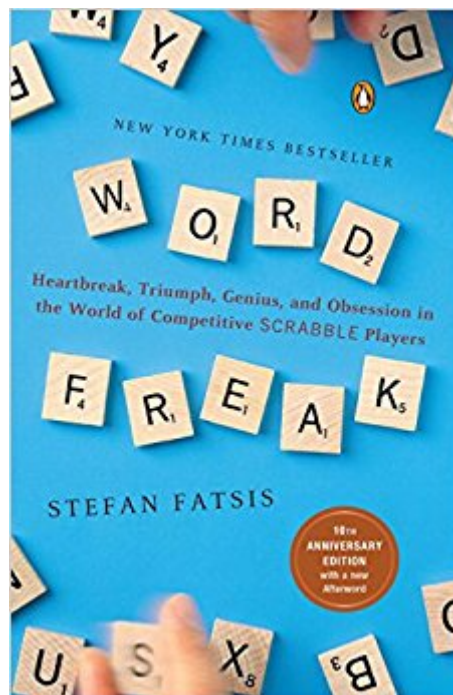




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Word Freak: Heartbreak, Triumph, Genius, And Obsession In The World Of Competitive Scrabble Players



Synopsis

Scrabble may be truly called America's game. But for every group of "living-room players" there is someone who is "at one with the board." In *Word Freak*, Stefan Fatsis introduces readers to those few, exploring the underground world of colorful characters for which the Scrabble game is life-playing competitively in tournaments across the country. It is also the story of how the Scrabble game was invented by an unemployed architect during the Great Depression and how it has grown into the hugely successful, challenging, and beloved game it is today. Along the way, Fatsis chronicles his own obsession with the game and his development as a player from novice to expert. More than a book about hardcore Scrabble players, *Word Freak* is also an examination of notions of brilliance, memory, language, competition, and the mind that celebrates the uncanny creative powers in us all. A Book Sense 76 pick.

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Customer Reviews

Fatsis spent time with avid scrabble players. Here are his observations. He relates through several dozen loosely linked narrations how the game has been transformed since the 1950s into a community that is strangely both exotic and familiar. This witty book celebrates scrabble as our national mental pastime. Everyone who likes the game will find her or himself in these pages. With a fresh writing style, he shares a huge amount of information about the way the game is seriously (if not addictively) played without the reader feeling burdened. (Did you know that in any random selection of 7 tiles, there is a 12% chance of a seven letter word appearing?) Fatsis delves in an

anthropological way into the life styles of noted participants in the competitive game. Some of these people are poster children for the saying that you either succeed in art or in life but not in both. The author knows how to approach even the most difficult personalities with wit and compassion. He takes the reader to visit lonely geniuses in ill-kept apartments, clubs in New York City which spawned top competitors, competitions in Reno and elsewhere. He recounts the tussles between player associations and the manufacturers as unhappy, comical scenes from a lifelong dysfunctional marriage. Fatsis is, I take it, a sports writer for the Wall Street Journal, and you should take that as an indication he knows how to bridge chasms. Lurking underneath the surface of his prose, I sense a belief in the power of play to discover value in our lives, and what more exquisite play is there but with words? Is it coincidental that during the decades of scrabble's dominance as a pastime, one of our leading poets, James Merrill, used a Ouija board to help compose poems?

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