

# **The Medium That Ate The World**

**Raph Koster**

**I'm here to talk about games.**

**People say games are frivolous.**

# friv·o·lous

*adj.* 'fri-v&-l&s

1. Unworthy of serious attention; trivial: *a frivolous novel.*
2. Inappropriately silly: *a frivolous purchase.*

[Middle English, probably from Latin *frivolus*, of *little value*, probably from *friare*, *to crumble*.]

**friv o·lous·ly** *adv.*

**friv o·lous·ness** *n.*

**People are nuts.**

**I'm here to tell you that games  
aren't**

**pointless,**

**childish, or**



**inappropriately silly.**

A thick, vibrant red paint is dripping down from the top edge of the page, creating several vertical streams of varying thicknesses. The paint has a slightly textured, brush-like appearance. The background is plain white.

**GAMES ARE HERE TO EAT  
HUMAN BRAINS.**

**Consider this a clarion call of  
warning.**

**(It's too late for me – save yourselves).**

# Where did games come from?

The world of boards

The regular world

Higinbotham's oscilloscope

**What is a game?**

# What are media?

Art

Music

Literature

# Games are models

The boardgame model

The sports model

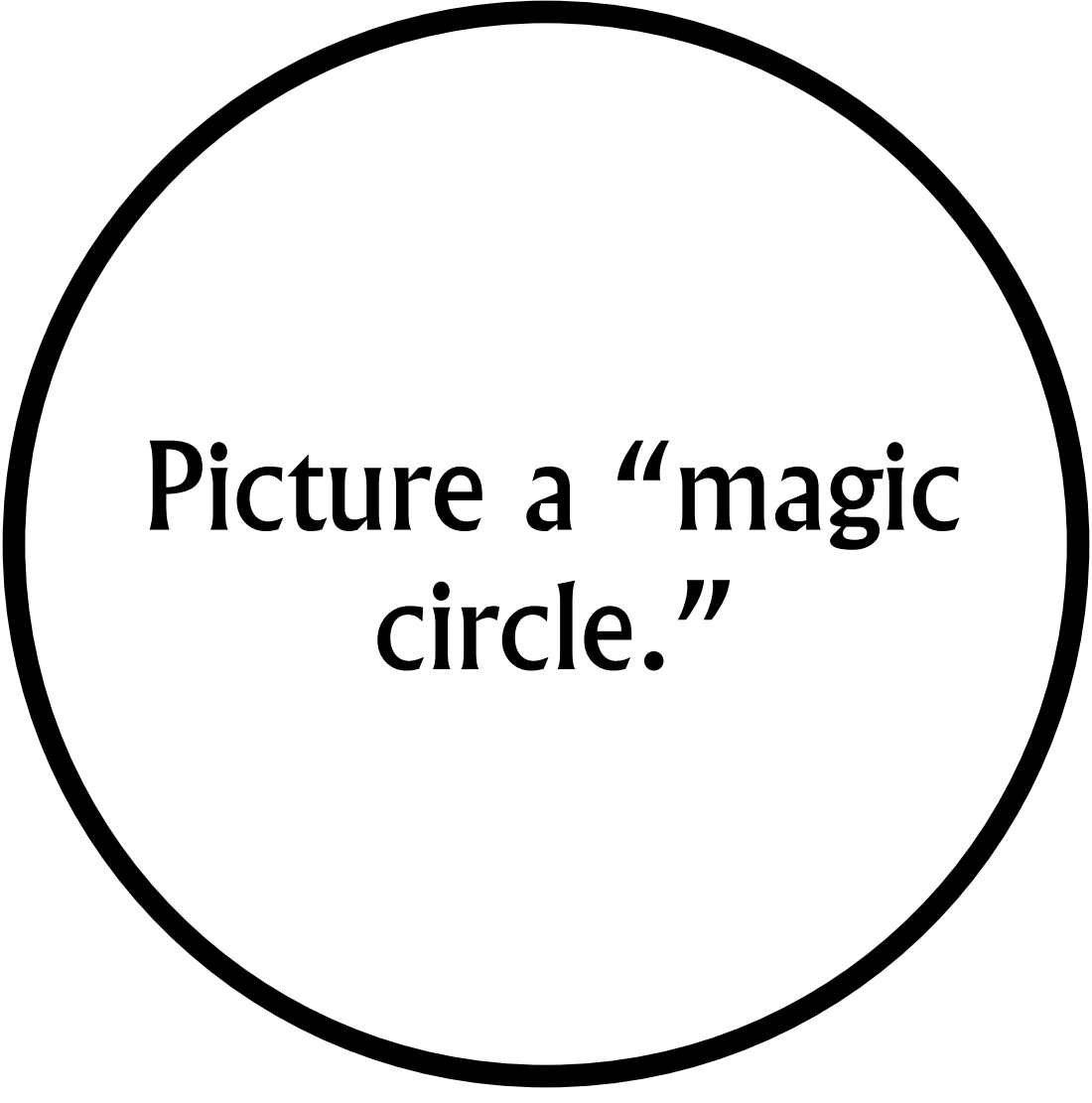
The play model



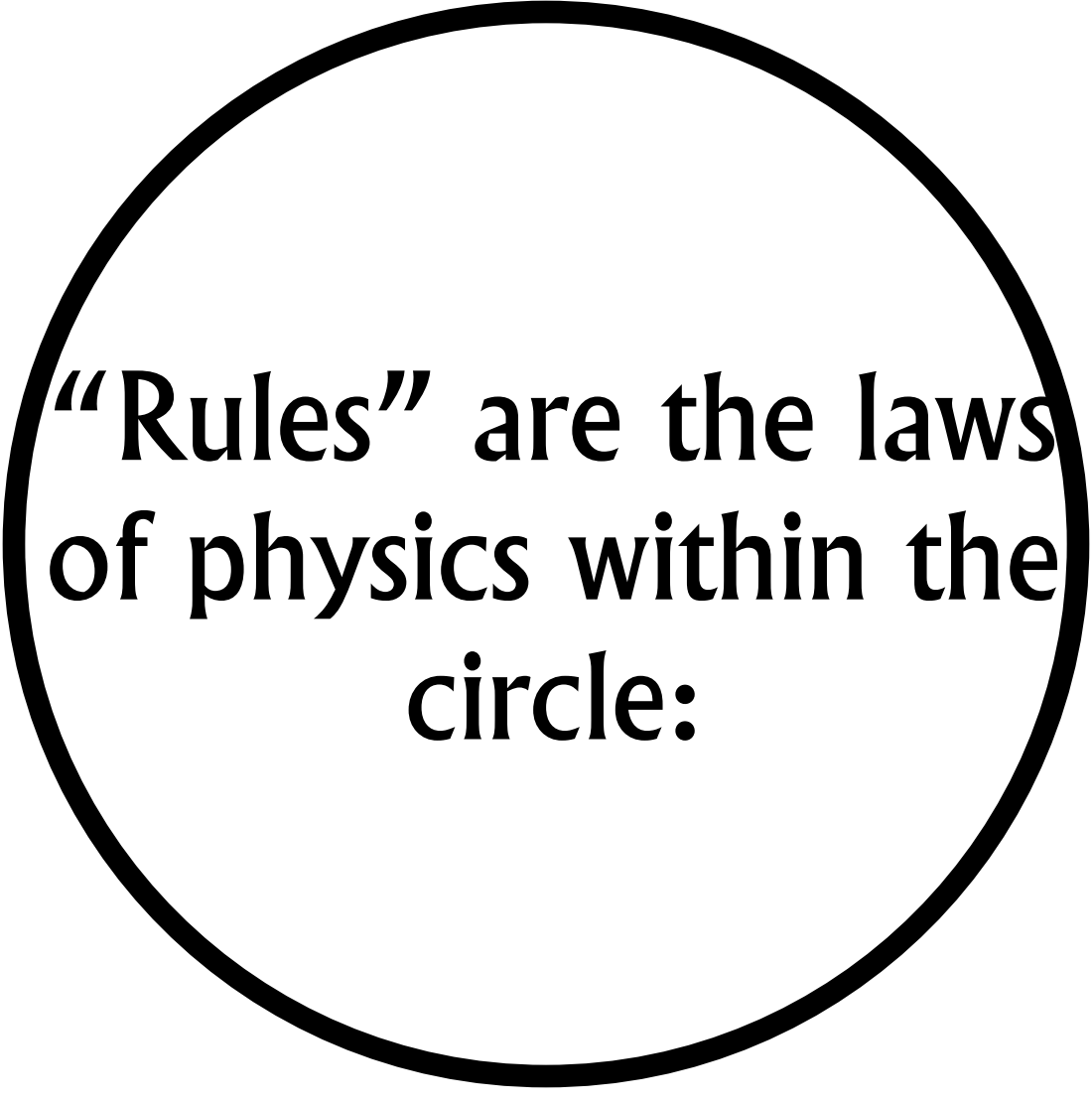


# The videogame model



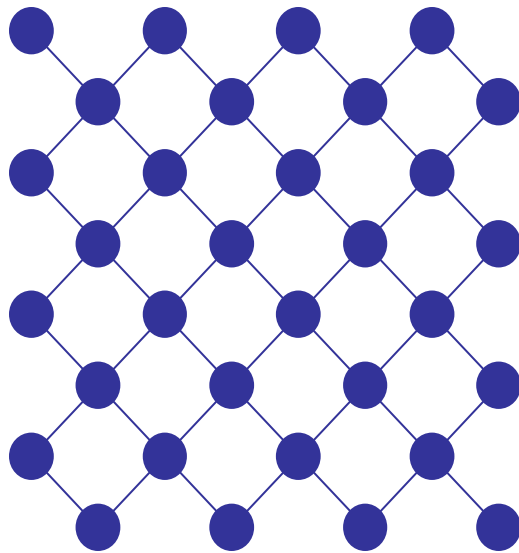


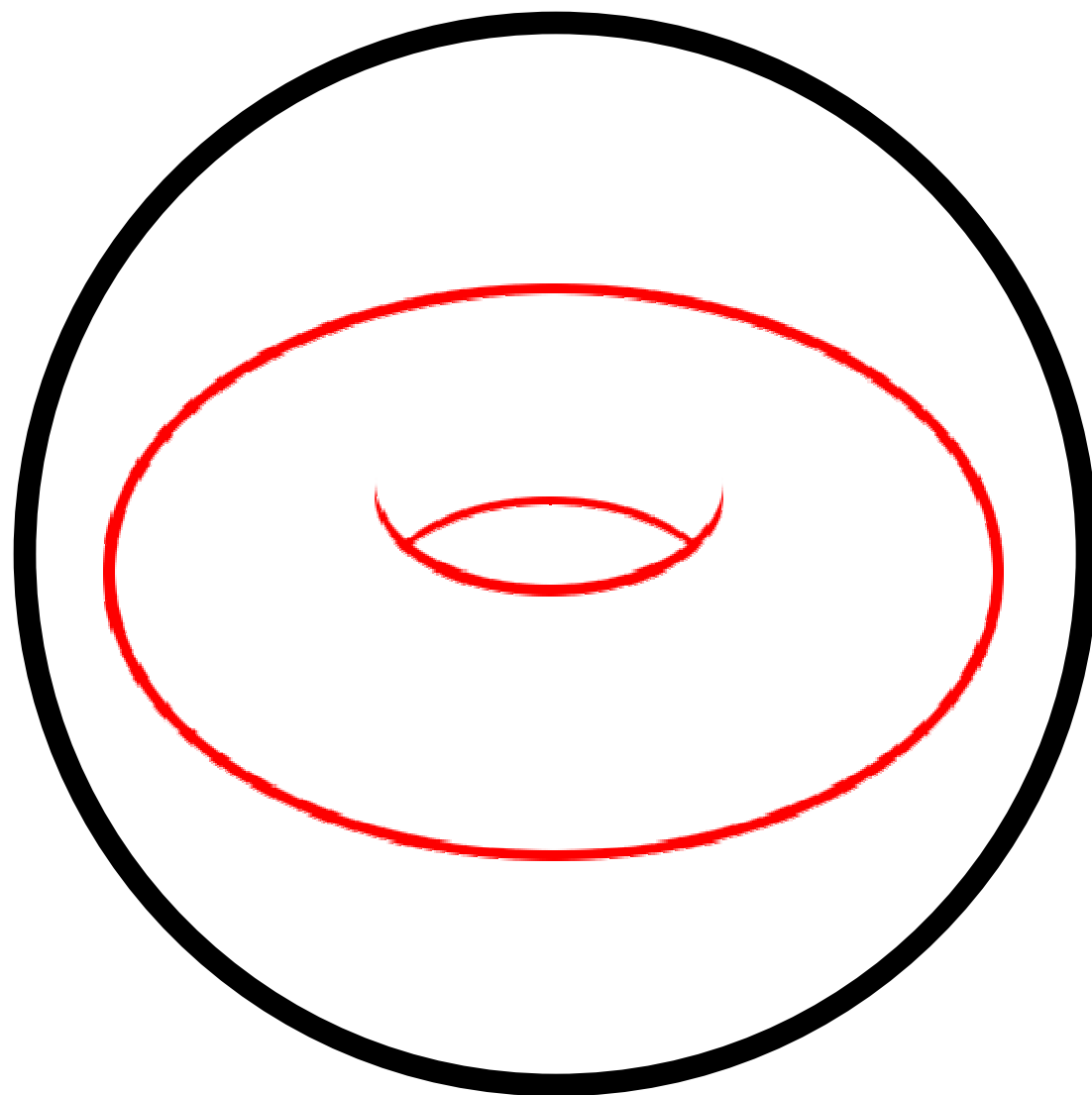
Picture a “magic  
circle.”

