SIX

The Game Begins with an *Idea*

The method you used to design your games was something like:

* Think of an idea.
* Try it out.
* Keep changing it and testing it until it seems good enough.

Which sounds kind of amateurish. Well, guess what? That is exactly what real game designers do. And this chapter would end here, except for the fact that some ways to do these things are better than others.

Lens #11: The Lens of Infinite Inspiration

To you use this lens, stop looking at your game, and stop looking at games

like it. Instead, look everywhere else.

Ask yourself these questions:

● What is an experience I have had in my life that I would want to share with others?

● In what small way can I capture the essence of that experience and put it into my game?

**State the Problem**

Three advantages of clearly stating your problem:

1. **Broader creative space**. Most people jump to solutions too fast and start their creative process there. If you start your process at the problem instead of at a proposed solution, you will be able to explore a broader creative space and find solutions that are hiding where no one else is looking.
2. **Clear measurement**. You have a clear measurement of the quality of proposed ideas: How well do they solve the problem?
3. **Better communication**. When you are designing with a team, communication is much easier if the problem has been clearly stated. Very often, collaborators will be trying to solve quite different problems and not realize it if the problem has not been clearly stated.

Lens #12: The Lens of the Problem Statement

To use this lens, think of your game as the solution to a problem. Ask yourself these questions:

● What problem, or problems, am I really trying to solve?

● Have I been making assumptions about this game that really have nothing

to do with its true purpose?

● Is a game really the best solution? Why?

● How will I be able to tell if the problem is solved?

Defining the constraints and goals for your game as a problem statement can help move you to a clear game design much more quickly.

Here are some common characteristics of the creative subconscious that most people seem to share:

●  **Can’t talk**, or at least chooses not to. Not in words, anyway. Tends to communi- cate through imagery and emotions.

●  **Impulsive**. Tends not to plan ahead, tends to live in the moment.

●  **Emotional**. Gets swept up in whatever you are feeling — happy, angry, excited, afraid — the subconscious seems to feel things more deeply and more powerfully than the conscious mind.

●  **Playful**. It has a constant curiosity, and loves wordplay and pranks.

●  **Irrational**. Not bound by logic and rationality, the subconscious comes up with ideas that often make no sense. Need to go to the moon? Perhaps a long ladder will work. Sometimes these ideas are a useless distraction, but sometimes they are the clever perspective you have sought all along — whoever heard of a ring molecule, for example?

*Subconscious Tip #1: Pay Attention*

* As usual, the key is listening, this time to your *self* (sort of). The subconscious is no different than anyone else: If you get in the habit of ignoring it, it is going to stop making suggestions. If you get in the habit of listening to it, seriously considering its ideas, and thanking it when you get a good one, it will start to offer more and bet- ter suggestions. So, how do you listen to something that can’t talk? What you must do is pay closer attention to your thoughts, your feelings, your emotions, and your dreams, for those are the ways the subconscious communicates.

*Subconscious Tip #2: Record Your Ideas*

* Certainly you will record your ideas during a brainstorming session, but why not record them all the time? The human memory is terrible. By recording all of your ideas, two things happen. First, you’ll have a record of many ideas that you would likely have forgotten otherwise, and second, you’ll freeup your mind to think of other things.

*Subconscious Tip #3: Manage Its Appetites (Judiciously)*

* Let’s be honest here — the subconscious mind has appetites, some of which are pri- mal. These appetites seem to be part of its job — just as it is the rational mind’s job to determine which appetites can be safely fed, and how to go about doing that. If the subconscious mind feels one of these appetites too strongly, it will obsess about it. When it is obsessing, it can’t do good creative work. If you are trying to come up with new ideas for a real-time strategy game, and all you can think about is candy bars or how your girlfriend left you, or how much you hate your roommate, you aren’t going to be able to get much good work done, because these intrusive thoughts will distract you, and the source of these intrusive thoughts, your subcon- scious mind, isn’t getting any work done either.

*Subconscious Tip #4: Sleep*

* As Salvador Dali points out, sleep is crucial, and not just the slumber with a key. We used to think that sleep was for the body — but it has become clear that sleep is primarily for the benefit of the mind. Some strange process of sorting, filing, and reorganizing seems to be going on when we sleep

*Subconscious Tip #5: Don’t Push Too Hard*

* Did you ever try to think of a name during a conversation, maybe someone you know, maybe some movie star, and you know you know it, but just can’t think of it? So you squint your eyes and try and force the answer out of your mind — but it just doesn’t come. So, you give up and move on, talking about something else. A few minutes later, suddenly the answer pops into your mind. Now, where do you think that came from? It is as if the subconscious was working on the problem of finding that name in the background while you moved on to other things. When it found the answer, it gave it to you

*Brainstorm Tip #4: Toys*

* Another way to get your mind visually engaged in your problem is to bring some toys to the table. Pick some that have something to do with your problem, and some that have nothing to do with it! Why do you think that restaurants like TGI Friday’s have all that crazy stuff on the walls? Is it just decoration? No. When people see it, they think of things to talk about, and the more things they think of to talk about, the more enjoyable their restaurant experience.

*Brainstorm Tip #5: Change Your Perspective*

* The whole point of the lenses in this book is that they get you looking at your game from different perspectives. But why stop there? Don’t just brainstorm sitting in your chair — stand up on your chair — things look different up there! Go different places — immerse yourself in different things.

*Brainstorm Tip #6: Immerse Yourself*

* You’ve stated your problem, now immerse yourself in it! Find people in your target audience at the mall — what are they buying? Why? Eavesdrop on them — what are they talking about? What is important to them? You need to know these peo- ple intimately.

*Brainstorm Tip #9: The Writing on the Wall*

* You might prefer writing on a whiteboard to writing on paper. If so, do it! If you are brainstorming in a team setting, you will need some kind of solution that everyone can see at once. Some people like to use index cards to write down their ideas.

*Brainstorm Tip #15: Find a Partner*

* When you brainstorm with other people, it is a very different experience than brainstorming alone. Finding the right brainstorming partner can make a world of difference — sometimes the two of you can get to great solutions many times faster than either of you could alone, as you bounce ideas back and forth and complete one another’s sentences.