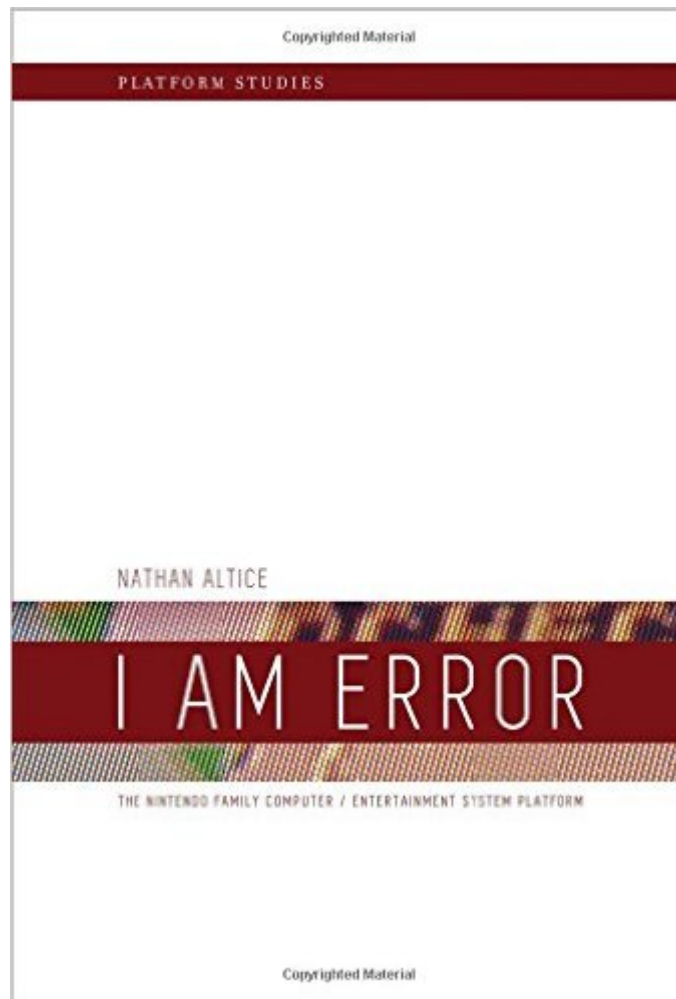


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I Am Error: The Nintendo Family Computer / Entertainment System Platform (Platform Studies)



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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.

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