

Computer games forever

By Mircea Cartarescu (Translation by Octavian Feneş)

What in God's name am I doing here? But is His name not welcome in these lands? Here there is eternal ice through which rivers of lava flow, there are mountains and ravines. Who am I? I cannot remember. All I see in front of me is the mighty and abstruse landscape – and a Weapon. I cannot even look down to see the edges of my footwear, which I feel to be of metal. I begin to slide, with the weapon in front of me (it is like a kind of winged ca-duceus), through these hells. I do not have time to ask questions about my condition. Because the Monsters are coming. They too do not know who they are and what power gives them life. They do not have any sense of self-preservation. Birds of fire, mutilated devils, zombies, mummies, werewolves, legions of inhuman invertebrates throw themselves at me, spit spheres of flame, they breathe sulfurous stench. I exterminate tens of them, releasing tongues of jade from the magical caduceus, I rapidly slide through the domain of melancholy, with a crooked tree here and there, I evade their painful flames of those who want my blood. When I am touched, my life decreases, the power goes away. Fortunately, there are Crystals on the ground. Violet, rose, or clear as ice. They are vigor and health. Any time I touch one, a great light radiates and I feel better all of a sudden.

I now descend into the dungeons. It is a fortress of death and of wickedness. Its ramparts go beyond the skies and the facades are the signs of the Devil. I enter the stone corridors. Secret doors open, trapdoors open. In iron cages, disemboweled mortals, impaled, crucified on bloodied walls. Every new chamber is littered with demons. I am only a Weapon that vaporizes. And wickedness. Now I seek the keys. The one of opal, the one of turquoise and the one of malachite. I bleed from hundreds of injuries, but I am not afraid and I cannot stop. I am just like Them. But good. There is no time for other thoughts. Mechanical wasps attack me. I got lost in the halls. I press resorts. I run up the spiral stairs. I slip on the floors of lava that burn my feet. I have the keys. I kill hordes of ogres until I find the first gate. Here the crystals are rarer. I almost die in these bowels of stone. I enter the opal gate, and then the one made of turquoise. I cannot find the third one. My life is constantly lowering. Monsters sneak behind my back and fry me with their claws. I desperately slide on phosphorous promenades.

All of a sudden, my weapon disappears and all I see before me are bare, hairy arms. I cannot defend myself anymore. I run, I hide, the devils scream triumphantly. I go on a bridge that is like a razor. I am beyond. I haven't been here before. There are stone ornaments, tragic and mighty. I enter the gate of decay, littered with human carcasses. Inside a niche, I discover – Evoe! – a formidable Weapon. It is like lily of transfinite light. With him ahead, like an Annunciation, I enter the final cave. I fight the Dragon. I have no time to see what it looks like. I constantly envelop him with billions of poisoned stars. Its screams are unbearable. It struggles in agony, it cannot breathe its iridium sheaves any longer. It suddenly stiffens. It vitrifies. It breaks into cinders. It is blown into smithereens. But my health is also almost zero. I barely crawl towards the malachite gate, which rises, slowly, to receive me. I touch with my hand the magic symbol.

Who did I defeat? Who did I save? Whose hero am I? I drink the waters of forgetfulness and before I dissolve to reincarnate into my eternal, absurd metempsychosis, I get to see the final screen: LEVEL 26 COMPLETED // KILLED: 56/64 // SECRETS: 4/7 // TIME: 1:23:45.