ABSTRACT:

"SUITS, GAMES, AND COMPUTER GAMES"

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This paper discusses Bernard Suits's analysis of playing a game as "the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles" and its applicability to computer games. It begins by defending the analysis against alternatives such as Huizinga's, Caillois's, and Juul's and answering objections that the analysis doesn't fit computer games. It then proposes two emendations to Suits's analysis. The first concerns the relation between the concepts of game and play and enables the analysis to avoid certain counterexamples. The second, which is more relevant to computer games, abandons Suits's assumption that something must be either just a game or just not a game. It argues, first, that an activity can have, simultaneously, both game and aesthetic or narrative properties, where the latter are coordinate with and equally important to the former. It then suggests, more radically, that aesthetic or narrative properties can be part of a game's prelusory goal, so what the rules make more difficult is e.g. producing something beautiful; then the properties aren't just coordinate with game ones but embedded within them. The paper finds this more complex structure in role-playing games such as cowboys and Indians and in judged Olympic sports such as figure skating; it may also be present in role-playing computer games and in ones that have a strong narrative element.