



BOOK
THE ART OF GAME DESIGN
 by Jesse Schell

Morgan Kaufmann www.elsevierdirect.com

THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF BOOKS WRITTEN that discuss computer game design. But only a very small handful of those were written by professional game designers. And although many of them are intended as possible textbooks for courses about the subject, very few have been written by successful teachers of game design. So the fact that Jesse Schell is one of the dozen or so full-time professors who have had a successful career in game design would be reason enough to be excited about his book.

But it goes far beyond that. This book was clearly designed, not just written, and is an entire course in how to be a game designer. The very structure of the book serves as an object lesson in interactive design. Its subtitle "a book of lenses" is not just a promotional phrase, but rather says a lot about how Jesse thinks about the meta-process of game design. He uses the term lens metaphorically, as a way of looking at a game and asking

questions to help analyze it. He includes 100 lenses he uses in the book, with names like Fun, Surprise, Flow, Chance, Emergence, Puzzle, Beauty, Client, Pitch, Technology, and many more. This philosophical approach captures in concrete form an intangible truth about the essence of game design. A good game designer has to wear many hats—but that's a tired and obsolescent metaphor. Looking at the world—or at the game you are designing—through different lenses is a much fresher, more accurate one.

That perspective frees Jesse to scan the landscape of game design, scrutinizing aspects of game development, creativity, psychology, technology, and many other related fields. He uses skillfully-written, relevant vignettes about what designers must learn in order to practice their art. He also approaches each aspect as a good designer would, providing not just bare facts but also captivating stories to set the

BOOK FINALISTS
Dungeons and Desktops: The History of Computer Role-playing Games by Matt Barton
Game Production Handbook, 2nd Edition by Heather Maxwell Chandler
Real-Time Rendering, Third Edition by Akenine-Moller, Haines, and Hoffman
Game Programming Gems 7 by Scott Jacobs

mood and provide context, and adds charts, tables, drawings, and cartoons to capture the essence of his subjects and to illustrate them, figuratively and literally, from many different perspectives.

The book is also intensely practical, giving some of the best advice on how to harness your own subconscious I've ever read, as well as short and useful descriptions of probability theory for non-mathematicians, how to diagram interest curves, working with a team, and dozens of other topics. It is simply the best text I've seen that really addresses what a designer should know, and then actually gives practical advice about how to gain that knowledge through life experience. It's a marvelous tour de force, and an essential part of anyone's game design library.

—Noah Falstein

