

‘Good Men Don’t Need Rules* - Games, Play, and *Doctor Who*



*This quote is by the Eleventh Doctor, Matt Smith. He is not Scottish and therefore Esther's least favourite Doctor

Context: *The Giggle*

Long awaited reboot of the series.

Released just after the 60th Anniversary of Doctor Who (but billed as part of it).

Three part relaunch, in advance of 'traditional' Christmas special.

Each part showcases a specific narrative aspect of the Doctor 'Whoniverse.'

Introduces the Fifteenth Doctor Ncuti Gatwa.*

However fan favourite David Tennant** and Catherine Tate star in these episodes.

The Giggle first broadcast Saturday 9th December 6.30pm 2023.

Uses thematic aspects of games, play and toys as central plotlines.

*Scottish. Gorgeous.

**Scottish, Esther stood on his foot once and 100% blames her two friends James Bacon and Nicholas Whyte for this. Second hottest Doctor (see above). Provenance of foot – unknown.



‘You’ll find that it is a very small universe when I am angry with you*’ or, What prompted this outrage?



*The Twelfth Doctor, Peter Capaldi. He's Scottish, and so am I.

“The giggle of a mysterious puppet is driving the human race insane. When the Doctor discovers the return of the terrifying Toymaker, he faces a fight he can never win”.

(IMDB 2023)

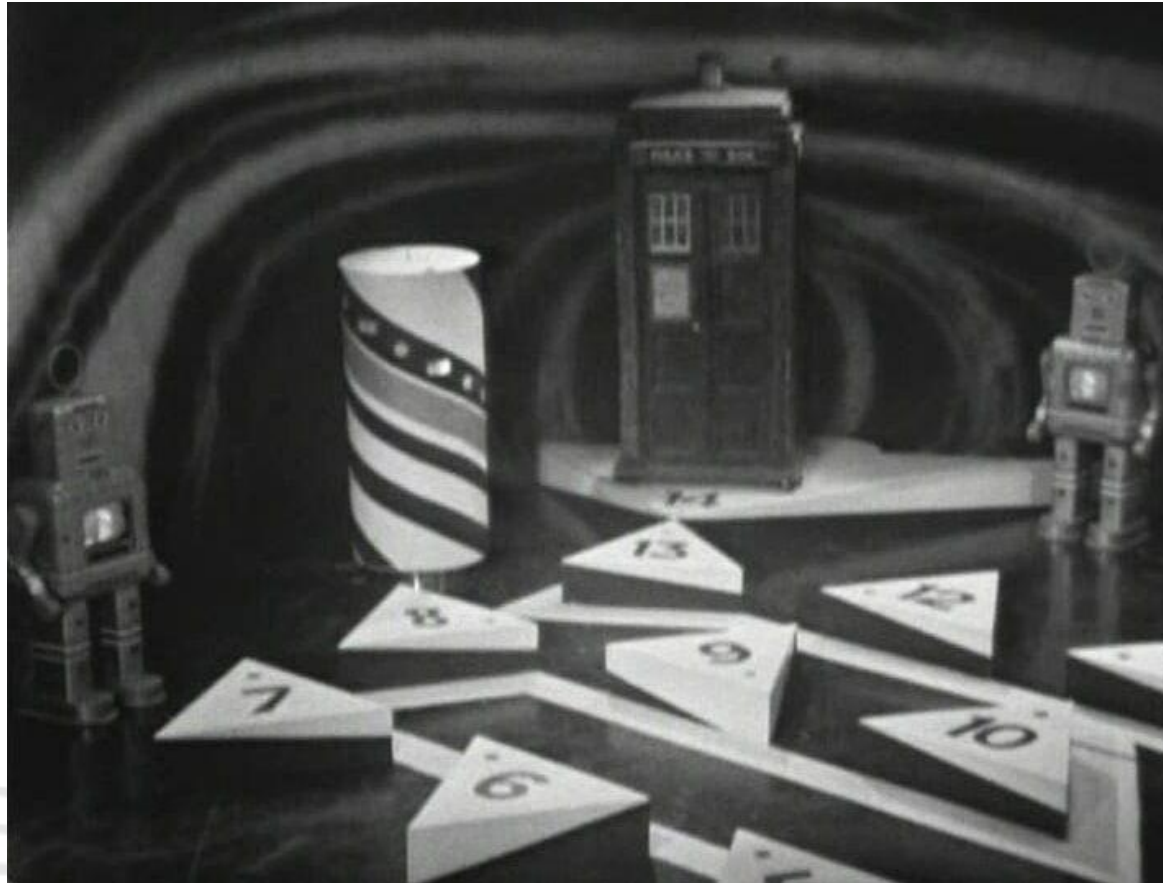


The Celestial Toymaker

2-23 April 1966 (7 episodes, Series 3 of the First Doctor*)

Lost episodes

The Doctor is invisible in at least 2 episodes so that William Hartnell* could go on holiday!



