What makes a game fun

Introduction to game design

PRESS START

Jean-Baptiste Boin

What we won’t discuss today

- Many elements are needed to make a great game
  - Story
  - Artwork
  - Genre
- We will mainly focus on the gameplay in general

What is a game?

- A game ≠ a toy ⟶ problem solving
- A game ≠ work ⟶ playful attitude

"A game is a **problem solving** activity,
approached with a **playful attitude**"

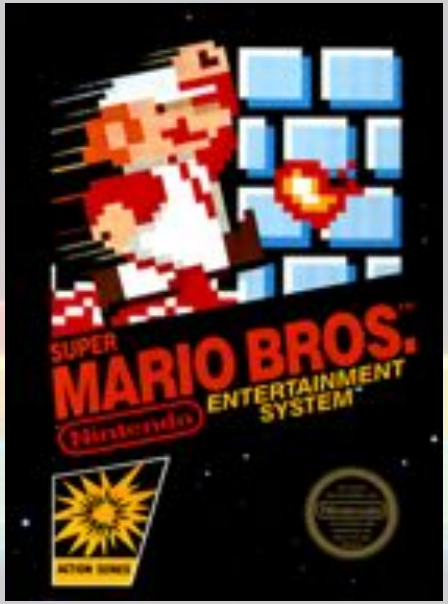
(Jesse Schell)

A set of rules

- Game designer: creates/organizes these rules
- Board games vs. computer games

Battlechess (Amiga), 1988

Case study: Super Mario Bros. (lvl 1)



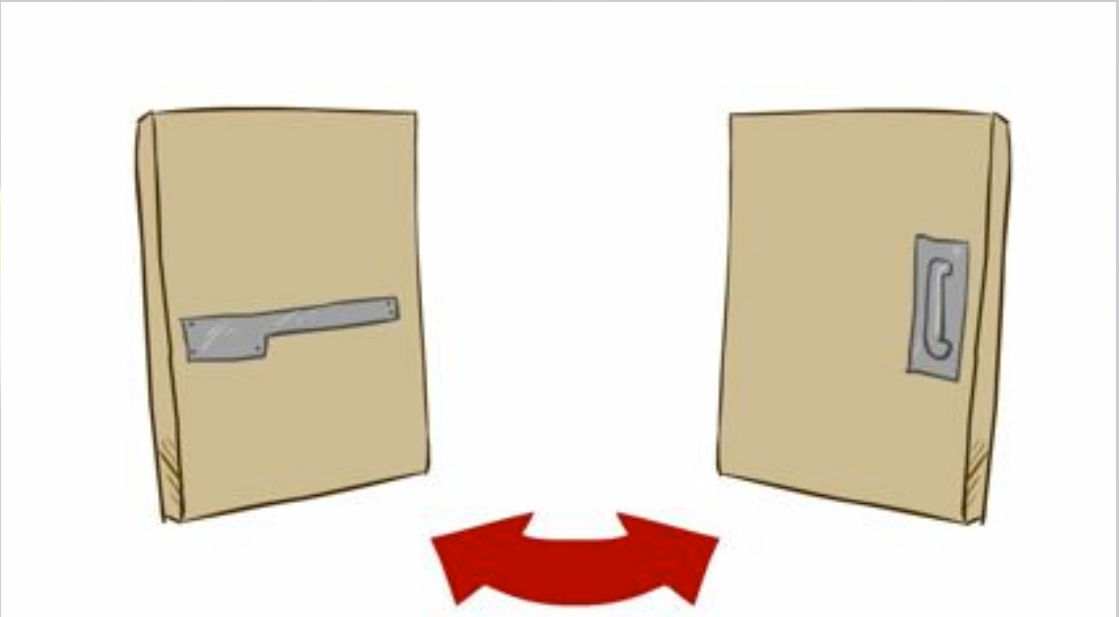
Released in 1985 on NES

Sold 40.24 million copies (fourth best-selling game ever)

Case study: Super Mario Bros. (lvl 1)

