



Radical Game Design

By Jack Rathbone

04

Let Us Play the Truth: A Games Manifesto

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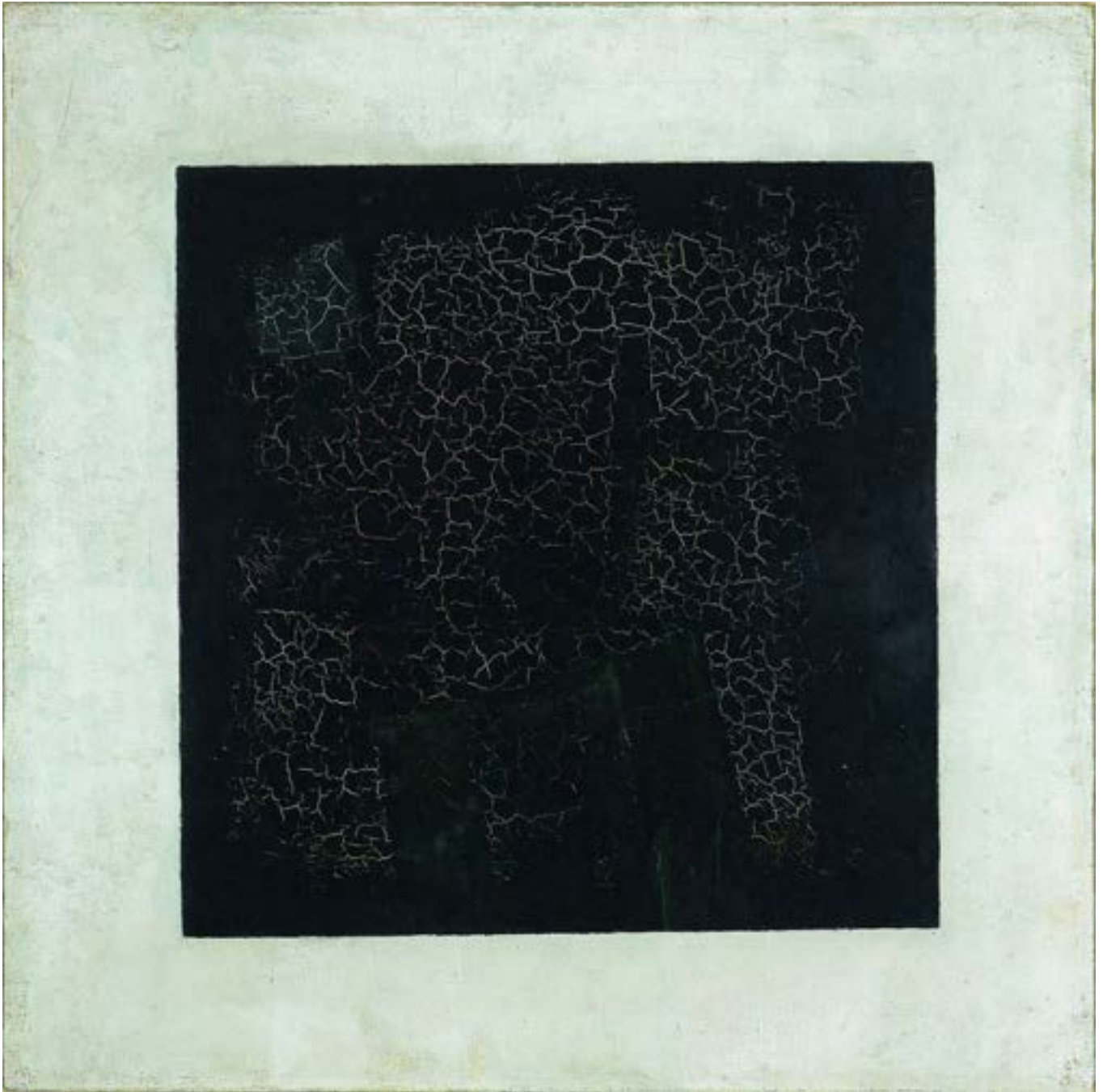
Playhaus Project Redux

10

1000 Fans Playbook

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1000 Fans: Patron Pitch



Malevich, K. (1915). Black Square. [Oil on Linen]

Moscow: Tretyakov Gallery.

Let Us Play the Truth



a games manifesto

INTRODUCTION

For too long games have been treated as abstract entertainment, detached from the reality under which they are constructed, too scared to explore deeper issues. Even now with such a huge drive for games to be more 'realistic' this is done to further their value as escapism, ignoring their ability as a medium to explore society and learn from society and its contradictions. This manifesto, while acknowledging games value as both abstract art and as entertainment, stands for the creation of a new trend in game design, one in which everyday struggle and life is explored. As previous forms of entertainment evolved and matured over time. So too must games...

