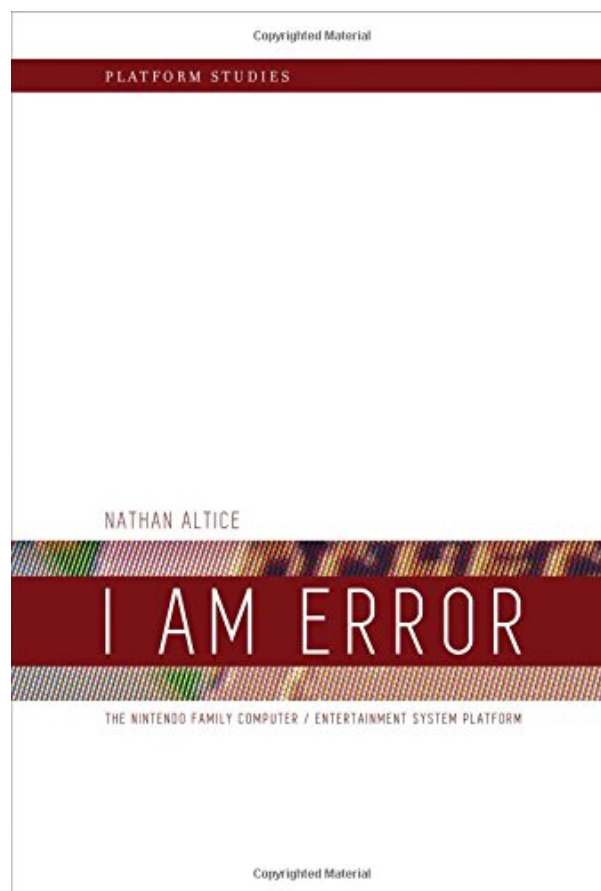


**I AM ERROR: THE NINTENDO FAMILY
COMPUTER / ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
PLATFORM (PLATFORM STUDIES) BY
NATHAN ALTICE**



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Review

Nathan Altice's I AM ERROR is the authoritative book on the Nintendo's first console system, and an exemplar of Platform Studies, comprehensive in scope, detailed in its analysis, fascinating, and accessible. It is destined to be a classic in Platform Studies as well as the study of Nintendo's legacy and influence.

(Mark J. P. Wolf, Professor and Department Chair, Communication Department, Concordia University Wisconsin)

An intriguing look beneath the hood of the Nintendo Entertainment System that explains the long-term significance of Nintendo's design choices. Beginning with the business politics that shaped the NES in the first place, I AM ERROR explores the influence of NES hardware capabilities and limitations -- not only on the system's own software, but on subsequent game design as well. An essential read for anyone with a serious interest in the evolution of videogames as a medium.

(Jeremy Parish, Editor-in-Chief, USgamer)

I AM ERROR is remarkable in its ability to make the most-discussed game platform in history feel new again. Altice has somehow managed to write a book I'd recommend enthusiastically to die-hard videogame scholars and to newcomers alike.

(Frank Cifaldi, videogame developer and historian)

About the Author

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In the 1987 Nintendo Entertainment System videogame *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link*, a character famously declared: I AM ERROR. Puzzled players assumed that this cryptic message was a programming flaw, but it was actually a clumsy Japanese-English translation of "My Name is Error," a benign programmer's joke. In *I AM ERROR* Nathan Altice explores the complex material histories of the Nintendo Entertainment System (and its Japanese predecessor, the Family Computer), offering a detailed analysis of its programming and engineering, its expressive affordances, and its cultural significance.

Nintendo games were rife with mistranslated texts, but, as Altice explains, Nintendo's translation challenges were not just linguistic but also material, with consequences beyond simple misinterpretation. Emphasizing the technical and material evolution of Nintendo's first cartridge-based platform, Altice describes the development of the Family Computer (or Famicom) and its computational architecture; the "translation" problems faced while adapting the Famicom for the U.S. videogame market as the redesigned Entertainment System; Nintendo's breakthrough console title *Super Mario Bros.* and its remarkable software innovations; the introduction of Nintendo's short-lived proprietary disk format and the design repercussions on *The Legend of Zelda*; Nintendo's efforts to extend their console's lifespan through cartridge augmentations; the Famicom's Audio Processing Unit (APU) and its importance for the chiptunes genre; and the emergence of software emulators and the new kinds of play they enabled.