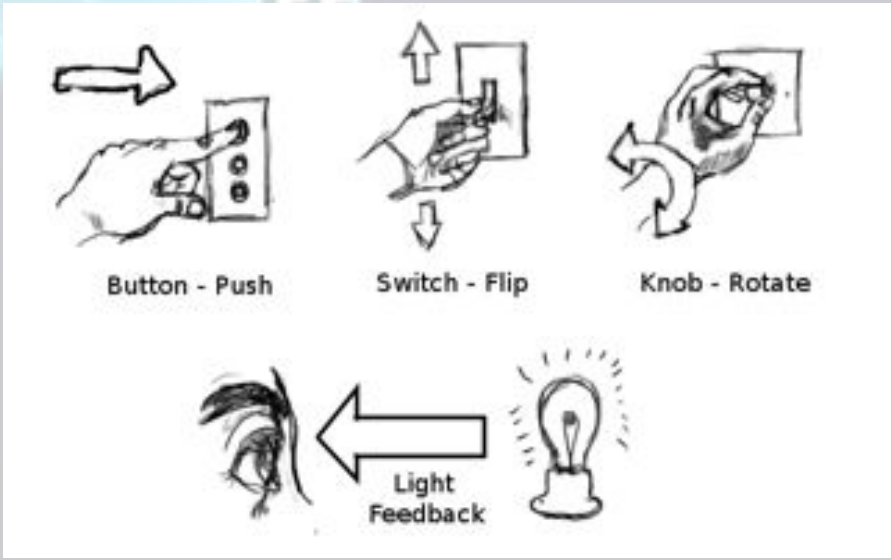
Nice article: http://auntiepixelante.com/?p=465

Affordance



Affordance

- Concept coming from the design world (*The Design of Everyday Things*, Donald Norman)
- Making things “obvious” to use



