The Core of Fun

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HOW MAGIC WORKS

I - I^7 - IV - I - V^7 - IV - I - I

(audience claps and we sing blues)
HOW IT DOESN’T

(audience makes random noises)
THINGS THAT “WORK”

often have underlying **STRUCTURE**
“SOLAR” by MILES DAVIS

C\textsuperscript{maj7} – C\textsuperscript{7} – G\textsuperscript{7} – C\textsuperscript{7}

F\textsuperscript{maj7} – F\textsuperscript{maj7} – F\textsuperscript{7} – Bb\textsuperscript{7}

Eb\textsuperscript{maj7} – Eb\textsuperscript{7} – Ab\textsuperscript{7} – Db\textsuperscript{maj7} – D\textsuperscript{7b5} – G\textsuperscript{7b9b13}
WE CALL THIS STRUCTURE “GRAMMAR”

(“Solar” is a blues)
When something works, it works at many levels.
I - I^7 - IV - I - V^7 - IV - I - I
= I - IV - V - I
= I - V - I
= 8 - 7# - 8
Songs are made of Songs...
Harmonies are made of overlapping Songs...
Visual compositions are made of spaces
That are visual compositions
IN THE CASE OF GAMES

Games are made out of

Games
FROGGER
TURTLES ALL THE WAY DOWN

Until you reach the interface button.
GAMES ARE DESIGNED TO EVOKE

FUN
FUN

...is a chemical response
RESEARCH SHOWS 4 TYPES OF FUN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hard</th>
<th>Easy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visceral</td>
<td>Social</td>
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Games mostly focus on hard fun.
HARD FUN GRAMMAR

HARD FUN is about solving problems.

The problems tend to be mathematical.

its grammar ignores presentation & metaphor.
GAMES ARE MADE OUT OF MAKING CHOICES

aka Interaction Design
Crawford

“A cyclic process where two actors alternatively listen, think, and speak.”
So let’s talk about how you apply this to the Web.
NESTED CHOICES

Let’s go to
amazon.com
Typing in the URL for Amazon or hitting your bookmark, parsing the intro page, skipping your recommendations, finding the search box, the search, narrowing the results, finding the results you want, getting distracted by that other thing you meant to buy, comparing every result, parsing the product page, reading the reviews, finding the buy button from the four choices, making the purchase, picking shipping method, picking payment method, choosing gift wrap or not...
The challenges are experienced sequentially, but in practice they are nested...
...you might have the boss level encounter with one-click multiple times in different places or for different loot.
THE **MAGIC INGREDIENTS**

- Territory
- Preparation
- Core mechanic (skill required)
- Range of challenges
- Choice of abilities
- Variable feedback
- Bad return on investment
- Cost of failure
THE MAGIC INGREDIENTS

• Where?
• When?
• How?
• What?
• With?
• For?
• Few?
• Phooey.
HOW?

The core verb has to be repeatable.
HOW?

Something that requires **SKILL**.
HOW?

Something that can handle

STATISTICAL VARIATION.
HOW?

Something that is COMPETITIVE.
EVERYTHING YOU DID BEFORE MUST MATTER.
WHEN?

Whatever the opponent last did to you should matter too.

Never start an interaction with no CONTEXT.
WHEN?

You must be able to PREPARE for this encounter

In different WAYS.
WHERE?

The same challenge in different locales should be a fresh SCENARIO.
WHERE?

The TERRITORY and TOPOLOGY should affect the outcome.
WHAT?

The same verb must be applicable to many different challenges.
WHAT?

Think of a verb as a HAMMER.
WHAT?

You should present users with lots of kinds of Nails
WITH?

There are lots of kinds of hammers too!
WITH?

Users should be able to solve the challenge with their choice of tools.
And you should reward them with different feedback for it.
A STATISTICAL INTERLUDE

All the above are Quantifiable.

You can arrive at a RATING for every challenge.

You can sum them for the DIFFICULTY of a meta-challenge.
A game that only has one outcome is BORING.
FOR?

VARIABLE FEEDBACK keeps things lively.
FOR?

(Usually, the *best* feedback is a greater challenge presented by the opponent.)
Sometimes, it’s a pleasant SURPRISE.
Either way, it has to be ***HIGHLY VISIBLE***. To everyone.
FEW?

BOTTOMFEEDING is bad for fun.
In other words, *low-risk activity for high reward* is bad for fun.
FEW?

You need to drive users to challenges at the edge of ABILITY.

(cf Csikszentmihalyi’s FLOW.)
Making a wrong choice has to be a setback.

(Even if all it costs you is time).
PHOOEY

Fun does not exist where there is Zero Consequence.
The absence of any of these features makes things less FUN.
A Theory of Fun for Game Design

WWW.THEORYOFFUN.COM
Spotting bad atoms

Never link or nest too many base atoms...

Crafting
Harvesting
Crafting
Use, donation
Selling

Killing
Finding
Dragging
Combining
Pricing