

The whole book, one wall chart.

Thirty-seven requirements a healthy free-to-play game **contains**, and thirty-six laws for how one is **run**. Every line is checkable against your game today.

THE REQUIREMENTS

37 · WHAT THE GAME CONTAINS

Common attributes of the most successful free-to-play games, refined across two decades and deliberately genre-independent. Follow most of them and you raise both reach and monetization. Ignore one knowingly if your design demands it; ignore several unknowingly and you have written this book’s next cautionary example.

I Immersion Ch. 4, 14

- 1 The player can customize a virtual identity that is visible to other players.
- 2 Every playstyle — all the classic player types — finds support in the game.¹
- 3 The player is always motivated by short-, mid-, and long-term goals at once.
- 4 The player always has something meaningful to do, no matter how much time he invests.

II Game World Ch. 1, 4, 14

- 5 The world is persistent — it keeps evolving while the player is offline.
- 6 The world is large enough to explore continuously for months.
- 7 The player advances through multiple progression systems, not one.
- 8 An endgame system waits beyond the standard content, so the veteran still finds meaningful play.

III Economy Ch. 8

- 9 The economy is well balanced: virtually no inflation, no exploitation.
- 10 Goods can be exchanged.
- 11 The player can feel richness and possession — the primal motivation of collecting is served.

IV Socialization Ch. 14

- 12 The player is always aware of other players in the world without having to seek them out.
- 13 Real-time conversation is possible.
- 14 Private communication is possible, free from interference.
- 15 Players can communicate independent of each other's online status.
- 16 The player chooses freely between playing alone and playing in groups of any size.

V Monetization Ch. 5, 6, 7, 8

- 17 Money spent keeps its worth — the paid economy is as stable as the earned one.
- 18 The player can spend as much as he wants, independent of his progress.

- 19 Spending produces the feeling of possession and value — a good feeling at the moment of purchase.
- 20 Multiple items are always available that match the player's *current* motivations and goals.
- 21 Offers exist in every desired price range at every level of progression.
- 22 Spending money speeds up progress; paying saves time.
- 23 Each core game mechanic has its own monetization strategy attached.
- 24 Fair play: premium currency or items can also be earned through time or skill.
- 25 Monetization is never forced — currencies are naturally integrated parts of the game.

VI Retention Ch. 2, 3, 17

- 26 The player always has something meaningful to do. (Yes, again. It belongs on both lists.)
- 27 The game gives feedback when the player will be, or has been, offline for a longer period.
- 28 The game welcomes the player back when he returns.
- 29 Other players can see a returning player log in and are enabled to reach out.
- 30 The game sends in-game mail with rewards attached under the right circumstances.

VII Conflict — pick your door Ch. 9–13, 15

Pick one of the three doors and build it properly. Two is expensive. All three, done well, is a luxury reserved for teams who have already shipped each of them separately — and most games that reach for all three end up with three mediocre versions instead of one good one.

- 31 The conflict on offer matches the player types the game is actually for — chosen deliberately, not inherited from the genre.
- 32 **Door one:** direct player-versus-player conflict.
- 33 **Door two:** indirect competition, where players measure themselves against each other without ever meeting.
- 34 **Door three:** no conflict at all — the door that matters most in the West, where your largest audience is older than your team and competitiveness declines with age.

VIII Mobile Ch. 2, 5

- 35 The player is in control of session length.
- 36 The game never requires complete focus for more than three minutes — if at all.
- 37 Players pay only while they play — so let them play indefinitely.

THE 36 LAWS

HOW THE GAME IS RUN

- 01 **You are a service, not a product.** Ch. 1, 17
- 02 **Never cut a price. Anywhere. Ever.** Ch. 5, 6, 8
- 03 **Never remove what a player earned or bought.** Ch. 4, 6, 12
- 04 **Never decide for the player.** Ch. 14
- 05 **Only power makes real money.** Ch. 5, 9–13
- 06 **Players only pay when they play.** Ch. 5
- 07 **Time your progression beats so one ladder is always within reach.** Ch. 4
- 08 **The second purchase is harder than the first.** Ch. 5, 9
- 09 **No packs under \$4.99 in the currency ladder.** Ch. 5, 8
- 10 **Half the revenue from the top tenth of payers, half from the rest.** Ch. 5
- 11 **A number without its definition is decoration.** Ch. 3
- 12 **Averages are crap. Median, segmented, or nothing.** Ch. 3, 5, 18
- 13 **Measure conversion on 28-day windows.** Ch. 3, 5
- 14 **Large events run a week plus both weekends.** Ch. 5, 17
- 15 **Name the season, not the holiday.** Ch. 5, 17
- 16 **Never patch on Friday. Never on Monday.** Ch. 17
- 17 **Every player lifetime must contain an update.** Ch. 17
- 18 **Events reuse mechanics; expansions bring new ones.** Ch. 17
- 19 **A feature bills you twice.** Ch. 17, 19
- 20 **Communication is honest, direct, immediate, complete, and frequent.** Ch. 17
- 21 **The economy is built deep in month one, or the payers stand in an empty shop in month twelve.** Ch. 8
- 22 **Gacha belongs at the core or nowhere.** Ch. 7
- 23 **Chat is the cheapest retention feature you will ever ship.** Ch. 14
- 24 **Players want to play together, but not at the same time.** Ch. 14
- 25 **Given the choice between lifetime and monetization, take lifetime.** Ch. 12
- 26 **Where the game is fair, the money flows.** Ch. 9–13
- 27 **The world is not one market.** Ch. 15
- 28 **Position before product.** Ch. 16
- 29 **Don't follow the top ten.** Ch. 16, 18
- 30 **Your graphics belong to the evidence, not to taste.** Ch. 15, 16
- 31 **Ship at eighty percent and finish in live operations.** Ch. 16, 18
- 32 **The vision is a kill switch.** Ch. 18
- 33 **Small is a weapon; keep it sharp.** Ch. 18
- 34 **The people who shipped games make the decisions; the players deliver the verdicts.** Ch. 18
- 35 **Never sell your IP.** Ch. 16, 18
- 36 **Serve the city, and the rent arrives on its own.** Ch. 1–19