



character Laila—semi-nude, female, makes her appearance. Within a minute, he becomes titillated and wonders, “Why wasn’t I born in the 90s?” He looks at the tissue paper box on the desk beside the computer monitor. “Shall I use some cheat-codes and have a look at what she’s got? She better be good,” he meditates. He gives insane amounts of salary to the 3D animators and developers — most of whom are lunatics in their own lives. They made the game so photo-realistic that people buy special VR kits to play.

After a few seconds, he decides against using the tissue paper. “Ok, not now,” he tells himself, “But tonight for sure. Time for other things now.” He clicks the NEXT button again. A new character. His code name is Masum Killah. But he does not look like a Masum or an innocent person. He has a red beard. His black headpiece has a printed sign of danger on the forehead—a blood-drenched skull with two crisscrossing bones. GK immediately loves his smile; it is a cut-paste of his own smile. Then he reads his character intro made up of a few keywords.

Killah is Illiterate. But on the roads, he can differentiate cows and goats from humans by their appearances. He has a fake motorbike license; he drives buses and trucks with it. He likes to carry passengers to their destinations hurrying over the roads, flyovers, bridges and over the bodies of pedestrians. He loves his passengers, especially, the women. He hates to see them leave his bus. Once in a while, when one of them is alone on his bus, he with his helper, takes a joy ride. When the fest is over, he throws off the dead-body. Over the roads, however, he is not a silent killer. He roars and people screech. And that’s what GK wants. He presses the other button SELECT.

“The real fun begins...,” he shouts gleefully and starts rubbing his hands. He is excited as hell. But nothing happens. Unexpectedly, the screen turns black. A few

seconds pass, GK becomes irritated. Then, the game starts. A bus is already running on a busy road. He holds the joy-stick and presses the buttons. He knows this route. Soon he realizes that his control button is not working. What he is seeing on the display are clips, recaps of his previous races and missions. These are segments of how he crushed other vehicles, ran over riders on bikes and pedestrians and violated the laws. The breaking and the bursting sound of the crushes, the screams of the dying people, and the laughter of his voice composed a metallic song he never heard before.

“Wait! What? How? ...How could the sound of me laughing be there in the game?”

He glances inside the bus surreptitiously. The dead bodies of the passengers are bouncing disorderly like popcorns baking in an oven.

“What’s wrong with this game? This isn’t supposed to happen.”

He throws down the game-controller on the desk. But the keyboard is not working either, not even the mouse. His heart starts to beat faster; he doesn’t know what to do. A video clip of him enjoying the game – laughing out loud appears on the top right corner of the screen alongside the running video. This is a proof of his reaction of every murder he has committed. Like Killah, he killed for fun. For the first time, he becomes scared of his own smiling face. Is it a smile? It looks more like a grimace. The video rolls fast... then gets faster... like the speed of light.

“Who made these effects without my permission?” his mind races. He picks up his iphone. It is dead and heavy as a brick. He leaves the chair and walks hastily towards the door. It is locked. He bangs on it but nobody answers, as if the guards are not there.

“I’ve to keep my cool. This can happen, right? It’s all about algorithms, I know it is,” he mutters and tries to calm himself. He sits on the couch and tries to think. “But

what happened to the guards?” he asks himself. The question makes him more nervous. He remembers the alarm switch on his desk and rushes toward it. Instead of hearing a ringing sound, he hears the sound of an engine starting. But he has no car here. He listens carefully. This sound is not coming from outside, it’s coming from ... his desktop computer. But... but... weren’t the speakers turned off? He always uses headphones.

He perches on his chair and looks at the display in stark fear. It is dark, but piercing the darkness a figure comes up front. A girl, in her school uniform. Then a schoolboy appears beside her. His school bag is still on his shoulders. Their faces flicker like the delicate flame of a wax-candle challenged by a gentle wind. GK’s eyes hurt. They look at him — directly into his eyes. Their faces come closer towards the window of the screen. “Are they flying?” GK asks himself. He sees a flash of their blood-bathed-fleshy-face. His jaw drops in horror and he tries to scream. But, he cannot. He sweats like a melting glacier.

YOUR LIFE IS HACKED a subtitle pops up into the screen. In a flash, GK sees a wormhole. It is a fast-forwarding tunnel — moving directly towards him as if it is going to swallow his head. At the end of the tunnel, he sees a bus; it is running at an unbelievable speed towards him. He tries to move his body, but finds that he is paralyzed. He hears a chorus, he jolts in fear as he realizes that the subtitles are the words from those two kids:

“YOUR LIFE IS HACKED. AND...IT WILL BE STOLEN SOON. YOU THINK YOU OWN EVERY LIFE IN THIS SYSTEM? WELL, YOU ARE WRONG. IN THIS GAME YOU DO NOT OWN YOUR OWN LIFE EVEN.”

The chorus stops. His computer shuts itself down. Then GK hears a very familiar sound—the sound of a motor engine. He forcefully tries to regain control over his body and succeeds. He jumps off the chair and rushes to the opposite direction of the monitor. He kicks the door with all his strength. Then his brain gets unlocked and he remembers every name he ever heard. He screams but nobody is outside. He calls his mother, his father, his wife, and his children. All the faces flash through his mind like a photo slideshow. The roar of the engine becomes stronger. It is getting nearer. “Oh! God! Please save me,” he breaks down on the floor.

The desktop starts trembling; the monitor lights up again. He feels a strong vibration on the floor. The sound is getting louder and louder. He knows it is a bus. Even though he can’t see it, he knows it’s here; not outside, not in the woods. When the bus appears again on the screen—jolt-ing and jumping—he moves backward and crashes against the wall. There is no place to go. He watches the bus coming out of the tunnel — out of the monitor. It is coming out like the way a spaceship comes out from a wormhole after a hyper-drive. The bus turns gigantic. Finally, its front wheels land on the floor. The time is slow; so slow that he can see and recognize the person driving the bus—carrying the heavy burden of a thousand dead bodies. How can he ever forget the face of Masum Killah — the driver who kills for fun?

The killer driver who looks exactly like him!

*Hironmoy Golder, using slate and chalk; palm leaf, bamboo wicker and ink, learnt writing from his mother. He is one of the first to complete an MA in Literature & Creative Writing from ULAB.*