

sionals, practitioners, and students new to the area of playground construction and safety. When revising this handbook, the authors might want to spell out each organization, agency, and commission, in full at the beginning of each chapter. Also, although the authors do briefly mention “natural play areas” in their first chapter, they fail to discuss the ongoing debate regarding the negative impact that emphasizing playground safety may have on a child’s ability to engage in spontaneous still spurs, at least in some individuals, thoughts of “mindless entertainment” that is primarily “for kids,” the current scientific consensus holds that video games, in fact, can be incredibly powerful tools, with a wide range of applications beyond entertainment. Indeed, today there are already video games that train individu-

als to perform better such difficult and complex jobs such as endoscopic surgery; to rehabilitate medical patients who have visual, cognitive, and motor deficits; to teach children scholastic content; and to spur interest in solving major societal problems. And in retrospect, these various functions may not be surprising. After all, if video game developers could become adept at teaching players to “rescue a princess” or “find a hidden treasure” more effectively, it would stand to reason that they could also become adept at teaching players’ other skills or knowledge.

But Karen Schrier’s *Knowledge Games: How Playing Games Can Solve Problems, Create Insight, and Make Change* explores an emerging use for video games that might be much more unexpected. Namely, in knowledge games the goal is not to convey knowledge or teach skills to players. Instead, the goal is for the players to actually produce knowledge. Take for example, *Foldit*, a game discussed in detail in the book. In this game, players attempt to construct solutions for real-life, and currently unsolved, protein-folding problems. By harnessing the brainpower of a large player base, *Foldit* has been able to advance our understanding of protein folding more than a small group of researchers would have.

Knowledge Games explores the fact that the best knowledge games harness what can be thought of as three separate sources of power. The first, as discussed, is the power of video games to motivate achievement and spur interest in solving problems. The second is the power of crowds, or in this case “crowd sourcing,” to use groups of individuals to complete tasks that none of the individuals could

have accomplished alone. And the third source of power is the citizen-scientist movement characterized by the desire of ordinary individuals to contribute to scientific knowledge.

In all, the book provides thoughtful analysis of knowledge games. It asks and examines what constitutes a knowledge game in the first place (this is a new enough domain to still lack consensus on what makes something a knowledge game)? It also explores the scientific knowledge that effective knowledge games build upon or should build upon. For example, there is a great deal of work on how commercial video games motivate players and what they offer that should be included in a knowledge game to produce maximum efficacy. The book also analyzes key questions that will increasingly arise as knowledge games become more common, such as the possibility that for-profit entities could use such games as a de facto source of free labor. And because these points are couched in terms of currently successful (or sometimes less successful) knowledge games, issues that might otherwise feel very abstract are made much more concrete.

The book may be a challenge for individuals who are not well versed in gaming, because it commonly makes allusions to popular commercial video games such as *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, *League of Legends*, *World of Warcraft*, *Bioshock*, and *Candy Crush*. And readers may be frustrated that the book seems, in some passages, to spend far more time posing questions than providing answers. Indeed, the rhetorical device of employing a long series of questions as a method to introduce or motivate concepts seems overused throughout the

book, even if it reflects a particular honesty regarding the current state of the field. We simply find it not surprising that given how new knowledge games are as a concept, we scientists would have more questions than we do answers. And after all, the first step to finding interesting answers is asking the right questions.

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Moral Combat: Why the War on Violent Video Games Is Wrong

Patrick M. Markey and Christopher Ferguson

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The concept of moral panic is a fascinating and scintillating one for scholars, because it speaks to the unfortunate, albeit inextricable, interaction between society and social science. Scholarship generally intends to help us better understand the world around us, but we usually prefer scholarship aimed at risk identification and aversion. Such preferences grow even stronger in the face of salient social and cultural flashpoints—for example, the sudden shift in funding towards auto-immunodeficiency (AIDS) research after the disease was contracted by American teenager Ryan White, one of the first nonhomosexuals to die from the disease in the 1980s, or the September 11 terrorist attacks, which led to a focus on identifying and stopping terrorist threats. Indeed, in *Moral Combat*,