RISK

PATTERN

SCRUTINY

REWARD

issue #01

INTRODUCTION

Ever notice a mechanic in a game and wonder where it came from — or why it feels so effective?

The over-the-shoulder camera in Resident Evil 4.
Raising your shield in The Elder Scrolls.
Carrying a Companion Cube in Portal.

These aren't random ideas. They belong to design blueprints known as game design patterns.

The example above is called Vision Obstruction.

There are over 200 documented patterns — and more are discovered as games evolve.

Why spend time studying patterns?

Imagine you're designing an RPG quest.
You've chosen the title. The reward. The companion. The location.

But the core interaction — what the player actually does — isn't clear yet.

This is where patterns become powerful.

Instead of starting from nothing, you have a catalog of proven design blueprints to draw from. Escort missions. Timed objectives. Hidden information. Resource tension. Moral tradeoffs.

Patterns don't replace imagination — they focus it.
They reveal structures that have worked before and open possibilities you may not have considered.

Tools like PatternChooser and Topic Creator exist to help surface these structures and spark new directions when momentum stalls.

This issue focuses on three patterns that reveal how deliberate design decisions guide player behavior — often in ways players never consciously notice. Once you recognize them, you'll begin seeing them everywhere.

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GUARANTEED PROGRESSION

Introduction

Guaranteed Progression is a design structure where all player actions keep the game moving forward, even when the player fails.

In many games, mistakes reset progress. A missed jump, a lost battle, or a failed puzzle can send the player back to the beginning.

Guaranteed Progression avoids this reset.

Instead, every attempt contributes to eventual completion. Even setbacks reveal new paths, unlock systems, or move the player closer to success.

The player may struggle, but their effort is never wasted.

Why designers use it

Guaranteed Progression reduces frustration while preserving challenge.

Players can experiment, take risks, and learn systems without the fear of losing everything they have already accomplished.

Because progress accumulates, the player feels momentum even during difficult sequences.

The challenge shifts from *avoiding failure* to *discovering the next step forward*.

Mechanic Spotlight

Progress through failure

When the timer reaches zero, the player fails — but the system does not reset.

Instead, the seeming trap activates a hidden mechanism.

The player's failure reveals a new path forward.

The player did not succeed in their original goal, but the world changed because of their attempt.

Failure becomes part of the path forward.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Game design patterns aren't stuck or set in stone.

They're insights — insights into seeing the invisible structures that shape how players feel while they play.

When you recognize these patterns, games begin to make more sense and reveal themselves as understandable systems.

Pattern Scrutiny exists for designers who want to understand games more deeply.

Every issue explores a single anchor pattern and the others orbiting around it — similar patterns, contrasting patterns, and the hidden relationships between them. Because the more we understand games and why designers made them the way they did, the more clarity we will have when design our own games.

This is not just a journey for the reader, but a journey for me as well — one that deepens my own understanding of these design structures.

And like the patterns themselves, the exploration continues.

Meet Booska

Booska is the mascot of OutBox Games — a curious little creature who spends most of his time exploring game mechanics, discovering strange design patterns, and occasionally getting himself into trouble while chasing shiny rewards.

Yes — he's the purple detective in the bottom of this page.

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