

VIDEO GAMES

By S. F. Wright

WHY WE LIKE IT: *We like the way the author uses repetition and short staccato sentences to convey both the obsession that has taken hold of his life and the monotonous dead zone his life has become in this short but effecting study of a young dude and his addiction to video gaming. The reason for his numbing compulsion is never explained nor does the story's ending point to any kind of resolution. His existence as an automaton entrapped in a bleak aimless 'present' is a metaphor for the generational drift that has come, in some ways, to define millennial culture.*

VIDEO GAMES

Drew played video games much growing up. But he'd gotten rid of his games and consoles, having decided he was too old. After seeing advertisements for Grand Theft Auto III, though, he stopped at GameStop one day. Within five minutes, he was the owner of a PlayStation 2 and a copy of Grand Theft Auto III.

After a few minutes, he managed to hook up the PlayStation 2. He then inserted the CD; a moment later, the yellow Rockstar logo appeared.

The next day, Drew played Grand Theft Auto III all morning and afternoon, stopping only to eat and shower. With reluctance, he left for his four o'clock shift at 3:50.

When he got home, he resumed playing, a glass of Jim Beam and Coca-Cola by his side. And even though he had to work at twelve the next day, he played until three a.m.

The following morning, his mother and father got ready to go to Connecticut to visit Drew's sister.

He played Grand Theft Auto III while his mother gave him instructions:

Take the dog out.

Get the mail.

Get the newspapers.

All right.

He played until 11:30. Then he took the dog out and left for work.

That evening, he played late, drinking Jim Beam and Coca-Cola; and around two a.m., he decided to call out; he just had to wake up to do so.

He took a long sip of bourbon and cola and sped through Little Italy.

He got Nat. It was 7:04 a.m.

Hey. He did his best to sound ill, which wasn't hard, considering his hangover. Not feeling well. Think I'm gonna call out.

Yeah?

He affected to cough. Think I got the flu.

All right. Feel better.

He hung up, went back to sleep.

He played Grand Theft Auto III all day. He stopped only to eat lunch, take the dog out, feed the dog, order Dominos, pay and tip the delivery guy, eat, and take the dog out again.

As he raced through streets and shot pedestrians and hookers with his AK-47, he felt numb. He wanted to believe it was from the bourbon, but knew his mind was getting fried.

Gotta cool it. Gotta take a break.

But he played until 2:30 a.m., drunk by the time he passed out on the couch.

The clock said 12:08. Drew looked at the floor. The dog had shit on the rug. He felt guilty, annoyed. He cleaned it up, took the dog out.

After eating an English muffin, he turned on the PlayStation 2.

He played throughout the day, but was burdened by the knowledge that he had to get up early: American Literary Realism at 8:30, Creative Writing at 11:05. He'd already blown off both of those classes twice.

He paused the game to feed the dog, take him out, order Chinese. When it arrived, he ate hungrily: an egg roll, dumplings, chicken with broccoli.

Should give the game a rest.

But I'll play just a bit more.

And since it's after six, I'll do so with a Jim Beam and Coke.

Immersed in his game, his buzz getting stronger, he considered not going to his classes. He was sure other students had or would miss three classes as well.

The dog whimpered.

When he came back in, he gave the dog a treat and stood in front of the screen. He wanted to keep playing. He wanted to keep playing and drinking and not have to get up for classes or work or anything else.

He took a sip, finished his drink. He wanted another. But if he did go to his classes, he'd have to cut it out.

He stared at the screen.

He then picked up the control and sped through Chinatown.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *This story was inspired by my time working at a Barnes and Noble in my early twenties, during which I became very interested in video games, after having not played them for a few years. I wanted to address how stupefying, time-consuming, and addictive video games can be. My influences, among many others, are Richard Yates, Raymond Carver, John Williams, Evan Connell, Larry Brown, Jane Austen, Hubert Selby, Henry Green, Charles Bukowski, and Flannery O'Connor.*

BIO: *S.F. Wright lives and teaches in New Jersey. His work has appeared in Quarter After Eight, Linden Avenue Literary Journal, and Elm Leaves Journal, among other places. His website is sfwrightwriter.com*

