



Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals

Katie Salen , Eric Zimmerman

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An impassioned look at games and game design that offers the most ambitious framework for understanding them to date.

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.

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From Reader Review Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals for online ebook

stephen k says

I did a lot of skimming here. The authors don't begin to understand how video games differ from traditional games or how to talk about them as the remarkably novel creation that they are. As a result, they write almost entirely about traditional games and the video games that closely resemble them. Most of this book could have been written before video games were ever invented, which shows how little they focus on how they are actually unique. If you're interested in video games as sets of limiting rules that provoke competition, this could be the book for you, but I don't think that's a subject worth spending time on. Hopefully some of the references they provided will be more interesting.

Ali Akhavan says

Some chapters were not well structured; however, the book gave lots of insights about games. Magic circle and lusory attitude were new to me. For a game designer, considering different types of rules in games such as constitutive, operational, and implicit rules are critical in designing a meaningful game. Last but not least, enjoy playing games :)

Maximilian says

It basically just says that games are systems and over. Flipping to a random page, here's an example: "It is clear that games are systems and that complexity and emergence affect meaningful play." Basically every sentence is like this, too abstract to mean anything. Absolutely horribly written and unpleasant to read. The authors are pretentious and have nothing actually to say. You WILL get a headache reading this; you WON'T ever be able to apply any of it.

It focuses a huge amount on giving "definitions" for things. In fact, it not only gives you the definition, but it gives you multiple definitions to allow you to follow the other's reasoning until he concludes, "yeah so if you just look at all these definitions that's the basic flavor of it." Oh yeah and usually the "definition" has the word "system" in it.

Don't buy this book.

Graham Herrli says

This dry, yet thorough, book draws upon research and theory in sundry fields (such as cybernetics, probability, and systems theory) to develop a thorough theory of game design as a field of its own.

One thing this book does both repeatedly and well is to describe a fundamental game structure and then suggest a modification of this structure that inspires thoughts of entire games based upon that tweak. For

example, after describing the formal properties of poker rules, they suggest that a new game could be made by using something other than cards while following the same rules (p. 121). In *Reality is Broken*, Jane McGonigal describes just such a game: she designed a version of poker that uses tombstones instead of cards.

Salen and Zimmerman consider designing for the interactivity of a game on three levels: rules (game pieces and their interactions), gameplay (players and their interactions), and culture (interactions between the outside world and the game). This structure moves them from considering the formal structure of games, through the experience they create, to how they interplay with their environment.

This book also contains commissioned writings from such big names as Richard Garfield and Reiner Knizia about their design processes.

Some things this book says are:
(view spoiler)

Valery says

Good book on theory of game design

Catherine says

Was a guinea pig for this book in several grad school classes. I turned out pretty OK!

Good intro to basic game design principles and thinkers. You can probably get away with reading chapter summaries, though, if you have any experience with game production, design, or critical thinking in general.

Dan Slimmon says

It's clear that the authors are extremely well read. The book is jam packed with different conceptual frames in which to place games. But it never really comes together into a coherent book. It feels more like a brain dump (albeit of two huge brains).

There were several really strong ideas that I thought could've been books, or units, to themselves. In particular, the idea of games as systems of *metacommunication* (how we signify what is play and what is not) strikes me as fascinating and rich. The chapter on *narrative* was also very good: the distinction between what games represent and how games themselves are represented is a powerful one.

The authors don't seem to understand information theory very well. I found it disappointing that such a germane topic received only one brief and confusing chapter.

Overall, I thought this book lacked focus. I have no doubt that the authors could write several excellent books on games between them if they stuck to more circumscribed areas of investigation.

Tony says

I had to get this through Interlibrary Loan, so I didn't finish it, but at about the half-way mark it was interesting. There's been a lot of talk about games as art recently, and the need for a critical language for them, and I think this is a good start. A lot of the concepts are perhaps over-done, with common sense stuff being spelled out in complex language, which can become tedious after a while. Still, there're a lot of interesting ideas in this book which are just now coming into consideration when creating and critiquing games. I would say that if you're into game design at all then this would be a book to consider. It covers both digital and physical games, going more towards the fundamentals of games as opposed to the specifics of a genre.

Parham Mohammadikalhori says

Hi guys.

I'm nob and I just read 4 chapters. still don't know I'm gonna continue it or not but to be honest is a little bit deep for someone who is new in this field. It's like you can not passing by a paragraph without stop and thinking about it that's why it takes too much time from me.

It's amazed me from providing different conceptual aspects .

I think, It helps me to get familiar with simple definitions which can mean more and precept them better.be honest I had feeling like I didn't know many simple definitions which is really important!

Plus sometimes I feel like this book is so old.

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Apart from Book! Game designer is a person who would like to be GOD but behind certain in his/her next life :D Joking ;)

Carlos Domínguez says

It is a heavy, extensive and a daunting but good entry point for game design basics.

This book dissects game design from the inside out. From the formal, mathematical, logical approach all the way up to the cultural side, and it's quite an eye opening journey.

Because of this, the reader must be aware that the book focuses more on breadth than depth, but again, that's good as it's set to be a starting point for game design in general and seeks to help the reader to establish a formal game design vocabulary.

It's also useful to know that the information is mostly theoretical, but you'll always find some examples of commissioned games specifically designed for each of the major sections that will link theoretic and empiric knowledge.

As a whole I think it's a must read for game design enthusiasts, it pours and shows the knowledge, the experience and love for the profession from both authors and it will also be a door to other fantastic authors and design philosophies.

Aaron says

Reading this made me realize that I'm mostly interested in game design as a hobbyist. That being said, I think this is probably the most complete textbook available on the subject and is really ahead of its time with the range of topics it covers. My main complaint is that most of the case studies are on really boring games that I doubt most readers have played. It gets pedantic at times, but most writing in academia does.

Noah says

An extensive and in-depth study on game design. The basic format is how games fit into different schema and how to design games by thinking about all the different possible ways to look at games. Katie Salen and Aaron Zimmerman use a plethora of games from classic card games to current (at the time this was written) games to illustrate their points. There are also four games made specifically for this book that are included in the book. Many parts are very interesting, but it can get dry at points. The authors also tend to repeat themselves quite often. The points they repeat are quite important, but it can get a little redundant.

Paula G. says

mixed feelings pero no os voy a dar la turra por aquí

Eduardo Omine says

I read the first "unit" and skimmed through the rest of this book. The content is actually good, but the text being set in a small sans-serif typeface makes it hard to read.

Matt says

The pretentious forward was the opening number in a scattergun approach to the topic that just felt so shallow compared to discussions you might hear on The Forge or Extra Credits or EnWorld or really anywhere that gaming fanatics gather to discuss theory. A dreary dull text that will be of no interest to anyone that would be interested in reading it, written by dreary dull academics that haven't a clue really what they are talking about and know less about game design than the average experienced GM.

The only somewhat redeeming portion of the book were the four games the writer had asked prominent game designers to design for the book. But perhaps the book would have been a lot less dull and a lot more insightful if the designers had also been allowed to write the book. Those that can, should also be teaching.
