

The World of *Sudoku*

By Valérie Lubrez

			1			7	4	
	5			9			3	2
		6	7			9		
4			8					
	2						1	
					9			5
		4			7	3		
7	3			2			6	
	6	5			4			

Let me introduce you to the world of *Sudoku*. First of all, I will define what *Sudoku* is, secondly, we will learn how to play it and, finally, I will try to convince you to enter the fascinating world of *Sudoku*.

So what on earth is *Sudoku*? Is it a new Thai method of relaxation, a Japanese management training school or a Japanese game?

You've guessed it: it's a Japanese game. *Sudoku* is a number game. Number games were invented a thousand years ago by the Chinese. Little by little, these games spread to other cultures.

In 1979, Dell Magazines, New York, published a puzzle called *Number Place*. This puzzle was introduced in Japan in 1984 by the publisher Nikoli. They called it *Suuji wa dokushin ni kagiru*, which means 'the numbers must be single' or 'the numbers must occur only once'. Nowadays, we are lucky because the name has been shortened to *Sudoku*, which is far easier to pronounce and remember!

Sudoku reached Europe thanks to Wayne Gould, who saw the game in a Tokyo bookshop in 1997. He promoted *Sudoku* to *The Times* in England, which launched it last year, in November 2004. Since then, there has been a *Sudoku* craze in the whole wide world.

But what are the rules of *Sudoku*? As I told you before, *Sudoku* is a number puzzle. It is a nine-by-nine grid divided into nine three-by-three subgrids. Some of the cells are filled with numbers, but most are empty.

There is only one correct solution, but many ways to reach it. The basic rules for the solution of a *Sudoku* are simple. In each row, column and subgrid, the numbers may occur only once. You have to place numbers 1 to 9 in each row, in each column, and in each subgrid.

There are three different levels of difficulty: beginner, intermediate and professional, so you can choose the one you prefer. [I choose professional.] Once you feel comfortable with a level, you can decide to move on to the next level.

You can usually find the solution at the end of the book or magazine, which is useful if you get stuck or lose your patience. But here are a couple of tips to avoid peeping at the solution:

- 1) You can write down all the possible numbers you think could correspond to a cell and erase them as you draw conclusions from other cells.
- 2) You can also write a number on a cell if and only if no other numbers can be inserted into this cell. Otherwise, why would *Sudoku* be called 'the number must be single'?

If I haven't convinced you yet, let me give you three more reasons to get into *Sudoku*:

- 1) *Sudoku* is an easy way to entertain yourself. You just have to know how to count up to nine, which I think all who are reading this article can do!
- 2) You can bring the game with you everywhere thanks to its practical size: a little booklet. But don't forget a pencil and a rubber!
- 3) If you, like me, spend a great deal of time in public transport or if your friends often turn up late, like mine, *Sudoku* is a wonderful way to wait without even being aware of it.

In short, if you want to have fun, enjoy your time or become a more patient person, *Sudoku* is perfect for you. I look forward to reading your comments in the Weekly Letter forum. And why don't you give the *Sudoku* of the picture above a try?

SOURCE: Martínez Roca, *El auténtico SUDOKU*. MR Ediciones, 2005.