The New Video Game Idea Book

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2021, Adam Jeremy Capps.

For the opportunity to help with creating a great game.

A Guide to Making Good Video Games:

Introduction

I can't program a game but hopefully you can. I will give you my best ideas here for a new game or to make an old one better. It's as simple as that.

I'll cover the best method and the best things I can teach you in your game making approach. I'll begin with I'll cover the things that make a good game. Then I will cover different ways that ideas are used- like how a character jumps or uses in-game money. Afterward I will give you ideas you can use in making new games. ND whatever good things I can write about concerning video game creation will also be written about.

My ideas here are free to use. With or without credit. With or without profit. And keep in mind that this is a public domain book. I don't good it under copyright. So please share my book. Maybe we can get some great new games made together.

My biggest interest is retro gaming. So maybe this book is better for older game styles. But often they go hand in hand. I am very often online watching all forms of it. Whether it is news, playthrough videos or just listening to music from them. As well as reviews of old games, top ten stuff, hacked video games and remakes, etc.

It's a great community- *the best.* A very large one, too. You'll find a large piece of the internet revolves around it. People are eager to talk about old games. To share their ideas, and so on. I invite you into it if you have not yet given it much consideration.

And may your game turn out very well and you have a lot of fun in creating it.

You can read this book randomly if you like until you've digested it fully. It is a short book that doesn't have to be read from the first page to the last. And thank you for reading!

Part One: An effective philosophy of game making

Some precepts, instructions, and advice:

The best games are simply those that are fun and involving. Fun and involving should be key words for what you are creating. Be after making a good product. One well polished, presented just as good as it could possibly be.

Cloning a game should be done better in a different way.. not just shadowing it.

Consider how the best games have evolved. While the first in the series was thought of as a great game, the second or third may have outdone it a great deal.

Think into themes. The best stories have come from the same pieces, just pieces put together differently.

Games should have good controls. Not frustrating ones.

The best music composers for games have taken obscure music and reformed it into their own music. It's just the inspiration that the best composers have. I composed classical music from my early years. There were certain lessons that stood out and helped me the most. They were about tonality. Tonality is all in making the music "make sense." That is done by not having the music be too complex to understand. I learned a simple method to make whatever I wrote be tonal. It is to emphasize the three tones of the scale's triad. That is the first note of the scale, the major or minor third (depending on the scale you are on) and the major fifth above the first tone of the scale. By emphasizing them with repetition, duration, and frequency, any music you write will be "tonal." The person that hears it will always be able to grasp it that way. Other than that a composer should be able to write nice melodies, and evoke the right feelings. As for an orchestra, you shouldn't at all need one. There is notation software for that. In fact many popular movies and games have employed them.

You don't have to go from beginning to end when making a game. You can work on things as they come along and tie them together later. Take the first as a draft and go from there. Strive to make a good product and you will.

Compare games to each other. Like one old fighting game to the next that took its place in popularity. It's never one that was just a pure rip- off clone. They did it "differently better." Look into the insides of games to see what you find. What is good about them or not will reveal a lot of good information for you. You can be inspired without outright copying a game. If you have a real desire to do whatever was done before but better and in your own way then that will lead to something new and good. If however you just want a quick buck- you'll get it, but you won't be remembered for it.

Resources for making games are larger than they've ever been and are sure to just become both more and better. No code is needed to know. There are many put-together softwares out there. There are things like pixel drawers and notation software too. Things like packaging is available- stickers, boxes, and mass copies of the physical games in some formats. The more you use these resources the more familiar and better at them you become. They might seem tricky at first but just continue using them because you will just get better and better at it.

Some games are just copies and they appear as ugly siblings to the gamer. It's always been true that as soon as a great new game comes out everyone else wants in. For every 1 original game there must be at least 5 that imitated it. A good game makes the same thing different enough to stand on its own. For example Mortal Kombat compared to its inspiration: Street Fighter 2. And did you know that Ninja Gaiden was inspired by Castlevania?

