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-Mayor Quimby

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# Alert Nerdian



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## “Scott 5”

I finally received and read my copy of *Scott Pilgrim Vs. the Universe* yesterday. Just as I was with *Harry Potter*, I find it almost impossible to do anything more than straight-up devour the new installment of *Scott Pilgrim* when it arrives. I'm a starving man slinging delicious comics down my throat, barely taking time to observe the clever design, artwork, and dialogue of Bryan Lee O'Malley.

Still, this one hit me pretty hard, especially that double-page spread of Ramona Flowers simply disappearing. It's a perfect moment, and a nice encapsulation of what makes the *Scott Pilgrim* series so unique—true feeling, communicated through specific metaphor, and the metaphor itself somehow comments on the action at hand, and on the characters themselves.

Reviewers always point at the video game imagery O'Malley uses, and it's incredibly creative, probably innovative besides. What intrigues me is the stuff Kieron Gillen talked about in his review of the book:

*It's as witty book as you can wish for, but we've moved past laughing, at least for now. This shows how analysis of Pilgrim as "Videogame reference gags" is absolutely myopic. Take the GAME OVER legend over the barren streets, of the CONTINUE? one over Scott, locked outside the flat again with the Evil-Ex-monikered cat. They aren't funny. They're tragic. They resonate.*

In other words, these aren't jokes; they're tools. I could do the same thing with *Star Wars* references; in ten years, maybe some kid will do it with Twitter and

Facebook gags, or Pokemon, or whatever kids do today. (Whatever it is, it ain't better than STAR WARS, GAD DAMNIT! GIT OFF MY LAWN!)

So in that sense, the specificity of these video game references speaks to Scott Pilgrim's own state of arrested development; I keep thinking back to all those rambling conversations Scott had with Ramona about Wolverine and gaming

nonsense, and it's like he's trying to share who he really is, but he is still immature enough to think he's just a collection of video game references and ideas about comic books. That's the real Level Up Scott's working toward, and so these gags and metaphors are tools that communicate story points or feelings; they speak to where Scott is as this book progresses.

Those tools are used to build a story that charts the peculiar limbo of one's early twenties, when you live in these little sharply-defined bubbles that occasionally burst, sending you floating into the next bubble and the next, until you find whatever settles you down—the right job, the right partner, the right bubble, I guess.

*Scott Pilgrim* has the feeling of a personal work that is so good, so specific and well-developed, that it becomes universal. It makes me think of my own early twenties. I think it's in general a fucked-up time for most everyone. You leave college, and you cling to your college life for as long as you can; in my case, it was years, seeing mostly the same people and doing many of the same things.

At the same time, I expanded outward into the world, gaining new groups of friends from work and geeky hobbies. So you're

trapped in your own past, but at the same time taking tentative steps into your future. It's a time that feels permanent, in every second, but really isn't.

So when Ramona vanishes, it's not just scary because you care about Scott, and you want him to be happy. It's scary because maybe you remember your Ramona, or many Ramonas—or Kims, or Wallaces, or whoever—all of whom disappeared out of your own life in a blink. And you don't necessarily miss them, because with hindsight you know they were meant to leave. But maybe you miss who you were when you knew them, and you remember how permanent and aching every cut felt when it was happening.

To me, that's why kids will be reading *Scott Pilgrim* for decades. That's what makes it GREAT, and not just really, really good. It is of its time, but outside its time; specific, but universal. Whether you are versed in the iconography of gaming or not, you become invested in Scott and the characters, and maybe even see a little of yourself in them—the person you were, or the person you're going to be; the one the person you are now doesn't know all that well, but you still want the best for him. ■



### Who? Wha?

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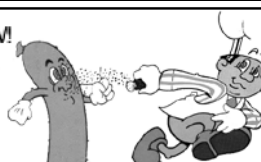
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