

## II. Essay - Origins and Overview of Collection

In June 2015, my mother saw a notice at our local library about a book signing she thought I might find interesting. Although my fourteen-year-old self was skeptical at the idea of an author event as a fun summer outing, I was intrigued by the book's title *I Am Error: The Nintendo Family Computer/Entertainment System Platform*. As an avid gamer, I was surprised at the idea of there being a book about video games. It had never occurred to me that there was such a thing, so I agreed to go.

Descending the steps to the auditorium in the library basement, I had no idea what to expect. At the door, we were greeted by a young man welcoming people to the room. To my surprise, he was the author of the book: Dr. Nathan Altice, a recent PhD graduate of one of our local colleges, Virginia Commonwealth University. I'm not sure I had a definite idea what scholars should look like, but I had not imagined they would be so regular-seeming and friendly.

Much of Dr. Altice's talk went over my head, but he was so engaging and down-to-earth that I managed to follow along and became eager to learn more about the history of video games and the companies that developed the industry. Flipping through Dr. Altice's book on the ride home, I noticed that it contained a bibliography of other books about video games. That moment was the birth of my collection. Coming from a family of bibliophiles--my grandfather and mother are book collectors--it occurred to me that it would be meaningful to assemble and preserve material about this fascinating, multi-billion dollar industry.

I began by making a list of the books from *I Am Error* that sounded interesting and looked for copies on Amazon and Abebooks to see if I could afford to buy them. I had no trouble finding the titles I wanted and many of them were quite cheap as I was not picky about quality or first printings. Several of them cost just a few dollars. As my orders arrived in the mail, I checked them for references to other titles on video games.

Another approach I used for building my want list was searching for the phrase "video games" on Amazon, AbeBooks, and Worldcat, a website that lets users search library collections from around the world. I also found a few online bibliographies/lists of books about gaming. Especially useful were:

- "Best Video Games Books: Our Top 100+ List!" *The Unseen Collective*. [www.unseen64.net/2016/11/05/best-video-games-books-top-100-list/](http://www.unseen64.net/2016/11/05/best-video-games-books-top-100-list/). 11 May 2016.
- Tassi, Paul. "The 10 Best Books About Video Games." *Forbes*. [www.forbes.com/sites/paultassi/2019/11/07/the-10-best-books-about-video-games/?sh=1a734c3b2f79](http://www.forbes.com/sites/paultassi/2019/11/07/the-10-best-books-about-video-games/?sh=1a734c3b2f79). 7 Nov. 2019.

As my want list expanded, money inevitably became a problem. Although I did continue to have good luck finding cheap copies of many titles, there was a long list of books that exceeded my teenage budget. This was especially true for new titles and books published overseas. To address this problem, I added pricier books to my birthday and Christmas wish lists. Over the course of the next few years, I received several of my wants from family and friends as gifts.

Another problem I faced was realizing there were far more books on the subject of gaming than I had originally envisioned. While there are not many books from the early years of the industry (1980s and 1990s), there have been hundreds, if not thousands, of books on the subject published from 2000 through the present. Popular games often generate a flurry of publications, many of them guidebooks generated by fans. Also noteworthy, the academic field of video game studies exploded in the early 2000s, leading to numerous textbooks on game theory, politics, psychology, and design. Initially, I bought just about any title on the subject of video games that I found and could afford. However, I eventually decided that I was not interested in guidebooks for recent games. There were too many, and they generally did not contain useful information about the industry, the subject that had first caught my attention. I also decided to be cautious about acquiring academic books. In addition to being expensive, most of them do not deal with the business of gaming in any significant detail.

Gradually, I defined my collection as specifically being about the gaming industry. My goal became building a collection of books that detailed the histories of gaming companies and their products, many of which were full of intriguing ups and downs. However, when acquiring older titles (1980s to 1990s), I allow myself to take a broader view and acquire almost anything I can find on the subject of video games, even consumer guides and playing manuals. Although many of these books are not about the history of the industry *per se*, they offer a useful overview of early gaming technology and product development. (One early playing guide I find particularly interesting is *How to Master The Video Games* by Tom Hirschfield published in 1981. The “The” in the title reflects it being from an era in which there were only a modest number of games available all of which were relatively similar in concept and operation.) It also occurred to me that these early books probably had been published in small numbers and, therefore, were inherently worth preserving as historic artifacts.