*Not Scottish but was in *Brighton Rock*, where I used to live. So he's off the hook.

What does this have to do with Games Studies?



Synopsis of Talk, or 'Why do things in order if you are a Time Lord?'

"People assume that time is a strict progression of cause to effect, but actually, from a nonlinear, non-subjective viewpoint, it's more like a big ball of wibbly-wobbly, timey-wimey... Stuff"



(The Tenth Doctor* 'Blink')

*David Tennant. Still Scottish.
His foot appears to be okay, thankfully.

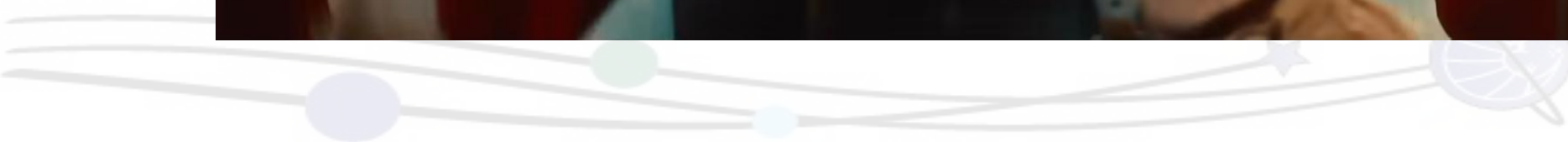
The Giggle contains a number of common misconceptions about games (and the theories within Game Studies) in the popular imagination.

Examining them gives us an insight into how Game Studies refigures and examines games in modern culture.

Players love to play!



Misconception 1 : The 'First Game'



Games are a fundamental aspect of learning and extend beyond human behaviour.
Therefore they MUST predate it.



It's Magic! (Circle)



Bears don't (normally) play with balls – amirite?



Ludic Function (Meaningful Play)

The Magic Circle*

Testing boundaries

Learning

Experience through Doing

'Ball' is not a game (yet).



*The ritual performance of the Magic Circle will commence in about 30 seconds! You have been warned.

History: The First Games
Senet 3300 – 3700 BCE

(still almost certainly not the first game, but the first one we have documentation of)



Nefertari plays Senet in her underwear
1295–1255 BCE



Amenhotep's Senet set
1390–1353 BCE

Honorable Mention (in the episode) Gyan Chaupar (13th Century)



Misconception 2: Games = Play



The Grasshopper - Bernard Suits



* 'At times tedious, hilarious and pretentious'

Games must be inefficient

Play is voluntary in a game

Games contain rules, and players accept those rules



* You have all been marked unsafe from the Hero's Journey

‘Play is Voluntary’ (said no one trapped in a TV episode game, ever)



Games are inherently tied to play



We can absolutely play without being part of a game, and we often do.

Misconception (Best of) Three: 'Per the rules of the game*'



*The Fourteenth Doctor, also David Tennant. Hiding his foot, I see!

‘Rules are a crucial part of games. Rules provide the structure out of which play emerges, by delimiting what the player can or cannot do’

(Salen and Zimmerman, 2003:80)



