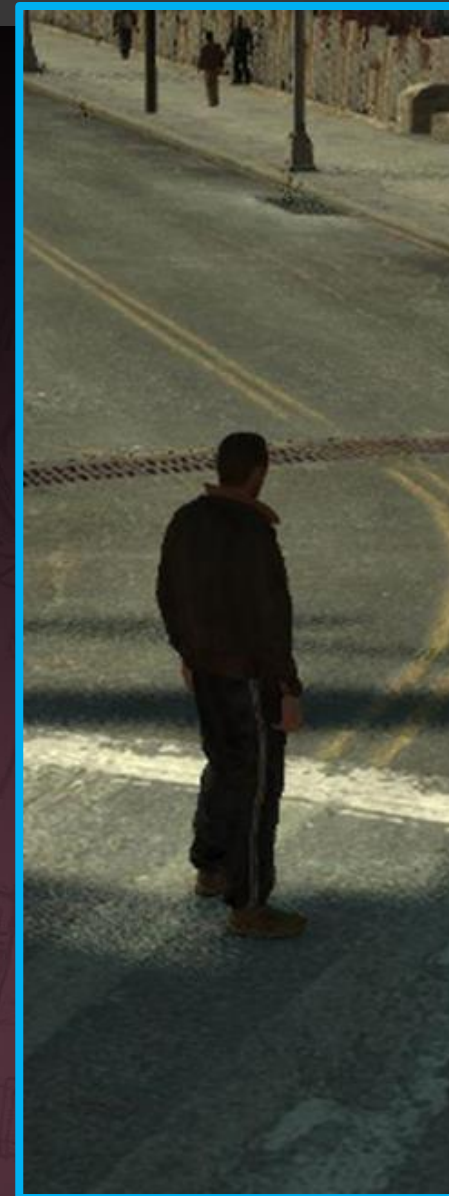
Players want to have an idea of what the goal is and to be **given some suggestions** of how they might achieve that goal.





With no idea of what their objective is, players are left to **wander aimlessly**.

Without something to do in the game world, it has **failed** as a game.





The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?