Don't depend too much on gimmicks. Some games steer too far off course because of them. Some are fanciful but just not traditional enough. Sequels that are that way don't feel like sequels. It's like a smart talker. They have neat things to say but they

say things that are just useless in someone's everyday life. Making a smart game doesn't hold as much fascination as the programmer thinks.

Many things have been done and redone over and over in video games. They will *always* work well in any game however they are in it, like the use of money. Some ideas can't get any better, it seems. And so don't feel you have to be totally different. Those things have stood the test of time and will always be things the gamers want in their games.

A good story is going to take the most work. If it is just glanced over in it's creation then you'll not have made a game that can compare to those that have. Some games are successful and have remained so just based on that.

Are you having trouble with knowing where to start? I would say begin by making something simple, gain a talent at it, and move onto bigger things. You might have questions like "it's not for the latest going system, so I don't want to bother." Or you find it easy to make a game for a much older platform, but that platform is obsolete. Actually because of the size of the retro gaming community and things like emulators, re-releases of older systems either as clone systems or mini versions, these concerns shouldn't be.

When you look at the first game to the third game in any gaming era, for 8 bit, 16 and so on, using the same hardware they have multiplied the quality of their games. They were certainly good at taking an old game and making it much better. New technology calls for new games. From very primitive music to full orchestrations, CD sound, 3D graphics, etc. Sometimes new hardware makes a genre popular when before its games were few and far between- such as shooters as 3D made it ideal. Being with the times is

a sure way to go. After the 3D appeal cooled down we found many going back to 2D pixelated styles, or at least 2.5 D. We all like cartoons. There are people though that would think otherwise. They think movies are always better. That's not true though. People like cartoons just as much as they always have. In today's times, programmers are trying to make things life-like, realistic. That just makes a game tedious, plain, and boring. There's no imagination that way. No "escape." For a while it could have been said that old game formats were becoming lost. Old games were cheap just about everywhere you bought them. Like a dime a dozen. Now? They are among the most pricey things to collect. People are modding old systems, bringing to them modern hookups. Even a light gun made to operate on a modern TV. Old systems restored- new caps, new screens for portable handhelds of long ago, new 72 pin connectors, new optical drive, you name it!

Try to keep things simple. Keep it tangible for you. Know exactly what you have done and are doing. There is a lesson to be learned about the painter who didn't know when to quit. After a while the whole painting was given a whole other (and worse) coat. You want the gamer to have an easy grasp about what the whole game is about. If you have a ton of items to pick from and buy in the game you'll never know which to get and when. Sometimes quantity is good, sometimes not, so measure your stones. One of the most important but most underlooked elements for game making is striking the right balance for its content. Things become convoluted over time. Everything that has been done has been done and its original appeal just isn't as striking anymore. So in measuring your new thing, trim it down and don't produce a thing that is over bloated.

Inspiration taken from movies isn't uncommon. It seems more frequent in some genres than others, such as fighting and beat em up games. There are a great deal of licensed games. Some companies were not able to secure a license so they just made it roughly the same. Metroid was influenced by the Alien franchise but not any kind of licensed game for it. It is a good feeling to take your favorite things and put them into game

form. It doesn't take a lot to make them different enough if you don't want to obtain a licence or are unable to.

All things are made up of the same pieces, just put together differently. Like a puzzle that makes a new image from thing to thing. Some pieces may not be used, some may be altered, but things like movies and games are based on their creator's favorite things only done their own way. Understanding your own tastes is very important. Going further than that by thinking how you would do it differently is, too. And of course it is important how well it all fits together.

There are good effects and graphics that are easily come by given some consideration and tricks. Music too and things. With limited possibilities from older hardware these had to have been come up with. On older hardware space mattered much more. So only the finer cuts could be included. Programmers were restricted from just putting anything in. There may be a lot more options now but many of the things in new games just seem to get in the way. I hear a fair amount of complaints against "better pixelated graphics" too. It loses a touch of the abstract that way. A picture had to tell a story. Games didn't go off into these long conversations. The RPG shop didn't give you anything imaginable. You didn't have to learn what all of those items did. On the other hand we are met with lush worlds in which so much can be done. Narration adds an element of personality to the characters. 8 bit was simply lacking whether we would admit it or not. So there was some loss but some gain. It depends on how it is all put together.

