


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

*By Nathan Altice*

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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 mesage 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.

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**I Am Error: The Nintendo Family Computer / Entertainment System Platform (Platform Studies) By Nathan Altice Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #188188 in Books
- Published on: 2015-05-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .75" w x 6.00" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 440 pages

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## Editorial Review

Review

Nathan Altice's *I AM ERROR* is the authoritative book on the Nintendo's first console system, and an exemplar of Platform Studies, comprehensive in scope, detailed in its analysis, fascinating, and accessible. It is destined to be a classic in Platform Studies as well as the study of Nintendo's legacy and influence.

(Mark J. P. Wolf, Professor and Department Chair, Communication Department, Concordia University Wisconsin)

An intriguing look beneath the hood of the Nintendo Entertainment System that explains the long-term significance of Nintendo's design choices. Beginning with the business politics that shaped the NES in the first place, *I AM ERROR* explores the influence of NES hardware capabilities and limitations -- not only on the system's own software, but on subsequent game design as well. An essential read for anyone with a serious interest in the evolution of videogames as a medium.

(Jeremy Parish, Editor-in-Chief, *USgamer*)

*I AM ERROR* is remarkable in its ability to make the most-discussed game platform in history feel new again. Altice has somehow managed to write a book I'd recommend enthusiastically to die-hard videogame scholars and to newcomers alike.

(Frank Cifaldi, videogame developer and historian)

About the Author

Nathan Altice is an instructor of Kinetic Imaging at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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**David Scott:**

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