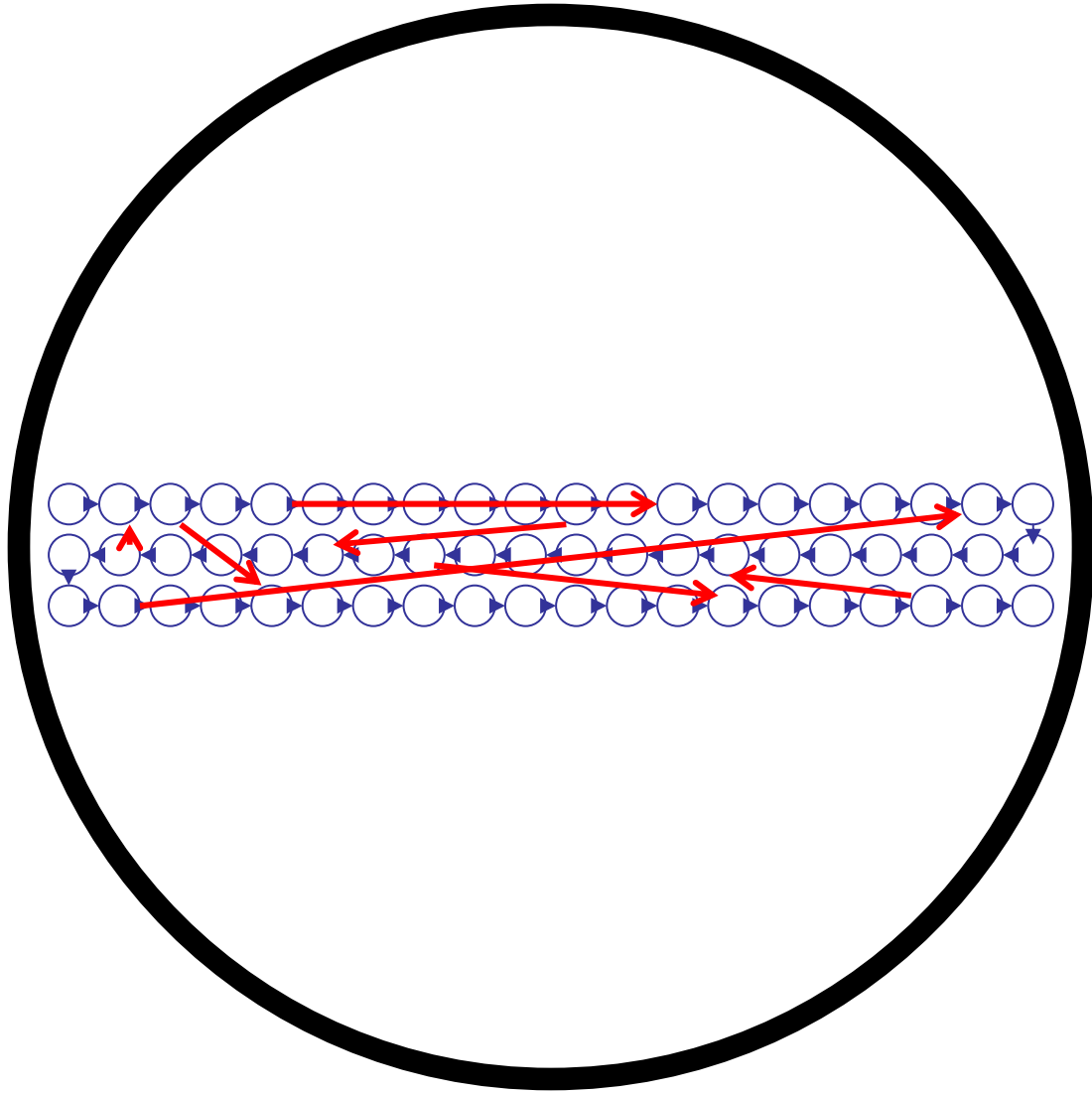


**“Rules” are the laws  
of physics within the  
circle:**

# Topologies.









**Algorithms.**



**Causality.**



**All games are turn-based.**

**(Some turns are really really fast,  
and run on a timer).**



**Some games are symmetric**

and others asymmetric.



