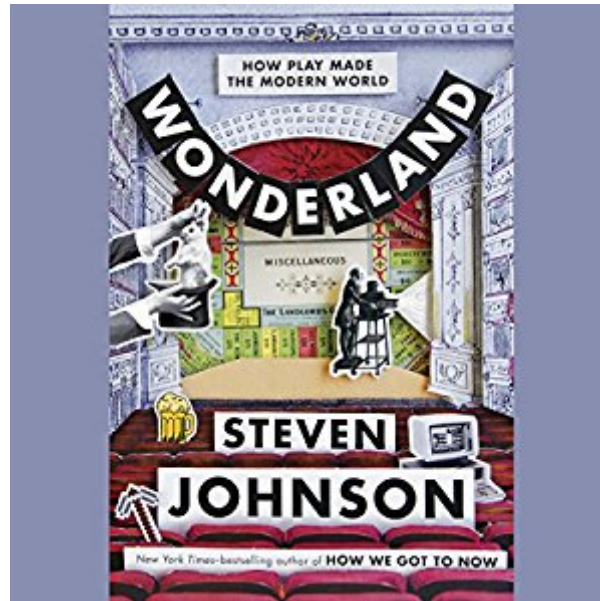




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Wonderland: How Play Made The Modern World



Synopsis

From the New York Times best-selling author of *How We Got to Now* and *Where Good Ideas Come From*, a look at the world-changing innovations we made while keeping ourselves entertained. This history of popular entertainment takes a long-zoom approach, contending that the pursuit of novelty and wonder is a powerful driver of world-shaping technological change. Steven Johnson argues that throughout history, the cutting edge of innovation has lain wherever people have been working the hardest to keep themselves and others amused. Johnson's storytelling is just as delightful as the inventions he describes, full of surprising stops along the journey, from simple concepts to complex modern systems. He introduces us to the colorful innovators of leisure: the explorers, proprietors, showmen, and artists who changed the trajectory of history with their luxurious wares, exotic meals, taverns, gambling tables, and magic shows. Johnson compellingly argues that observers of technological and social trends should be looking for clues in novel amusements. You'll find the future wherever people are having the most fun.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Wonderland : How Play Made the Modern World (2016) by Steven Johnson is an interesting read about the impact of how luxuries and amusements have had on history. Johnson wrote a superb book called *How we got to now* that had a limited number of key inventions that he says lead to the modern world. *Wonderland* is similarly constructed. The book looks at shopping, music, taste, illusion, games and public space. The chapter on shopping looks at how the development of shopping fed growth. When looking at music the fact that humans like

music and the importance of automatic players is described. Taste concentrates on the importance of the spice trade. Illusion looks at spiritual shows and finally Disney. Games looks at Chess and early computer games. Public space describes pubs and other public spaces. Johnson is a fine writer and a lot of the information in the book is fascinating. His descriptions of the mechanical works of Iranian engineers is amazing. However, the book is undermined in that the main thesis running through it is oversold. The book is worth reading for a well written and interesting diversion though.

This book puts a whole new spin on the concept of "play"- taking it well beyond childhood or leisure games. As in Johnson's other books, this book guides the reader on wonderful journeys through history - social, political, technological - and you end up in some surprising locations. This book got me thinking about "play" in many different ways - and the outcomes that "play" had for our present and may have for our future. This is my third book by Mr. Johnson-- all are well written, researched, and worth reading.

This is the first book I've read by Steven Johnson, and I enjoyed the way he traced the development of major technological and cultural innovations back to roots which were less utilitarian and more aesthetic or even hedonistic. But with the possible exception of the chapter on games, most of the book is not about the role of play in shaping society, so much as the impact of the human appetite for novel, surprising, and pleasurable sensory experiences (e.g., the visual displays of upscale shopping venues or phantasmagoria, the tactile pleasures of cotton, the taste of nutmeg).

A fun, often surprising, and very informative look at key junctures in history from a fresh point of view. It reminds us of what being human is all about.

Such an interesting way to look at history and innovation. As usual, Steven Johnson's writing is witty, engaging and entertaining. Sure keeps you turning the pages.

If I was teaching World History in college, I would seriously consider including Wonderland as part of my curriculum. Not only is it educational, but it is a fun read as well.

not all that amazing to me

I had never thought of this perspective on human behavior. It will influence my philosophy of human activity, even of politics.

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