Love, The Old Man: Tricking Your Brain

Posted By Matthew Hlady
Sunday, April 16, 2017

If you’ve been following this blog (in which case, my condolences), then you’ll notice that a recurring theme here is about productivity. That is in part due to my parents’ various bits of advice and in part because of my complete inability to follow it.

I have a problem focusing. Not from A.D.D. or any actual excuse. I’m just lazy and easily distracted. In order to remedy this, I’ve stumbled across a little trick that sometimes will help me at least get going.

When you were a kid, I bet that your parents or someone tried to get you to do a chore by turning it into a game. I don’t know if I was an especially smart kid or, more likely, just an uncooperative little twerp, but that didn’t work for me too much.

Thing is, the same principle applies here.

I want to advance my writing, especially my fiction. However, instead of going straight into whatever project that I’m supposed to be working on at the time, I’ll often get distracted or feel overwhelmed and, thus, unmotivated.

What I have taken to doing instead has been to start what amounts to a writing exercise. One of the podcasts I listen to gives writing prompts and homework assignments at the end of each episode (check out “Writing Excuses” here, if you’re interested) and every now and then one will catch my imagination. Also, this blog counts as one of those potential side-projects.

So, instead of working, I’ll just play around with whatever these guys have inspired me to do. After a while, whether it’s finished or not, I feel ready to start on my real projects,
be they school or something else.

Downsides:

- You spend potentially a lot of time on this
- You might not actually get any real work done. Like, diddly-squat.
- You could get sucked in and never want to stop
- Your sense of accomplishment could fade into a feeling of remorse and worthlessness. That might just be me, though.

Upsides:

- It’s fun
- It gets your brain working and in the mood to work
- You accomplish a side goal or practice a craft or hobby
- Pretty immediate gratification
- A lot easier to start than that twelve-page paper you have due next week

It’s not a perfect system, but it’s my system.

So, if you’re having trouble mustering the strength to buckle down and get stuff done, put on some music you can work to, break out a hobby or side project that requires your brain’s full involvement, and forget yourself for a while.

Just don’t forget your paper entirely.

Song of the Week: “Rhapsody in Blue” by George Gershwin. Again, this has nothing to do with this week’s entry, but it’s been stuck in my head. Also, it’s a great song to write a modern story to.
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Source URL (retrieved on 05/25/2017 - 10:10am):
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