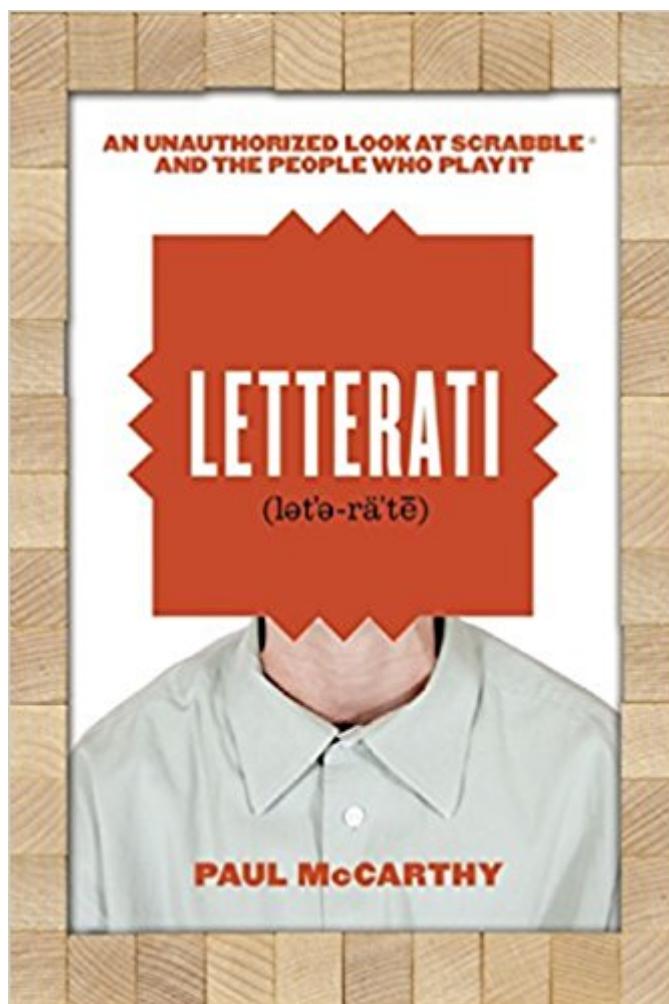


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# Letterati: An Unauthorized Look At Scrabble And The People Who Play It



## Synopsis

Letterati spans the history of competitive Scrabble in North America from the colourful hustlers of the 1960s New York game rooms, to the hard driving quantitative tile pushers who dominate the game today with strategic skills and memorized vocabularies. Yet, there is more to the history of Scrabble than just playing the game. There is a parallel plot line that revolves around many of the top players, who over the years have wanted to see the game develop through the outside sponsorship of tournaments, the unfettered publication of strategy books and the encouragement of a professional class of players. Along the way the reader will learn about how and why the Official Scrabble Dictionary was compiled, then expurgated in 1993, and now is sold to the public without such words as "jew" as a verb, blowjob, or fatso, while club and tournament players have their own word list, where some 200 such words are legal. The book also covers the obsession that Scrabble becomes for those who play seriously, traits that make a top player successful, how gender affects game play, and how teen players are able to rise above their limited educations and life experience to best their elders. There's also a look at the Scrabble trademark and how its so-called required protection by its owners has been used as a justification for prohibiting outside sponsorship of tournaments, the publication of strategy books and the growth of a professional class of players. At the same time, the book provides a glimpse of how the players' enthusiasm for the game has been harnessed so that they have de facto ended up working for free on the owner's PR plantation, publicizing tournaments, putting on promotional events, talking up the game, and sporting Scrabble geegaws, all unwittingly helping to sell ever more Scrabble sets.