Rules need to be agreed

Rules are stated before the game starts

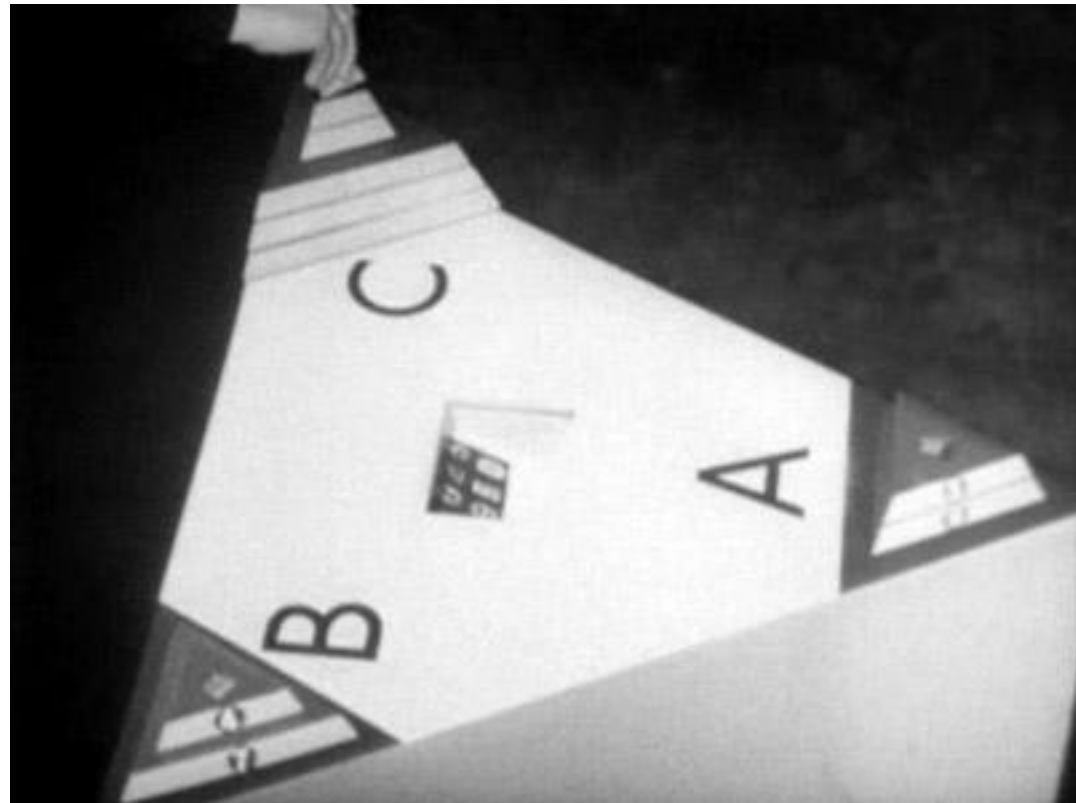
Changing the rules in the middle is usually considered ‘cheating’ (a whole other lecture!!!)

Misconception Four: Is it Actually A Game?



“The trilogic game. A game for the mind, Doctor, the developed mind. Difficult for the practiced mind. Dangerous for the mind that has become old, lazy, or weak.”

(The Toymaker, 1966)



‘Technically... not a game’

RADIO TIMES March 31, 1968 5

CONTINUING **Saturday**

DR. WHO plays the Trilogic Game


1 5.50 We think of a game as something that provides relaxation, amusement, fun: but in the latest *Dr. Who* adventure beginning today, the Doctor and his companions come up against a man who considers games in a very different light. To the Celestial Toymaker, a game is a means of dominating people and making them his playthings.

In this new story Steven (**Peter Purves**) and Dodo (**Jackie Lane**) are faced with a number of games played in competition with the Toymaker's subjects. Doctor Who himself (**William Hartnell**) faces the dreaded Toymaker (**Michael Gough**) in a life-or-death battle of wits: the Trilogic Game.

The Trilogic Game is played on a triangular board with three or more counters of different sizes.

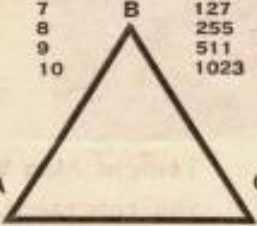
The object of the game is to move the pile of counters from one corner of the triangle so that they end up in the same piled sequence in one of the other corners—for example, from A to C in our diagram. Only one counter can be moved at a time, a larger counter can never be placed on a smaller one, and the game must be completed within a fixed number of moves (see the list on the right).

In the story Dr. Who plays with ten counters.



The Counter Moves

Number of Counters	Number of Moves
3	7
4	15
5	31
6	63
7	127
8	255
9	511
10	1023



REDACTED Games

Michael Gough in today's new adventure.

*I'm fairly sure that WH is looking pissy here because the Trilogic Game is NOT A GAME, and because these episodes are notoriously racist.

