PRESS START TO PLAY

SAM GAYTON

PLUS CARTOON FLIPBOOK!

PRESS START TO PLAY ◇ SAM GAYTON

GET READY TO
PRESS START ON ...

video games, board games, word games,
playground games, card games,
and play-to-make-you-laugh games.

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SOMETIMES, YOU JUST GOTTA LEARN THE BUTTONS

sometimes
you just gotta learn the buttons
twist your hand into the right controller crab
so you can run / fly / jump / grab
better

sometimes your trigger finger
doesn't twitch
the way it needs to

sometimes your fumbly thumbs
can't beat the button drums
in any sort of rhythm
that makes sense

sometimes it comes
so slowly
with each stick mis-twist
with each that
instead of this
until there's ache in your wrist



you think
maybe this game
is not for me

but slowly, slowly
SLOWLY
you start to get your grip
start to skip instead of trip
start to dance in digital
gaming lyrical
buttoning poetry electronically

remember this next time
you stare at squiggles on a page
and wait for them to unsquirm
into some sort of word worm

remember this next time
that lace on that shoe won't tie
that step in that dance won't stick
or you aren't able to times table quick

sometimes
you just gotta learn the buttons

A GAME OF MARBLES

(written after learning that the Milky Way is due to collide with a nearby galaxy in several billion years' time)

our world
is a blue white marble
flicked across the galactic table
at super cosmic speeds

but we still don't know
who set us rolling
in the first place
or what exactly
they are playing at

and in five billion years
when the milky way
smashes into andromeda
flinging a trillion marbles
every which way

i wonder if they'll say

'good move, how about a rematch?'

'. . . nah, we should probably clear this all up before mum gets back.'



WHAT IF?

stories are imagination engines suspending
disbelief until
their mind bending
heart rending endings

stories are
creativity mines
digging up diamonds that shine
with truths that sparkle for all time

stories aren't just
words that we're reading
but dreams we
need to
believe in
a creed of feeling
for every soul that needs some healing

stories are the stars in the night
the sparks that set us alight
so why are they
so hard sometimes to
write?

well actually
to be a jackanory of story

i'm sure the only
words you need to have in your repertory
are these two

and listen
this is just a suggestion
but if you're stuck upon a story ask yourself one
question:



ask 'what if'
that's all i want to say
a 'what if' will gift
you stories all day
and if you'd like to sample
i will give you an example
here are some 'what ifs'
you can take away today

like what if
you ate a dodgy egg salad sandwich
that granted you a power
you could use to your advantage

where you close your eyes and concentrate
harder and harder
until you turn into a scruffy little
baby chihuahua?

or what if something in the multiverse shifted
and suddenly supers like in DC and Marvel
really existed?

what if you were a hero?
and your best mate was a villain?
would you chuck them into
super prison?

or what if this room became a time machine
and took us all back to prehistory
and a t-rex chomped right through the ceiling
which grown-up do you reckon that we're going to
feed him?

or what if suddenly to our surprise
zombies attack, yeah the dead arise
and we lock ourselves into a shopping mall
how are you going to survive it all?

what if the government tried to control ya?
what if the climate turned much much colder?
what if there's a ninja out to get ya?
what if there's a map to buried treasure?

what if you owned a unicorn?
what if you owned a dragon?
what if you owned a genius evil chicken called kevin?

what if babies could talk?
what if sharks could walk?
what if jack never chopped down the giant beanstalk?

what if an alien?
what if a fairy?
what if your feet turned super hairy?
actually i don't know if that last one works but

a 'what if' is a game you can play and play
like a hen with golden eggs it'll lay lay lay
if you can't get past the stage where you're staring at the page
then these words will assuage your rage

WHAT IF?





ONE OF MY KEYBOARD KEYS IS BROKEN - A PUZZLE POEM



(see if you can solve this poem!)

one of my keyboard keys is broken
but all of the rest work fine
so there is one bit of the alphabet
that i won't be using this time

my poem can be about anything
except and unless it has got
that one in particular letter
my broken-keyed keyboard has not

it seems you can write quite a lot
with twenty-five of twenty-six
in fact, if i hadn't have told you
it might not have even been missed

so which is the one I'm omitting?
it's very much not on this page
maybe you know the answer
if you know it, then i'll be amazed

IT'S ONLY A WEENSY BIT VIOLENT!!!

it's only a weensy bit violent
there's merely a smidgen of gore
there's barely a bit of bloodspatter
only one or two heads rolling over the floor

but the violence is really quite weensy
the slaughter is really quite slight
i'll only be butchering bad guys
in the rare times i get to engage in a fight

i know it says 18 and over
i know it's called CARNAGE: THE SLAYING
but if i see something more
than a weensy bit violent
i could just shut my eyes whilst i'm playing?



