

Loops and the Metagame

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Game Design 2016

- Games between playing and gaming
- what is a game loop, and why it matters
- new words, old concepts
- loops and design
- player care
- metagame, stories, moneys
- designing metagames



**what have we learnt
so far?**

important things

- player experience
- game mechanics
- challenges
- rules
- contexts of play



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Spelunky

- game mechanics?
- challenges?
- rules?
- contexts of play?

for designers

gameplay design is more than just figuring out mechanics, and rules, and the rest. We need to structure this in forms that are more granular



A person in a wetsuit is holding a blue hose, and a dog is in the background. The image is dark and has a blue tint.

Game Loops

Spelunky





Games between playing and gaming

play: fun

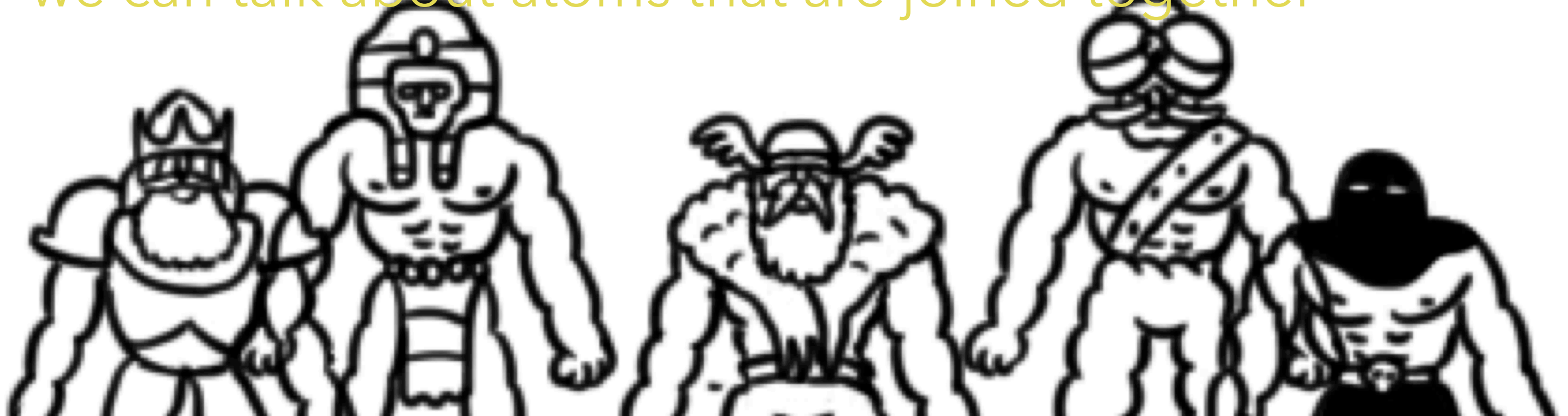
games: structure

there is always a liminal point from playfulness to playing a game

in *Spelunky*: from figuring out the game, to getting better at the game, to the daily challenge and leaderboards.

What is a game loop?

- basic element of play
- action(s) repeated throughout the game
- learnable, develop skills
- we can talk about atoms that are joined together