This is a call for a conscious break from the separate perceptions of games as entertainment, games as art and games as education. Designers must embrace the avant-garde, the experimental and the revolutionary. They must be teachers, artists and radicals. Games must realise their potential and help teach and inform about our reality.

WE BELIEVE

1. Games must be tools of education, in the sense that they are about analysing and challenging our perceptions and views on society
2. Their needs to be an end to the view of games as just escapist entertainment, but a mature medium in itself
3. There should be a new critical analysis and understanding of games not just as fun experiences, but as meaningful and insightful ones
4. That games should be made that explore current issues and situations through appropriate means
5. Fantasy and crafted worlds should not be a colourful backdrop but a canvas for exploring concepts and ideas
6. All game designers must attack both the public and industry perception of what makes a game, to open up a new avenue of design and creativity unhindered by past ideas of game design
7. That games as a medium are not yet mature, and that they can only develop through conscious struggle against the perceived norms
8. Game designers must look to the past of film and literature, and be prepared to be radical intellectuals and artists, and actively build the future
9. Every designer must be a teacher

WE OPPOSE

1. Game designers not being held to account for the views and politics they express through their designs and worlds they create
2. The artificial barrier between film, literature and game design that views games as a less creative medium
3. The view of games as only commercial and consumer lead products
4. The lack of mainstream critical games journalism that challenges the current situation within the games industry and market
5. All the restrictions and perceptions that continue to hold the development of game design back
6. Designers and publishers who do not want to take the medium as a whole forward but instead accept and do not challenge the norm
8. Players who do not question the status quo in gaming, who accept the limited content offered to them by the mainstream studios and companies

A REVOLUTIONARY PEDAGOGY

Games hold an untapped potential, as a medium with the unique ability to put the audience into a designed world. Never before has this been a possibility. The leap to film from literature changed so much in the world and opened new avenues of understanding and analysing society, films could effectively agitate and educate even to the illiterate. Digital games will do the same as their value and use is realised and expanded upon. As tools for education, not just in the traditional classroom sense, but as real radical ways of showing the world to other people, games are limitless.



Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas radical socialist film, the Hour of the Furnaces, is legendary for creating riots whenever it was shown in the poor neighbourhoods of Argentina, so powerful was the message laid out in the film. If games are truly a medium on par with film, imagine what they could achieve in the hands of experimental and extraordinary designers who are looking to push the limits? This is what game design needs, radical teachers who will use games as the format of agitation, and a tool of knowledge. This is revolutionary pedagogy: theories and ideas of education through digital games that don't just target the young, but instead allows mature players to explore and understand concepts from reality packaged in a designed and interactive world. Let radical design expand discussion and analysis of our reality.



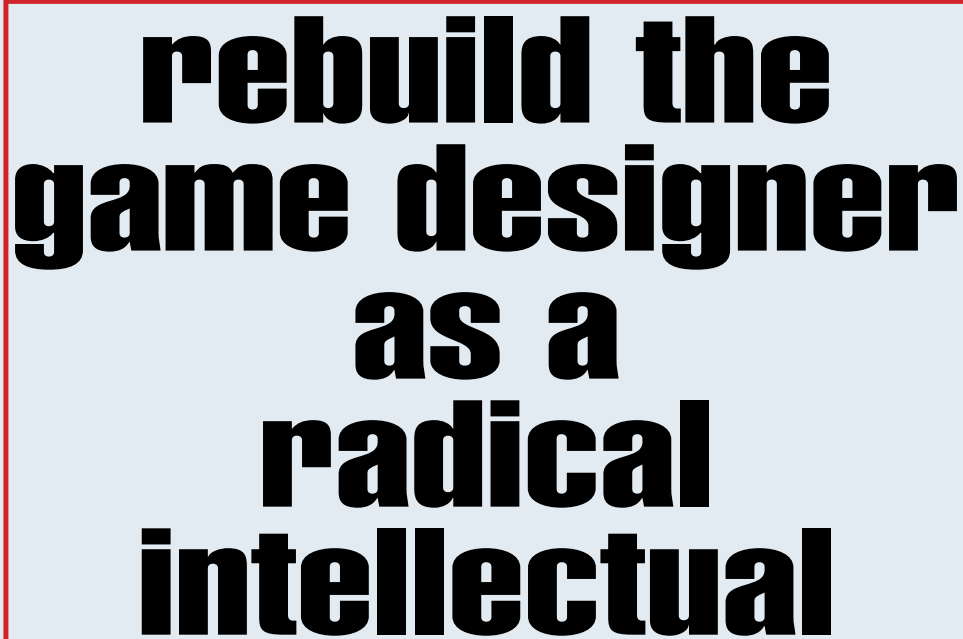
Poster for the film 'Battleship Potemkin' by Sergei Eisenstein.

