



Life Theft Auto: Vice City

HIRONMOY GOLDER

"CHOOSE YOUR CHARACTER"—the instruction pops up on the brand new 32-inch curved monitor's screen. "Hmm... Which one? Which one should I select?" Genghis Khan murmurs. He needs to choose a character for today — an avatar — his rider. He hesitates. By clicking the NEXT button he changes the characters on display, one by one. He is looking for a figure that suits his current mood best in the game called 'Life Theft Auto: Vice City.' Generically, it is a car driving game, developed by Xstream.vog company. He is one of its builders, now working as the CEO. He is a well-known figure in this industry; young gamers love to call him GK, which has become his celebrity name.

Like most games, the users of this game can make their own experience profiles inside the game by choosing a character and cars and then racing on different tracks and solving numerous problems on and off the road. But for adults, it has a unique feature; it has a secretive dark mode that gives access to a place called vice city, where one can explore money, crime, violence and all possible inhibitions. Gamers who have access to premium version can visit brothels in that mode. It has been an ingenious idea of his that even have led people in their fifties and sixties getting addicted to this game, regardless of their socio-economic and cultural identities. To them, it is less about driving and racing and more about relaxing and having a bit of fun. Holding the joystick and pressing the buttons they can "relax." Little wonder why the game has "so you

think you can't drive?" as its slogan.

GK has his own version of the game and he can literally do anything with it. He can break rules; he can set new rules for himself and get access to anything. He can use cheat-codes to make the game easier, to get engaged in his wild fantasies virtually. He can do anything to the female characters.

At the moment, GK is in one of his personal bungalows; it looks like an ancient *Zamindar's* palace. Built outside the capital city, it stands at the center of a tiny but dense wooded expanse. None of his family members are here; they have no idea about this very special place and what he does here. There are no roads leading to this place, only footways; hence, he does not have any of his posh cars. Instead, he has a helicopter. His servants also reside nearby. The highway is about half a kilometer away. GK has made huts for his attendants, similar to the ones from the villages—made up of woods, straws and jute sticks. In the bungalow, this gigantic personal room of his has all the latest gaming facilities. When he is here, he feels like a King having both a real and a virtual kingdom. When he enters the room, a few servants stand by the door for orders and others remain busy working outside.

GK is in his mid-fifties. He never belonged to the working class; nor was he ever a gentleman. He was never into football or cricket; he went to the Golf course once, because he thought, "who was more elite than him?" While he had swung the golf club for the first time, his right forearm crushed on

the extension of his fat belly and he missed the ball. There were a few young girls nearby who saw the incident and tittered among themselves. He did not approach them; he has tons of them in his PC. But yes, he hates remembering that moment. The other thing he hates is getting up early for morning walks. He tried that too, but was irritated by the over-enthusiastic old fellows trying religiously getting into shape. He does not have to be like everybody else as he has personal physicians who take care of it. And Mount Elizabeth of Singapore is just two hours flight-time away.

So, he loves shortcuts; he wants something that is addictive and seductive, something that can entertain him in an instant, like shots of drugs or alcohol. But he also needs to attend meetings, social and political gatherings and press-conferences to talk about the effects, updates, and upgrades of the games and apps his company develops. And nobody seems better in looks than him with his chubby face and childlike smile. He is a well-known philanthropist too, but—as usual— his enemies tell a different story. They say drug is his main-business while video games are his means for pleasure.

"Oh, you again," GK sees a hippy with introductory tests on the display. He does not like the character. "Sorry, Mr. Artist," he says, "I'm not like you. No fun. If you were real, I'd have wished that you die in a car accident and never appear on my screen or in Talk Shows again and speak against my games." He clicks NEXT again, and the hippy man disappears from the screen. A new