

Game Design Workshop: A Playcentric Approach to Creating Innovative Games - Review

I will admit that the lack of a reading week on FI and the work I had to put in other courses meant I didn't pay the book too much attention and read it rather hastily. This actually quickly became pretty frustrating because the book turned out to be very good and if I had the time to read it in a more relaxed manner, making it less of a chore to get through it, I could genuinely enjoy it.

It is written in a very nice style, discussing what it sets out to clearly and directly, without any distracting tangents. Often the advice is given in the form of questions to ask yourself when designing, rather than telling you directly how to make your game, which I greatly prefer. Through the combination of practical examples and concise bite-sized theory, it is very readable. Before I chose this book, I tried to read *The Theory of Fun* and I had to put it down about five pages in because of how unpleasant the style was to read and I am glad that I did, as this book turned out much more enjoyable. The only negative I can find about the style of this book is its very annoying two-column layout which makes it difficult to find where a paragraph continues.

The content of the book started off a bit dull. As usual with game design materials, there was a lengthy chapter about what is and isn't a game which by now I'm growing allergic to. While it is good to define the basic terms of the field, it is not necessary to spend pages on end discussing edge cases, distinguishing arbitrary terms like "game", "puzzle", "toy", etc. when those words can be assigned literally any meaning based on what the author of a particular text is talking about. After getting through this chapter, however, the rest of the book is much more interesting. About the first half discusses things I mostly knew about, but putting them into a nice, formal perspective. The second half taught me things I haven't known before and was quite excited to learn. While the first chapters of the book were a little too theoretical, the rest of it actually often talked about very specific things. For example, when discussing the elements of each game, it had paragraphs specifically on Health, Units, Currencies, etc. Similarly with discussing narratives, or prototypes. Because of all that, I actually often found myself eager to turn the page, just like in any gripping fiction book. This lasted until about the fifth to last chapter, where the more business-like parts of game development are discussed. Teams, pitches, how to sell your idea, etc. While these parts are definitely important to learn, they also lay out the darker parts of game design and as such are rather stressful and discouraging to read about, so I had to actually motivate myself much harder to get through the last chapters..

The last thing I want to note about this book is its relatability. Oftentimes it mentions an example of a problem that "new game designers" struggle with and it is actually a problem I have either struggled with in the past, or do so right now. Similarly in some chapters it mentions some ideas, which I did think of before any formal education and pondered without finding a good answer, and here I was handed the answer on a silver platter. More generally, none of the information presented felt outdated, nor irrelevant to what I want to learn, which is quite rare with textbooks.

Overall I really enjoyed the book and I might actually read it again and properly once I don't have such a tight schedule and don't need to get through it quickly for an assignment.