**Why do games exist?**

**What is fun?**

# Kinds of fun

Ludus

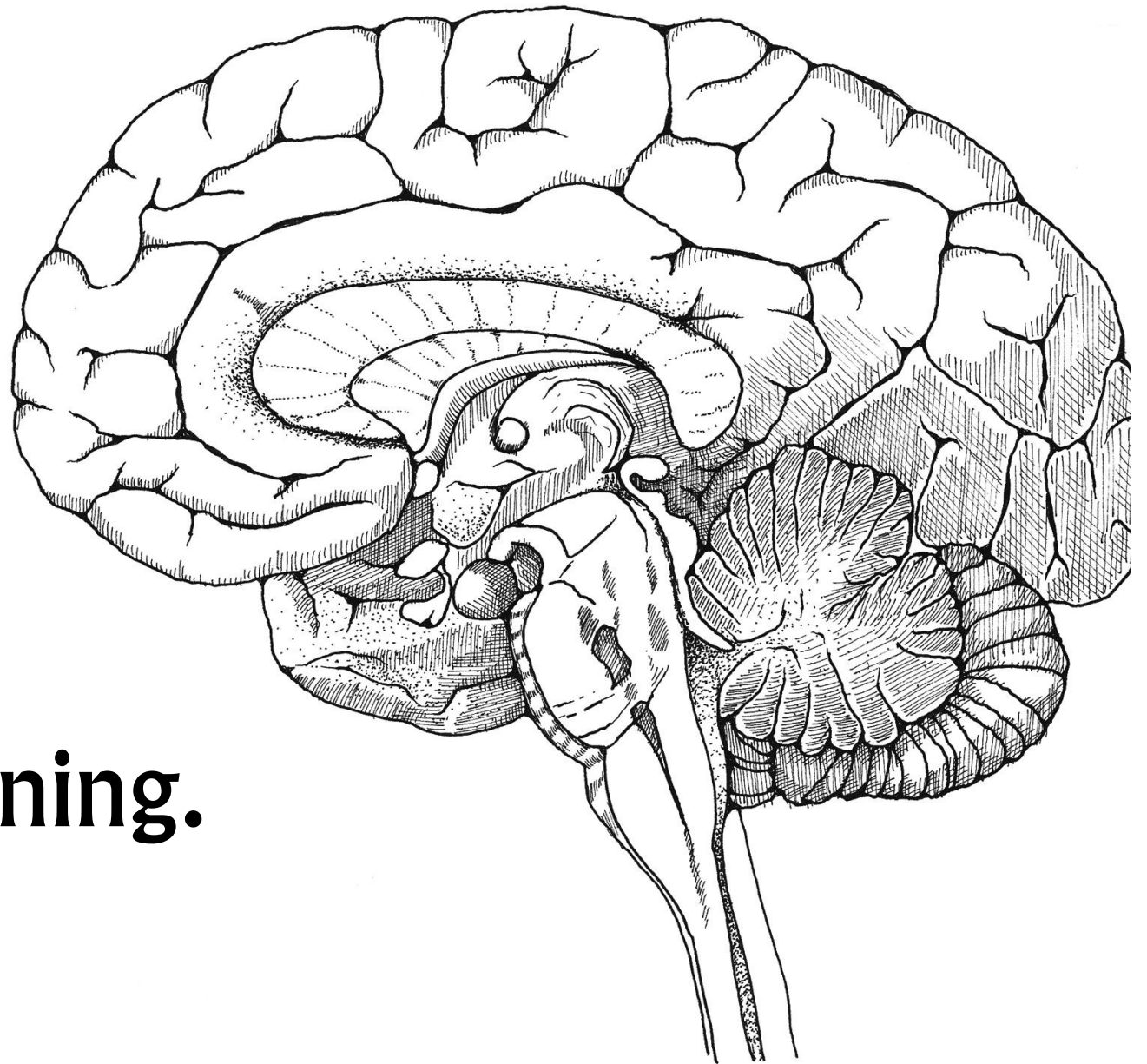
Paidia

Ilinx

Vertigo

Alea

Mimicry



**Fun is learning.**



**What does that tell us about ourselves?**

Killing.  
Aiming.  
Projecting force.  
Assessing arcs.  
Timing actions.  
Collecting.  
Exploring.  
Building.  
Forming tribes.  
Seeking understanding.

**Seeing the world as a gamer  
means...**

**Goal-oriented behavior.**

**Quantification.**

**Collaboration.**

**The rise of play?**

**Games are eating popular culture.**



**How many of you play games?**

**100% of kids aged 6-10 do.**

\$7,548,000,000

**dollars spent on games in 2004.**

**Not to mention pop culture  
impact...**

**Where are games going?**

**There are two kinds of video games  
today.**

**Incredibly expensive CGI movies  
with occasional interactive  
sequences.**

**And “pure” games.**



**One path leads to the holodeck.**

**The other is the models model.**

**One swallows the other.**

(models > holodeck)

**Can there be a metaverse?**

**Modern games are composite  
media.**

**It's easier to imagine a TV show  
within a game than the other way  
around.**

**The pace of cyberspace is being set  
by games.**

**The future of play is ubiquity.**