BATTLE ROYALE (with thanks to Jay-Z)

switch on
log in
sit down
relax

controller's ready
mum's getting a plate of snacks

me and you
choose login names
i'm DUSTY LEMON
you're FUNKY JANE

watch the countdown tick
we're starting now
it's game night
and this is a
battle royale

100 other players
but when the game's done
there'll be
99 others
i'll be number one

start up
head down
to the island
map



me and you
we're a team
yeah we got
each other's backs

you look for baddies
while I look for
loot

i only find a fishing rod
i need something to shoot!

when suddenly
BOOM
ahh!
we're under attack

someone called
FLUFFY POODLE's
going brap brap brap

so i use my fishing rod
yoink them close



and we team up
and whack them
... and they're toast

84 other players
when the game is done
there'll be 99 others
i'll be number one

we're looting
we're shooting
driving cars
horn tooting

pick up a bazooka
and we start bazookin

FUNKY JANE'S on the sniper
scopin

DUSTY LEMON (that's me)
sees some
others approachin

like ninjas we hide
in the shadows around them
they've no idea
LEMON and JANE surround them

crouch down
shields up
ambush is ready
wait
wait
wait
wait
steady

NOW!

53 other players
when the game is done
there'll be 99 others
i'll be number one

me and FUNKY JANE
play hard cos
YOLO

we team up cos a duo's
much better than solo

we eliminate a player
called FURIOUS DAVE

emote when win
give that loser a wave



the player count is ticking down
to single figures

me and JANE have got aches
in our trigger fingers

only 2 other players
when the game is done
there'll be 99 others
i'll be number one

tiptoe now
inside some house
stealthy as a really super
stealthy mouse

the count on my screen
says two players left
we're nearly at the end
of our royale quest

me and FUNKY JANE
are nearly done
and that's when it hits me
there can only
be
ONE

betrayal comes fast

like a bullet from a rifle
like a sith lord turning
on their old disciple

i barely have time
to turn around

there's a bang
then my avatar
is on the ground

'FUNKY JANE?' i whimper
in my headseat mic

and FUNKY JANE says
'soz babe
a sniper
gotta
snipe'

one other player
and the game is done
i'm with the 99
FUNKY JANE has won

... MUM?
I'M GONNA NEED
MORE
SNACKS



EMOTIONS ONLY GAMERS FEEL

SIBSLAMMED (sɪbslamm'd : verb)

the mixture of shock and pride you feel when your little brother or sister beats you at a game for the first time

PLAY JÀ VU (/ˌpleɪʒɑː ˈv(j)uː/ : noun)
the unsettling feeling of flicking through your library and finding a completed game that you don't remember ever owning

ONLINE BOY - A SPOOKY POEM

there's a spooky story
don't know if it's real
but it's still pretty chilling
whatever the deal



apparently, there's this
really cool game online
you can play for free
any place
any time

and the game is
whatever you want it to be
puzzle, building, fps
or strategy

whenever you get bored
it gets more entertaining
almost as if
it wants to keep you playing

there's just one rule
written small on the site
you have to stop the game



before it gets to midnight

that's it
nothing bad
log off before twelve
but this one kid
let's call him timmy
couldn't help himself

timmy started playing
at a quarter past nine
he thought
it's fine
i've got loads of time

but the game got him hooked
like a fish on a line
and before he even knew it
it was 11:49

oops
thought timmy
i forgot to stop
let me do this last level
then i better log off
but the next time his eyes
flicker back to the clock
it's midnight

and that's when he hears it
KNOCK
KNOCK

KNOCK KNOCK
it's coming from behind the screen
KNOCK KNOCK
timmy stares
is he having a dream?
KNOCK KNOCK
is the knock what it seems to be?
KNOCK KNOCK
timmy blinks at the LED display
no way
this had to be fake
it's late, maybe he's starting to hallucinate
this has to be a prank
he looks around for a mate
KNOCK KNOCK
his screen flickers
then starts to
CRACK
and
BREAK

timmy backs away
it's 12:01
he should've stopped playing



should've stopped having fun

his heart starts fluttering
stuttering
like it's buffering
his itching eyes must be glitching
can this really be happening?

a hand is coming out
through the screen's black crack
a bone white hand
timmy tries to jump back

too late
it grabs his shirt
and he feels himself go
bit by giga bit
he feels his body upload
timmy's data, timmy's digital,
timmy's turned to code

he streams from his chair
into the cloud, into the air
before he can scream
there's no one even there

silence
and as the screen powers down to black

you can just see the outline of
a boy inside
trapped

now maybe you're thinking
where's his mum
or his dad?
when i stay up too late
one of them gets mad
how's this kid even playing
until twelve o'clock?
no way in my house would i hear that knock

well timmy's mum and dad
were both gamers too
and the night before
they stayed up playing
until 12:02

it's probably just fake
but all the same
i'm gonna go online
i'm gonna find this game
i'm gonna play it myself
don't worry, i'll be fine
i'll definitely log off
at 11:59
won't i?