Film has informed and taught about revolutions that shaped history, and great films have been made by revolutionaries. The question is, where are the revolutionaries in game design?

Either games are truly the next evolutionary medium after film or they are not. It is up to the designers of today to prove this as a fact.

THE PLAYERS DEMAND: LET US PLAY THE TRUTH

In this conversation of designers, it is still important not to forget the players, to listen to their voices. It is also important to listen to the silence of all those who are not players, and to think how we can draw their voices and minds to the medium. In the end no matter how interesting or new the ideas presented by designers are, if there is no one to play them there is no point. All revolutions need the masses, all radicals need someone to debate with. The growing interest in independent games, even games that are do not conform in any way to the traditional understanding of what a game is, shows that there is a hunger for something new even within the current shape of the market and playerbase. The disinterest and boredom felt by those sick of mainstream game design, of titles pumped out with profit as the only aim, relates to the greater feeling of hopelessness and helplessness in general. People desire not to be coddled and simply entertained, but to be challenged and asked to question the reality they live in. The demand that should be raised: let us play the truth! Don't hold back, instead confront whatever you can, break down every wall in the way. Daring to rebel will only open the way for everyone else, for designers and for players. The greatest writers, designers, directors throughout history choose to break away from the norm and build something new, if we hope to create something great we must be prepared to follow in their footsteps...



**rebuild the
game designer
as a
radical
intellectual**

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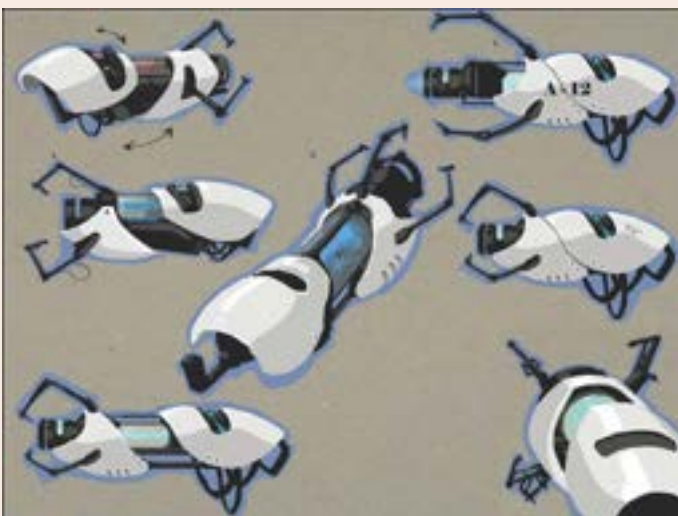
Review & Remix:

The Trip Game Concept

by Jack Rathbone

Introduction:

Tasked with producing a game concept based around a well know creator (artist, director, designer...) and a video game, Portal and Jamie Hewlett seems an odd choice. The Trip is the result of this remix, featuring mechanics and ideas from the Portal franchise as well as the vibrant style of comic book artist Jamie Hewlett. The final concept is of a game based around taking drugs and the mind altering impact they have on people's perceptions of reality, with the player completing trippy puzzles, phasing in and out of reality and the 'drug world'. This idea was shown through a presentation which highlighted the aesthetics and feel of the game, and its appeal in traversing mind bending and colourful puzzles.



Portal Gun Concept Art
from Valve Corporation



Female Freedom Fighters No.1
by Jamie Hewlett

Review:

Looking both at the actual concept and how it was presented, I believe that there is much that could be improved, especially with the presentation. Firstly the pitch itself very much relied on assumed game design and heavily played off the aesthetics to make the idea seem attractive, but actually failed to really describe the gameplay or even the proper form that puzzles would take shape in or how the player interacts with the world. Obviously in the game Portal the use of the portal gun is important to showcase as it is how the player solves puzzles and completes the game, but no such mechanic is outlined in The Trip's pitch. The trailer section of the pitch which describes a theoretical six second trailer shows this reliance on the aesthetics, showing bright colours and the visuals of drug use in the game but no relation at all to the puzzle aspect. I think if this pitch really was to be improved it needs a bigger focus on the mechanics and what makes it actually fun to play.

