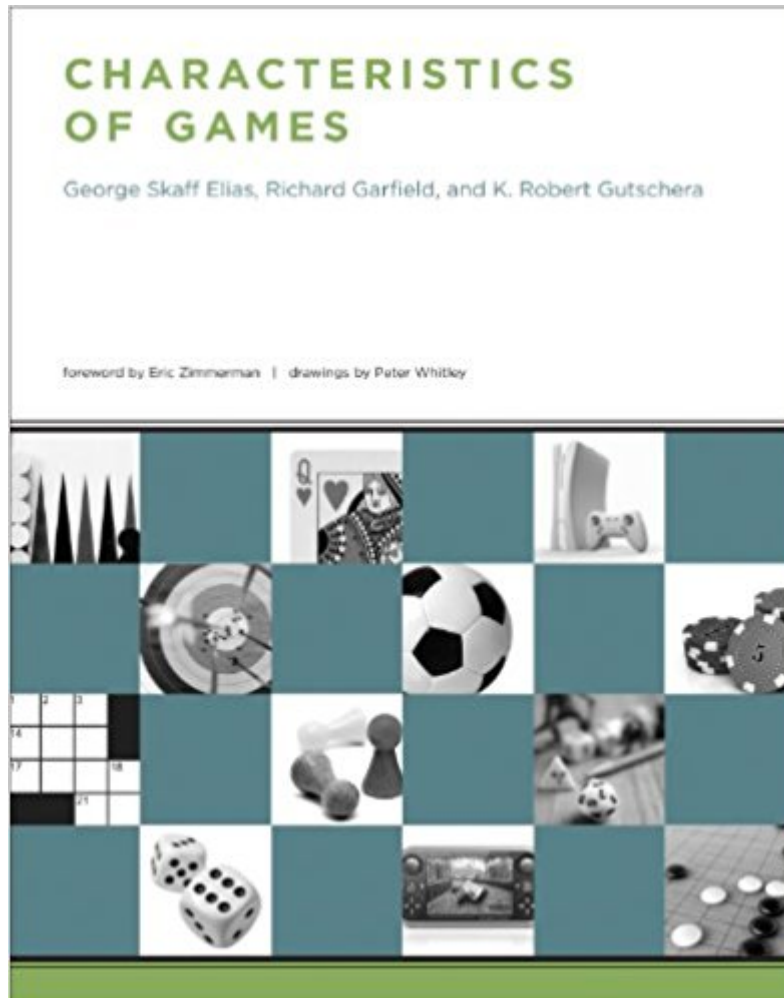




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Characteristics Of Games (MIT Press)



Synopsis

Characteristics of Games offers a new way to understand games: by focusing on certain traits -- including number of players, rules, degrees of luck and skill needed, and reward/effort ratio -- and using these characteristics as basic points of comparison and analysis. These issues are often discussed by game players and designers but seldom written about in any formal way. This book fills that gap. By emphasizing these player-centric basic concepts, the book provides a framework for game analysis from the viewpoint of a game designer. The book shows what all genres of games -- board games, card games, computer games, and sports -- have to teach each other. Today's game designers may find solutions to design problems when they look at classic games that have evolved over years of playing. Characteristics of Games -- written by three of the most prominent game designers working today -- will serve as an essential reference for game designers and game players curious about the inner workings of games. It includes exercises (which can also serve as the basis for discussions) and examples chosen from a wide variety of games. There are occasional mathematical digressions, but these can be skipped with no loss of continuity. Appendixes offer supplementary material, including a brief survey of the two main branches of mathematical game theory and a descriptive listing of each game referred to in the text.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Most of the academic literature on games is either mathematical, focusing on finding optimal strategies, or sociological, focusing on the role that games play in human society. Characteristics of Games is neither. Its intended audience is the community of game critics and game designers—people who have studied hundreds of games closely and are faced with the task of evaluating them and determining what would make them better. Even though games have existed throughout human history, our vocabulary for discussing games is surprisingly primitive.

Characteristics of Games plugs this gap by introducing a powerful set of concepts for thinking about, analyzing, and discussing games. As an example, consider the common misconception that a game is simply a set of rules. Though it is undeniable that the rules of a game are absolutely fundamental, they do not by themselves determine everything about the game. How seriously the players attempt to win, how much work it takes to become an expert, and even how quickly the game is played depend more on the community of players of the game than on the rules themselves.

Characteristics of Games provides the vocabulary for this distinction by introducing the adjective "agential" for the aspects that are player-dependent and the adjective "systemic" for the aspects that are not and depend only on the structure and rules of the game itself. Armed with this distinction, we are immediately better equipped to analyze a question such as, "Is poker a game of skill?" Naively, most people assume that the answer to this question depends only on the rules of poker; i.e., they assume that skill is a systemic characteristic of a game. However, the authors argue that skill is largely agential.

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