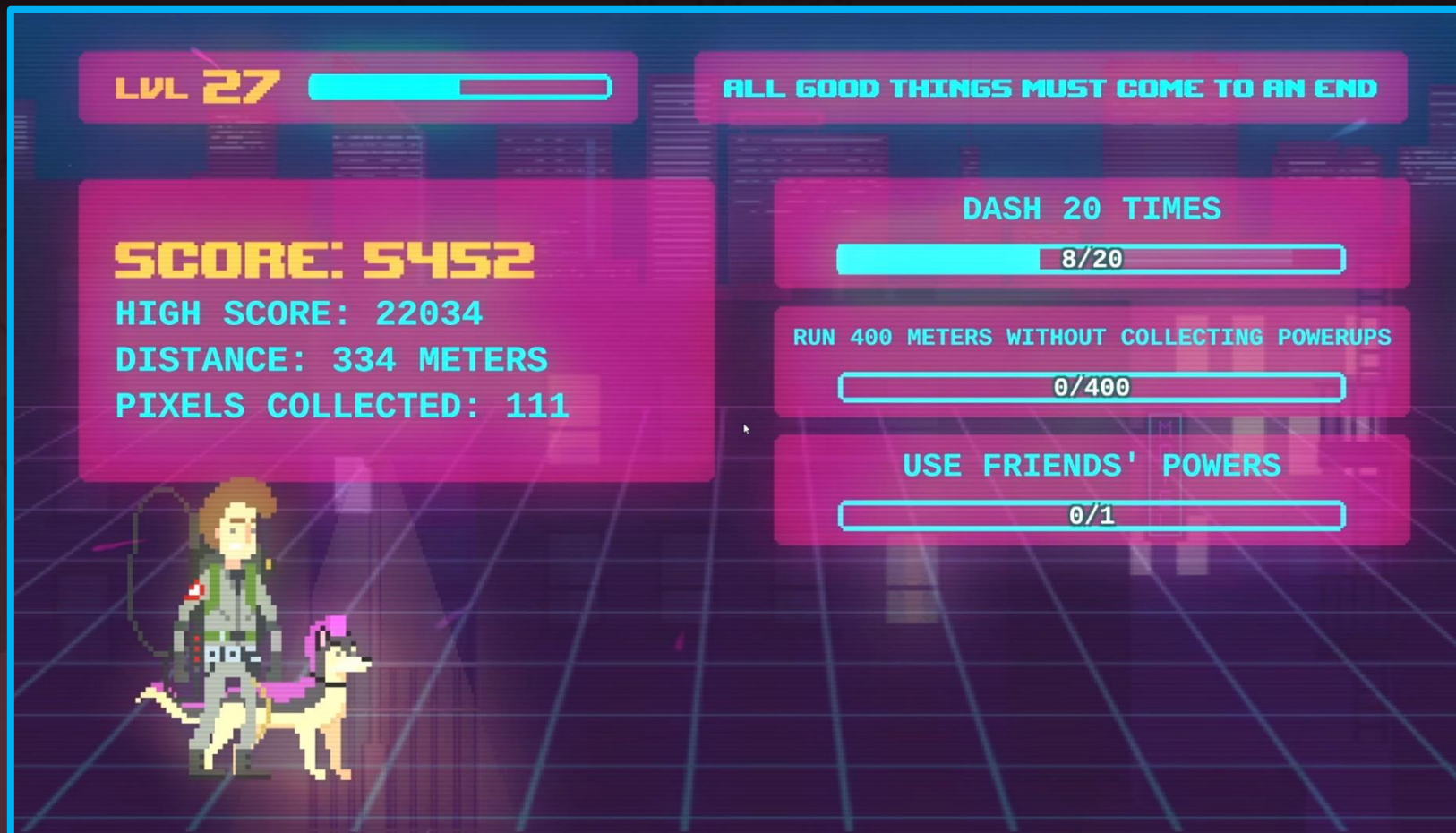


The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?

