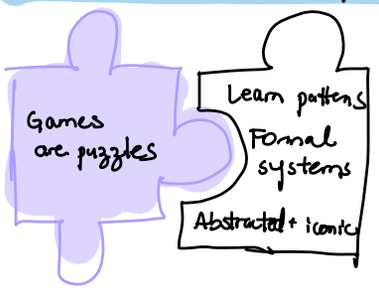
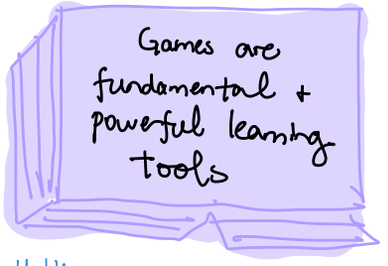
Ch. 3 What Games Are



The only real difference between games + reality is that the stakes are lower with games



Unlike a book, games help you practice patterns, run permutations, and respond with feedback
Train us to see mathematical patterns.

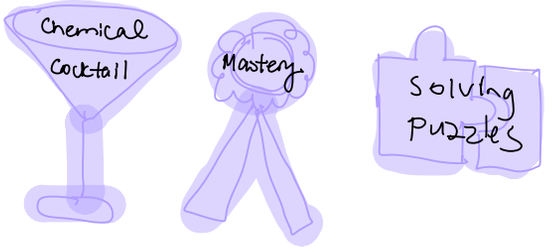
Boring game = not exercise brain
↑ patterns ↑ novelty ↑ game attractiveness
Games are = limited formal systems =
Boredom is inevitable

What keeps games fun?

"Richly interpretable situations"

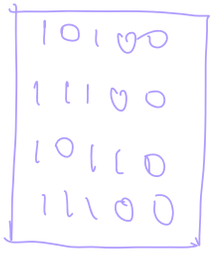
*The more rigidly constructed your game is, the more limited it will be"

WHAT IS FUN?!



Learning is the drug.

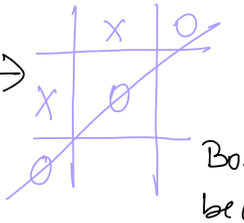
Boredom ⟷ Learning

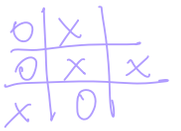


The brain doesn't necessarily crave new experiences — mostly it craves new data.

Data → Pattern → New system

Sensory Overload ⟷ Sensory Deprivation
Too much stimuli — Lacking stimuli





Boring because...

- Player grocks game fast
- Depth of game is uninteresting
- Fail to see patterns
- Patterns ramp up slowly
- Too hard too fast
- Beat every pattern

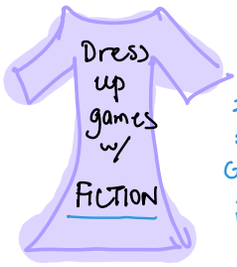
Boredom + → Triumph, Frustration, Confusion

The definition of a good game is "one that teaches everything it has to offer before the player stops playing"

Games are teachers

- Aspects of reality
- Understand yourself
- Imagination
- All games are "edutainment"

Ch 5. What Games Aren't



FICTION HELPS
1. See underlying math problem
2. Recognize real-world situations

Games help you see patterns past fiction

Controversy: games w/ metaphors of killing, stealing, etc are stage settings not what game is about.

Games are not their "dress" / staging
They are the formal abstract system

Stories in games are side dishes for the brain

Games are not stories

Stories	Games
Vicarious	Experiential
Empathy	Objectification
Blur, deeper	Quantize, reduce
Internal	External
Provide narrative	Generators of player narrative

Games do better at emotions related to mastery

Why play a game?

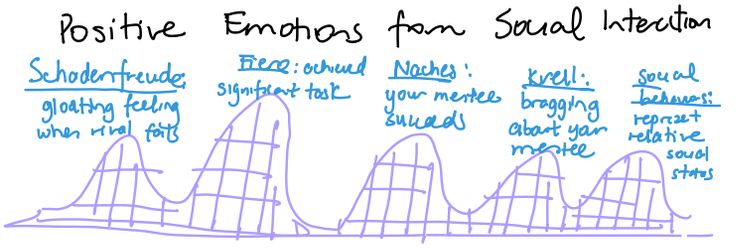
Emotions from Games

Hard Fun
Easy fun
Altered states
People Faction

Breaking down fun

Fun = mentally mastering problems

Aesthetic appreciation: enjoyable
Visceral reactions: physical mastery
Social status signals: self-image + communi+



Sensawunda: aesthetic appreciation, delight about recognizing pattern

Beauty is found in the tension between expectation + reality

FUN IS CONTEXTUAL

Having fun is a key evolutionary advantage

We are tribal monkey to own the top of trees thru naches, etc

DELIGHT: temporary feeling when we find patterns but are surprised for them
Delight ≠ Real fun

Flow: when you enter absolute concentration on a task
Fun ≠ Flow
Flow = Mastery not Learning