TURN THAT THING OFF YOU RIGHT BAD MENACE, PART I

TURN THAT THING OFF YOU RIGHT BAD MENACE

i will do, i swear mum,
i'm gonna, i promise
but i just gotta get past the haunted forest . . .

CONSIDER THIS
YOUR FIVE MINUTE WARNING
IT'S ALREADY LATE AND
YOU'VE GOT SCHOOL IN THE MORNING

DUMBPHONE / SMARTPHONE

a
e
r
i
a
l

plastic plastic plastic plastic
black black LOGO black black
plastic pixel pixel pixel plastic
black pixel pixel pixel black
plastic pixel pixel pixel plastic
black pixel snake pixel black
plastic pixel pixel pixel plastic
black black black black black
button 1 button 2 button 3
plastic plastic plastic plastic
button 4 button 5 button 6
black black black black black
button 7 button 8 button 9
plastic plastic plastic plastic
button * button 0 button #
black black black black black
plastic plastic plastic plastic



curve rim rim rim rim rim rim rim rim rim rim rim rim rim curve
rim glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass rim
rim c glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass rim
rim a glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass rim
rim m glass glass glass glass glass glass thumb smudge glass port
rim e glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass zap
rim r glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass port
rim a glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass glass rim
rim glass glass glass glass glass glass crack glass glass glass rim
rim glass glass glass glass glass glass crack glass glass glass rim
rim glass glass glass glass glass glass crack glass glass glass rim
curve rim rim volume up down rim rim rim dent rim rim curve

THE THREE YEAR OLDS ARE HAVING A MATCH!

buckle your seatbelt
batten the hatch
the three year olds are having a match!

toss a foam football
on to the pitch
in every single toddler
a switch gets flicked

cuteness: deactivated
ENGAGE MONSTER MODE



instant mayhem
fifty-a-side
every single shoelace untied

every player
running round the ball
kicking turning spinning
it's a kiddie whirlpool

rush goalies running
two-footed tackling
heading in headfirst



madly cackling

what's offside?
don't know don't care
just yeet the ball
way up in the air

total carnage
red card fouls
dribbling feet
dribbling mouths

arlo's doing divebombs
jaina's sweeping legs
someone call the medics
someone call the feds

hana's doing headbutts
connie's playing rubgy
jackson's doing ninja kicks
things are getting ugly

nursery leader paula
dived in to the fray
no one's seen her since
i hope she's okay

a year six gets the ball

tries to do a rabona
the three year olds just flatten him
like a hundred bulldozers

ball comes to me
i take a touch then a gulp
the whole of the pre-school
beats me to a pulp

one hundred little feet
going hack hack hack
like i am the beanstalk
and they're jack's axe

one hundred little feet
toe-punting my shins
they're the bowling balls
my ankles are the pins

'but i'm the referee!' i scream
they don't seem to notice
who's that gnawing at my leg?
my little brother otis

after that, it's all a blur
don't know how i survived
the doctors in intensive care
say it's lucky i'm alive



the game's still going on
no one knows the score
or even if the foam ball
exists anymore

let's play another game next time
like a gentle game of catch
now line up, kiddies, take one of
these charming cricket bats . . .

ohwaitno —

BAD MR BLOCK



i really am just super stuck
i'm staring at the clock
i don't know what to write at all
it's cos of mr block

mr block's a
massive pest
he is this book's
antagonist

(which means he is the enemy
of poets and all poetry)

i try to write – he blocks my brain
he stops the tracks of
my thought train

he's foiling all my
grandest schemes
taken hostage of my
hopes and dreams

my bright ideas
he snatched like gems
and in their place
he's sent his friends



here's mr worthless
who sows fresh doubts
like rows of growing
brussel sprouts

and megaphone neggy
who, on loudspeaker,
says 'this idea stinks'
on repeater



with these lot
inside my noggin
all my thoughts
they've started robbin'

it's very hard to carry on
when all your good ideas are gone

and nothing seems
quite good enough
you just sort of
run out of
stuff to say