Core loops

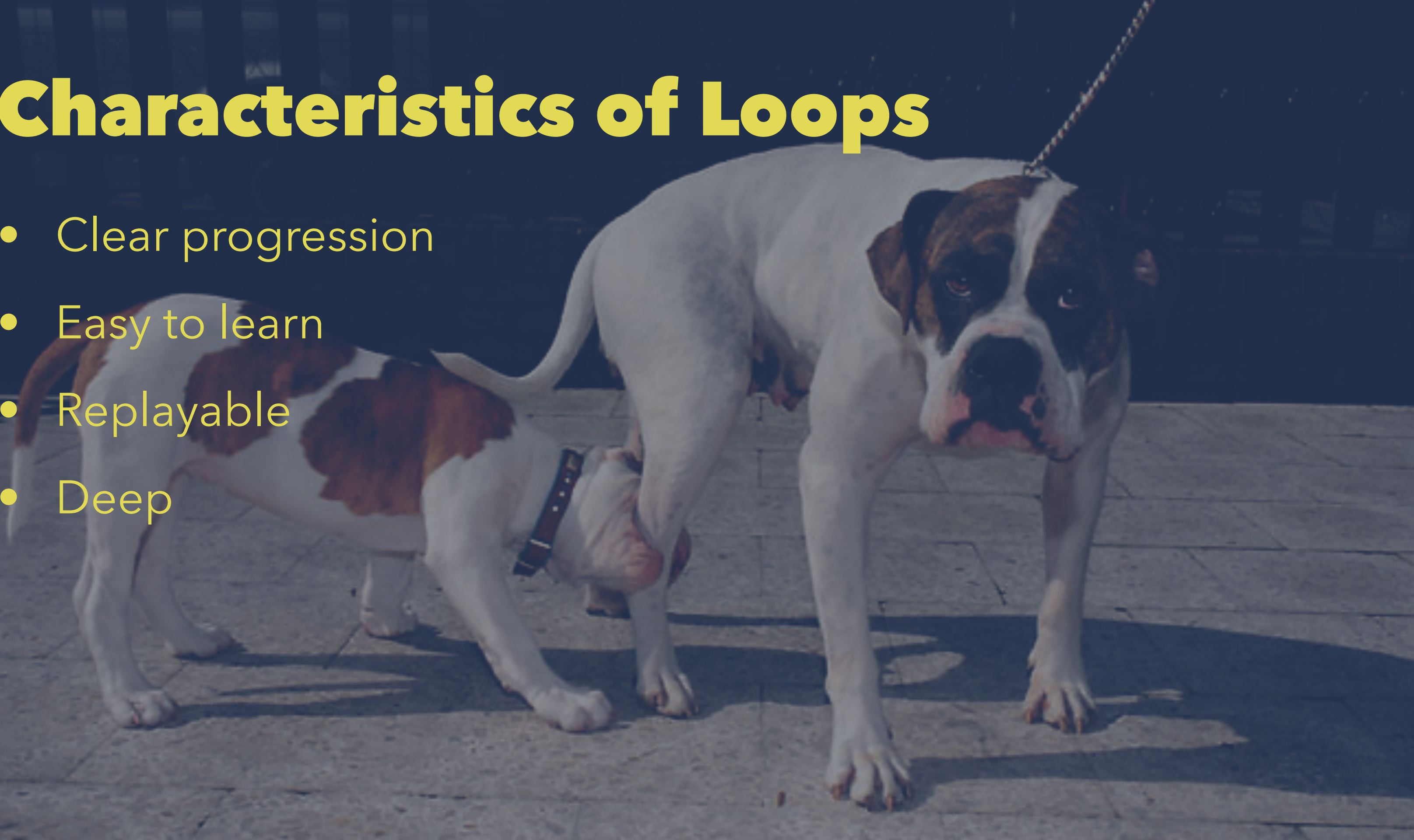
Main actions that have to be performed to progress in the game

Secondary loops

Reinforcing the core loop, providing variety, expanding gameplay

Characteristics of Loops

- Clear progression
- Easy to learn
- Replayable
- Deep



Task!

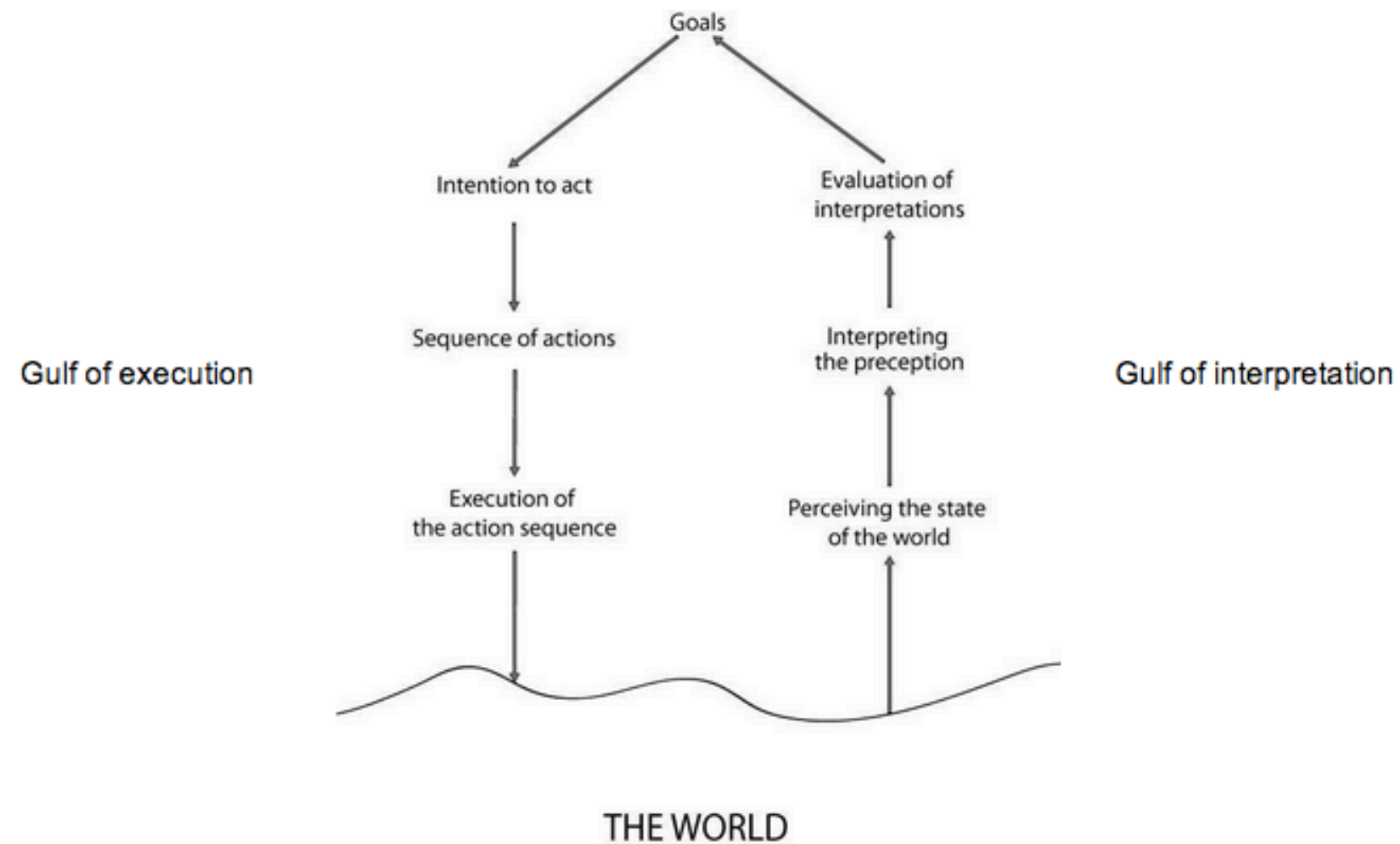
- Identify core loops in games of your choice.
- Draw them!