The Trip Concept Redux:

If I had the opportunity to change the concept and add to it, the first main thing would be to specify the actual mechanics, even if it isn't in much details. I would say that interaction with puzzles should be physics based and involve the player picking up and moving objects as well interacting with buttons to move platforms around thus the puzzle solving becomes more physical like in Portal and uses both mental and physical skill to solve. An addition to the game that would make the idea more appealing is an actual defined switching mechanic where the player switches between reality and the 'drug world' to overcome obstacles that are impassable. This ties the drug concept directly to a gameplay mechanic and not just a reason for the visuals of the game.



Godself
by Alex Grey

References

- Hewlett, J. (2016). Female Freedom Fighters No. 1. [Screen Print].
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1000 Fans

PLAYBOOK



1000 Fans Playbook Introduction:

Following the theme of radical design, this is an exercise in non-traditional games design, based around the 1000 true fans concept. This concept can be summarised simply as the idea that with a dedicated fanbase of only 1000 fans, if they are willing to pay for what you create regularly, you can make a living from it.

This exercise will involve me building a game concept for my theoretical 1000 fans, but the challenge is that my idea must originate in some form from another very different game: marbles. So I will analyse this famous and historic game, to understand what makes it fun and playful, and break down its elements into broad categories. These categories will be further refined until I have a few guiding lights to base my new game concept around.

What are the Elements of Marbles?

GLOSSY
SHINY
COMPETITIVE
COLOURFUL
SKILLS
LUCK
FIRING
UNIQUE
RULES
GROUP
FRIENDS

CLICK-CLACK
CHATTER
ROLLING GLASS
SMASH
COMMUNITY
PLANNING
KNOCKING
SHARING
DYNAMIC
TAKING AIM
WIN/LOSE

let's sort these elements into categories

Look & Feel:

- *Glossy
- *Shiny
- *Colourful
- *Click-clack
- *Rolling glass
- *Smash
- *Knocking
- *Chatter
- *Unique

Shared Play:

- *Community
- *Rules
- *Group
- *Friends
- *Sharing

Player vs Player:

- *Skills
- *Planning
- *Dynamic
- *Competitive

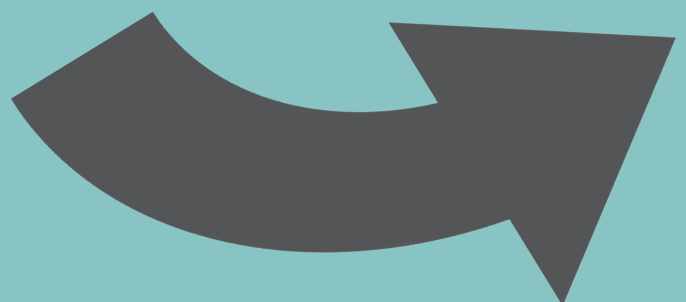
The Mechanics:

- *Taking aim
- *Luck
- *Firing
- *Win/lose

Guiding Lights & the North Star:

We can see that marbles, while seemingly simple, can be broken down into multiple different categories. To make these categories useful for building my own game, I need to further refine them into guiding lights. This means I will abstract the categories and elements, ignoring the specifics of marbles, but instead look broadly at the main source of fun in marbles.

With the guiding lights, I can then go on to create a north star, a broad and abstract idea that will lead my game and give it a purpose and direction. So from the basic elements of marbles, you can keep refining and categorising them until you have ideas that could be applied to very different games and experiences.

