

# On the Way to Fun

**An Emotion-Based Approach to  
Successful Game Design**

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# Introduction: What Makes a Game Fun?

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Art is something designed to evoke emotion through fantasy... The computer game is an art form because it presents its audience with fantasy experiences that stimulate emotion.

—Chris Crawford  
*The Art of Computer Game Design*

What makes a game fun? And what is “fun” actually? Unfortunately providing an exhaustive and objective answer to these legitimate questions is likely to be an impossible task since having fun is a very personal activity that can be completely different from individual to individual.

In fact, what is fun for someone can be extremely boring for somebody else and vice versa. For example, some people find watching a football match to be an extremely fun and exhilarating activity, while others would definitely skip it and spend their free time doing something else. Videogames are no exception, and even within them there are many subcategories that attract and provide fun experiences to only a specific group of people. So the aim of this small book is not to try to directly answer “what makes a game fun” but rather to provide a simple and easy to understand framework that links successful yet simple games to basic human emotions and instincts.

Why? Well, the idea is to show aspiring and beginning game designers how certain games successfully relied on behavioral aspects deeply rooted in human beings to provide experiences that completely immersed players in those experiences. In doing this, we are assuming that such games were able to deliver a truly

entertaining experience and we will analyze the reasons why the games were so engaging that they were ultimately perceived as fun—however we define this concept.

The book is structured in different parts. The first part provides a theoretical framework for analyzing gameplay in terms of underlying emotions. The proposed model is called the “6-11 Framework” after the 6 basic emotions and 11 instincts it takes into consideration. In particular, after a quick introduction to basic emotions and instincts, we discuss which ones are more relevant in videogames and how they can be used to affect and influence players’ experiences. To do this, we will define a “path”, or “way”, that, by having different emotions and instincts as intermediate stops, will likely lead us to the final destination of “fun”.

The remaining parts are dedicated to a collection of case studies with a special focus on old retro games. In Part II, we will review and analyze a selection of 20 meaningful examples from the 1970s and 1980s to show how, by basing their gameplay on a few of the emotions and instincts considered in the 6-11 Framework, they succeeded in engaging generations of players despite being developed with very limited technical means and without any fancy graphics or realistic sounds. Alongside these, we discuss a couple of games that didn’t live up to their expectations. This will be instructive and also a little provocative as we will try to explain the reasons for their partial or complete failure by pointing out how they overlooked or misinterpreted some particular emotion or instinct which resulted in the players feeling less engaged and immersed in the overall gaming experience. In Part III we will look at how the proposed framework could be applied to more contemporary productions by analyzing a few well-known modern independent (“indie”) games. Finally, Part IV will conclude with some thoughts about the broader picture of the usefulness of our approach.