About a year into my collecting, I decided to document my collection with a website that included basic publishing information about the books along with photographs of the covers. I also included a “Contact Me” page requesting that visitors let me know about titles that I was missing from my collection. Unfortunately, my website did not generate much traffic. Being so young, I did not have any expertise in search engine optimization and never managed to establish a meaningful digital footprint for my website. However, I very much liked the process of organizing and inventorying my collection.

After starting college in 2018, I decided to close my website. I was so busy pursuing a major in Computer Science and a minor in Math that I had little time to devote to the site. Also, I

became interested in documenting my collection using more traditional methods and eventually started creating the attached bibliography.

I have found the process of preparing a formal bibliography challenging. Even the most basic question of what order to put the books in required careful consideration. I ultimately decided to order them alphabetically for ease of reference and because it keeps books with multiple editions grouped together. However, I do want to note that a chronological ordering offers interesting insights into how the gaming industry has been documented in print. Many of the early books were issued by independent or self publishers and are informal in style. The few early books from big publishers are mass market paperbacks intended as entertainment. Not until around 2000 did mainstream and academic publishers actively enter the field in a serious way. From that point forward, many of the titles are quite sizable, beautifully illustrated, and extensively footnoted.

I also faced challenges when trying to identify publication information for the bibliography. In some cases, the title listed on the cover of a book does not match the interior title page. In consultation with my project advisor, Charlotte V. Priddle, I learned that librarians deal with this problem by using the name on the title page in case the book's cover is ever removed. I decided to follow that approach in my bibliography. In other cases, identifying the publishers proved difficult as they were mentioned in odd locations in the book or not listed at all. Of particular note in this latter regard are five books in my collection that contain no identifying information for the publisher but that were all published in Middletown, Delaware and share the same distinctive bright white paper. (See items no. 17, 47, 50, 55, 69.)

Another issue I debated was whether to list the dimensions of the books in inches or centimeters. Research into the issue revealed that this is a debate among bibliographers, with one camp arguing for inches as that is a scale that most readers in the United States will easily be able to visualize. Others argue for centimeters on the grounds that they are more exact and are used internationally. (Bowers, Fredson. *Principles of Bibliographic Design*. Oak Knoll Press, 2005, p. 430.) As the Library of Congress uses centimeters, I have chosen to do the same.

In terms of the future of my collection, I eventually hope to expand into acquiring magazines from the 1970s and 1980s that featured articles about the video game industry. I imagine a wealth of information was published in this more ephemeral format in the days before anyone thought to publish a book on the subject.

### III. Bibliography

(Unless otherwise indicated, books are first editions, first printing.  
Measurements are in centimeters.)

1. Ackerman, Dan. *The Tetris Effect: The Game That Hypnotized the World*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2016. 264 pages. Hardcover in dust jacket. (16 x 24).
2. Altice, Nathan. *I Am Error: The Nintendo Family Computer/Entertainment System Platform*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015. 426 pages. Hardcover in dust jacket. (15.5 x 23.5).  
Note: Signed by author.
3. Amis, Martin. *Invasion of the Space Invaders: An Addict's Guide to Battle Tactics, Big Scores and the Best Machines*. Millbrae, California: Celestial Arts, 1982. 125 pages. Paperback. (21 x 29.5).  
Note: The author of this book is now an acclaimed novelist. This was one of his earliest published books. Also interesting, the book contains an introduction by Steven Spielberg.
4. Bissel, Tom. *Extra Lives: Why Video Games Matter*. New York: Vintage Books, 2011. 242 pages. Paperback. (13 x 20.25).  
Note: Paperback edition (with additional material) of a hardcover book published by Pantheon in 2019; this is a third printing of the paperback edition.
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Note: Fifth printing
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Note: Fourth Printing
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13. Dillon, Roberto. *The Golden Age of Video Games*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2011. 183 pages. Paperback. (15.5 x 23).
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19. Flanagan, Mary. *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013. 353 pages. Paperback. (17.75 x 22.5).
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Note: Tenth printing
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Note: Fourth Printing
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Note: Third edition
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Note: Second printing
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Note: 12th printing
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40. Kline, Stephen, et. al. *Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing*. Québec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003. 368 pages. Paperback. (15 x 22.5).
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Note: First paperback edition, eleventh printing
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Note: Thirteenth printing
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Note: Second American printing
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Note: Subtitle on full title page: *How Nintendo Conquered the World*.
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Note: This is a second edition of Entry No. 60, with a new publisher.

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