**Wait, haven't we
seen this before?**



Norman's theory!

Norman's 7 Stages of Action



Why is this important?

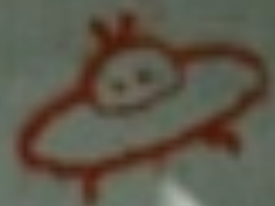
Norman's theory allows us to specify success conditions for the
loop design
gulf of evaluation
gulf of execution

For instance:

- loop speed
- closeness (when is the action closed: aggregating values)

Important

Loops always involve the processing from the machine and the feedback
Remember: programmers design, too!



But who cares about loops?



The background of the image is a blurred photograph of a staircase. A wooden handrail is visible on the right side, and the steps of the staircase lead upwards. The overall tone is warm and slightly out of focus.

Why do we play games?

Metagame





Old concept

Metagame was used to refer to:

- the rules that allowed the game to be changed
- any actions/knowledge outside of the game (loops) that has an influence on the game

A vintage, slightly faded color photograph of a beach scene. In the foreground, a woman in a black bikini is lying on her stomach on a white towel on the sand. To her right, a young child in a pink swimsuit is crouching and playing with a bucket. In the background, a man in a brown jacket and dark pants is walking away from the camera towards a small, white, gabled structure on a pier. A striped beach chair is visible on the left. The overall tone is nostalgic and candid.

Free to Play

Metagame

- Out-of-the-game information that affects in-game decisions
- Game economy
- Social context of play
- fiction



- Automatic Positioning of Decimal Point
 - Eliminates Scaling
- Easy, Fast, Direct Programming
- Minimum Instruction Required
- Mobile, Desk-Side Convenience
- New, More Flexible Tape Units

- Single-Instruction Square Root
- Divides and Multiplies Simultaneously
- No De-bugging Run Necessary
- Develops 30-Digit Product
- Fifteen-Digit Input and Output

- Cathode Ray Tube Display
- Decimal or Octal Arithmetic
- High-Speed Printed Numerical Output
- No Special Air Conditioning Needed
- Low Cost

For the engineer and scientist, with a minimum of instruction, the compact new IBM 610 Auto-Point Computer provides large-scale electronic computer facilities at desk-side.

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TIME
EQUIPMENT

Metagame as information

- what does the player know that can be used to gain advantage in core loops
- faqs, social communities, experience, ...
- we need to design into the game what the player knows
- *Spelunky*: PGC levels, but also platform games
- As seen on TV: *Lost*

Metagame as economy

- all games have economies (some are part of the game)
- some resource management does not happen in the loops, but outside
- play to win vs pay to win
- *Plants vs. Zombies 2*
- Making game economies porous
- Balance?

Metagame as context

- core loops are played in focused sessions
- social games/f2p want to extend that
- actions associated to the context of playing, not the activity of playing
- *Farmville*
- Design the context of play as part of the game

Metagame as fiction

- we empathize with worlds, characters, stories
- those are part of the metagame:
- they inform core gameplay,
- but they also engage us
- Design the game world to communicate your loops

It's the hat.

Game Design

- loops as systems
- metagames as engagement
- design systems,
- but also design the context in which those systems are played

**I DON'T
KNOW
WHAT I'M
DOING**

Play, loops, metagames

- design the core loops of engagement
- design their contexts of play

conclusions

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