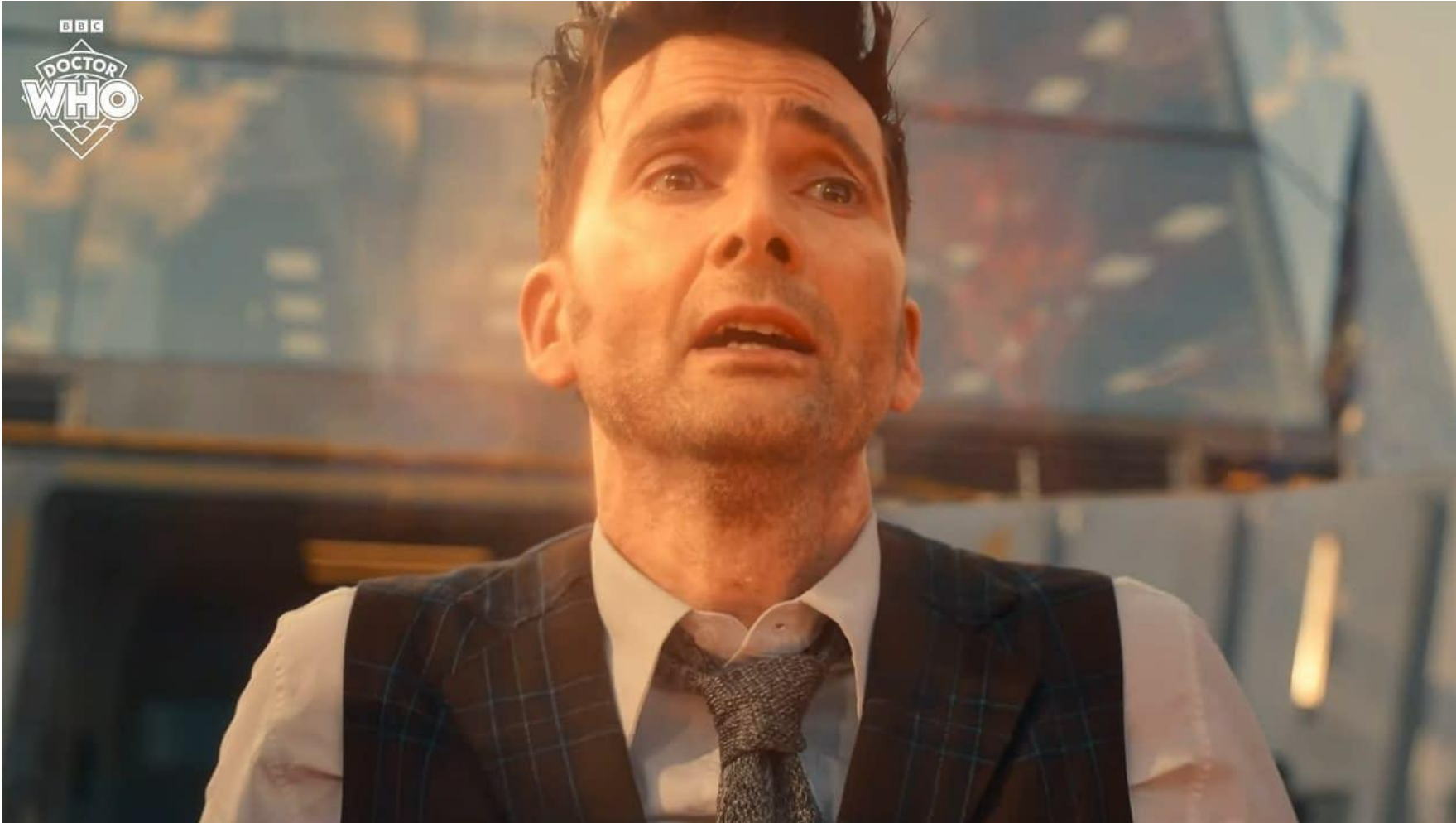
The Trilogic Game Redux: Towers of Hanoi



...We should be cautious...



Games are FUN (said no one in a Doctor Who episode being forced to play for their lives, ever)*



**

*It's true, no Doctors said this
** Is he expressing delayed chiropractic torment?

Common Trope 1: Games Make You Smart!



The Seventh Seal, 1957

'In Chess, the Pawns go First'*



*Eric Lehnsherr (not a Doctor, I checked)

Being Smart is Relative to Design



In *Marco Polo* (1964/1984/2020), the Doctor plays repeated games of chess against Marco. Finally however, he switches to backgammon, and loses the TARDIS in a bet as a result.

