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## 2023-02-22 "Hogwarts Legacy" Divides Gamers: Ethics of Supporting Problematic Creators

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# “What a Character!” Tattoos Romanticize My Job

## Guest Contributor

Occasionally, I'll make an attempt to romanticize the unromanticized. Here's an example: It's 10 p.m. and we're closing the doors for the day. The rain is touching the ground the way a lover would. Our neon sign turned off with a 'click' reminiscent of the old typewriter in my grandparent's house, and I'm excited to read the books in my bag. There have been so many customers that they're collecting dust. Seven rats have gathered around a bag of birdseed as if they're performing a satanic ritual (there are no birdseed stores in the area), and if my shoes didn't have holes in them, I might be able to hear their slap against the hardwood floor. My shirt feels wet against my back. It's my third day of wearing it, and my other two work shirts are dirtier.

Romanticizing my job doesn't work. I'll serve customer after customer for hours on end. I'll wear clothes that make me unrecognizable. The hours will pass by somehow too quickly and too slowly. The passage of time occasionally goes unnoticed, and I'll be thankful for it. This cycle repeats until I get my paycheck, pay my bills and do it all again.

After my first year in food service at the ripe age of 16, I had given up at any attempt at fostering community with my customers. I'm not paid enough for that, and I have had too many interactions with customers that make me happy that I'm voting every election for the sole purpose of canceling out their hate-filled ballot.

At work, the people gather around me for the sole purpose of purchasing a good, and I'm around to provide it to them faster than the speed of light, so the agonizing social interaction ends, and my bi-weekly payment is deposited into my bank account, and I can eat something other than the (probably) expired instant noodles in my cupboards. My job could be taken away by automation any day now, but I already feel automated myself. I go through the motions of each customer interaction and need an oil change a little more after each one.

Occasionally, I'll wish my job were different and yearn for a sense of community with my customers. My dad used to get to know all the shop-owners in our small town. He'd leave the convenience store with a boisterous laugh, me on his shoulders and a coffee with cream in his hand. Once we were out of earshot he'd say "what a character!," appreciating all the shop-owner's quirks and the stories behind their lives. As much as I'd like to be the character behind the counter, the customers aren't searching for that kind of connection, and, to be honest, I don't really want them to. I'm making funds to survive, and I'm not paid enough to foster those kinds of relationships.

But sometimes, every so often, a customer will jump off script, break the painful monotony and bring a little spice into my half-hearted small talk by saying "I love your tattoos!" After giving the customer my artist's Instagram account and asking them about theirs, we'll part ways, and I'll feel more fulfilled than any interaction that night. Rather than being the minimum wage worker that parents of children point at and say "you don't want to end up like them," I'm a three dimensional character with playing card tattoos that have mysterious meanings others feel inclined to ask about.

At a job where self-expression is thin, where I wear the same black shirt for three days in a row, where I dress as discreetly as possible to avoid being recognized by the creepy regular who always seems to be wandering around after work, where I get verbally thrashed by customers on a daily basis, where unsolicited photos are taken of me while worries of my parents somehow seeing my

pronoun pin online dance at the back of my mind, dare I say, where I'm treated like one of the mediocre-at-best coffee dispensers on campus, I don't need to put in any unpaid effort for my tattoos—my eyeliner takes too much time—and I get to romanticize my day, even if for a split second.

The moral of the story, I guess, is to get that tattoo you've been thinking about. I promise they won't make anyone's brain explode or spark a natural disaster like relatives in every family seem to think. The little stories people choose to put on their bodies makes them such characters.