riences and instead engage with games in superficial, goal-oriented ways—what literary scholar Louise Rosenblatt would call “efferent” reading. This is the core challenge the book takes on: How to push players beyond functional play into aesthetic engagement.

It is a provocative stance and one that feels refreshing in a space where game culture often gets handled with kid gloves. However, the book stops short of offering a fuller critique of why shallow reception dominates. It offers no sustained analysis of the game industry, the everyday lives of players, or the ways in which play is consumed. Unlike, say, theorist Theodore Adorno in his critique of popular music and listening, Fullerton and Farber avoid connecting surface-level engagement with deeper structures of power, commerce, or ideology. One wishes they had gone further in this regard.

They also miss an opportunity in their treatment of community and culture. Although they advocate for thoughtful, reflective engagement, they largely bypass Let’s Plays, fan forums, and streaming—venues where play often gets discussed, if not always aesthetically in the manner they advocate. They point out that most Let’s Plays are stuck in walkthrough or comedy mode, but they do not explore what kinds of play cultures could be cultivated instead. If the book hopes to move players from shallow consumption to rich engagement, it needs to say more about the environments in which this shift could happen.

The Well-Read Game ultimately hopes that if players learn to reflect on games the way skilled readers reflect on literature, they will not only appreciate games more deeply but grow as empathetic, emotionally literate citizens. This educational ideal, rooted in Deweyan public pedagogy, feels optimistic but genuine. As the authors write, “Well-read players possess both the multimodal literacy skills and the social and emotional skills that will make them uniquely equipped to participate in today’s complex societies” (p. 206).

This makes for an inspiring goal, even if it may take more than journaling to get us there. Still, encouraging players—and students—to take their play seriously, to reflect, to write, and to talk about games in richer ways seems a worthwhile mission. We can only hope along with the authors that playing and reading games can create a better engaged citizenry. And if we do not quite get there, more people learning to take their play seriously and to come to enjoy it in new, perhaps deeper ways, would be a worthwhile goal in itself.

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Eugene Jarvis: King of the Arcade

Matthew Thomas Payne

New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2025.
Preface, foreword, acknowledgments, gameography, references, and index. 248 pp. $29.95 paper. ISBN: 9798765113547

A persistent temptation exists in all histories to deify the creators we admire. This is particularly true for auteur-focused histories that zoom in on a single individual, who by that focus almost invariably becomes heroic in the telling. So I was pleased that Matthew Thomas Payne’s *Eugene Jarvis: King of the Arcade* neatly sidesteps this historiographical trap and

presents Jarvis not as a singular genius, but as a talented, scrappy industry survivor whose works draw together game history, pop culture history, and even literary theory into an elegant, intriguing tour through half a century of coin-op game development.

Eugene Jarvis, the latest in Carly Kocurek and Jennifer deWinter's Influential Game Designers series, follows the four-decade career of the titular designer, from his early days designing pinball cabinets for Williams to his present-day leadership of Raw Thrills. Though Jarvis might not enjoy the name recognition of a Shigeru Miyamoto or a Hideo Kojima, Payne compellingly argues that "Jarvis's journey in game-making is a micro-history of the American coin-op video game industry" (p. 16). In relating this micro-history, Payne pulls widely from trade publications, extensive oral history interviews (including a long, useful interview with Jarvis himself included as chapter 6), and archival materials from The Strong National Museum of Play. Throughout, he does an admirable job connecting Jarvis's life with the endlessly mutating arcade industry in the United States.

Chapter 1 introduces readers to the book's major conceptual contribution, which Payne terms "arcadesploitation." As Payne puts it, arcadesploitation refers to "a creative set of practices that strive to maximize the return on investment of a coin-op game machine by making the most of its medium-specific affordances in a public play venue" (p. 15). Though simple, this new concept gives Payne a powerful tool for deconstructing the political, social, and economic ambivalence at the heart of Jarvis's games. Like his film exploitation forebears Roger Corman and Russ Meyer, Eugene Jarvis has long survived and thrived in an unforgiving industry by rolling with the punches and by exploiting whatever design concept or competitive advantage he can.