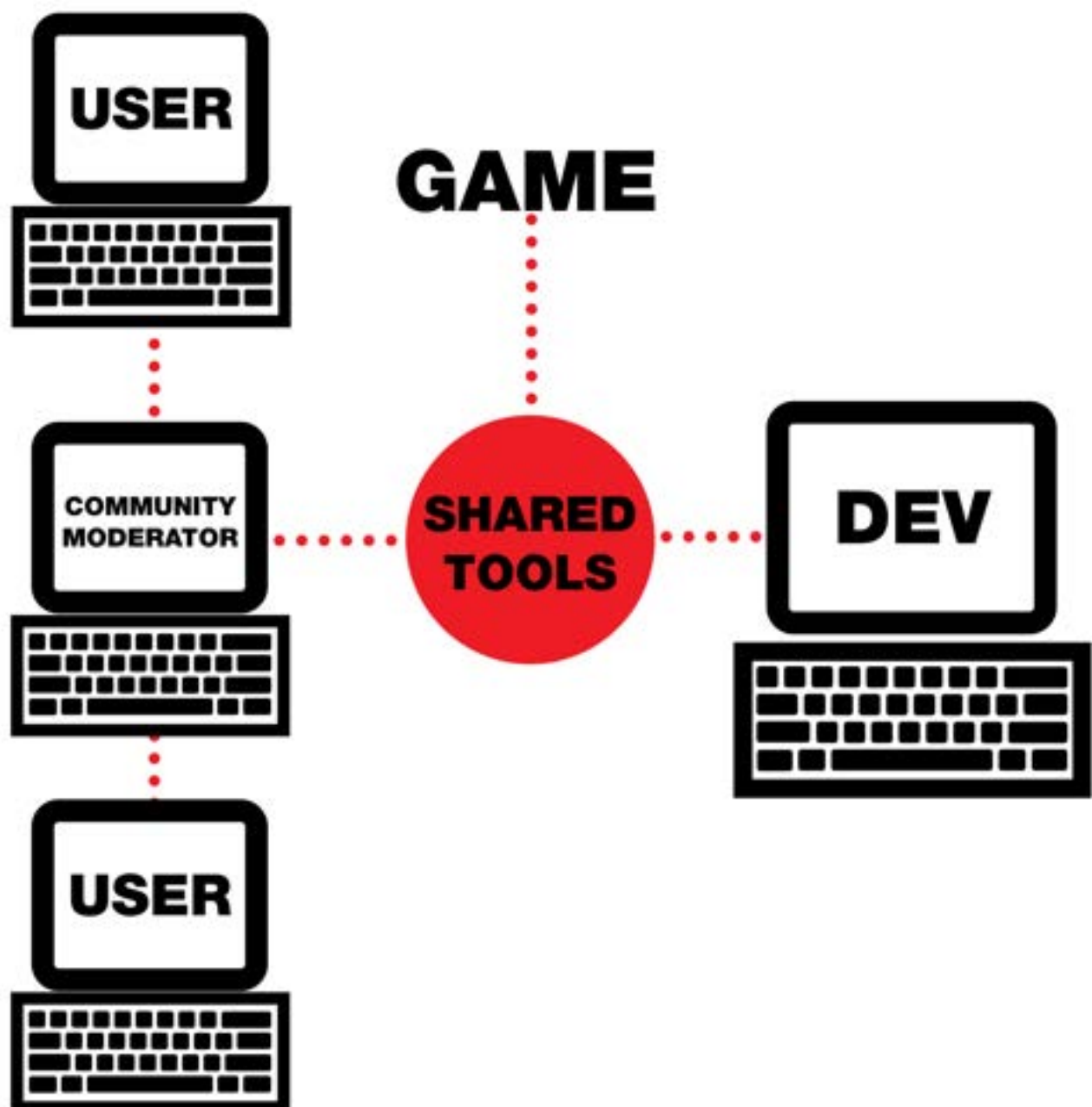




‘The community runs the game’

What would a community run game look like?

Many games have built up huge communities around them, ones that support and promote the game, and continue to play the game once the majority of people have left it behind. For most multiplayer games it is the community that keeps them going even when newer titles are released. But for the most part the community and the developers are kept very separate. My north star is to build a game around the concept of community, one where the developers have a direct and democratic relation to the players. A game where the players can participate in building the game world instead of having to make non-official mods. So much content has been unofficially produced for games by modders, this creative community could be harnessed to build a new type of game.

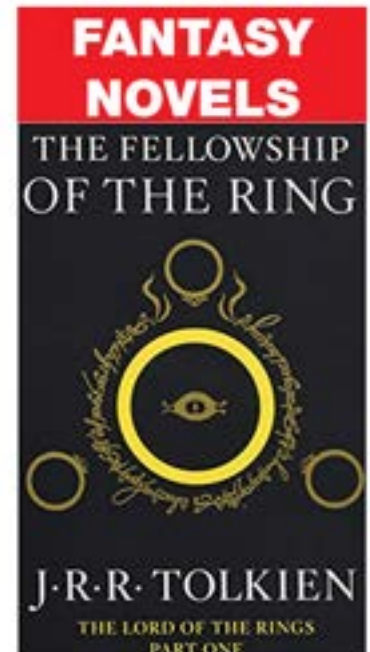


Full Game Concept:

Akhar

A Community Designed Roleplaying Game

Main Inspirations



Basic Concept:

The driving idea behind Akhar is to create an extremely dynamic and system-driven RPG with very challenging and complex gameplay. The focus of the design is character customisation, letting players make unique characters with various specialised skills which all effect the game in different ways. The purpose is to make a RPG not just with a combat focus but a multitude of solutions to every problem allowing for many different playstyles.

