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Gods of Death Love Apples: Rules, Strategy and Deceit in 'Death Note'

It is a mistake to construe rulemaking as a narrow, restrictive use of power. Rules do more than impose limits, they set agendas, define a field of play and are constitutive of practice. Significantly they can also be used in strategies of deception.

In the manga 'Death Note' supernatural metaphors are used to explore strategic rule practices. Governed by an extensive set of rules, the Death Note is a book in which the Shinigami (gods of death) write the names of people who are about to die. When one of these books is placed into the hands of a mortal, teenage sociopath Light Yagami, the Death Note and its rules become tools he exploits for his own agenda.

Light's use of the Death Note results in mysterious deaths which brings his actions to the attention of maverick genius known as 'L'. L seeks to catch Light, in part by anticipating the rule set from the patterns of the deaths. In counter move, Light begins to fabricate his own rules, creating a deceptive field of rule engagement where both of the story's protagonists double-guess their rival's moves based on the apparently regulated nature of their conduct.