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About the Author

Nathan Altice is an instructor of Kinetic Imaging at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Most helpful customer reviews

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

For Fans of Racing the Beam

By Andrew Rayburn

I loved Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System (Platform Studies) and although there have been other Platform Studies books this one seemed to be the closest follow up. Since the NES is more complicated than the 2600 this book, out of necessity, is too. Not all of what Nathan Altice talks about is easily visualized and the black and white screenshots rarely illustrate effectively, so be sure to have YouTube at the ready for looking up games as they are mentioned. The section on audio is especially difficult on the page. It's an absolute must to listen to the music if you want to follow along.

The nature of print is the biggest weakness of the book, but the biggest strength is Altice's connecting the features and limitations of the hardware to the world around them. This gives context to why the NES was what it was, and how that shaped the games we all played. There are lots of books about the NES but few have tied it all together so well.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

A fantastic look at the Famicom's/NES' history

By Zivilyn

I initially bought this book to read a little about the heritage of the Famicom/NES. I ended up getting that plus much, much more.

The combination of both technical and historical aspects of the system was exceptional. Being a collector of NES games, it was enlightening to finally get some additional information on the wide range of hardware and software pieces that make the system tick. I can't imagine the amount of time the author must've spent compiling all of this data; I'm very appreciative that he did.

I highly recommend this book to technical minds that enjoy reading details about early gaming systems. It's certainly applicable to the non-technical as well, although they won't be able to get quite as much out of it overall. I hope the author continues with an SFC/SNES version soon!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Good, but gets bogged down in details

By JoshJosh

The first book in the "Platform Studies" series was *Racing the Beam*, which is a really wonderful book on the Atari 2600. Most videogame books are fairly lightweight reads that provide broad surveys of the industry or company at a given time. Many of them also tend to go over similar stories so they start looking predictable. *Racing the Beam* dodged all that by doing a deep dive on the 2600, telling the story of its creation, how developers made games, its cultural influence, and how the developers did things with the system it was never designed for.

This book attempts to treat the NES the same way the 2600 is treated in *Racing the Beam*. The book is even structured similarly. The NES is a far more complicated piece of hardware than the 2600, and it had an even greater cultural impact. As such, this book is longer and more dense than *Racing the Beam*. It's also far more technical, to the point of being laborious at times. Altice does a deep dive on *Donkey Kong* and *Super Mario Bros.*, obviously two landmark games on the system, and one walks away from that chapter with a lot of knowledge on the system and those games. That said, unless you have experience with assembly programming (yes, not programming in general, assembly), this book may require some slow reading to get the details. I am fine with this, because, again, understanding how the NES worked is crucial to understanding how NES games were made and what they did. However, it does mean that this book is not quite the page turner that *Racing the Beam* is.

The book, like "*Racing the Beam*" goes into some detail about how the hardware was pushed, putting a lot of words into the Famicom Disk System, mappers, and other enhancements. Pretty interesting stuff, especially as an American who never laid eyes on a FDS. Towards the end, Altice goes into details on the NES in modern contexts, including chiptunes, emulation, speedruns, and so forth. It's here I think he loses the plot a bit. I understand what he is doing - trying to place the NES into cultural terms today - but quite frankly I do not think it works. The audio chapter in particular really bogs down, and it's a tough read. And while emulators are moderately interesting, the discussion on different types, development groups, etc. don't really do it for me. I think those pages would have been better used continuing to talk about the NES/Famicom as it was in the late 1980's. I'd rather read more about the people coding the games than people coding emulators 10 years later.

I was a child during the NES' heyday, so I thought this book also provided an opportunity to relive some nostalgia. Turns out, not so much, but that is okay. I think this is a good book for anyone who is interested in how old computing platforms were structured or anyone who is interested in a deeper dive on the system. Just be prepared to take it slow and absorb the details.

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