Affordance

Rayman Origins (PS3, Xbox360, Wii), 2010

Affordance

Fantasia (Mega Drive), 1991

Core mechanics

- One core gameplay

Super Mario Bros. (NES), 1985

Sonic the Hedgehog (Mega Drive), 1991

Core mechanics

- One core gameplay

Gran Turismo 6 (PS3), 2013

Mario Kart 8 (Wii U), 2014

Core mechanics

- One core gameplay

Call of Duty: Black Ops
(Xbox 360, PS3, Wii, Windows, Mac), 2010

Pokemon Snap (Nintendo 64), 1999

Core mechanics

- Dual-core

Tomb Raider (Windows, Mac, PS3, Xbox360), 2013

Final Fantasy VII (PS), 1997

Core mechanics

- Multi-core

The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker (GameCube), 2002

Core mechanics

- “Many”-core

Mario Party 9 (Wii), 2012

Gameplay loops

Micro

Medium

Macro

The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword (Wii), 2011

Gameplay loops

Objective

Challenge

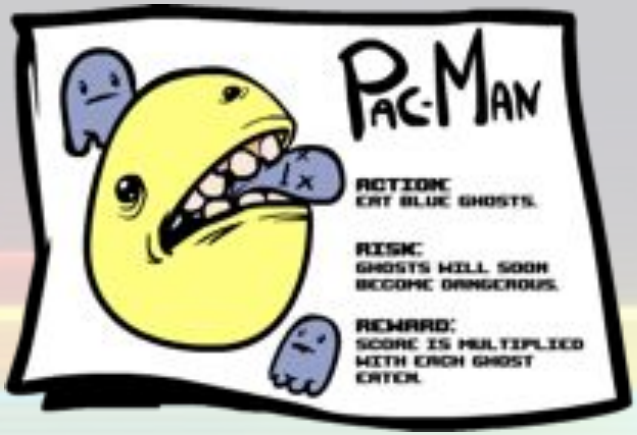
Reward

Super Mario Bros. (NES), 1985

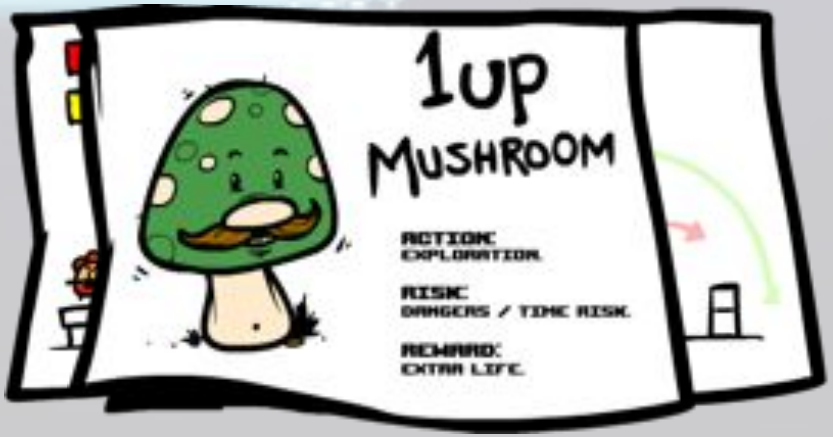
Gameplay loops

- Specificity of “sandbox games”

