

ALL WORK AND NO PLAY WHY DOES THIS EXIST?

Thomas Huff (2022)

I've wanted this book to exist ever since the first time I saw *The Shining* many, many years ago. It's something I wanted on my coffee table or to leave on my desk at work for people to pick up inquisitively, thumb through in bewilderment, and put down wondering why in the world something so ridiculous existed.

I don't know exactly why I finally got around to it, but I did. I knew for it to work, it had to be presented in the most deadpan style possible—never let them know that you're in on the joke; in the same vein as *This Is Spñal Tap*, play it straight. (That's why the silly endorsement quotes are a bonus and not in the book itself or in what you'd probably consider their proper spot—on the back of the jacket.)

One possible reason I may have decided to jump into this after completing my last book, *Halloween Things (That Sometimes Rhymes)*, was the “About the Author” section of that book. After writing such a ridiculous book, something just didn't seem right about trying to tell the world how great I was, so instead—and keeping in the spirit of the book—I opted for a diatribe of baffle-gab about how the author's main purpose in life seemed to be to defend and justify the grammatical integrity of the odd sounding title of the book.

Writing a page of nonsense that served no purpose other than to fill a page while sounding intelligent and scholarly on the

surface, was a complete contrast to how I usually approach writing, which draws its inspiration from the school of Ambrose Bierce’s philosophy of making each word count—that you can make one word do the work of four by choosing the precise word. Bierce defined “novel” in his famed *Devil’s Dictionary* as “a short story padded”—when your reader is putting faith in you for information or entertainment, you might resonate with them or you might not, but at least respect them enough not to waste their time.

But the joke here is to waste their time, and the more of it you waste, the funnier it will become. It kinda works in similar fashion to the vaudeville era comedy-routine known as *The Aristocrats* wherein comedians perform this well-established long-form joke (usually to each other) with the intention of making it last as long as they possibly can.

And that leads me to carrying the momentum of *Halloween Things’* “About the Author” to the obvious necessity of a foreword to *All Work and No Play*, which would literally have to be page after page after page of deadpan scholarly-sounding gobbledygook, for it to work. Much of the joke is the preposterous notion that there is something so exhaustive published about something so ridiculously stupid—the book is not funny, but the fact that it exists is.

After *Halloween*, the timeframe also seemed right, as I figured that aiming for a release date of April Fool’s Day would allow me to complete it at a nice leisurely pace.

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Next came the rules. Without rules there can be no consistency, and without consistency, this kind of humor doesn't work.

Rule 1) *The Shining* is a docudrama chronicling actual events. (For the "Endorsement Quotes" bonus section, *Firestarter* and *Misery* are treated the same way.)

Rule 2) *All Work and No Play* by Jack Torrance has been circulating around underground literary circles since the events chronicled in the movie took place, but has not been generally available to the public.

Rule 3) The 1980 Stanley Kubrick movie supersedes the book and all other adaptations as my source.

Rule 4) Everything else in reality is exactly as it is, all other fictional characters and works of fiction remain just that.

For the foreword, I decided to avoid going into much biographical detail on Jack Torrance and instead concentrate on presenting it more from the vantage point of a literary critic judging the work on its merits as opposed to it becoming a biographic account of the author, because the former, to me, is where the potential for better humor resides. A minimal amount of background information on Jack seemed necessary to give it some context though and to get the ball rolling. But for the most part, I wanted to act the part of a pretentious defender of the text as an underappreciated masterpiece, staunchly opposing any and all criticism no matter how blatantly obvious or indisputably valid.

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As for the content itself (e.g. “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy”), I wanted to make the book seem as legitimate and aesthetically stylish as possible. I wanted the “reader” to be able to flip through the pages and not just have a wall of text, but instead see shapes and patterns (like a kind of crazed ASCII art), thus continuing the style of the pages shown in the movie itself.

The first 22 pages of *All Work and No Play* are actually transcribed exactly from the pages shown in the movie. From there, I obviously had to improvise, so I did my best to mimic the style but keep it interesting—obviously, I mean to flip through, not to read—varying patterns and typos, while trying not to deviate from anything that would have been out of place appearing on the screen, basically sticking to the letters used, frequency of typos, general patterns, etc. For instance, as tempting as it might have been to do something like punctuate “All work and no play...” with an entire line of exclamation points to show that *he really meant it this time*, that would have seemed out of place and inconsistent. Within these confines, I still needed to demonstrate that Jack was not just a machine stuck in a loop, but an actual person displaying the traits of disorganized thought and an obvious disconnect from reality—and hopefully I succeeded.

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