**Players Expect to Accomplish
A Task Incrementally**

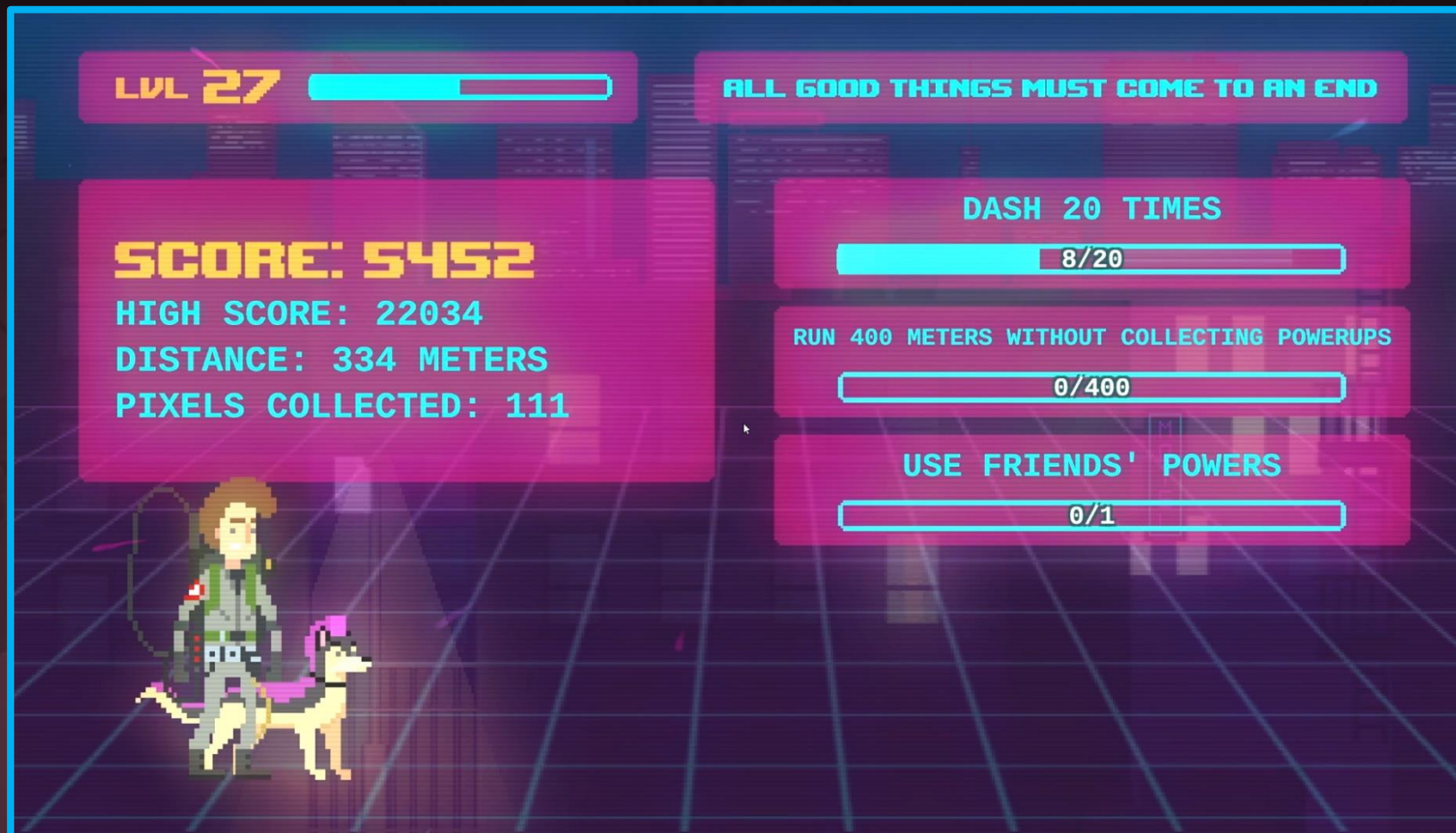


Players like to understand **what their goal in the game world is** and if they are on the **right track** to accomplishing it.





Sub-goals are a popular way of **communicating to a player** that they are heading in the right direction or doing the right thing.





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The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Players Expect to Accomplish
A Task Incrementally



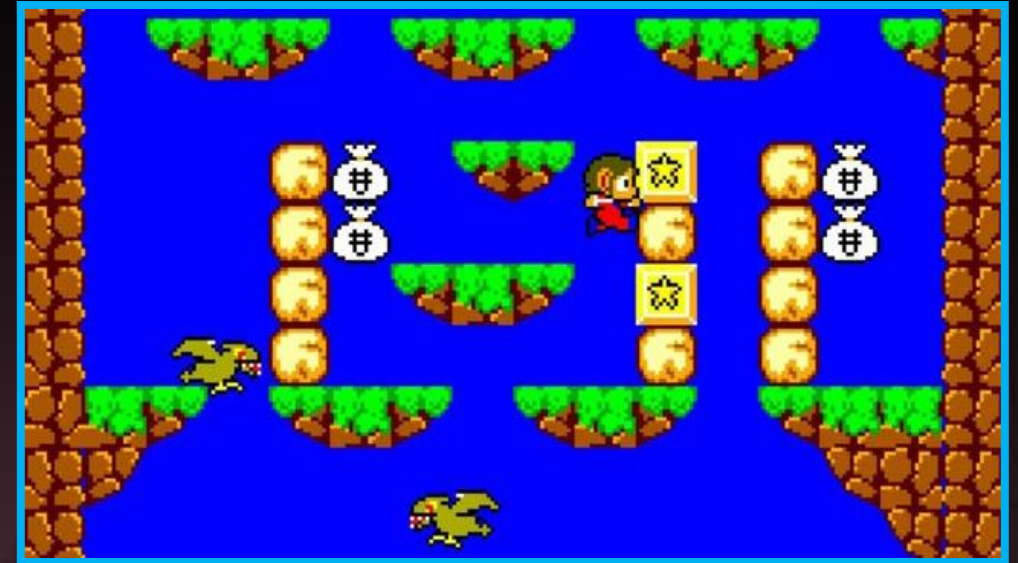


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The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Games such as *Alex Kidd in Miracle World* and *Scott Pilgrim: The Game* include **coin drops** for players to collect when they defeat enemies or break open boxes.