Risk and reward



Pacman (arcade), 1980



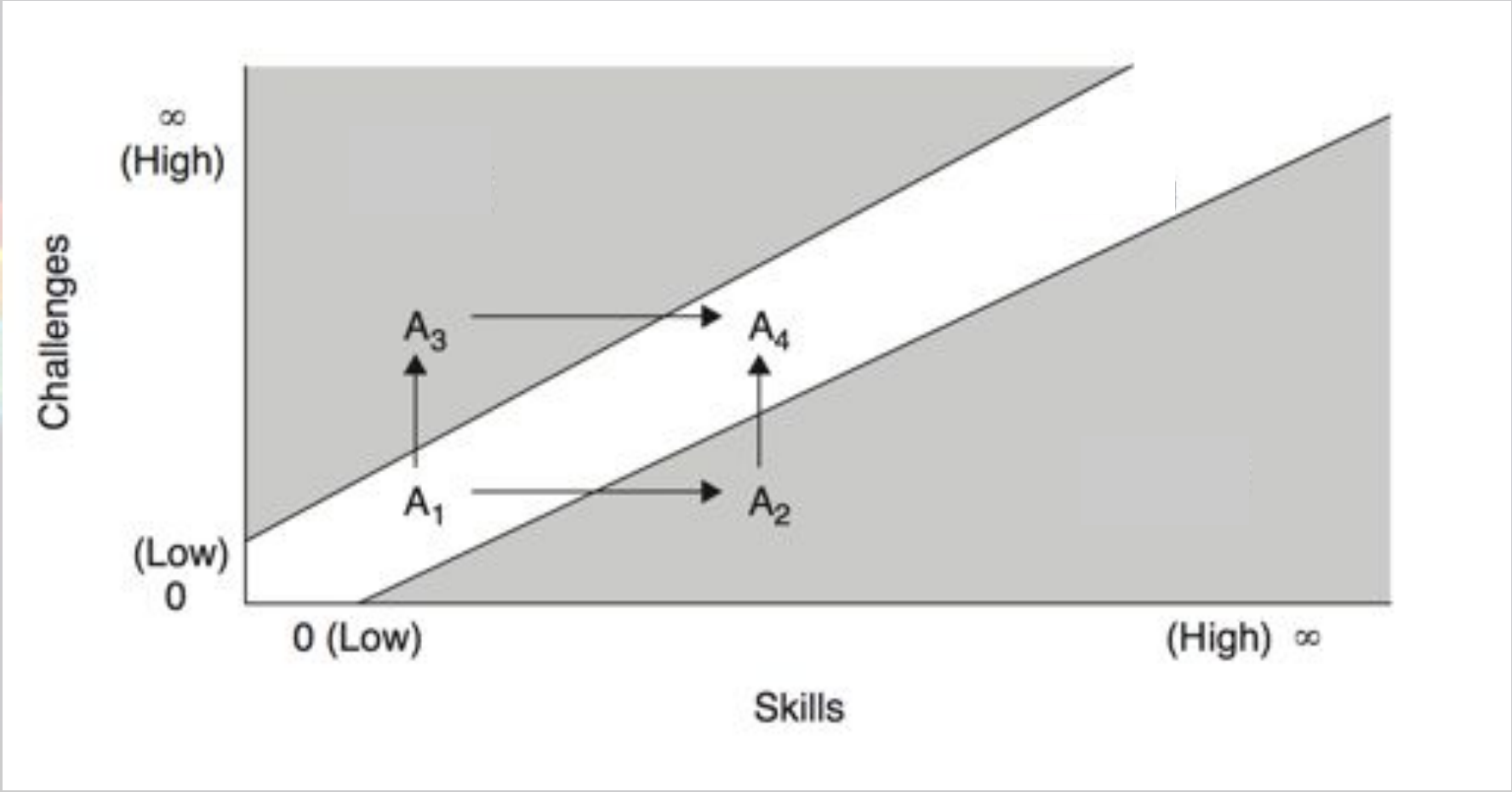
Credit: Edmund McMillen

Risk and reward

Super Meat Boy (Xbox, Windows, Mac), 2010

