

# Intentionally Broken Game Design and the Art of “Deputizing” Players



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Games that are intentionally designed to be  
ambiguous, abusive, broken, or otherwise  
“incomplete” can help shift the focus from  
winning to a decidedly festive, collaborative,  
and intrinsically motivated kind of play.

Games that are intentionally designed to be  
**broken**

BRUTALLY UNFAIR TACTICS TOTALLY OK NOW

# BUTTON

(Press start to return to the main menu)





Put down your controller



Take 7 steps back





Spin around 4 times



Go!



**First player whose button  
is held for 4 seconds  
wins**









*“But how do you enforce that people follow the directions?”*



Take 7 steps back



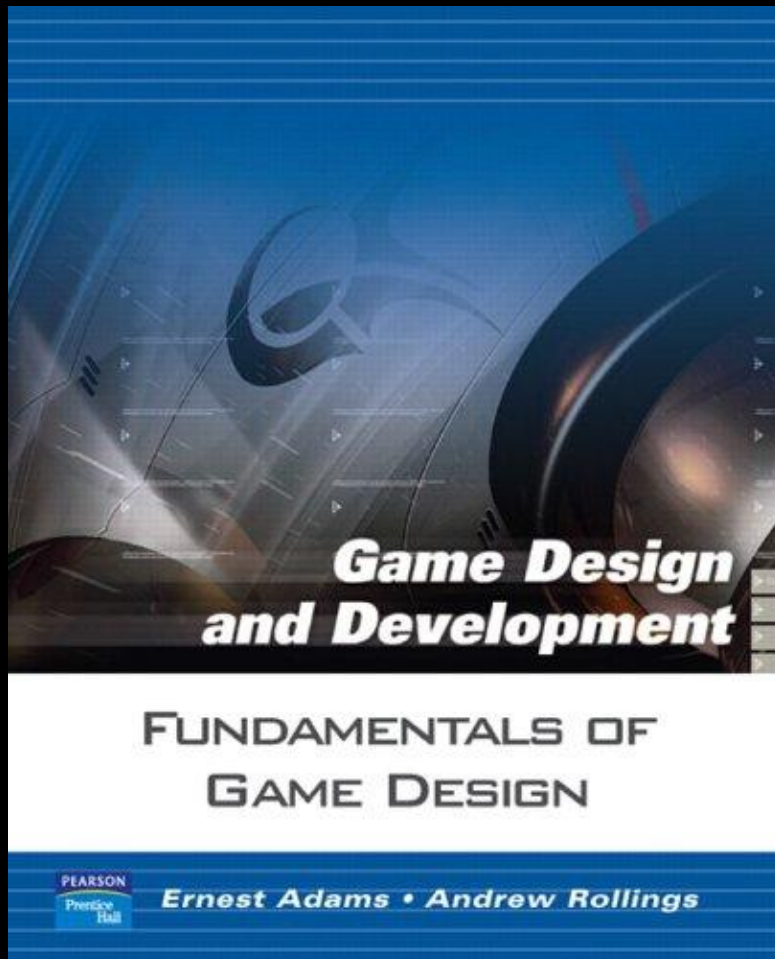
*“But how do you make sure  
that nobody cheats?”*



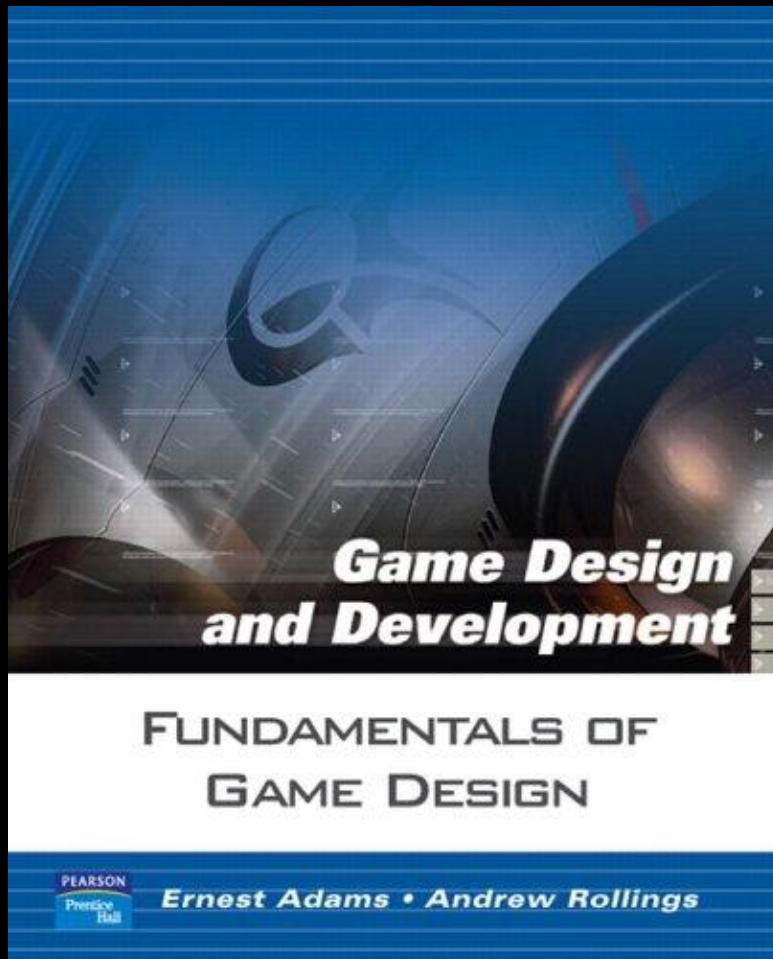
# DOUBLE FACEPALM

FOR WHEN ONE FACEPALM DOESN'T CUT IT





*“In most video games, the computer sets the boundary of the magic circle because player actions are meaningful in the game only if the machine can detect them with its input devices”*

