

entertaining and enlightening all on their own. Who knew, for example, that Sonic was originally intended to be a lead singer in a rock band and that he had a human girlfriend named for and inspired by the pop singer Madonna? The text does a compelling job of working such information like this into the larger conversation about game design and marketing.

Service Games and *The History of Sonic the Hedgehog* are not academic texts, nor do they pretend to be. While *Service Games* includes much information presented as historical fact, little of it is properly attributed. Indeed, some minor facts involving who developed which game or what position a particular person held at a specific time complicates the books usefulness for academics. Instead, both texts target nonacademic audiences interested in technical specifics and marketing and those nostalgic for an older version of SEGA. Still, there is a lot here for anyone who wants to know more about the history of SEGA's characters, its systems, and the culture surrounding its games.

—Josh Call, *Grand View University, Des Moines, IA*

Jacked: The Outlaw Story of Grand Theft Auto

David Kushner

Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2012. Acknowledgments, notes, and index. 298 pp. \$25.95 cloth.

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In the first few weeks of September 2013, sales of the latest entry in the *Grand Theft*

Auto series, *Grand Theft Auto V*, topped one billion dollars. The game continued to press the controversial themes which accounted for so much frisson in the press throughout the last decade. David Kushner's book *Jacked: The Outlaw Story of Grand Theft Auto* shows how high sales and lurid controversy fueled each other throughout the history of *Grand Theft Auto* and the career of its publisher Rockstar Games.

What *Jacked* lacks is attention to the game itself. We don't learn about *Grand Theft Auto* the game here. In fact, there is no real game history or criticism, just a sometimes compelling story of how a few British game designers came to America to make games and to make their games popular by making the news. The book focuses on business—on the story of a company, its founders, and its critics. Such a focus is in many ways valuable. We learn what it felt like to work at Rockstar Games, to “crunch” while making *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* (2002), to wear jumpsuits with company logos, and to feel taken advantage of and proud in equal measure. We do come away knowing a bit more of how it felt to play the very first *Grand Theft Auto*, what it looked like and how it worked, but not much about any of the later fully actualized versions that a reader would recognize today.

Play or game studies specialists will benefit from some compelling backstage anecdotes but will be frustrated by the dated material and the focus on an overplayed legal and public relations contest between Rockstar and the antivideo game zealot Jack Thompson. For a nonspecialist audience, Tom Bissell's essay “Grand Thefts” in his *Extra Lives: Why Video*

Games Matter, does a better job looking at *Grand Theft Auto* as a game and play experience.

Still, after reading *Jacked*, a new player of *Grand Theft Auto V* might find themselves, as this reviewer did, thinking about the game and perhaps the series a bit differently than before. After reading *Jacked*, the historical background of the company and series comes to the surface during play. We might note that the characters drop into odd Britishisms, that talk-radio stations in our cars touch mockingly on video game controversy, that lens flare in salute (or challenge?) to cinema. We start to notice that much of what makes the game inter-

esting seems to come from a company that throws man-hours and money at problems. We might not have realized this, or at least not in this particular way, were Kushner's book not so effective.

In the end, *Jacked* and its subject *Grand Theft Auto* are the same sort of product: the writing can be schlocky; the characterization over the top and simplistic; the actual content slim and recycled from previous ventures. But ultimately they are compelling because of, not in spite of, these faults.

—Samuel Tobin, *Fitchburg State University, Fitchburg, MA*