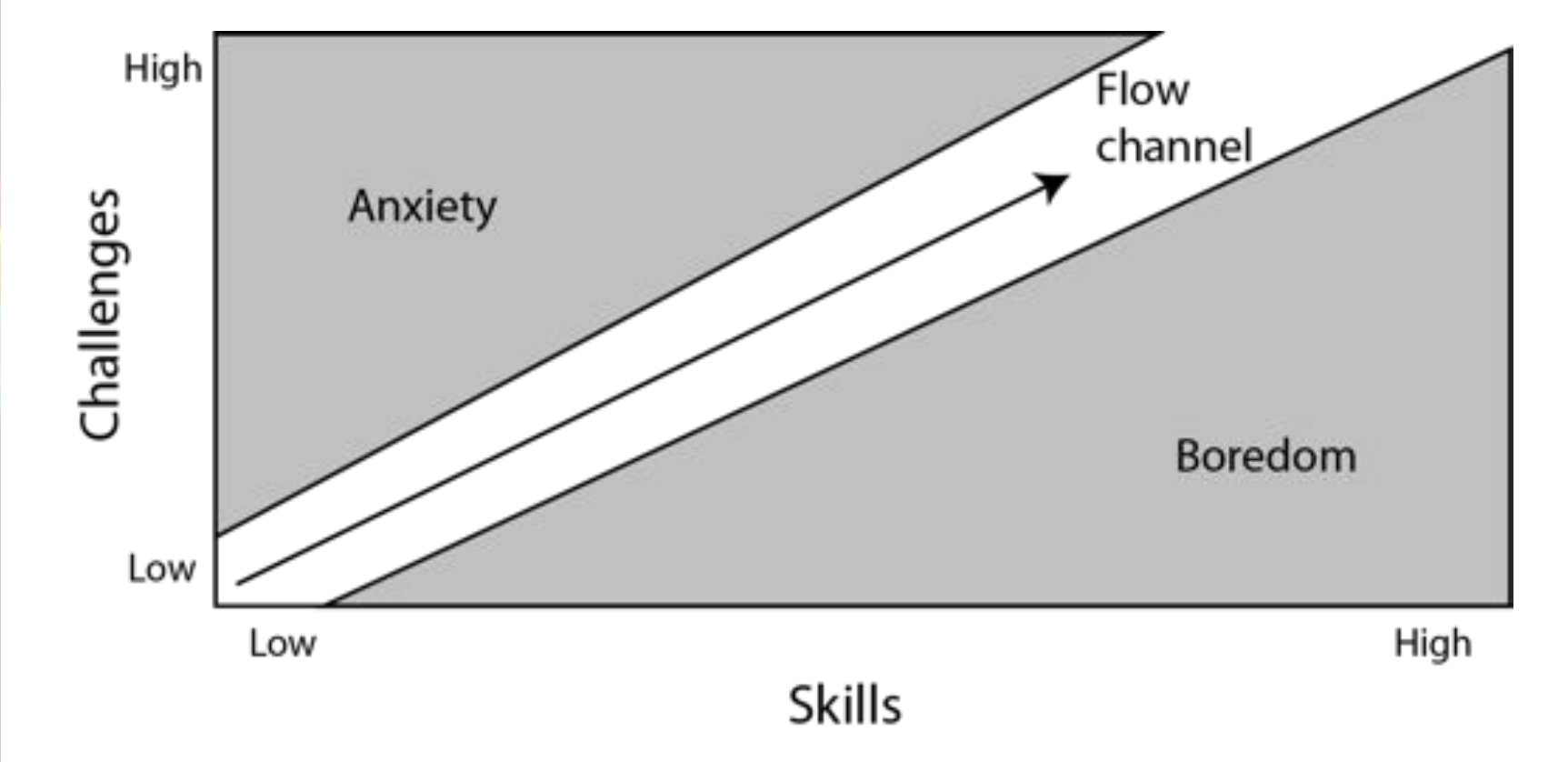
Credit: Edmund McMillen

Managing difficulty



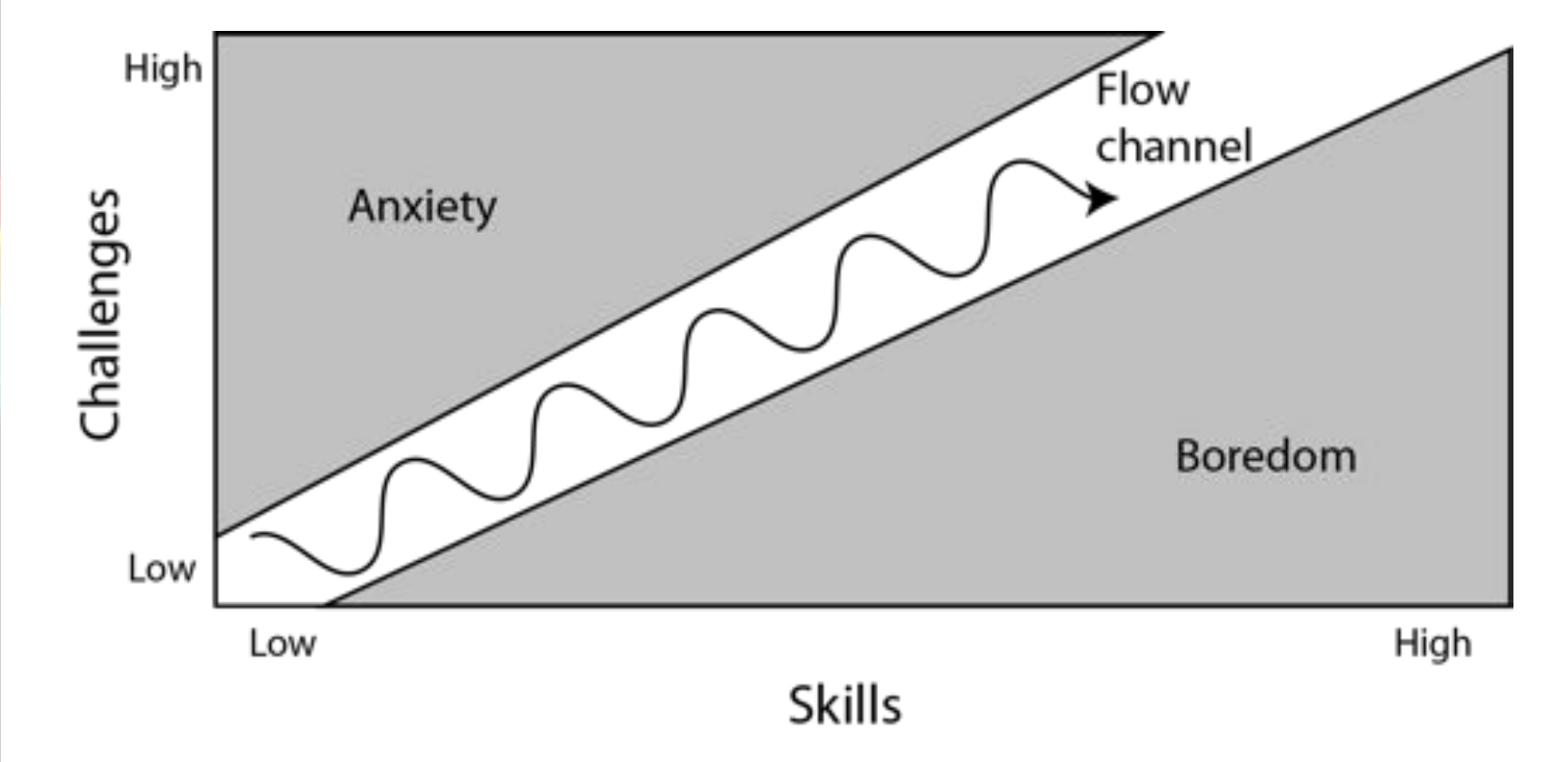
Credit: Jesse Schell

