a growing number of creative approaches to play-space design. A few examples include built-rope courses or challenge courses developed by groups such as Project Adventure and High Five, youth-designed play structures developed by Planet Earth Playscapes, and playgrounds constructed for individual housing developments.

—David B. Jones, *University of Southern Maine, Portland, ME*

LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon
Mark J. P. Wolf, ed.
New York: Routledge, 2014. Figures, contributors, institutions, prolegomena, appendix, index. 320 pp. $43.95 paper. ISBN: 9780415722919

Over more than fifty years, LEGO sets have expanded from an open-ended building system to include instructions for building specific models, themed play sets, and licensed products. More recently, the company has become a transmedia empire with books, games, educational products, a feature film, and more. *LEGO Studies* works from the premise that LEGO is a distinct medium that warrants closer consideration. The book offers fifteen essays incorporating play theory, games studies, cultural studies, media industries scholarship, fan cultures, adaptation studies, and other disciplines to articulate both LEGO's cultural significance and to explore the many complex ways that LEGO products work in play.

The book, which includes contributions by fans of both LEGO products and some of the franchises adapted into LEGO toys, games, and other merchandise, deftly balances critical and celebratory approaches to the brand, a perspective that facilitates deep readings firmly oriented in the aforementioned scholarly traditions. Despite such detail, the chapters are short and do not rely on extensive ancillary theoretical knowledge, making the book easy to read and teach.

Several essays concentrate on issues related to adaptation and play—what is made possible when popular franchises are given the LEGO treatment. Mark J. P. Wolf's and Neal Baker's chapters deal with the adaptation of *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings* respectively, from films to LEGO sets, while Jessica Aldred's and Robert Buerkle's contributions explore the adaptation of these films into LEGO-styled video games. Each undertakes thorough analyses of the films, toys, and—as applicable—related games to explain how LEGO works as a distinct medium, not beholden to verisimilitude, variously inhibited and liberated by aspects of its material design and discursive framing. The abstraction resulting from adapting popular culture icons into LEGO products creates successful merchandise for multiple age groups, combines irony and sincerity, and infuses the brand's playful ethos into a range of established story worlds.

In the book's consideration of LEGO as a system of play, questions surrounding modularity and units of meaning arise as a second core theme throughout the work. Lori Landay's essay describes how two of LEGO's early product lines—Ninjago and Chima—use mythical schema to generate

international appeal. She demonstrates how the brand now comprises not only physical interlocking blocks, but interlocking ideological components as well. Likewise, Derek Johnson's discussion of LEGO's much-maligned Friends line for girls examines the toy industry's construction and deployment of "creativity," arguing that it becomes "a site of industrial and critical struggle under constant contestation and reconstruction," where "industry lore" is perpetually met with activists' "counter-lore," which may rely on the same kinds of essentialization it seeks to dismantle (p. 101). Christopher Hanson's essay on LEGO Mindstorms robotic kits likens toy building blocks to the blocks of computer commands that Mindstorms users connect virtually in writing the programs that control robots. Hanson celebrates the open-ended quality of Mindstorms products, which eschew goal-oriented activities in favor of paidic or play-like experimentation.

Other contributors address a third set of preoccupations, discussing how LEGO intersects with education, social change, and artistic expression. Michael Lachney's essay explores LEGO's role in education and particularly in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education reform at national and international levels. It contends that the LEGO's classroom application replaces the critical pedagogical "teacher-as-learner" paradigm with the concept of the teacher as manager or coach, thereby falling short of its potential for radical education and social justice, a potential that David Gauntlett argues is at the heart of the brand. Kevin Schut's essay proposes that "the virtualization of LEGO" via games

and digital brick-building platforms steers play in a ludic direction, altering the spatial and temporal possibilities of play. Essays by Nathan Sawaya and Ed Diment and Duncan Titmarsh concentrate on LEGO as a sculptural medium, for both artistic expression and public relations appeal to public and corporate audiences.

The book's breadth of approaches attests to the multidisciplinary potential of LEGO as an object of serious inquiry. This breadth notwithstanding, the essays are, on the whole, unified in their commitments to various areas of scholarship—such as works within games studies, Mark J. P. Wolf's work on world building, and, particularly, Caillois's theory of play. Seth Giddings's penultimate chapter stresses the importance of balancing theory-based research with ethnographic accounts as it presents adults' accounts of playing with LEGO as children to demonstrate particular play practices and to highlight the impossibility of ever fully articulating the range of undertakings associated with such a versatile system. Although this position does not reflect the book's overall orientation, at times, individual essays articulate LEGO's relative importance by stressing that it is not just a toy—or that it is more than just a toy—approaching a tone that might seem dismissive or at least unnecessarily contentious within the context of the volume. Such moments are rare, however. At other times, the exquisite level of detail in the essays assumes, perhaps understandably, prior knowledge either of LEGO products themselves under examination or of the franchises from which they are adapted (for example *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings* films).

LEGO Studies represents not only

an invaluable text for those working on LEGO (aided by a comprehensive resource guide included in an appendix) and related transmedia phenomena but it also offers an example of the depth and detail for which such scholarship should strive. Jason Mittell's afterword thoughtfully cautions against allowing such inquiry to codify into a discipline. Instead, he urges readers to "take inspiration from its cross-disciplinary strengths and keen insights, but also recognize its gaps" (p. 272). The book primes the reader for this very sort of engagement, offering rich insights, thorough research, and sharp analyses and providing models of exploration that are as carefully considered and open-ended as the LEGO system itself.

—Meredith Bak, *Rutgers University-Camden, Camden, NJ*

Dangerous Games: What the Moral Panic over Role-Playing Games Says about Play, Religion, and Imagined Worlds
Joseph P Laycock
Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015. Notes, bibliography, index. 349 pp. $29.95 paper.
ISBN: 9780520284920

I am old enough to remember what Joseph P. Laycock describes as the 1980's "moral panic" concerning Dungeons & Dragons (D&D). I was a casual player of the game at that time, and I also enjoyed the Saturday morning D&D television series that aired from 1983 to 1985. My parents, to their credit, never bought into the anti-

D&D hype that Laycock explores—I think they harbored a fundamental mistrust of evangelists such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson—yet, neither did they join in my or my sister's game sessions or even ask much about D&D.

Laycock's general thesis is that role-playing games (RPGs) and religion share a number of characteristics, including their construction of multiple worlds and the ability of their adherents or players to move between these worlds (and also to transform themselves through this movement) and that both games and religion can be viewed using the same set of cultural and sociological lenses. He also asserts that religion essentially needed to attack role-playing games, especially D&D, to assert its own "reality" and relevance during a time when such concepts were commonly being called into question sociologically (the rise of cults and the increase in urban and suburban violence, for example) and through the media (the proliferation of occult-based films and books as well as evangelical programming). Ironically, Laycock argues, the very role-playing games that the Christian right and parental concern groups such as BADD (Bothered About Dungeons & Dragons) were attacking could be used to deconstruct their own agendas and to point out the constructed nature and potential abuses of religion when viewed as game.

Laycock's book is divided into two parts: first, a well-researched description of the moral panic concerning D&D and other role-playing games from the 1970s through the 1990s; and, second, a cultural analysis of this moral panic. In the first section, Laycock presents meticulous