

# Book Notes: The State of Play Law, Games, and Virtual Worlds, by Jack M. Balkin and Beth Simone Noveck (eds)

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## Citation Information

Kim, Irene. "Book Notes: The State of Play Law, Games, and Virtual Worlds, by Jack M. Balkin and Beth Simone Noveck (eds)."  
*Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 45.3 (2007) : 649-649.  
<http://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/ohlj/vol45/iss3/9>

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*THE STATE OF PLAY: LAW, GAMES, AND VIRTUAL WORLDS*, EDITED BY JACK M. BALKIN & BETH SIMONE NOVECK. NEW YORK: NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2006. Pp. 304. About the Contributors, acknowledgements, case list, index. \$24.00 paper.

BY IRENE KIM

*The State of Play* is a collection of essays from the first annual State of Play Conference in 2003. The collection brings together contributions from a variety of experts, including sociologists, legal scholars, journalists, economists, and game designers, fleshing out the concept of the virtual world, both as an issue of the real world and also as an existence all its own.

There are five parts in the volume. Part I introduces and gives a brief historical account of the virtual world. Part II attempts to inspire a virtual world rights discourse by articulating their source and their limits, and noting the interaction between the virtual world rights and the real world rights. Part III examines the concept of private property and ownership in an imagined realm, scrutinizing the impact of virtual property rights reaching into reality, with implications for criminal law, the economy, and politics. Part IV traces the complex web of relationships facilitated through the virtual realm. The concept of privacy between “players” and “designers,” the responsibilities of the respective actors, and the consequences in breaching defined boundaries are among the issues here. The final part, Part V, takes a more deliberate and methodic approach to the virtual world—but taken from a distinctly real world vantage point—seeing the virtual world as a potential tool for practical applications (for example, as a sophisticated testing ground for real world objectives). It offers perhaps the most “realistic” approach to understanding the virtual world, which may also be the least sensible approach for that very reason.

Unbound possibility and limitless freedom are central to the attraction of virtual reality. But as more people are drawn to it, definition and regulation become imperative for its viability. *The State of Play* alludes to this conflict repeatedly as it attempts to “master” the virtual world.

