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Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Simon, Jonas Heide Smith, and Susana Pajares Tosca. *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction* (4th ed). Routledge, 2020.

Building on very successful previous editions, the recently published fourth edition of *Understanding Video Games* introduces the reader to developments and perspectives in the study of games. Across nine chapters, the authors discuss games (including their history), the game industry, video game aesthetics and narratives, video games in culture, and serious games and gamification. To clarify key questions including "what is a game," "do games affect the player," and "can games teach children useful skills," the book provides examples, digs into the history of game development and production, and allows readers to gradually understand what video games are about and what they can contribute to bringing about. The chapters are structured in a coherent way and all end with discussion questions and further readings, which "are designed to stimulate thought and argument on the topics covered and to offer avenues for further reading and research" as well as to "address areas that we find are tangential to the chapter but not always covered in full detail" (Introduction, p.4).

Following a brief introduction, chapter 1, "Studying Video Games," discusses the basics of how to study games by suggesting five major types of analysis (game, player, culture, ontology, and metrics). The authors also explicate some common methodologies for each. A short subchapter titled "Schools of Thought?" sets out to clarify certain dominant perspectives. As with every chapter, this one ends with

discussion questions and suggestions for further readings. Chapter 2, "The Game Industry," takes up several aspects related to game production and development. For instance, the industry's size, including revenue numbers and examples for sales numbers of major consoles like Sony PS4 and Nintendo Switch, are presented. The chapter proceeds to discuss the industry's structure for developing new products. Two short subchapters also introduce readers to the basics of the game development process by giving brief descriptions of the conceptual and design phases and production and testing phases. It is in the latter that the actual production happens, such as code writing and the creation of graphics and audio. The longer chapter 3, "What is a Game?" considers the core question. It is here that the key authors of game research are introduced, especially those present at the start of game studies and research. Short paragraphs make the readers aware of Johan Huizinga and the Magic Circle, Marshall McLuhan and Games as Cultural Reflections, Henry Jenkins and the Art of the Game, and others. The chapter then proceeds to offer some formal definitions of a game. This chapter's second part on game genres provides an overview of the most important genres, namely action games, adventure games, strategy games, and process-oriented games.

Chapter 4, "History," represents the book's longest chapter. This chapter is divided into an opening section devoted to the pre-history of video games and a brief discussion on whether history matters, as well as to a detailed section that guides readers through video game history. Beginning in the 1970s, this section offers information on each decade up to the 2010s and beyond. In a final outlook, the authors offer three perspectives on what they call likely developments: a likely rise in experimentation, a growing gamification that moves gaming beyond clearly defined platforms, and a likely growing cultural attention for games, as games will be more and more perceived as an established part of culture and society. Chapter 5, "Video Game Aesthetics," begins with introducing the concepts of rules and gameplay. The subchapter on geography and representation highlights, among other things, massively multiplayer online role-playing games and video game perspectives (first- or third-person perspective, isometric perspective which is similar to an architect's sketch of a building and top-down perspective, also known as bird's-eye). Furthermore, brief introductions to aspects such as dimensions, space types, graphical style, and game audio have been added here. Chapter 6, "Video games in Culture," focuses on the interrelation of games with culture and society. The cultural position of games, games as cultural forms, and the public perception of games are the core points of discussion here. Additionally, the chapter

looks at players, considering why people play and who plays. Namely, this book chapter discusses female players, player communities, and cooperation and conflict in games and e-sports.

Chapter 7, "Narrative," explores storytelling, including settings and actors in games, game mechanics, and reception — that is, the player's experience of a story. The chapter offers a brief history of literary theory and video games to explore the theoretical work "that explicitly deals with questions of narrative, storytelling, and fiction in relation to video games" (223). Authors such as Espen Aarseth and Jesper Juul, as well as the ludology versus narratology debate, figure here. The chapter concludes with remarks on the interactive element of games and transmedia games. Chapter 8, "Serious Games and Gamification," expounds on games-for-change and games-for-health as examples of serious games, introducing readers to genres such as news games, political games, and advertainment. Serious games including edutainment and educational games are discussed here, including a helpful subsection on key research challenges in serious games. The book's final chapter, "Video Games and Risks," acquaints the reader with two key research perspectives in game studies, active media perspective and active user perspective. Both are presented in detail, enabling the audience to further understand the complexity of games and their research.

Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction was very deservedly leveled up to a fourth edition. These is no doubt that this concise introduction will remain an important starting point to gain first insights into the academic inquiry of video games related themes, for many students, researchers, and non-academic audiences alike. As the authors state, "today we increasingly talk about a society where games and play are ever-present" (Introduction, p. 1). The massively increased interest in understanding video games and their research (in manifold academic fields as well as beyond academia) calls for books like these that are predetermined to attract a large readership. Moreover, beyond introducing the theme, the book succeeds in raising interest and excitement for the ever-expanding worlds of games and gaming and inspires the readers to further delve into these worlds.

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