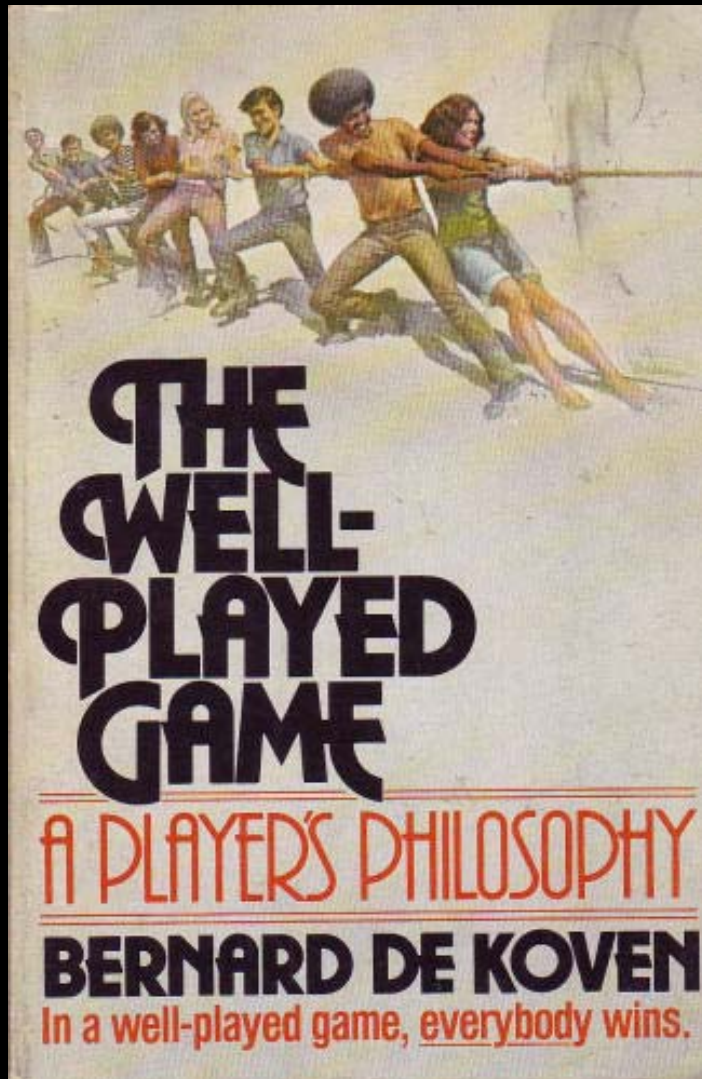


*“The **most** important benefit computers bring to gaming is that the computer relieves the players of the burden of personally implementing the rules. This frees the players to become as deeply immersed in a video game as they can in other forms of entertainment.”*









*“Rules are made for the convenience of those who are playing. What is fair at one time or in one game may be inhibiting later on.*

*It’s not the game that’s sacred, it’s the people who are playing.”*







## “Broken” Games

The game doesn't even bother to enforce the orders it gives!

*How is a “step” measured?*

*How slow do you have to go in the slow-mo round?*







## “Broken” Games

The game would be unplayable if taken at face value or played super competitively!



Any player whose button  
is pressed loses





## “Broken” Games

The game would be unplayable if taken at face value or played super competitively!



e.g. “Close your eyes”



It's not just that the  
rules are ambiguous

It's that the game  
signals an acute  
*self-awareness* of  
this ambiguity



BRUTALLY UNFAIR TACTICS TOTALLY OK NOW

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(Press start to return to the main menu)





**“Deputizing” the players**

*“Why do games like B.U.T.T.O.N. even need computer technology at all?”*



**Multimedia**





**Subverting expectations**

# Precedents





Boards of Canada

*“Too many electronic bands get carried away with the influences of computers and the internet and other technology, and they end up using that as their sole inspiration because at the end of the day that's all they do...”*





Boards of Canada

*... They're geeks obsessed with equipment and computers and ultimately it's become fucking predictable and boring. They should go out and live."*



Boards of Canada

*“We wouldn't want a show to be perfect, because we don't like perfection. We want there to be an element of chaos in a show, or in our music; a raw edge; **surprises.**”*



Celebrating the *imperfect*

# “Augmented reality”





# “Augmented reality”



# “Augmented reality”





***Disenchanted*** and ***un-augmenting*** digital games





**Festivity!**



# Takeaways

Ask yourself: What is  
unfair if unfair is  
totally OK?





“Doing ridiculous sh\*t with technology”





Human beings can enforce rules, too





*Johann Sebastian Joust*

# Final thoughts

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*“... we find it best to play pointless games in which the wellness we are able to share comes not from the excellence of our performance but rather from the excellence of the joke we have perpetrated upon each other, the sublimity of the silliness, the perfection of the ridiculous.”*

– Bernie DeKoven, *The Well-Played Game*

# Final thoughts

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*“It’s the twenty-first century. Things should be really wild. Anything else is boring.”*

– Paul D. Miller  
(aka DJ Spooky)

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More game projects:

[www.cphgc.org](http://www.cphgc.org)

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