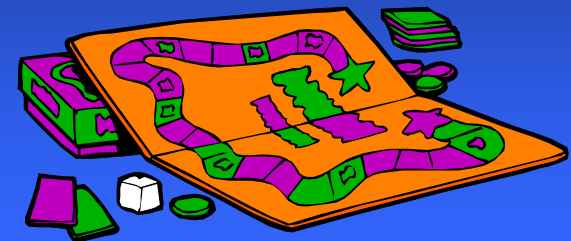
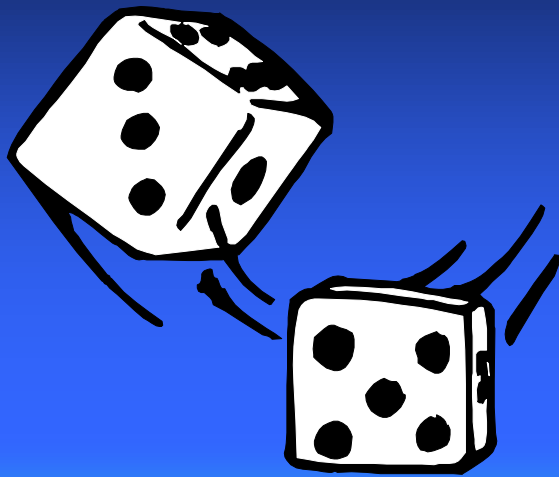


# “Game Design” (“A Balancing Act”)

*by Dr. Rich Staats*



# Overview

- Gaming Principles
- What is a Game?
- Common Themes
  - Balancing Act
  - Love, Not Money
- Steps in Process
- Overlooked at designer's peril
  - Playtesting
  - Common Fallacies



# Gaming Principles

1. ***Stafford Principle: maintain a sense of wonder in the campaign.*** Make sure there is always some surprise or something special that makes a session, an adventure, a campaign and your whole world unique.
2. ***Perrin Principle: be consistent.*** If you do something once, it becomes a precedence. The players will remember it, and count on it being the same next time. If it's not the same later, have a darn good, obvious to the players reason that it's different.
3. ***Petersen Principle: make it fun.*** Don't be afraid to change a plot to go with player enthusiasm. Try something crazy or goofy, even (or especially) in serious settings. Roll with the mood and make it happen. Be high energy!
4. ***Staats Principle: reward the players as well as the characters.*** Handouts, riddles, music, etc. that can be experienced by the players' senses directly or challenge the players' creativity reward the players. The players are the ones that come to the sessions every week, and ultimately, it is the GM's goal to reward the players. Some folks are just fine vicariously being rewarded through their characters, but it's oh so much more fun to be rewarded as a player during the course of a session.
5. ***Sandy's Axiom: involve at least three senses in every scene.*** These can be described or experienced (e.g. props, incense, etc.). People have five senses, and adding details about weird sounds, the unusual smell or the texture of something adds to the gaming experience.

# What is a Game?

- A Codified Means of Having Fun Where the Outcome is Uncertain.
- A Model with No Fun is a Simulation!
- What are the pillars of game design?
  - Structure
  - Presentation
  - Dissemination

# Common Themes

- Games must Entertain!
- All Games Model Something ...
- Balancing Act
  - Realism versus Playability
  - Perfection versus Production
  - Real World versus Creative Fun
- What makes a Game good?
  - As many answers as gamers
  - As a designer you have to think about your criteria for success ...

*I 'm allowed to be  
contradictory!*

# Steps in Process (1/5)

- Think Great Thoughts! Ah-ha!
- Think about key aspects of your Ah-ha!
- Stop & Consider: What makes your Ah-ha unique?
- Pick a medium to express your game in
- Focus on the effect you want to create (write it down and come back to this periodically)

## Steps in Process (2/5)

- Consider the Gaming Principles
- Stop & Consider
  - What makes the game fun?
  - How often are players rewarded?
  - What would make this game challenging to play again?
- Rough out a structure for your game
  - Can you talk a friend through it?
  - Leave it for 48 hours; does it still make sense?



## Steps in Process (3/5)

- Explore presentation options
- Stop & Consider
  - Your goals versus the cost
  - How legible will the game be?
  - How durable will the game be?
  - How long is the lead time?
  - What are the limits in distribution?
  - Is the game still fun to you?



# Steps in Process (4/5)

- Revisit design
  - Reward your players
    - Little rewards periodically
    - Larger goals with much foreshadowing and celebration
  - Challenge your players
    - Choices equals challenge
    - Balance luck versus skill (do folks get better at it over time?)
    - Beware of frustration

## Steps in Process (5/5)

- Find an advocate to get your game published / publicized
- Get something out even if it isn't perfect!
- Don't give up your day job! (L.W.E.)

**I 'm allowed to be  
contradictory!**

# Overlooked at Game Designer's Peril

- Playtesting
  - Spread of gaming experience
  - Someone who doesn't like you
  - Someone who is a stickler for grammar
  - More is never enough!
- Common Fallacies
  - Game designers are representative of the market
  - Last year's hit will be next year's hit
  - If I just make the game perfect, everyone will love it.
  - These racial and inside jokes are in-context; so, everyone will appreciate them!