The world itself will feature cities and factions all running on random and dynamic systems, the game will always be different and the world will change around the player. This focus on the mechanics and dynamic gameplay exists so that the actual quests, characters and world can be filled in with the communities own creations, creating a massive canvas for all sorts of specific stories to be told. Thus the role of the developers is to build the tools through which the community as a whole will actually create the game as an entire project.

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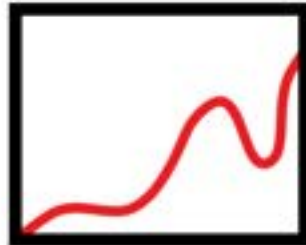
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AKHAR: MECHANICS & SYSTEMS



**Dynamic Faction
Conflict**



**In-game
Economy**



**Random Encounter
Generation**

Fencing - 45
Archery - 15
Trade - 25
Looting- 32

**Variety of
skill choices**



**Large
world map**

**Build your
Character**

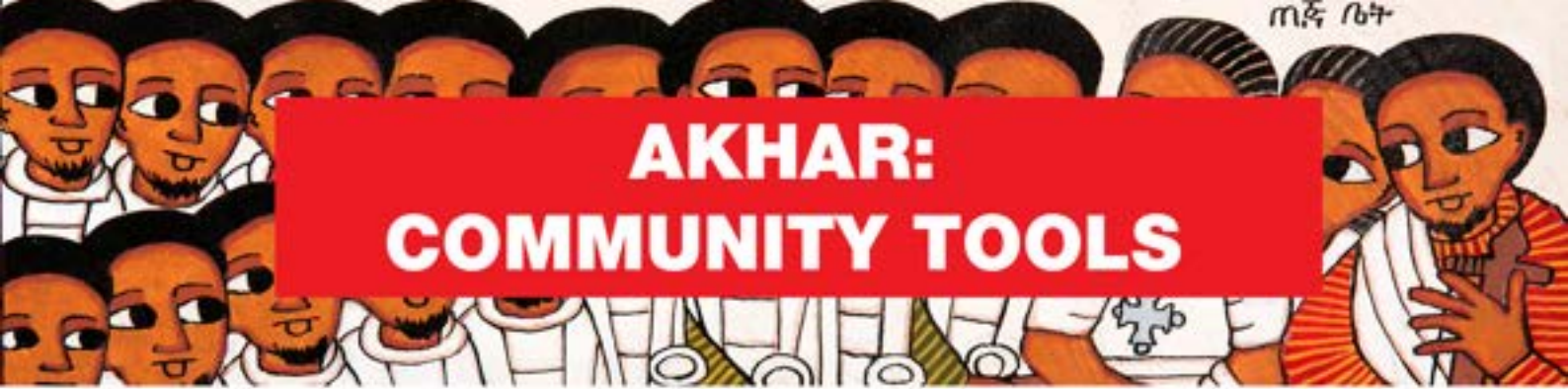


**Overcome
Challenges**



**Become More
Powerful**



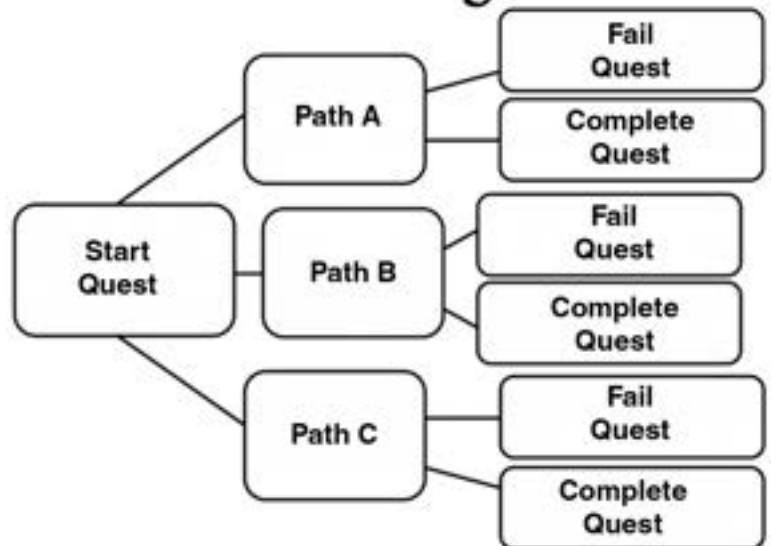


AKHAR: COMMUNITY TOOLS

NPC Builder



Quest Designer



Dungeon Editor



Item Maker

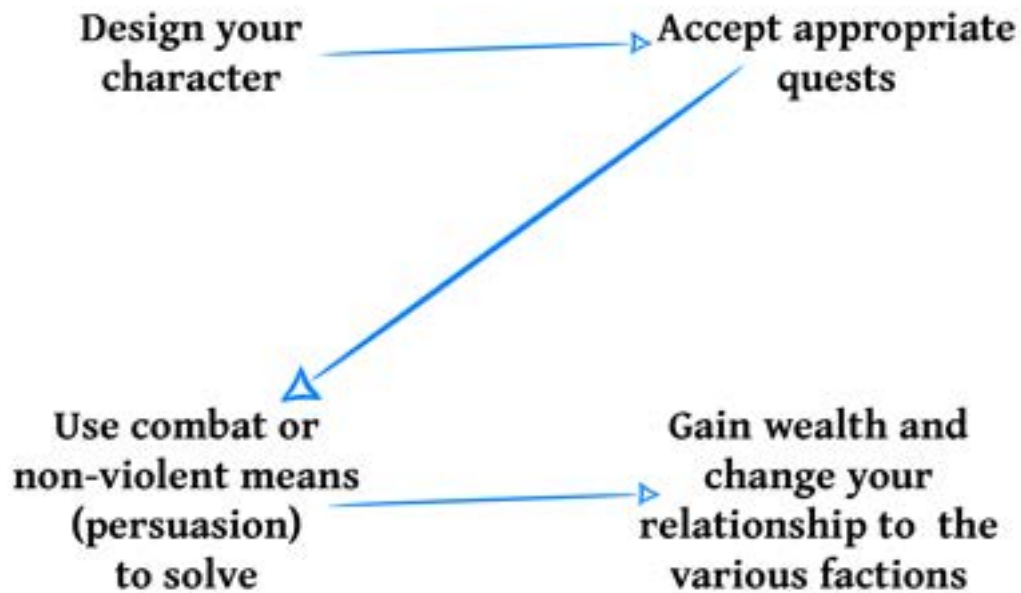
Hand Axe	
Swing - 98	◀▶
Stab - 15	
Block - 44	
Weight- 23	



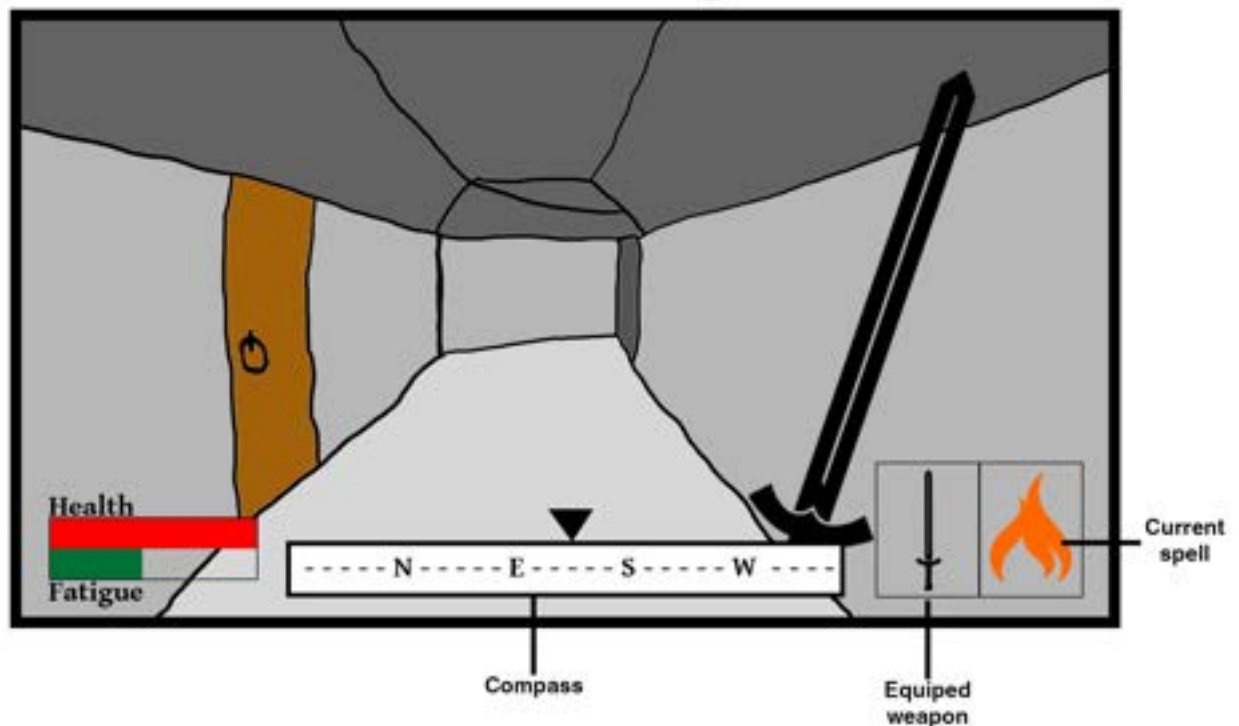
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AKHAR: THE EXPERIENCE



