Juniper Lewis on Tom Tyler, *Game: Animals, Video Games, and Humanity*

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**Juniper Lewis on Tom Tyler, *Game: Animals, Video Games, and Humanity***

*Game*, by Tom Tyler, is a collection of twelve interesting and engaging essays on the nature of humanity, animality, and play. It also includes a thirteenth essay, the final chapter, that I will return to later for reasons that will become clear. Drawing on the work of theorists and activists such as Donna Haraway, Carol J. Adams, and Friedrich Nietzsche, as well as playing with the writings of Shakespeare, Homer, and other classics, Tyler weaves together a combination of perspectives that are often in dialogue but rarely in conversations about video games. This variety of perspectives is fascinating but often leads to a lack of depth on any one issue. While *Game* uses video games as a medium through which to talk about animals, it is not so much a game studies book. Animals, meat, and humanity are the key focus here. The game studies literature is not nearly as present as work from other fields. So while the book is more suited for an animal studies audience, game studies scholars will find it both an informative and enjoyable read.

Tyler’s book grapples with how video games have thought about the animals that are a part of them. While a great variety of games are discussed, each chapter tends to focus on one or two games. Through these games and their analysis, Tyler leads readers through the argument that animals in games, and animals outside of games, should be seen as individuals with valuable perspectives. Video games allow players the opportunity to try on a variety of viewpoints, but all too often the main character is, as discussed in chapter 12, an “everyman” who through their adherence to hegemonic norms is entirely atypical. When discussing the 2003 game *Dog’s Life*, where players inhabit the dog Jake, Tyler highlights this issue of norms in regard to human senses and means of navigating the world. “Smellovision shows us, in short, that the default, seemingly impartial third-person perspective is, in fact, a human perspective” (p. 27, emphasis original). Subjectivity and positionality are not new subjects, but thinking about the human-centered view of video games is interesting. In addition to talking about animals in games, Tyler spends some time talking about the real animals being represented in games as well as animals that play video games. This expansion of the idea of the imagined player is useful for games studies researchers.

There are many interesting tidbits throughout the text, but in order to discuss Tyler’s book further we must look at the last chapter: “Trojan Horse.” In the final chapter of *Game*, Tyler reveals that the true goal of this book has been to subtly persuade readers to become vegan: “In each of these essays, and indeed in the many others that we might imagine, a vegan perspective is not introduced by means of...
a frontal assault, but rather snuck in under cover, before emerging, impenitent and assured, to shake the troubled” (p. 150). This Trojan Horse approach to veganism, which Tyler dubs “vejan,” is modeled off of the Christian apologetics of Origen, William Paley, and C. S. Lewis. Lewis recommended that not only should Christians write about Christianity, but they should also produce literature and films that are subtly Christian. While Lewis is the most well-known Christian apologetics writer, Tyler’s analysis feels out of touch given the later history of the movement and modern Christian apologetics organizations such as Creation Ministries International, an anti-evolution organization, or the God’s Not Dead movie series, wherein an evangelical Christian college student is forced to debate his atheist philosophy professor because the student will not sign a document stating that God is dead. While Christian apologetics refers broadly to any philosophy that seeks to provide evidence for the Christianity being real and true, it is currently most commonly taken up by biblical literalists who worry about the harm of a liberal education.

The inclusion of this chapter in Game feels like a sharp tonal shift that undercuts the rest of the book. Instead of a general academic audience, Tyler appears to be addressing just those readers who are vegans looking to convert others to veganism. This is not a terrible goal; eating less meat can help slow climate change, but this method of education seems unproductive. By connecting his vejan approach to apologetics, Tyler is doing himself a disservice. Readers who have encountered conservative Christian apologetics, such as those who argue that the Earth is only a few thousand years old, will be disinclined to engage with his ideas about veganism. Including this last chapter does not heighten the pro-animal rhetoric throughout the book, and readers will no doubt pick up on this viewpoint even when reading chapters in isolation.

There are not many books that focus on the flora and fauna of video games. Tom Tyler’s Game is a fun and interesting addition to this growing field. While the last chapter of the book reframes the text as vegan subterfuge in a way that feels ineffective, that does not mean that the book is without merit. The medium of video games allows for players to experience animals as they could by no other means; for this reason virtual animals will continue to be a fruitful site for academics. Animal studies researchers, game studies researchers, and of course vegan activists and vejan creators can all find something worthwhile in Game.

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