Do what you can to pull the gamer into the reality of the game. Being relatable is one of the best things you can do. Maybe that's why having human characters in fighting games makes them do better. The story can't be too generic. If The player likes the personality and appearance of a character so much the better. Over simplistic games are nothing more than dull. Those games that are "collectathons" or require tedious

"fetch quests" do no good for the player's interests. It is good to carefully give the player the weakest things to start out with and more and more better items as the game goes forward. Like Link's new tool or that amazing new spell. A story that captures the gamer's heart will build interest like nothing else. Having just the right variety, a lot of game area, contrast, and giving the player the ability to play as they want to, are other important things towards making a game be involving. Other than that, having a good game to begin with- control and mechanics are good, as is the music and playing in general.

Good games give the gamer the sense that *there is another place/world over there that I can't go to yet* (so wants to) and *there are going to be things in this area that I can't get that are better than what I currently have* (and so are invested in the game.) To invest a person in a game leveling up must be pleasant, gameplay must be smooth and operable, the music must be very good, and "what waits around the other corner" desirable to find, among other things. One of the worst things is to have a part of the story drag out longer than it should. The player wants to get to the next thing. Not continue on far too long for any given thing. For example those games that make you think you are going to get something but then the game hits you with additional quests before you can. You thought all along that it was practically in your hands only to find out there is one more thing to do or worse, a few more elongated things before it happens. That's like a friend who keeps saying he'll pay you back. "Wait one more day and I'll pay you more."

Can give the gamer a break from playing—giving them a little bit of cinematics or story telling. Tell them where they came from and how that led them to where they are. Give them an idea of progress

Sometimes the player doesn't want to be fully engaged and certainly doesn't for too long and too often. Like by having them face one boss after another or going after the

same thing and they can't break from the game, it just keeps forcing them along. Maybe that's why mixed genres do well such as racing segments in a beat 'em up. Having a different flow from place to place is a talent that only the best game maker's know and use. First the fast pace then the next level a slower pace, is a good thing to incorporate into your game. Cut scenes between levels is a good thing to put in a game for these reasons. Zelda does all of this really well. Link can go off looking for heart pieces or exploring around if that's what the player would rather do- and it is very rewarding to do so. Breath of the Wild gave you a world where you could pretty much do what you want when you want and only if you want. So let the player take short cuts if it is the best thing to do. Fill the world with many things to gather.

Some games over text the gamer with forced pauses and such to read them. Give it as much as can be assimilated and no more. Wind Waker and its compulsive sailing may have sounded nifty to the programmers but really no gamer wants to have to walk places or sail places for long periods. Ghosts and Goblins expected you to replay the whole game again in order to officially beat it- with no difference. Some games have you beat the same bosses all over again without any differences to their reappearance. Another drawn out thing is when you are fully able to beat a boss except it takes twenty minutes or longer. They keep you at the threshold of about-to-die but you are fully able to survive. So you focus most of your time on healing yourself with a little bit of here and there attacking.

Don't be too unfair. Too unfair would be like forcing the gamer to take a hit, and couldn't prevent it. Enemies that respawn, pixel perfect strikes, being thrown backward when hit, and one hit deaths are some other unfair things. Some games expect you to get something you had no idea you needed in order to defeat a boss. Some expect you to solve puzzles that aren't really puzzles- holding down in Castlevania 2 in a certain area, for example, to go any further.

One game that has you re-routing yourself in different areas does well by making each area important but another would have you going out of your way to backtrack for little or nothing. Yet if you don't backtrack your character will die.

Don't be discouraged if your game doesn't immediately reach a desirable amount of success. There is a lot of competition. But there are many looking for hidden gems in the retro going community. My advice is to advertise it wherever you can. Get input from others. Maybe a sequel will do much better. Maybe your luck just isn't going well. Maybe it just needs better box art or be brought to greater attention. Just because your game doesn't do well doesn't mean that you made a bad game. There could be a number of other reasons for it.