Each following chapter proceeds chronologically through several eras in Jarvis's career, each corresponding to a distinct period of arcade culture. In chapter 2, we follow Jarvis from his early mixed success at Williams's pinball department to his first—and most successful—title, *Defender*. *Defender*'s notorious difficulty not only left a huge impression on the design of the arcade games that followed but also gives Payne a venue in which to meditate on the cultural politics of difficult games that continue to animate discourse in the era of *Dark Souls* and *Celeste*. Chapter 3 then follows Jarvis's difficult design ethos through his following cabinets—*Stargate*, *Robotron*, and *Blaster*—to reflect on how difficulty like that of a Jarvis proved vital to the formation of competitive arcade communities in the early 1980s.

Chapter 4 begins with Jarvis taking a hiatus to earn an MBA before returning to Williams in 1986 having deftly avoided the worst of the mid-1980s video game crash. The industry he returned to had changed, however, as it moved from the skills-based model of *Defender* into a pay-in model of linear games that would inform *Narc*, *Smash TV*, and the Cruis'n series. As players increasingly embraced home consoles and personal computers in these years, Jarvis's games began to lean on taboo subject matter like drugs, graphic violence, and consumerism to coax players out of their homes and into the arcades.

The book brings us into the pres-

ent with chapter 5, which follows Jarvis's founding of arcade studio Raw Thrills in 2001 through to its continued survival in today's post-arcade era. Where each previous chapter focused on the space of the arcade itself, Jarvis's Raw Thrills era is about the move from dark, smoky arcade contexts to today's family entertainment centers. Payne dives into games like *Terminator Salvation*, *The Fast and the Furious*, and the aptly named *World's Largest Pac-Man* to show how Jarvis and his colleagues at Raw Thrills have exploited major licenses and massive form factors to appeal to a wider, more casual coin-op audience. A long interview between Payne and Jarvis make up chapter 6 before the conclusion then reflects on Jarvis's three legacies as a crafter of difficult challenges, as a mentor for other designers, and as a popularizer of inclusive, family friendly coin-op games today.

If I have one problem with *Eugene Jarvis: King of the Arcade*, it is that Payne may not push his critique quite as far as he might have. Credit where it is due, both Payne and Jarvis himself refuse to shy away from the fraught imagery of Jarvis's carnivalesque era, but they seem less interested in probing how Jarvis's particular brand of coin-drop-at-all-costs design has led, with seeming inexorability, to today's gamblified gacha games. Students and scholars of game monetization today will surely find fruitful material for their own critiques within.

Nevertheless, these chapters contain a wealth of historical information and cultural insight that will make it invaluable to any researchers of public play, games studies, or arcade spaces. But the book's uses extend beyond play. Media scholars at large will find in Payne's arcadesploitation a new approach to understanding exploitation as a media strategy, one with obvious connections to 1970s content-focused exploitation and to film scholar Tom Gunning's cinema of attractions. From the cultural politics of challenge to the economic exploitation of public spaces, *Eugene Jarvis: King of the Arcade* speaks to the past, the present, and the future of America's entertainment landscape.

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Streaming by the Rest of Us: Microstreaming Videogames on Twitch

Mia Consalvo, Marc Lajeunesse, and Andrei Zanescu
Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2025.
Acknowledgments, introduction, conclusion, notes, bibliography, and index. 272 pp. $45.00 paper.
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Streaming by the Rest of Us expands on existing scholarship about livestreaming by emphasizing the long tail of users other than those most prominent on the platform. Instead of the Ninjas and Kai-Cenats and Amouranths of the world, the streamers that Consalvo, Lajeunesse, and Zanescu interview are the creators who put their content out there for audiences of zero to a few dozen viewers. Twitch streamers, like much of the internet, could be described by a power law distribution in which just a few streamers are mega-popular, and the vast majority have much more modest audiences. These smaller