Managing difficulty



Credit: Jesse Schell

Managing difficulty



Credit: Jesse Schell

A cautionary tale

US

UK

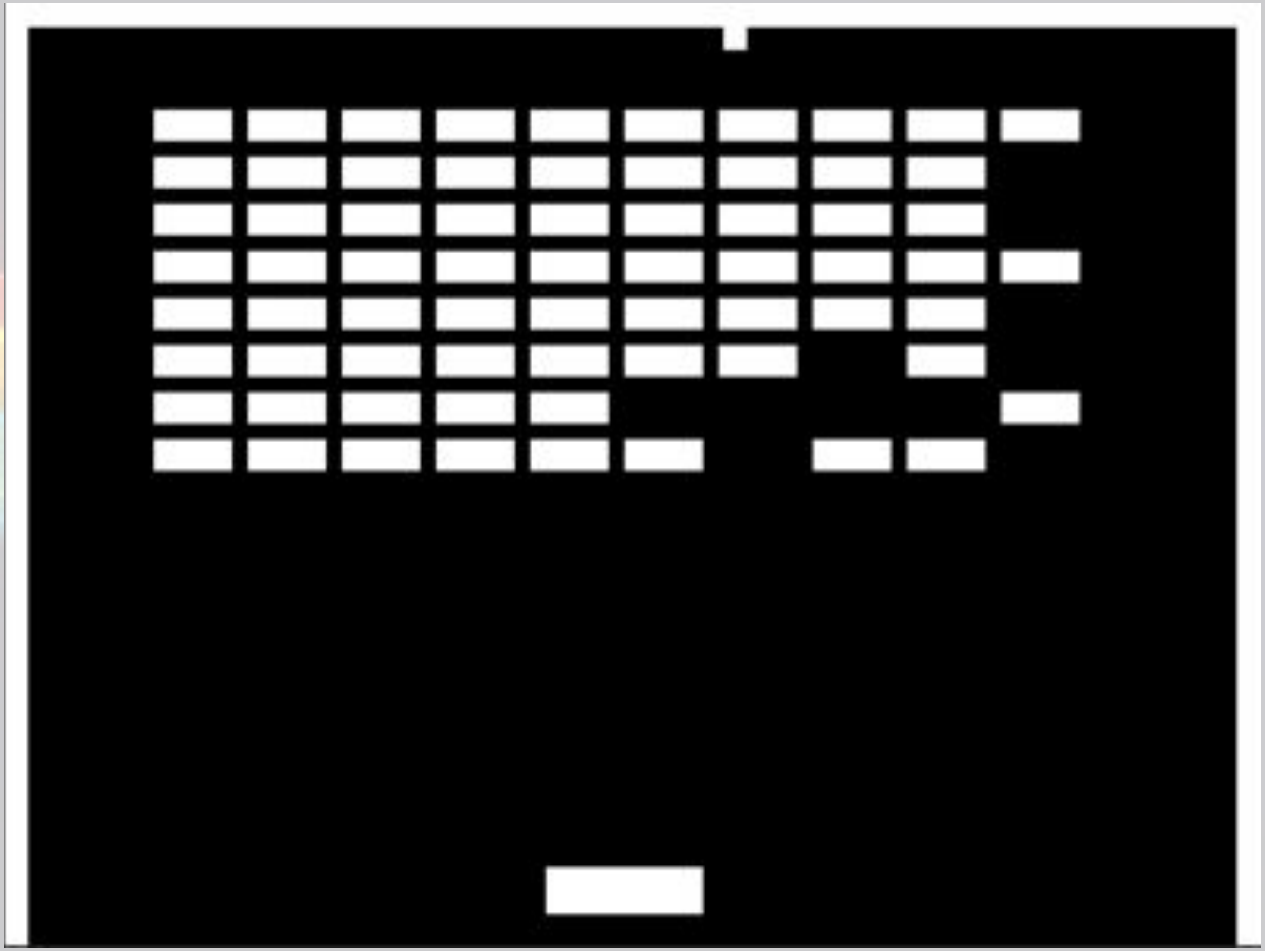
Direct feedback!