Be cohesive. I'm sure there are a lot of things that people like to eat but to put it together in a soup could taste awful. Or you could relate this to a person whose clothes match up terribly though individually they are good shirts and shoes and stuff. Just like you mix a good drink, bring together a good game based on ingredients that suit each other. If this is true in any way then make a game of good taste.

Replay ability can be very important. With just a little change one level isn't beaten one way but also another. One level being played twice just for that. And even a flag pole at the end makes the level just a little different each time. Give the player enough continues to begin with. Make it challengeable but beatable. Assign more difficult levels where they should be. Place secrets in the game. Have a broad enough playing area to allow for at least a little exploration.

As they expect the game to go let it be. If every new element wasn't expected the gamer would have no idea of what's going on.

Some games were just too plain to have become successful. All the player did was strike and move forward. Least of all was strategy in them. No diversity really. And not even the platforms were ever different. A good game changes up the platforms, the powerups, items, graphics, adds water areas, underground areas, you can fly above, a world of ruin, a dark world on top of the regular one, can at first walk, then sail, then fly. They are robust with their soundtrack instead of quick tracks that wear out fast. They add new characters. They don't recycle enemies throughout- with no difference other than a color swap. They invite new powers, abilities, and tools for the gamer to use and go farther.

Ask yourself how you can include one thing in *your* game the best way. There are many ideas that have better or worse ways in their presentation. Making any given thing just right is a good thing to do. For example when Nintendo was making Super Mario Bros. 3 they wanted Mario to fly but they didn't want the gamer to just fly over every level. So they required that Mario needed to run before he could fly. Sometimes things get in the way of balance in the game. Sometimes the main weapon just invalidates all of the others. Some weapons and characters turn out to be useless. A good programmer gives everything its purpose. They execute things just right.

I've seen some very fun 2D games made by individuals but the graphics ruined them. They couldn't quite know how to make trees and things. They probably didn't practice. Drawing on paper is one thing, drawing on a grid is another. In pixel art form matters a lot. Such as the reason why Mario was given a hat.

The best items are sometimes a box of survival tools. The player collects these to proceed safely across. Adventure games can be surprisingly easy to make. Games like Zelda- not the more difficult made open world games in the series, but the 8 bit and 16 bit incarnations can be both fun and easy to create. You take things you find in life and put them into such a game, like a shovel, a flute. You add fairy tales. You provide tools that let the player enter into areas they couldn't before. Monsters on the field are creatively made. Really eerie dungeons are placed in and amusing people here and there. Personally it sounds like a lot of fun to program such a game.

Give the player what they want. Provide a character for every gamer. Like how Street Fighter 2 made a character for different major nations and a diverse set of characters. Then Mortal Kombat came along and gave people blood and gore. The SNES had a bloodless port- the Sega Genesis included it, the ESRB came along and Nintendo would decide to allow Mature rated games.

The question has often been asked: how do we combine different styles? Styles such as platforming with overhead views, or with a 3D perspective, sometimes with *pseudo* 3D. How can you have a Batman game without the Batmobile? For that reason Batman games sometimes have racing segments- like battle racing in the Batmobile or Batcycle. The rest of the game is usually some form of beat 'em up. The Legend of Zelda had a very subtle side perspective in dungeons at times. Super Mario Odyssey pulled off a neat 2D effect in a game that was mostly 3D. The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds allowed Link to become flat like a 2D image in order to pass through cracks in the wall. Dragon Quest 11 gave you the choice to play in either 3D or 2D form. Some games are 3D in a 2D way. The best example I can think of is Octopath Traveler. Some games have games within games like a visit to the arcade in an open world game or if it is just playing a card game. Mixing forms is an art. It sometimes works well for a game and sometimes not. Some people do not like it when one level is different from another.

