



The well-played game: A player's philosophy

By Bernard De Koven

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In *The Well-Played Game*, games guru Bernard De Koven explores the interaction of play and games, offering players -- as well as game designers, educators, and scholars -- a guide to how games work. De Koven's classic treatise on how human beings play together, first published in 1978, investigates many issues newly resonant in the era of video and computer games, including social gameplay and player modification. The digital game industry, now moving beyond its emphasis on graphic techniques to focus on player interaction, has much to learn from *The Well-Played Game*.

De Koven explains that when players congratulate each other on a "well-played" game, they are expressing a unique and profound synthesis that combines the concepts of play (with its associations of playfulness and fun) and game (with its associations of rule-following). This, he tells us, yields a larger concept: the experience and expression of excellence. De Koven -- affectionately and appreciatively hailed by Eric Zimmerman as "our shaman of play" -- explores the experience of a well-played game, how we share it, and how we can experience it again; issues of cheating, fairness, keeping score, changing old games (why not change the rules in pursuit of new ways to play?), and making up new games; playing for keeps; and winning. His book belongs on the bookshelves of players who want to find a game in which they can play well, who are looking for others with whom they can play well, and who have discovered the relationship between the well-played game and the well-lived life.

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Editorial Review

Review

This is one of the most brilliant and overlooked books on games to date. For anyone interested in playing, studying, designing, or writing about games, this should be a perennial and oft-referenced bookshelf companion.

(Celia Pearce, author of *Communities of Play*)

The Well-Played Game focuses on a kind of fun that is unfortunately not normally associated with games, and certainly not with sports. I like to think of it as 'kindly fun' -- like the fun that families share when they are enjoying each other, or the fun that children share with each other when they are feeling safe and free from supervision. The book is remarkable, because it demonstrates that kindly fun is not only something that people experience, but something that can be nurtured and extended throughout an entire community.

(Brian Sutton-Smith, author of *The Ambiguity of Play*)

In a world filled with technologies and devices devoted to diversion, we need this very human reminder of what really matters in games: how we are able to challenge, support, and discover each other through play, and to create communities of fun that can last a single round or many generations.

(Tracy Fullerton, author of *Game Design Workshop: A Playcentric Approach to Creating Innovative Games*, 2nd Edition)

Play is fascinating, especially when shown to us through the delicate and generous gaze of this seasoned player. To De Koven, play is an act of imagination, generosity, delight, danger, and to risk sounding cheesy, love. From the most generous spirit the game industry has ever witnessed, read this moving meditation on being a genuine human being.

(Mary Flanagan, author of *Critical Play*)

...this book is a must-read for game designers and game players who may wish to tweak the games they play to make playing more rewarding. I would go even further. Because it is so delightful to read, I recommend it to anyone who likes a thought-provoking, intellectual journal. The writing style is deceptively simple. As you read, you wonder to yourself, "Can it really be this easy?" But don't kid yourself; this is a book that can be read again and again for new insights each time.

(*Computing Reviews*)

This book is important. If you have not read it, read it. If you already have, browse it and you will almost certainly find small details and aspects of play and games that you already knew but failed to take into account. And, more importantly, please rewrite this book in a different tone, in a different format, make

YouTube videos about some of its ideas, create web comics about them, share the stories with your students, use its anecdotes in your own work. That is the way that classics are supposed to be dealt with.

(Gonzalo Frasca *Game Studies*)

About the Author

Bernard De Koven is a game designer and theorist of fun. He was a codirector of the New Games Foundation and a founder of the Games Preserve. He is the author of *Junkyard Sports* and the creator of the website deepfun.com.

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