



The Playful World: How Technology Is Transforming Our Imagination

Mark Pesce

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As you read these words, the architects of the new virtual reality are inventing a world you never imagined: call it the playful world. It's a world of interactive Web-based toys that instantly collapse the gulf between wish and existence, space and time, animate and inanimate. It's a world where the entire fabric of the material world becomes manipulable, programmable, mutable. Situated at the crossroads of high technology and popular culture, the playful world is taking shape at the speed of electronic creativity.

Are you ready for it? Your kids are.

In this spellbinding new book, Mark Pesce, one of the pioneers in the ongoing technological revolution, explores how a new kind of knowing and a new way of creating are transforming the culture of our time. It started, bizarrely enough, with Furbys, the first toys that had the "will" to grow and interact intelligently with their environment. As Pesce argues, Furbys, for all their cloying cuteness, were a vital sign of a new human endeavor--the ability to copy part of our own intelligence into the physical world.

But engineers of the playful world have already gone much further into considerably stranger virtual realms. Pesce takes us inside the world's cutting-edge research facilities where the distinction between bits and atoms is rapidly dissolving. We meet the creators of LEGO Mindstorms, a snap-together plastic device that intelligently controls motors and processes data from sensors. We watch technological geniuses like Marvin Minsky and Eric Drexler turn the theoretical breakthroughs of Nobel laureate Richard Feynman into "nanites"-- tiny ultra-high-speed computers that replicate intelligent life. We observe the launch of the amazing and much-anticipated Sony Playstation 2, a platform that will allow us to bring synthetic worlds into the home and create a gateway to the living planet.

Web-based toys are only the beginning--the first glimmer of a new reality that is transforming our entire culture with incredible speed and power. After all, thanks to the computer revolution and the Internet, all of us already command powers that just a generation ago would have been described as magical. Magic is about to take on a whole new dimension. In this dazzling book, Mark Pesce offers a mind-bending preview of the incredible future that awaits us all in The Playful World.

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