The player should really have the sense that there is an interesting thing coming up. Give gifts to the gamer throughout. That could be job classes, new spells, new abilities, new suits, new weapons, a new world, the moon to travel to, and lots of other things. These can be alluded to. They can be predictable to some extent. Like Tellah who is trying to remember his greatest spell. Some of them could be called gifts for the player. The game just gives them good things again and again. They know that there are more espers to find. They know that defeating the legendary dragons will cause a good thing. They may not know what it is but they know it will bring about something good. In an RPG the gamer is always excited to see what set of monsters will be there in the upcoming areas. They are always excited to learn what new weapons, armor, and relics will appear in the next town. They might have gotten bored in one area but they know if they continue then they will come to a new place. For sure RPG games have a "what's next" appeal to them. Really any game does to some extent. Like what the design of the next level will be. Where it will send you. The desert maybe, or an ice level. On top of a train, or wherever else. What the new set of enemies will be in a beat 'em up. What the next enemy boss will be and certainly what the last will turn out to be. So fuel that desire to see what comes next and the player will always be eager to move forward to the next thing.

The player should enjoy every place they go to. That's best done by giving each level or area their own unique personality. In Final Fantasy 6 towns were not just towns. They were none the same. It did really well in this regard. There was Narshe, a snow covered miner's area with homes on cliffs. There was Zozo, a town of crazy people. There was a town of secretive mages. There was a town of rich people. Certainly in every town you could find different kinds of people and had to engage with them in different ways.

Super Metroid is another good example. Every area had different enemies and great things to find- more powerful guns and suit enhancements. There was a spaceship to

venture through, lava that could at last be traveled through. Monstrous aliens to defeat and one ominous setting more striking than before.

Make any given thing special. Who doesn't like going through the Lost Woods to get the Master Sword or stumbling upon the Magic sword in the graveyard beyond it? Or the charm of the ocarina player in A Link to the Past? You enter into a glade and there he is on a tree stump playing his flute. He disappears. You find that flute buried after you get the shovel. You play the same tune. A bird appears allowing you to transport to key areas. The point is- Link just didn't get the flute, the content surrounding it held a lot more magic for the player.

Make any tool have a robust amount of uses. Give it more importance than just a little bit of use.

Not dying over nonsense reasons: What is the worst thing that people always say about the original TMNT NES game? It was the level where you had to maneuver around the sewer water diffusing bombs. In that level if you came into contact with seaweed looking stuff you'd get shocked. It's not fun, it's just frustrating. In overhead games jumping on platforms can be tricky. Gremlins 2 for the NES was a great game- except for that. It was so easy to miss the platform for what should have been just a simple jump. Who likes dying for nonsense reasons? You can defeat the hardest enemies but something silly like that takes your life over and over again. You could even say that the hardest boss in the game wasn't a boss but a platform.

Be cautious that one thing can make or break the game. The game could be wonderful yet it controls terribly. It has graphics anyone would gawk at. It is underwhelming. Some things are like good machinery with a wrench thrown into the gears.

There are a lot of sources to pull from. According to what you are creating you can read about old myths, cultures and their gods, ancient weapons and lifestyles, as you choose.

Ask yourself *why wasn't this ever in a game?* Movies can be a good inspiration. They always have been. I hear about it so often in the history of games that they say one movie or another inspired the idea. They weren't always direct copies but just representations. Maybe a good game maker is well read or has watched movies that fit well into games and so makes them. For making games a part of the maker's study could be just watching movies or reading. With how many books and movies there are there is no lack of material.

Find a good way to have the buttons used in a game. The most revolutionary games are those that innovated upon their uses. Not *just* new gamepads, but new uses of them in gameplay. I guess you could assign the color green to button x, for example. I always thought a gamepad that had LED lit color buttons would be a good addition to gamepads. Some games got it all wrong entirely- like having the down button make you jump. Some games require too much button work. Sometimes that makes the gamer fumble around clumsy with the controls. The NES may have had only two action buttons but it pulled it off very well. To throw a weapon you just press up with B. It may have been a little better for Mega Man however if you didn't have to open up the weapon screen. Really though that wasn't a problem. You may have only needed to switch weapons a few times during the level. Overall the L and R buttons on the SNES pad were never much used or useful. However in fighting games they were essential. That prompted Sega to make a 6 button controller. I would say be a minimalist on how many buttons are used. Even assign the same thing to different buttons as much as is practical. Keep it all cohesive- easily understood and remembered. Keep in mind that the button most used is the most remembered while the ones less used are the easiest forgotten.

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