## Book Information

Paperback: 303 pages

Publisher: ECW Press (June 1, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1550228285

ISBN-13: 978-1550228281

Product Dimensions: 4.9 x 0.8 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.6 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,049,998 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #77 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Puzzles & Games > Board Games > Scrabble #1386 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Puzzles & Games > Word Search #1522 in Books > Humor & Entertainment >

## Customer Reviews

"Who knew the world of competitive Scrabble was so cutthroat, so compelling, so organized? . . . Letterati will surely appeal to those who are ardent fans of the game, but even a casual player will find something flabbergasting in McCarthy's doggedly ethnographic examination." — The Bloomsbury Review

McCarthy, who is ranked in the top 10 percent of Scrabble players in the country, pulls back the curtain on other obsessive letterati. — The St. Petersburg Times

"Exhaustively researched. . . . An interesting history, commentary on strategy, wordplay, rule evolution, and numerous character sketches will appeal to those with an above-average interest in the game." — Scene Magazine

Paul McCarthy is a freelance magazine writer who has appeared in "American Health," "Equinox," "Omni," "Oncology Today," "Psychology Today," "The Scientist," and others. He has been a club and tournament "Scrabble" player for 11 years and is ranked in the top 10 percent of players in North America. He lives in Littleton, Colorado.

Well-written and thorough history of tournament Scrabble in the US from a long-time player. One really has to care about the subject, though, and those who don't play tournament Scrabble or want to learn about what it's like and how it's evolved over time probably won't care enough. It's much nearer complete than the account given in Fatsis' book *Word Freak*. Good chapter on how players of Ping Pong freed it from needlessly stifling corporate control by altering it slightly and creating table tennis -- the parallels between Scrabble and Ping Pong are multitudinous and sometimes uncanny -- and how Scrabble might be similarly freed (although changing the game sufficiently to make this possible might itself not be possible without ruining the near-perfection created by Mr. Butts, its inventor).

This book gives a lot of insight into the history of scrabble but the culture that it created! You can read whatever you want that hasboro or joe edly writes, which is extremely sugar coated, but this will give you a whole new aspect of it and not only with great depth, but even genuine emotion. Admittedly it does kind of jump around, but it's not necessarily hard to follow.

If you're not familiar with the world of tournament Scrabble and want to know more you'll probably

enjoy this book. However, it's repetitive and the author has an ax to grind that probably most people not in the tournament scene won't get the point of. An OK book

First, a confession: I've never been to a scrabble tournament. However, having loved S. Fatsis's "Word Freak," I thought I'd give this one a try. Wow, what a let down! While McCarthy has an impressive collection of scrabble photos, his descriptions of people are almost non-existent; for instance, about Joel Sherman, he pretty much just tells us that besides winning some scrabble tournaments, Joel played chess with his brother. Wow, how enlightening! McCarthy also just doesn't know how to grab a reader. Here's the 1st sentence of the last chapter: "Some would argue that the future of organized scrabble looks quite promising." Yawn. (I was also going to type in the uncatchy 1st sentence of the book but ran out of steam! And no, I didn't read the whole book.)

I read Letterati from the viewpoint of someone whose hobby is Scrabble. It is a wonderful history of how Scrabble developed from a family game to tournament play and the players who caused that to happen. Scrabble is a relatively recent game dating from the 1930's. It became popular after WWII when it is believed that the owner of a major New York City department store saw the game and began to sell it in the store. Then some of the people that frequented the NYC game clubs -particularly one by Times Square-began to play the game competitively. They developed strategies for the game and word lists to study. Today we have books on strategy and written and electronic study tools. There are Scrabble clubs throughout the US and tournaments almost every weekend, and the game can be played online. The author is himself a tournament Scrabble player and he knows the players that he describes. He weaves into his chronicle the history of the various companies that have owned the Scrabble brand and their different relations to it. He talks about the difficulties that tournament players have with the current owner Hasbro and its reluctance to fully support them and to overprotect its brand, as seen in the recent removal of the Scrabble lookalike Scrabulous from Facebook. Letterati and Stefan Fatsis' "Word Freak" are two recent books on competitive Scrabble. I recommend them both. Then go to a local club and play the game in its purest form. You can find a list of clubs on the website of the National Scrabble Association. James Cassidy Washington, D.C. squire on the Internet Scrabble Club

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