

Colin Milburn, **Respawn: Gamers, Hackers, and Technogenic Life**, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018, 301 pp., \$27.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by
William Thomas Howe
University of Kentucky, USA

Throughout the book **Respawn: Gamers, Hackers, and Technogenic Life**, author Colin Milburn theorizes about the connections between video games, hacking, science fiction, technological activism, and technological communities.

This book appealed to me, as I considered myself to be a gamer and have an interest in the motivations of both hacking and technological activism. I say I “considered” myself to be a gamer because the book made me question my identification with this label. Most video games discussed in this book are games that I have never played or even heard of. The opening of the book centers on the game Zero Wing. This game began as a Japanese arcade game, released in 1989, and was adapted to PC and Sega Mega Drive (Genesis) in 1991 (Classic Reload, 2017). If this is a familiar game, then this chapter, and the book overall, may be easy to read and understand. However, if a reader lacks knowledge of this game, and games like it, then this chapter may prove to be a difficult read. Apparently, during the translation of the game from Japanese to English, a quote was mistranslated to “All your base are belong to us.” Several pages discuss this singular phrase, and this illustration serves as the foundation for many of the arguments advanced in the book. However, I must admit that the focus on this miscommunication left me feeling a bit uneasy, as it could reinforce negative stereotypes of those who do not speak English as a first language.



Readers who understand the context and significance of the Zero Wing incident will likely enjoy this book and be able to view and understand the connections made between video games and the other areas presented in the book. However, readers, such as I, whose knowledge of video games is limited to popular console games may not see the connections this book makes as quickly, or even understand them at all. Therefore, the audience that will enjoy this book is likely smaller than a title that includes video games may suggest. It does seem natural and logical to me that players of certain games, such as Adventure, Portal, Command and Conquer, System Shock 2, and more, that are discussed in the book, may acquire skills or a desire for online resistance and/or hacking. However, players of games such as FIFA, Call of Duty, Contest of Champions, Farmville, etc., may be playing games due to alternative motivations than those presented in the book. A discussion of motivations for gameplay is one area that the book could have expanded on. Recent research has shown that individuals play games for a plethora of reasons (Adachi & Willoughby, 2017; Sjöblom & Hamari, 2017) and therefore, acknowledging this fact more explicitly could help readers understand that researchers have not proven a causal link between gaming and hacking.

Similarly, the book lumps all games, gamers, and gaming endeavors into one group. However, most of the examples that the author supplies to support the claims of the book come from games that are

older, played on a personal computer, and of a unique genre. Some video games may support the claims this book holds while others, especially social mobile games, may not. Readers might be able to make a connection to video games more broadly, but for some of the arguments, I found this process to be quite challenging. We know that gaming activities are often culturally bound (Ćwil & Howe, 2020) and have various outcomes (Hamari, Malik, Koski, & Johri, 2018; Wulf & Baldwin, 2020). This book focuses primarily on outcomes of technological activism and technological communities from a Western perspective. Readers that are specifically interested in these outcomes from this approach will likely appreciate this book and thoroughly enjoy reading it.

Regarding technological activism and technological communities specifically, this book does a tremendous job of building a case for the importance of these issues and the need for more research in these areas. The author also acknowledges how far these issues have advanced in the 10 years since the author began the project until the conclusion. Undoubtedly the last decade has seen tremendous advancements in these areas and in the development of video games and the affordances of technology in general. The book supplies an excellent groundwork for beginning to investigate these activities and spaces. Scholars interested in these areas would benefit from reading this book, especially if it is read in combination with recent research (e.g., Pilny, Poole, & Reichelmann, 2017; Riles, Pilny, & Tewksbury, 2017).

Overall, this book was educational, engaging, and evocative. The author was able to take the broad concepts of video games, hacking, and technogenic life and weave them together to present cogent and timely arguments about technological activism and technological communities. Scholars from a variety of fields could benefit from reading this book, as it engages a variety of disciplines, and the diligence of the author to obtain open access rights to the book should be applauded, as it provides needed information freely in an equitable manner.

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