Players Expect to Accomplish
A Task Incrementally





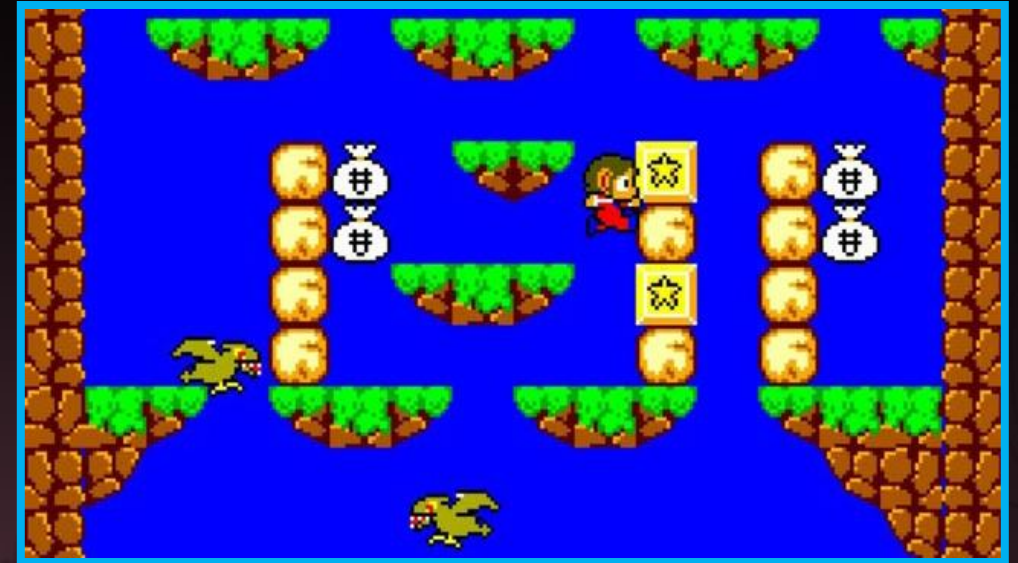
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Players Expect to Accomplish A Task Incrementally

These coins can be gathered and used to buy character upgrades and health that help the player later on.

These pick-up rewards help pull players through the game.





The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?





The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?

Players Expect to be Immersed



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The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Once players are caught up in playing a game, **they do not want to be snapped out of their experience.**

Games that **crash or glitch regularly** will **bring players out of an immersive state.**

Players Expect to be Immersed





Similarly, if a puzzle cannot be overcome with a perfectly reasonable in-game solution, players will be reminded that they are just playing a game.

The more players are rudely awakened from their game-world fantasy, the harder it is for them to re-immense themselves in it. **Many players want to play games to fulfil fantasies.**

Players Expect to be Immersed





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The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Players Expect to be Immersed



Another important component of player immersion is the **character that players control** in their game.



If the character is not someone the player can like or see themselves as being, their immersion may be disrupted.



The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?





The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?

Players Expect Some Setbacks



Players tend not to enjoy games that can be played all the way through the first time.

If the game is so unchallenging that players can finish it straight away, it might as well not be a game.





Gamers are drawn to playing games because they **want a challenge**. A victory that is too easily achieved is a **hollow victory**.

However, it is important to understand that players **want setbacks because of their own shortcomings**, not because of problems with the game they are playing.





Any 'cheap' tricks the game throws at the player will result in **player frustration**.

It is also a good idea to **allow players to enjoy small victories at the start of a game** to draw them in.

The difficulty can increase as players invest time in the game.



The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?





The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?