Inversion – ‘a genius pretending to be stupid’

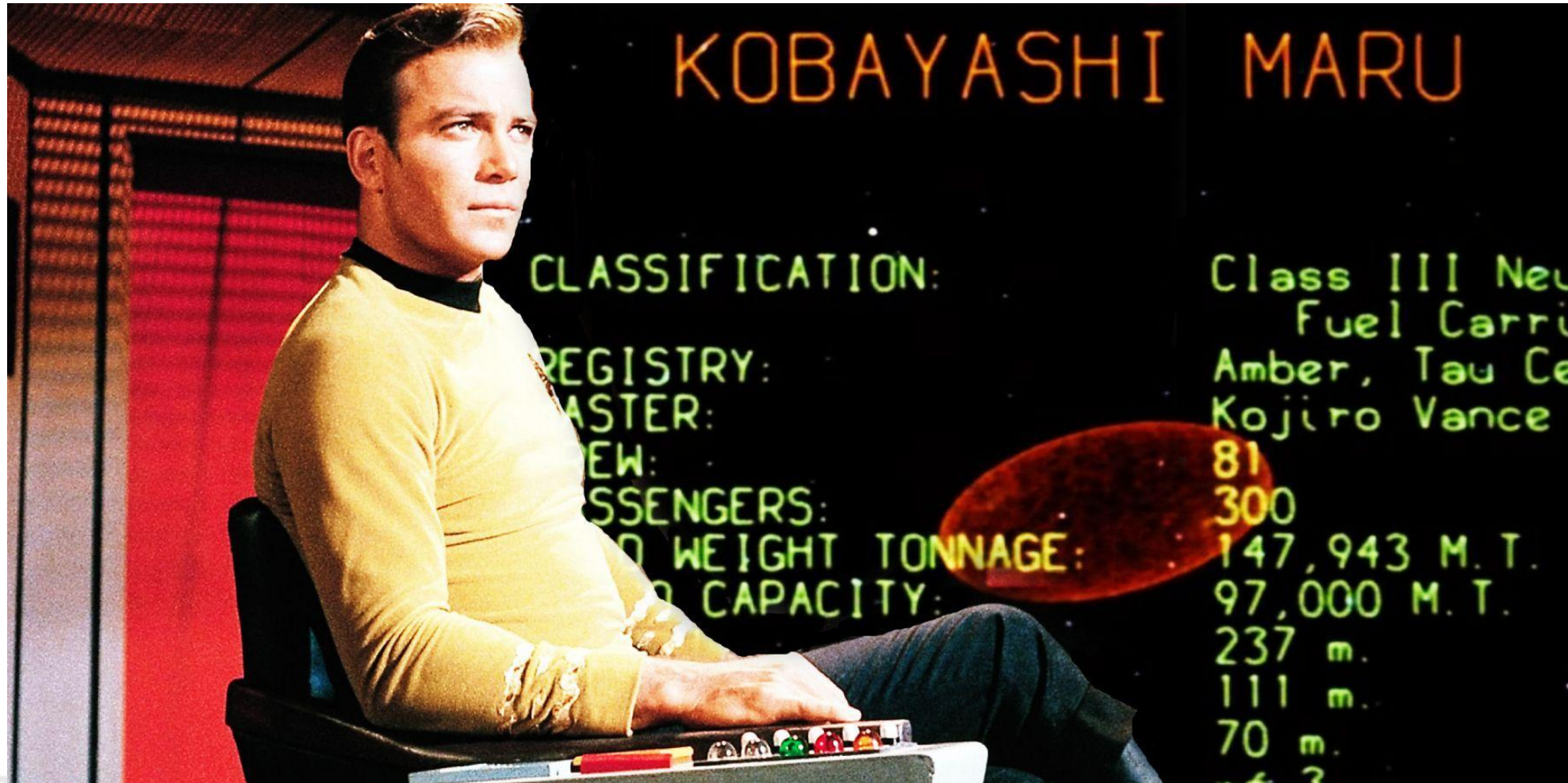
The three tenets of the BBC (not of David)

A familiar game, rather than a historically accurate game, becomes the signifier



Recently I found out that this set of UR was discovered by Sir Leonard Woolley, who was a friend of Agatha Christie, and a character in *Murder in Mesopotamia*!

Common Trope Two: Villains Cheat, Heroes Bend the Rules



Playing Ball



Bi-Generation



Conclusion - Critical Play

A means for creative expression

Instruments for conceptual thinking

Tools for social change