Feedback

- Used as a reward
- Hierarchy in actions

Super Street Fighter IV (PS3, Xbox 360), 2010

Feedback: make your game juicy!



Credit: M. Jonasson, P. Purho

Bad feedback

Link: Faces of Evil (Philips CD-i), 1993

Great feedback

Fruit Ninja (mobile), 2010

Angry Birds (mobile), 2009

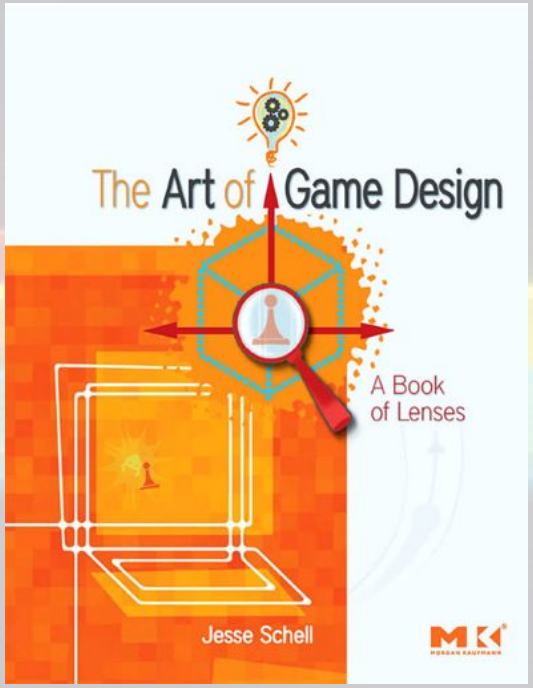
Great feedback

Rayman Legends (Wii U, PS3, Xbox 360, Windows), 2013

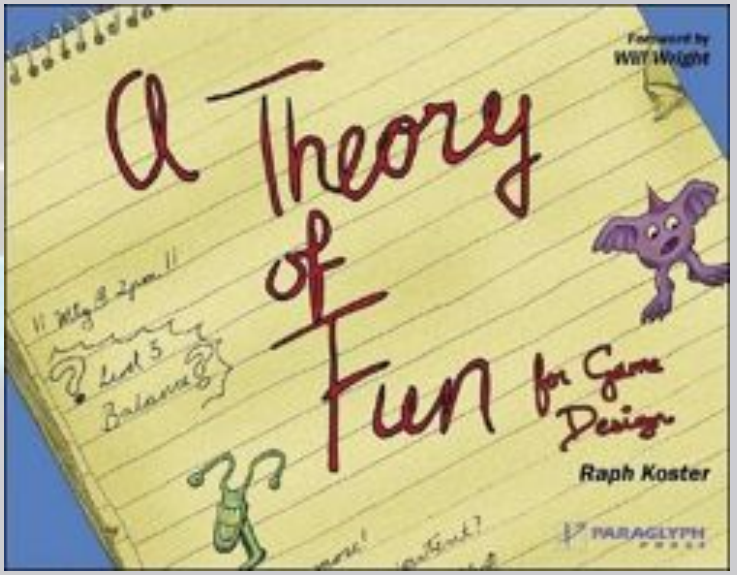
Tips for a successful game

- Easy to understand rules/world
- Polished core gameplay
- Work on different level of achievements
- Nice difficulty curve
- Feedback

For going further



The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses, Jesse Schell



A Theory of Fun for Game Design, Raph Koster

Last words

- The human brain is not so evolved
- Play games!
- Bad games can teach a lot too

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GAME OVER

Jean-Baptiste Boin