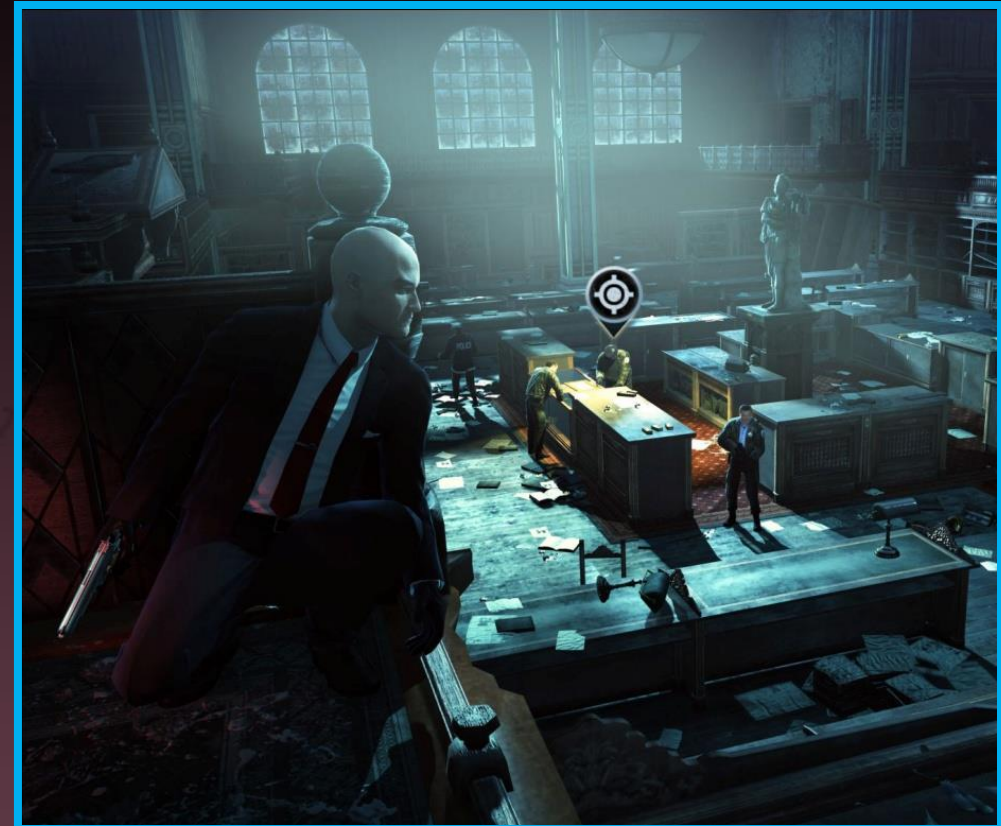
Players Expect A Fair Chance



Players do not want to be presented with obstacles that can only be surmounted through **trial and error**.

They may be able to figure out how to overcome it through trial and error, but there should be some way to figure out a successful path on their first try.

It should be **theoretically possible** for players to make it through on their first try.





The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?





The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?

Players Expect to Not Need to
Repeat Themselves



If the designer has created a puzzle that is extremely challenging - even if a player has solved it once already - **it should not be overused.**

Puzzles such as this should not appear repeatedly unless **they are a lot of fun to solve** and the player is rewarded in different ways each time.

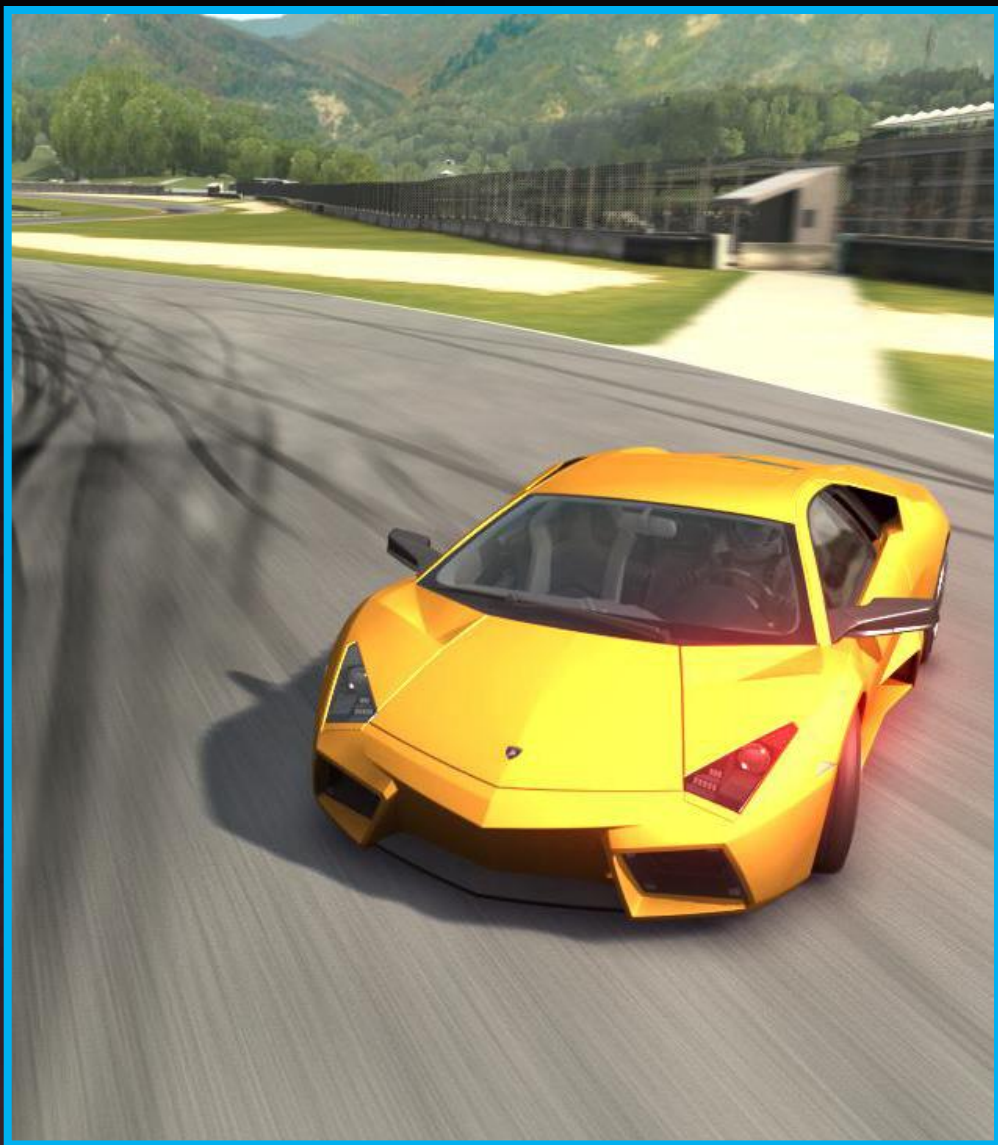
If a puzzle such as this is not fun to solve, players will **hate the game and its designers for their lack of creativity** in not coming up with new challenges.



