

On Joy and Time

Why I always read the summary of the story first

I'm the worst movie night companion, my siblings and friends would testify.

Before the movie's plot thickens, I would have consumed everything about it in Wikipedia - particularly the plot summary.

To me, I satisfied my information needs. To everyone else, I ruined their immersive experience through my sneer comments about character development, amazing turn of events, delicate acting skills and foreseeable events.

This impatience is fundamentally glued to how I consume every art form. Every medium that uses time as its primary dimension of creativity is no ally to my patience. From novels, movies, plays, video games and even novellas, I would first read its synopsis, absorb its characters and events, analyze its main emotional triggers and then decide if I wanted to consume it in long form.

Why?

As I was growing up I would just call it my thirst for stories. Today, I have a more mature answer.

First: It's an emotional perception of the value of time

This is a fancy way of describing how anxiety makes me act. Time for me is highly associated with the bandwidth of tasks I can possibly accomplish. That's why I'm always attracted to shortest path options, including reading the summary. The faster the story unravels itself to me, the faster I can decide whether I wanted to indulge myself in it.

When I was playing Red Dead Redemption 2 last week -- a game worth at least 30 hours of gameplay -- I paused early in the game to judge its potency and weigh it against my appetite. I knew I wanted to resume playing when I read how the character, a devoted criminal with conflicting values and unwavering loyalty, was going to gradually experience the bitter change of the one constant in his life.

Second: To seek sensations and satisfy my adventurous inclinations

I am driven by the desire to touch as many experiences as possible. They say to read a book is to live another life, and I feel the same way about every story that I consume. The more I consume, the more I expand my sensory memory of things.

The desire to experience a wide array of feelings, to observe a lot of people change, to live through the events that made them evolve (or decline), these experiences all expand my thinking about the world and its inhabitants. I'm thinking about the blistering vengeance of

the Count of Monte Cristo, the depressing reality of Anna Karenina, and the weight of the world that Jack Shepherd lugs in the Mass Effect series.

Third: To build a repository of intuition & figure out all the mysteries in life

When you are in creator mode, your eyes spot the meta elements that a lot of stories share. Just look at *The Seven Basic Plots* and tell me it doesn't tickle your passion for taxonomies, frameworks and all cognitive structuring tools. We love anecdotes because they build our intuition around the world and how it works, because deep inside, we understand ***there is a formula for every answer***. The more we consume stories the better we can predict, the better we can judge and the better we can identify and appreciate true ingenuity. We end up skimming stories for signs of innovation. When you have very sharp intuition, you have a sense of how the author crafts their worlds. You would experience less surprises and would be prepared for every event.

This phenomenon is actually recognized amongst game designers. In the popularly crowned book "*A Theory of Fun*", the author describes a phase for game designers where they would be bored from all games 10 minutes after playing them. To seasoned game designers, everything consists of a combination of the same game mechanics, elements and design styles that wraps them. It becomes less enticing once the formula is discovered.

Despite how depressing it may sound, I enjoy reading the summary first.

It's dessert before the main course for me.