

parison of Colonial Williamsburg and American Girl, the authors noted that “Pleasant was also inspired by a desire to share a patriotic vision of history with children. . . . The development of these dolls, outfits, accessories, and stories reflects a similar impulse to curate, or choose what to share, and therein lies the common instinct toward ‘selective fantasy’ using history” (p. 48). A deeper exploration of this thesis could have carried the book, but instead Mahoney and Horrocks conclude the chapter with “Top Tips for Visiting a Historic Site Like Us.”

In chapter 3, Mahoney and Horrocks look at how Rowland built the brand, and they explore the catalogue, dolls, clothing, and accessories with other fans in chapter 4. Each of the book's six chapters contain compelling observations related to how the American Girl brand, with its high price of entry, taught kids to value and practice consumption and engage in racial blindness. American Girl sanitized the past. For example, the doll Kirsten and her stories focused on the empty frontier lands, which we should know were not free, unoccupied spaces, but Indigenous homelands. The doll Felicity represented a wealthy girl living in Virginia during the early years of the American Revolution. In a blatant act of tokenism, Felicity's story included her Black friend. Unfortunately, the engaging, contextualized history was often interrupted with irrelevant pop culture snip-its, a series of unpolished photographs and scans, and attempts at witty banter turned problematic, such as a reference to a JonBenet-themed birthday party hosted by the authors.

Mahoney and Horrocks set out to answer questions about American Girl

and girlhood. But the book is not cohesive, and I find it unclear who the audience is for *Dolls of Our Lives*. I suppose it consists of the same people who enjoy listening to their podcast, which serves as a space for community and friendship.

—Michelle Parnett-Dwyer, *The Strong National Museum of Play, Rochester, NY*

Juggling

Stewart Lawrence Sinclair
Durham, N.C.: Duke University
Press, 2023. Acknowledgments and
references. 136 pp. \$15.95, paper. ISBN:
9781478019602.

In 2023 more than two hundred sports books were published in the United States, not including self-published titles. One notable addition to this extensive collection is Stewart Lawrence Sinclair's *Juggling*. The book is particularly engaging because of its unique descriptions of the physical skills and artistry of one of the world's oldest performance arts and sports. For example, Sinclair explains the significance of mathematics in juggling's early history when it was the primary means used to describe a sequence of throws. He provides a basic understanding of the relationship between “duration and height,” and readers will be intrigued by statements such as, “For a ball to stay airborne three times as long, it must be thrown nine times as high” (p. 10).

Sinclair also describes fundamental juggling skills such as trajectory, symmetry, pattern, apex, parabola, and cascade in user friendly terms, to assist first-time

enthusiasts. The book does include more complex concepts, such as Shannon's Mathematical Theorem and Quantum Juggling, but they are always discussed in a narrative format designed to educate and maintain the interest of more advanced jugglers. Sinclair also mentions the skills and abilities needed for competitive and freestyle juggling and the art of clowning.

Sinclair also uses vivid analogies throughout the book, likening juggling to musical notes and employing metaphors such as "multicar wrecks" to illustrate instances of erratic throws (p. 13). This writing style distinguishes *Juggling* from other generic how-to reference books that often become dull after the first few chapters. Readers will not become discouraged by information overload because the instruction for different juggling techniques is dispersed through the book in contrast to lengthy chapters. Just as captivating is the way the book delves into how the learning process affected Sinclair's youth, character development, and day-to-day interactions with people. It offers brief biographies of famous jugglers, highlighting their advanced techniques, which raises the role of a juggler well beyond a young child's image of a circus performer. Through self-reflection, Sinclair has effectively captured the essence of his childhood and the countless hours required to become an accomplished juggler with showmanship and bimanual dexterity.

My favorite part of *Juggling* was Sinclair's explanation of how he, as a seven-year-old boy, struggled to fit in a boys and girls after-school club until three jugglers were hired to entertain and teach the latchkey children basic skills. That initial catalyst sparked his love for juggling,

which ultimately led years later to his writing stories based on his childhood, adolescence, and the period when he juggled to keep his sanity through the COVID-19 pandemic. His chapters contain humor, warmth, acts of perseverance, and even sadness. The personal events also bring a unique perspective to the almost forgotten mentor-apprentice relationship. Examples of young apprentices benefiting from older adept mentors are exceedingly scarce today. More importantly, *Juggling* recounts the positive lessons learned from the often coarse human interactions while busking in the juggling subculture. These lessons will resonate with adolescents struggling to showcase their juggling skills in public for the first time. They should also appeal to adults when reminiscing about their life's tribulations or frustrated ambitions and remembering specific people who supported their efforts when learning new skills. One could argue that there is no greater enlightenment than finding a challenge to aspire to and having mentors who guide the learning process throughout one's youth and beyond.

Finally, it is debatable whether juggling can regain its status as a prime-time performance art that was once appreciated by royalty or whether juggling will someday become an Olympic sport. However, Sinclair's *Juggling* makes an excellent case that it should be a part of every adolescent's life, and the book is a wonderful addition to the "practice" series edited by Margaret Griebowicz. Furthermore, at the time of its publication, statistics indicate that approximately 21 percent of the U.S. population participates in this engaging pursuit. Stewart Lawrence Sinclair's *Juggling* certainly has the potential to inspire

the next generation of proficient jugglers.

—Rhonda Clements, *Manhattanville University, Purchase, NY*

Playing Place: Board Games, Popular Culture, Space

Chad Randl and D. Medina Lasansky, eds.
Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2023.

Introductions, acknowledgments, figure credits, notes, selected bibliography, contributor biographies, and index.

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For many of us, our interest in games started from losing ourselves in a sense of immersion and immediacy. Games pull us into other worlds, other times, and other bodies. The spirit of play takes hold of us, and new, altered perceptions of space and time become so natural as to be unremarkable. Randl and Lasansky's *Playing Place* contains a multitude of considerations about the construction of space and place in games. How do board games construct spatial interactions, and what can these constructions tell us about players and cultures? While the editors approach the question from an architectural perspective, the sizeable number of authors in this collection draw from several dissimilar backgrounds. By the editors' own admission, this choice is an intentional push to extend answers as widely as possible. This choice is the greatest strength in the collection, and it points to the rich interdisciplinary potential of game studies. Rather than an authoritative voice on spatial construction in board games, this

approach allows many generative avenues of discussion and radically broadens the appeal of the collection as a whole. Whether examining the cultural history of the South Bronx neighborhood as represented in a board game or the ludic logic of real-world spaces in real-world cities, *Playing Place* holds great value, especially for readers intrigued by the intersection of material and ideological components of games.

Because of the wide array and sheer quantity of essays in this collection (thirty-eight in total), each essay is modest and approachable. Essays focus on ludic, visual, and tactile approaches to a game or games united by a theme. Rarely does an individual essay stretch beyond a few pages, and each is replete with beautifully rendered pictures and figures. Each page is a joy to turn and behold, inviting readers to revisit favorite chapters and ideas. However, readers should not mistake the succinctness of chapters as a dearth of thought and depth. Indeed, the contributors to this collection strike a uniform balance between welcoming, bite-sized narratives and a well-informed, powerful thesis. This stylistic choice makes *Playing Place* welcome not just for young academics or professionals but also for more seasoned board game analysts who are interested in finding sound perspectives on games both old and new.

Framing these essays is a transparent and helpful introduction and conclusion, written by Randl and Lasansky. The editors recognize that anthologies such as theirs are read "by skipping between subjects of greatest curiosity" (p. xvi). Besides just signposting their clear intentions and hopes for the collection,