GAME THEORY & DESIGN

The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Players Expect to not need to
Repeat Themselves



Many games are built on **repetition** but gameplay and **actions can be varied in subtle ways.**

Racing games and puzzle games are repetitive but unique challenges can arise to define each session of play.

In games where exploration is a key part of the experience, subsequent explorations are **less interesting** than the first time.



Players **lack of desire to repeat themselves** is why **save-games** were created. Some games automatically save player progress and provide them with a more immersive experience.

Many developers are concerned that allowing players to **save anywhere removes tension**, drastically reducing the challenge in a game.



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The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Players Expect to not need to Repeat Themselves

However, some believe that if players want to ruin their experience by saving constantly, **they should be allowed to do so.**

Games are about **empowering players** to do what they **want** to do.





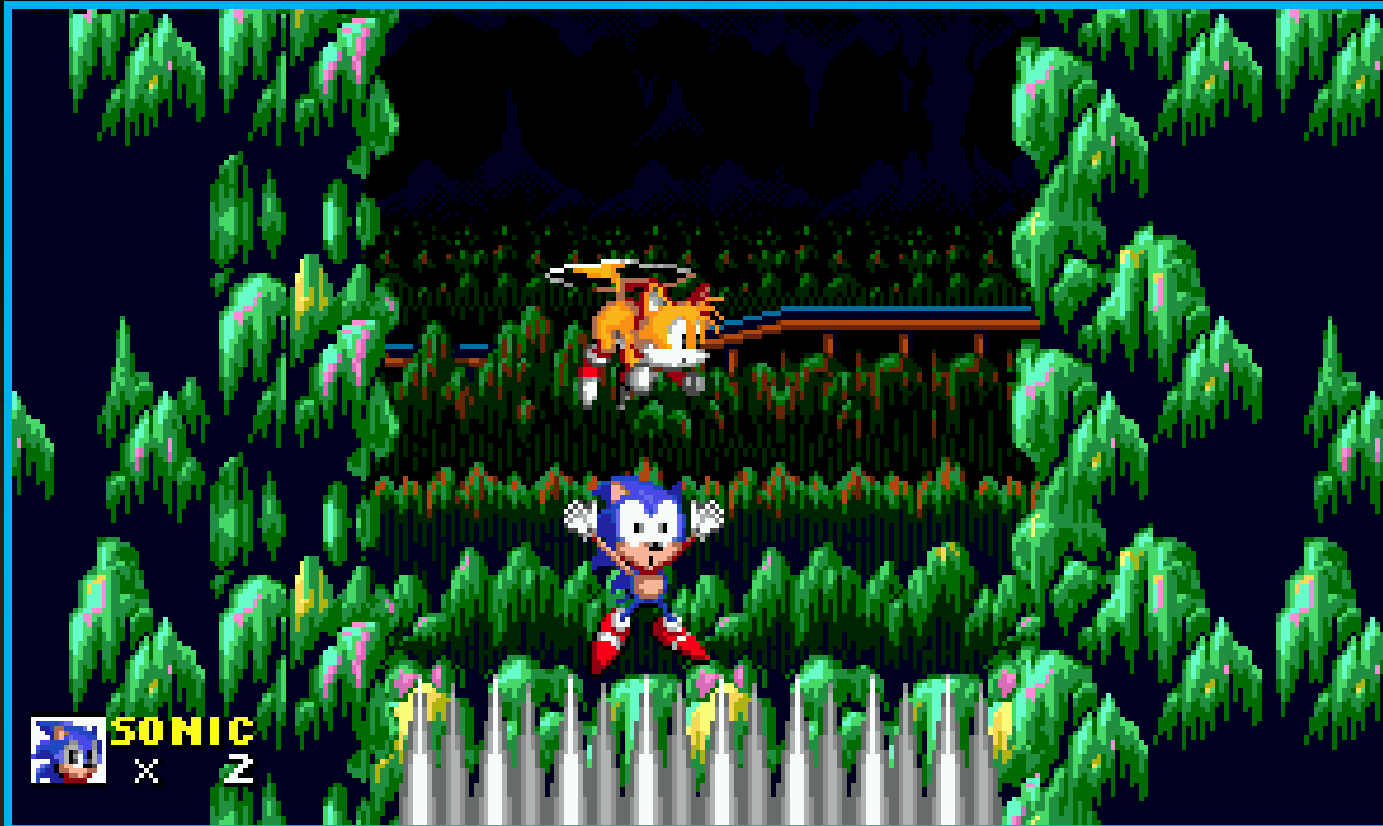
The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?





