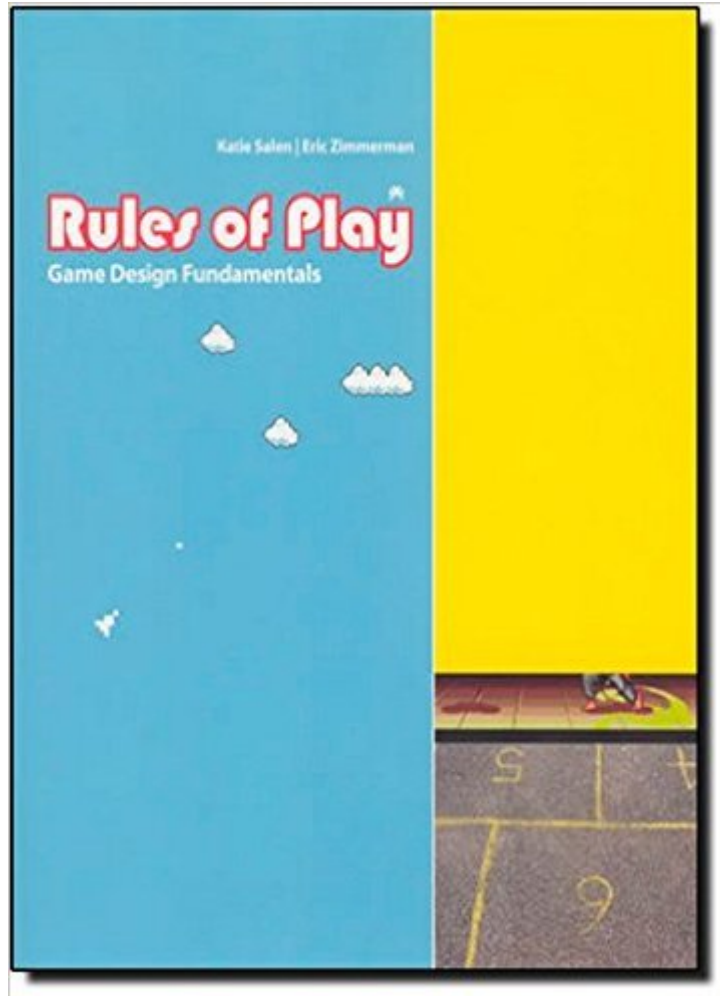# Rules Of Play: Game Design Fundamentals (MIT Press)

Synopsis

As pop culture, games are as important as film or television -- but game design has yet to develop a theoretical framework or critical vocabulary. In Rules of Play Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman present a much-needed primer for this emerging field. They offer a unified model for looking at all kinds of games, from board games and sports to computer and video games. As active participants in game culture, the authors have written Rules of Play as a catalyst for innovation, filled with new concepts, strategies, and methodologies for creating and understanding games. Building an aesthetics of interactive systems, Salen and Zimmerman define core concepts like "play," "design," and "interactivity." They look at games through a series of eighteen "game design schemas," or conceptual frameworks, including games as systems of emergence and information, as contexts for social play, as a storytelling medium, and as sites of cultural resistance.Written for game scholars, game developers, and interactive designers, Rules of Play is a textbook, reference book, and theoretical guide. It is the first comprehensive attempt to establish a solid theoretical framework for the emerging discipline of game design.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

There are very few books about the theory of game design. Most of the books which purport to be about game design theory have titles like _Game Design: Theory and Practice_ [Richard Rouse III: 2001], and focus much more on the latter than the former, usually in the context of commercial

computer games. The exceptions to this rule generally approach the subject of game design theory from a particular perspective, e.g., as a communication method or "future's language." [Duke: 1974] So when _Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals_ (by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman) was published by MIT Press in 2004, I took immediate interest.The book largely lived up to expectations. Weighing in at a hefty 672 pages of relatively small type, this textbook-format tome is, as the title might suggest, heavy on game design theory but light on practice. This makes it a excellent complement to the established game design literature.Structurally, the book is fairly straightforward and is divided into four major sections: Core Concepts, Rules, Play, and Culture, each of which is capped by an essay or a game design by an established game designer written especially for this volume.The first section (together with two brief chapters preceeding it) discusses necessary background ideas, defining important terms and presenting concepts to be built upon later. Besides preparing the reader for the next 500 pages, it's in this section that the authors accomplish one of their primary goals of the book: creating a game design vocabulary.

First, let me say that if you want to learn to use a technology like DirectX, OpenGL, C++, or Your Favorite Game Engine to build a computer game, this is absolutely not the book for you. Most of its examples don't even come from computer games, although the authors are fully aware of games like Warcraft and Unreal Tournament.This is a book about *fundamentals of gameplay*, independent of any particular physical realization. It addresses the deep, underlying elements of designing an engaging, effective game, drawing on a variety of social and technical fields. The first unit focuses on defining the properties of effective games and the different "frames" or viewpoints from which they focus on gameplay. The rest of the book focuses on describing games from these viewpoints in a variety of ways by tying them into concepts used in other fields such as probability and semiotics. While one might expect such a drawing together of disparate elements to result in an wandering mishmash, the authors' continuous focus on the application of game design keeps this from occurring.As for audience, this book does not require a background in mathematics, computer science, sociology, or any of the other areas it draws from; except for an assumed knowledge of various well-known games, it is self-contained. In fact, those with background in these areas may wish to skip a few sections that cover their basics. Just about anyone can read this book and get a lot out of it, although it is a deep treatment and requires careful thought to get the most out of it. Not a quick pleasure read.It also evidently had a large budget, because it includes a variety of fitting photographs, commissioned games for the book to use, and a commissioned essay.

(NOTE: This is the final review of the book. I wrote preliminary reviews which have since been cleaned up by ; unfortunately it looks like they left my negative review that was submitted to balance my multiple positive reviews.)The SummaryThis is the BEST BOOK ON BOARD GAME DESIGN that I have read and I have read many! The book is well written, it is thorough in its analysis, has references and bibliographies that allow you to explore the authors' research yourself. I had high expectations for this book and that normally leads to being a little disappointed, but this book not only met my high expectations but actually exceeded them! This book isn't for the impatient programmer who just wants to know how to write the next First Person Shooter, or the person who wants to be told some quick methods to come up with new ideas for games. This is for the serious student who wants to really understand game design and what it truly means to design immersive, balanced and compelling game play.I have been reading and researching game design for over 10 years now. I have been writing computer games for over 20 years. Over the last 4 years I have been researching board games, since discovering the European board games that have been doing so well across the pond, I got hooked and realized that these games were the embodiment of great game design. I decided that to become better at designing computer games I should learn what makes games like Settler's of Catan and Carcassonne so compelling. So for the last few years I have been exploring the theory of game design. Since there wasn't much out on board game design specifically, I read newsgroups, web site articles and the plethora of books coming out on computer game design.

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