UI Mock-up



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**‘Akhar is more than just
a fantasy RPG, it is a
model for building
games collectively’**





Jack is creating Akhar, the community led roleplaying game

[Overview](#)[Posts](#)[Community](#)[BECOME A PATRON](#)

What is Akhar?

Akhar is an open world first-person roleplaying game inspired by titles such as the Elder Scrolls 2: Daggerfall and Ultima Underworld. Akhar itself will be a challenging RPG with in-depth and completely unlocked character customisation including a massive set of skills, letting players create unique characters from merchants to mercenaries. The living fantasy world of Akhar is open for exploration with dynamic factions struggling against each other for power and an in-game economy which fluctuates over time. The graphics of the game will be simple 3D terrain and buildings with 2D sprites for characters and items in the vein of early 3D RPGs but using much more detailed sprite art and modern shaders/effects.

A Community Led Game

What makes Akhar a truly unique game experience is that the world of Akhar is led by the community, taking a cue from the history of modding to create a new kind of open source game. Through the Patreon platform all supporters get access to tools that let them design content for the game including quests, items, characters and locations. The community can all take part in building the world of Akhar and telling their own stories and ideas in the game.

I want to build a different kind of game, one where the people who play it can take part in making it better. This also makes the development of a game in the scale of Akhar possible, even a large development team cannot hope to write thousands of unique and interesting quests by themselves, but by getting the community involved anyone who wants to tell a story though the game can.

REWARDS

Supporter

\$2 or more per month · 0 patrons

For those who want to help the project grow
-Get to design an NPC to be put in the game

[GET \\$2 REWARD](#)

Community Member

\$8 or more per month · 0 patrons

Be part of the Akhar community
-invited to the Discord server
-full access to the content creation tools
-Final version of the game included
-Beta access

[GET \\$8 REWARD](#)

The World of Akhar

Some of the most interesting RPG's of all time have been ones that break from the mould of classic European high fantasy, like Morrowind or Baldur's Gate, to create unique and interesting worlds. The world of Akhar is based heavily on Ethiopian art and culture, with influence from Arabic and east African cultures in the mix, but also features an Italian renaissance style to its weapons, cities and politics. The role of politics is very key to the game with many different factions vying for control of the world and its resources, from monarchists and republicans, to rebellious peasants. This complex and tumultuous world is the canvas for the players to help tell their own stories in.

Why You Should Support This

With Akhar I am not just trying to create a game, but to create a dedicated and open community with a shared passion for RPG's and for telling stories. By giving your support to this project you not only gain access to all the tools for adding content to the game but are also funding it's development. Your support goes directly to the game, helping pay for new art assets and materials to speed up production, and the more people who support Akhar the bigger and deeper the world we are making together will be.

Community Tester

\$15 or more per month · 0 patrons

Be involved with the games early production
-All previous rewards
-Alpha access
-See developer updates & be involved in major development decisions

GET \$15 REWARD

Community Curator

\$25 or more per month · 0 patrons

For dedicated community members
-All previous rewards
-Be a moderator on the forum
-Join discussions with the developers

GET \$25 REWARD

GOALS	View all	GOALS	View all	GOALS	View all
\$0 of \$100 per month		\$0 of \$800 per month		\$0 of \$2,500 per month	
When I reach \$100 a month I will start a weekly stream where I show off the progress of the game, discuss updates and answer questions from the community.		At \$800 a month I will be able to work full time on the game and stay in touch with the community more, as well produce more livestreams and other content.		With \$2500 a month I will pay a programmer to produce a mobile version of the game as well improving the games shaders and lighting.	
1 of 3		2 of 3		3 of 3	

Thank you message for patrons:

Thank you for supporting me and Akhar, I want this project to get big and become an amazing community for fantasy RPG fans all over, but it takes people willing to support something new and have some faith. Thanks for being someone like that, and lets make this game amazing together.

-Jack Rathbone



Radical Game Design

A Catalogue of bold ideas for a new era of games design

featuring...

let us play the truth: a games manifesto

1000 fans project: a community driven game world

Playhaus game remix: summary and review