The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?

Players Expect Not To Get
Hopelessly Stuck



There should never be a time while playing a game that the **player is incapable of winning**, no matter how unlikely it may be.

If trapped by a hazard or other trap, **the player should never be left alive** in a situation where they cannot continue with their game.

fixed position
- talking to
npc's



Nothing is more frustrating
than a game that cannot
be won.





The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?

Players Expect to *DO*,
Not to *WATCH*



GAME THEORY & DESIGN

The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Players Expect to **DO**,
Not to **WATCH**



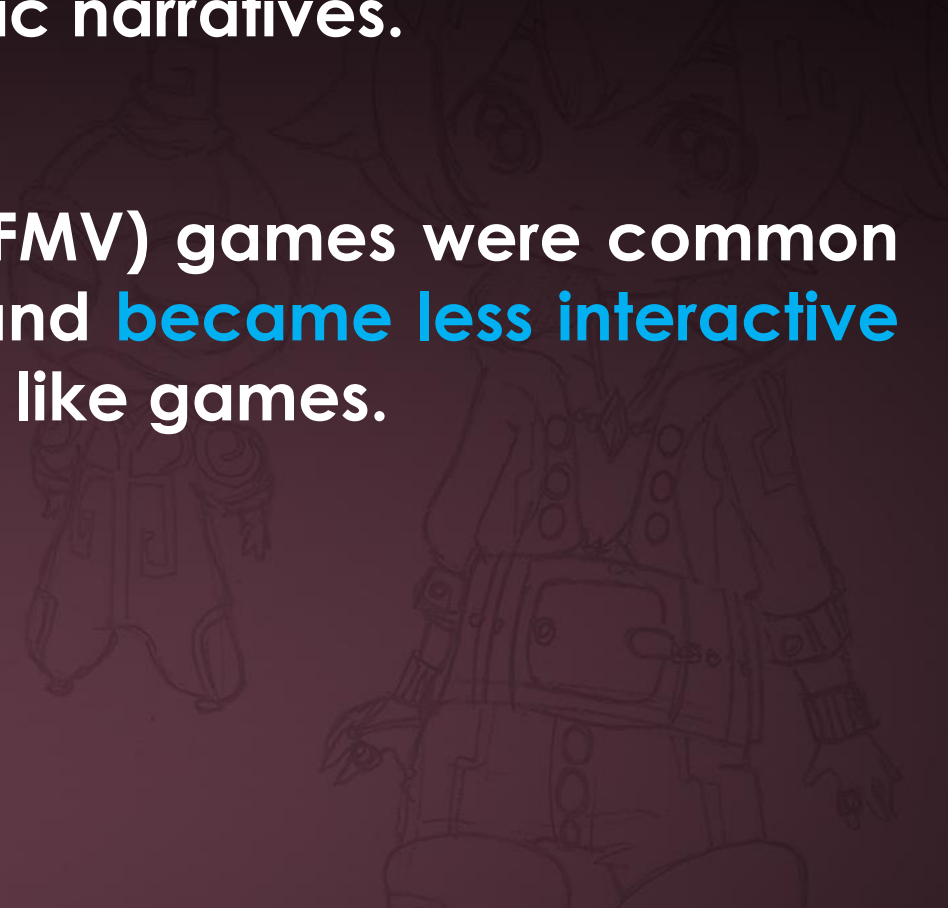
As the capabilities of games platforms have increased, many games have featured elaborate, cinematic narratives.



