



# What You Can and Can't Learn from Games

1. [Features and Antifeatures](#)

# Features and Antifeatures

One interesting thing I've noticed in the field of game design is that there are some purported features that are so hated that *not having them* becomes an advertised feature! Here are some quick examples:

- In the world of card games, *Magic: the Gathering's* 'lands'/'mana' system for accumulating resources is widely hated, and competitors to *Magic* at times explicitly advertise "no mana flood! no mana screw!" (For those unfamiliar with *Magic*, this is a situation where randomness in the game's resource system can essentially decide the game without the players making very meaningful decisions.)
- In digital games, I've seen "no pay-to-win" used as a selling point to differentiate from games where players can directly buy things that increase their in-game power.
- An even more extreme example of "no pay-to-win" is "no NFTs" -- NFTs have a very bad reputation in the gaming world, to the point where not having them is advertised sometimes even when one doesn't much have reason to think the game *would* have NFTs.

I like the word 'antifeatures' for these sorts of things -- and while the existence of 'antifeatures' first came to my attention in the domain of game design, I think this sort of thing is prevalent in a lot of other places as well. For example, some bars will advertise "no cover charge", some comedy shows will advertise "no drink minimum", and so on.

However, I think there's another important aspect to this that concept some people miss. *Just avoiding things that people don't like doesn't make your game good!* It's cool that your game has no mana screw or mana flood, that it isn't pay-to-win, and that it doesn't have NFTs -- but in order for me to be interested in it, it has to go beyond merely not having bad things and instead has to *actively have things to recommend it!*

In other words, I'm talking to my friends about a game and trying to get them to play it, I think I generally need more to go on than "it doesn't have <unpopular feature X>" -- there have to be other things that make it actively appealing!

One potentially relevant example is that there are a bunch of conservative films that have "this film isn't 'woke' like what Hollywood puts out!" or whatever as a primary selling point. Unfortunately, to be really successful you also have to... actually make a good film? "Not being <undesirable thing X>" seems generally insufficient.