

What it Means to be the Player in *Needy Streamer Overload* (Essay), Bee Wertheimer

A lot of games grapple with the ethical implications of the player’s capability—the player’s *destiny*—to manipulate their narratives. If you want to achieve the ending for the “genocide route” in *Undertale*, for instance, the game will condemn you every step of the way; the gameplay is tedious, the insults to the player’s moral character unending. But what if your very participation in the game immobilizes the narrative? What if you embody a barrier to the plot’s progression?

*Needy Streamer Overload* (2022) is a cute, edgy, trippy visual novel about an aspiring streamer and various planes of existence (real life, cyberspace, heaven, and *real*, out-game life). Made by Japanese developer Xemono and published by WSS Playground, the game follows Ame, a young woman who struggles with mental health issues and drug abuse, on her quest to become a popular live streamer under the name KAngel. In *Needy Streamer Overload*, you, the player, are dubbed “P-chan” by Ame—because you’re perfect, she declares, and also because you’re her producer and partner. You are instructed to dictate her every move—personal and professional—and elevate KAngel to stardom. On top of KAngel’s follower count, you’re also responsible for managing Ame’s Stress, her Affection for you, and her Mental Darkness, all of which are impacted by the actions you choose to have Ame perform throughout the day.

The game deals primarily with Ame’s objectification. KAngel is simultaneously hypersexualized and sexless—unable to have a boyfriend without public outcry but adored for her seemingly oblivious sex appeal (such as bouncing suggestively on a yoga ball, claiming it’s just for good exercise, forbidden from acknowledging the sexuality of the act). Her comments are flooded with declarations of her cuteness and her fans’

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desires to meet her, to befriend her, to date her. She makes a living off of her constructed persona, her carefully crafted beauty, her fabricated nerd-loving personality. Only the player is privy to the real Ame, her sexual desires and her drug abuse and her disdain for her creepy fans. But the real Ame is nothing more than an object herself—every action she makes is dictated by P-chan, she has a private “tweeter” account visible only to P-chan, all of her thoughts manifest as text messages sent to P-chan. Ame is no less a commodity than KAngel, though Ame’s audience consists of only the player.

Except here’s the thing: at the end of the game, you find out P-chan isn’t real. They’re an imaginary person made by Ame, a symptom of her obsessive desire to be consumed, a desire instilled by patriarchal capitalism: to be loved and dominated by a man (though P-chan is never gendered in the game, I always presumed I was playing as a man, and Ame only ever dates other men). If you take the time to replay the game the 27 times necessary to achieve all the endings—to watch Ame kill herself, overdose, leave you, have a psychotic break, hurt over and over and over, finding only pain at the end of her endless pursuit—you discover the “true ending” of the game is one that doesn’t involve you at all. *Needy Streamer Overload* concludes with Ame deciding she doesn’t need P-chan, that she can stream by herself.

But what does the player have to do to get there? How many times must you feed her pills, fuck her, cut her wrists, exploit her? P-chan may not be real, but *you certainly are*. And you watched her suffer 27 different horrible fates, 27 realities where she’s miserable or dead because of the way you directed her performance. In order for Ame to achieve

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liberation and agency, you must torture her relentlessly. If you want what's best for her, you should have never opened the game at all.

Is that the point, then? That the very act of playing the game is reprehensible? What does it mean to simultaneously be the instigator of the narrative and its inhibitor, Ame's oppressor and her liberator? If you only achieve one or a few endings and then close the game, Ame never finds peace. If you torture her and yourself with repetitive gameplay, minutely adjusting variables just to fill up the ending slots, are you getting off on her trauma? Are you truly freeing her, if she spends all that time dancing for you? And if you're like me, and you watched [a YouTube video of all the endings](#), are you somehow worse for not putting in the effort?

Maybe the point is that she can never really escape. After all, even without P-chan, she's still streaming, still being gobbled up by her predominantly-male audience. Maybe Ame just never stops dancing.