

Wolcott does not directly refer to the existing literature on childhood and play, she does demonstrate how play spaces were fraught with racial tension and served as an arena for larger social and political struggles. The overall study makes a noteworthy contribution to the historiography of the civil-rights movement by connecting the desire for leisure with the struggle for freedom and aptly demonstrates how the history of recreation and play has been irredeemably shaped by the tortured history of race relations in the United States.

—Matthew Wittmann, *Independent Scholar, Denver, CO*

Service Games: The Rise and Fall of SEGA

Sam Pettus

CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012. Acknowledgements, images. 396 pp. \$17.99 paper. ISBN: 9781463578473

The History of Sonic the Hedgehog

Pix'n'Love

Ontario, Canada: UDON Entertainment Corp., 2012. Images, bibliography. 297 pp. \$49.99 cloth. ISBN: 9781926778563

By now, the typical digital gamer has become so familiar with the words “console war” that he or she scarcely bats an eye when someone invokes them. Still, in the aftermath of the 2013 Electronic Entertainment Expo and the ongoing struggles between console manufacturers to capture

consumer dollars and loyalty, we should remember how the competition evolved over more than thirty years of video game marketing. As we rapidly approach the eighth generation of the home-console war, and current titans Sony and Microsoft vie for attention, reviewing the landscape is both interesting and illuminating. Sam Pettus’s *Service Games: The Rise and Fall of SEGA* offer a history lesson from a former console contender about the way the world of digital games has changed.

SEGA (an acronym for “Service Games”) remains a household name in the gaming industry, although the company is less prominent than in the past. Once an industry standard for home gaming hardware, SEGA now focuses primarily on software production for multiple hardware platforms. Pettus’s book serves an in-depth introduction to the SEGA Corporation, offering chapter-length descriptions organized chronologically for each individual generation of console hardware. Each chapter offers less a focused argument than a detailed account of hardware components and technical specs. But the work also explores the relationship between title licensing and the successful generation of a marketable public image.

I find compelling the attention the book pays to the culture of the advertising of each generation, sporadic as that attention is. Pettus focuses on the frequently euphemistic rhetoric in advertisements such as “The more you play with it the harder it gets!” (pp. 66–67) and offers an analysis of SEGA as growing an “anti-establishment image” that better resonates with younger Western gamers. He outlines how other companies and console manufacturers have ultimately used this strategy

since to displace SEGA and capture market shares. Here, perhaps the book shines most, looking closely at both the advertising of games and consoles and the specific titles that hardware systems offer to command attention or generate a marketable rebel image. The reader quickly draws parallels to the current game market, and the advertising rhetoric used to distinguish console manufacturers into the buyable-identity commodities of fan culture.

Pix'n'Love's *The History of Sonic the Hedgehog* also attempts to characterize the growth and popularity of the SEGA brand but does so by focusing on the evolution of its highly popular mascot. From an organizational perspective, the attempt to chronicle the history of a character as prolific as Sonic is complicated. Rather than sticking to a strict chronology, the editors instead frame the story as an evolution of the character from a technology demo in 1990 (p. 35) to Sonic's current game stardom across multiple consoles. Doing so allows them to consider the development of the SEGA console hardware and to discuss the need for the emerging game company to establish a rival for Nintendo's Mario character. This historical analysis (which includes interviews conducted with Sonic creators Yuji Naka and Naoto Oshima), provides a complicated and compelling picture of the inner workings of game development, one that attends to issues of graphic design and hardware capacity.

Outside the evolution of the hardware, the book effectively organizes the entire library of games in which the famous hedgehog appears. His titles are clearly divided between 2D games, 3D games, a vast library of hand-held games, and a unique if lesser-known collection

of special appearances in other titles. This system works particularly well because it reinforces the central tension in effectively combining good graphic design with able hardware. Especially interesting, the defining feature for the Sonic character—his speed—posed significant complications for developing the game across multiple generations of consoles. Originally designed to run at the rendering limits of the hardware, the pace of the protagonist coupled with the parallax-scrolling background produced significant motion sickness for the designers during play testing. As a result, they revised the game's code and background rendering extensively. Such moments give the book what significance it enjoys, offering candid and clear insights into how these games evolved, emerged, and ultimately clicked with their users. For this alone the book will be of considerable benefit to game historians in filling the gaps around the Sonic character and recounting the evolution of the franchise and its hardware over more than two decades.

Perhaps the most interesting elements of the book come in the form of "factoid" or tidbit sidebars located throughout. These often help flesh out surrounding context of game-development culture. In several instances, the book clearly describes the difficulty of localizing and marketing games globally and the ongoing tensions between the Japanese and American divisions of SEGA. Such tensions still exist in the industry. This work, by focusing on localized decisions, helps us see game development as less a matter of static release and as something more attentive to cultural and market forces than one might suspect. Plus the factoid and tidbits are

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.

ISBN: 9780470936375

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*