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“Valid” Failure in the Design of Digital Games: An Introspective View from a Player’s Perspective

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Abstract

This paper identifies a knowledge gap about certain forms of failure, what I call valid failure, found within video game design from developer commentary. The theories developed thus far for categorising and exploring player failure in general are quite limited but this is particularly true of those associated with the validation of failure. A literature review of the research surrounding the areas of failure within game studies, psychology and learning studies provides both a foundation upon which to expand on the theory of valid failure within game design and also the tools to develop it further. A methodology for analysing games to determine their ability to validate player failure is developed and applied to three case studies, analysed from a player’s perspective, which are representative of broader trends within game design relating to designing for valid player failures. This paper lays out one possible design strategy that can be taken when exploring such design approaches, a strategy grounded in interpreting failure through the lens of challenge. However, further exploration is needed to achieve a real understanding of such a complex phenomena.