Full Motion Video (FMV) games were common in the early 1990s and **became less interactive** – they became less like games.

for for future
normal job in
crazy ass world.

fixed position
- talking to
npc's





GAME THEORY & DESIGN

The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Players Expect to **DO**,
Not to **WATCH**



As the capabilities of games platforms have increased, many games have featured elaborate, cinematic narratives.

Full Motion Video (FMV) games were common in the early 1990s and **became less interactive** – they became less like games.



FMV titles became unpopular with gamers. **Players want to play games, not watch them.**



Cutscenes can be very useful for communicating a game's story, or providing the player with information to **help them succeed in their goals**.

Non-playable sequences should ideally be stripped down to the **shortest possible length** and set up the next segment of gameplay.



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The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Players Expect to *DO*,
Not to *WATCH*

“People play games because they want something different from what a movie, book, radio show or comic can provide. They want to *interact*.”

(Rouse 2005:18)



The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?





The Player's Expectations: What Do Players Expect?

**Players Do Not Know What They Want...
But They Know When it is Missing**

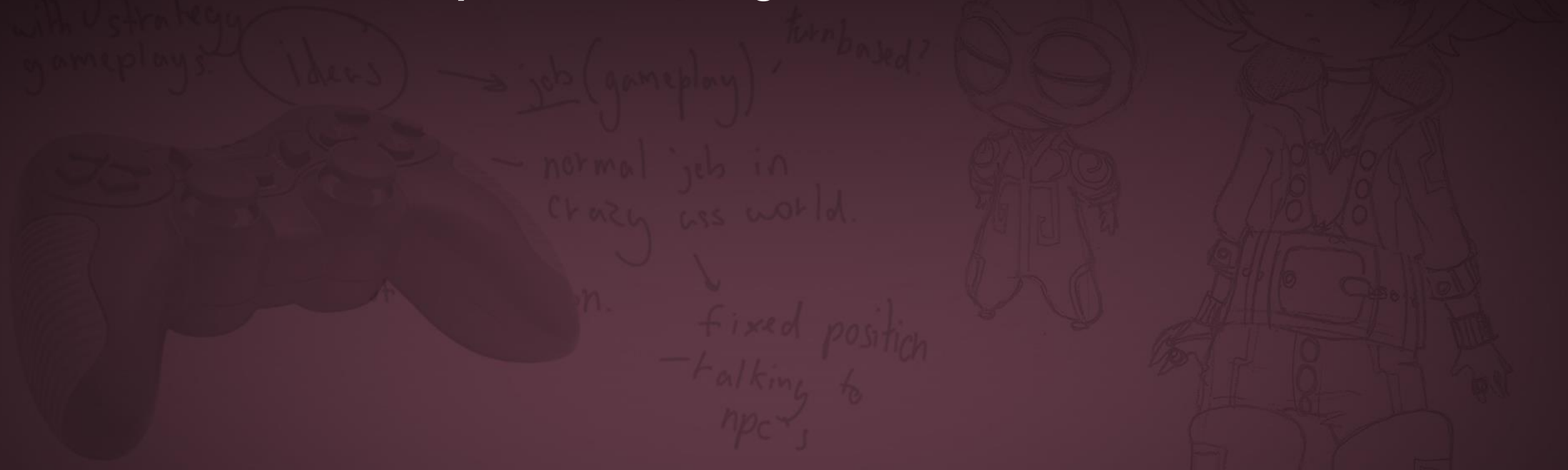


Gamers can quickly judge whether a game they have been playing is any fun.

When a game fails, they will often point out the flaws but very few will be able to tell a designer what to do in order to fix the problem.



Additionally, it is a rare person who can discuss raw game ideas and determine if it is likely that the final game will be fun or not.





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The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Players Do Not Know What They Want...
But They Know When it is Missing

Additionally, it is a rare person who can discuss raw game ideas and determine if it is likely that the final game will be fun or not.

It is these people who are best suited to become **designers**.



Think of what frustrates you while you play a game.

- What parts give you the greatest satisfaction?
- Why do you react to a game mechanic the way you do – What did it do right or wrong?
- How could gameplay be improved to increase replay value, or challenges, or a sense of achievement / satisfaction?



Think of what frustrates you while you play a game.

Analysing games in this way will help you establish your own list of rules.

These rules can be applied to **your own projects in game development.**



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The Player's Expectations: What Players Expect

Any questions?



Books

**Rouse, R. (2005). *Game Design Theory and Practice* (Second Edition).
Wordware Publishing Inc., USA**



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