

DIGITAL HINDUISM

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“Come on, try it. It’s fun!”

“There’s no way I’ll make it.”

“On your first try? You’re right, there’s no way you’ll make it. But you gotta try, it’s the only way to learn.”

Veeno42 looked down the hallway to the checkpoint. In order to see it, he had to look past whirling circular saw blades, lasers and trapdoors that periodically dropped open and emitted belches of oily fire. The green blinking checkpoint seemed a million miles away. Veeno42 shook his head.

“No way. I’m not doing it.”

Iamone88 gave Veeno42 a familiar look of annoyance. “Well, one thing’s for sure, I’m not going to argue with you about this again. If you won’t come, fine, then you can just stay here with your finger in your nose. Why don’t you just zap out and go home—you can sit and stare at the vitals on your physical body until you die out there and in here both.”

“I don’t see the point in the game—dying over nothing.”

“It’s not really death.”

“Your consciousness winks out.”

“That happens when you’re sleeping too,” Iamone99 pointed out, reasonably, for the millionth time.

“I just don’t want to play, okay?”

“I mean yeah, whatever, you don’t want to play. Then why do you always want to hang out here?”

“I know everybody else likes to play, so I come too. I don’t want to be left out.”

“Dude, you’re leaving yourself out,” Iamone88 looked at Veeno42 with frustration, “Suit yourself.”

Without another word, Iamone88 started jogging down the hallway, ducking and rolling over the lasers as they swept towards him. He made it safely through the flaming trapdoors and had completed most of the giant circular saw blades before he made a slight error in timing and wound up getting sawed neatly in half in a spectacular blur of gore.

“See,” Iamone88 said after rematerializing a second later, “here I am again—it’s nothing. This is just a videogame. Now come on, try it.”

“I’m not gonna try it,” Veeno42 demurred.

“Whatever,” Iamone88 laughed dismissively and started jogging down the corridor again.

This time, he managed to avoid all of the circular saws and he ended up on the far end of the hallway. He gave Veeno42 one last wave to give it a try. He demurred. Iamone88 shrugged and disappeared down another corridor and out of sight.

Once he disappeared, Veeno42 kicked the virtual wall and logged out of the game, returning to the reality of his small room with its blank white walls and grey clothes. He got up out of bed, stretched, and went into the equally cramped living space that served as kitchen, dining room and living room. Since most people spent a majority of their time in virtual space, apartments had grown quite tiny.

The second Veeno42’s mother, Carrie-Ann saw the look on his face, she knew.

“You’ve been messing around at the DeathMaze again, haven’t you Thomas?”

There was no point in lying. She could easily check his logs.

“I told you mom, my name is Veeno42.”

“And I’ve told you. I’m the one who put your name on your birth certificate; I could care less what you think it is. I say it’s Thomas, so it’s Thomas. You better respect your mother.”

An awkward silence built up between them. Thomas went to the refrigerator and took out a bottle of orange juice. He took a swig while he debated the point of having the same argument for the hundredth time. He tried to let his anger go, but he couldn’t. He could feel it festering. Finally, he couldn’t keep quiet any longer.

“I want to play DeathMaze. Everybody plays,” Thomas whined. *“I have to lie all of the time and say I don’t want to play. But I do. I don’t play because I know you’ll take away my ability to even go there if I try. But I want to. I’d be great at DeathMaze. I know I would.”*

Carrie-Ann saw Thomas’s outburst coming a mile away. It happened at least once a week. She prayed for the patience to maintain her temper. Children could be so obstinate. She prayed for the Lord to make him see the error of his ways.

“If you play DeathMaze you would die,” Carrie-Ann said.

“Yeah, of course I would—so what?”

“So what?” her hands fluttered around her face like butterflies. *“How could you say such a silly, cavalier thing? We’re talking about your eternal soul.”*

“But it’s not really death. It’s in a computer. It’s not real!” Thomas slammed his orange juice bottle down on the table and a big blob of it flew out and splashed all over the counter.

“You’re going to clean that up right now,” Carrie-Ann demanded, her face hard and set.

Head down, Thomas got a sponge and wiped up the spilled juice.

When he finished, Carrie-Ann said, *“God made the virtual world same as the real one. All modes of existence are included in his Kingdom. When you play that game, you are voluntarily entering a situation where you will die. We have a word for that. What’s that word?”*

Thomas made a face. He knew the answer his mother wanted. Sighing, he said, *“Suicide.”*

“Exactly, suicide. And can someone who has committed suicide ever enter the Kingdom of Heaven?”

“But it isn’t real suicide.”

“Can someone who has committed suicide ever enter the Kingdom of Heaven?” Carrie-Ann repeated.

“No, but—”

“But nothing. You want to believe it’s not real. That’s the temptation. That’s the lie Satan wants you to believe more than any other. It’s one of his greatest deceptions. He plays on humanity’s vanity. We created the virtual world, so we think it is beyond the realm of God’s laws. We think we’ve created a magical space beyond religion’s reach. But all we’ve created is a playground for the devil to work his evil.”

“There are lots of people who call themselves Christians who play DeathMaze.”

“There are probably a lot of coyotes who call themselves wolves, it doesn’t make it so. Those people are idolaters and sinners. They are Digital Hindus who think they can just practice reincarnation without consequence. They’re deluded and they will go to Hell for their transgressions. Call yourself a Christian all you want, but if you play video games then you are a Digital Hindu and you will never enter the Kingdom of God.”

Thomas wanted to throw himself out of a window, but he didn’t. He couldn’t. Maybe his mother was right. Maybe committing suicide, in any realm of existence, would keep him from the Kingdom of Heaven. And even if heaven itself seemed a little boring, Thomas knew Hell wasn’t someplace he wanted to go. If dying really was a form of digital suicide, what about the killing? Did God see murder in a videogame as equivalent to murder in reality? If the simple desire to commit sin, without any corresponding action, was itself sinful, then surely committing murder would be even worse, even if the murder only happened digitally. These questions haunted Thomas and Veeno42 both.

At its core, it came down to the question: Was it worth his eternal soul to play a game?
In his heart, he knew the answer.

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