



The Satan of Jhumrah

Short Story by E.

Harikumar

translated by

E. Madhavan.

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'The Satan of Jhumrah' written in 1998 has assumed special relevance now, as society discusses with concern the disturbing reports from different parts of the globe including our own country about children falling prey to the so called internet games like the "Blue Whale". This game reportedly demand the children to accomplish extraordinary tasks over 50 sessions. The tasks become progressively dangerous and culminate in an act which would end the child's life. This short story was written in 1998 by the author when even a Pentium PC was a rarity, not to speak of the high speed internet!

The Satan of Jhumrah

(Short Story by E. Harikumar)

He is Sunil Menon; a wealthy businessman. Has an air-conditioned office at M.G. Road and owns a double-storey bungalow in Panampilly Nagar. He lives there with all modern amenities and his proud possession includes a wife and a son. A happy family indeed!

Once in a month and without fail he boards a plane to Saudi Arabia. That is to attend to his export-import business. While returning, he would carry French perfume for his wife and computer games for his son. Both of them never wanted anything else. As for himself, he brings only movie CDs with Bruce Willis or Michael Douglas acting in them. Son greedily snatches the CD gifted to him and runs to the computer room. He is lost for the remaining part of the day. After dinner Sunil watches the super-human acts of Bruce Willis in his video-player, while his wife would be watching some Hindi movie in a TV channel sitting in the bed room upstairs. Rajesh sitting in the computer room downstairs all tensed up would be intently looking at the computer screen as his fingers frantically run over the key board.

As Bruce Willis, his body riddled with wounds and shirt smeared with blood and grease, walks away into the screen, Sunil switches off the player. He asks his son, whose eyes are glued to the computer, a never responded question: "are you not going to sleep?" After standing behind his son for two minutes admiring his dexterity on the machine, he goes upstairs. Rajesh uses Sunil's computer. It is the new Pentium1. His i486 has now turned too slow. He does not have the patience to play his computer game in that. So whenever he gets a new CD he would load it to his father's machine. The speed of Pentium gives him a high. This time father brought the game 'DOOM'2. He had played it in his friend's computer before. But only when it was played in a Pentium computer did he realize the real high to which the game could take him. He would leave Pentium, if and only it is absolutely needed by his father. Sunil has stored all his files in the office computer. He keeps only secret documents in his home computer.

It so happened once when Rajesh encountered shortage of space in his 486 computer, he was trying his father's computer. He was under the impression that his father's computer would be full of office files and there would be hardly any space left. But to his delight he found 850 mega bytes lying free in the hard disk. Acres of fertile land! It was then that he started raising his crops in his father's Pentium computer field!

Terrible creatures stared at Rajesh from the computer screen. Fire and smoke emitted from their mouths. He is shooting them down using different types of guns.



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Well-lit corridors are filled with the headless cadavers of those creatures. He is running down those narrow alleys holding his guns and chasing the terrible creatures. He alternately yet continuously uses his Magma and Laser Guns. It is a dreadful war. The race down the narrow alleys was fraught with dangers. It is impossible to guess where those creatures of terrible shapes would be lurking in the hide-outs. They are there everywhere. Moreover it was necessary to run, dodging those barrels filled with poison and also the backwaters, without either touching them or falling in them.

"Now-a-days Rajesh never sits in front of the television." observed Rajani, "Could he ever let go cartoon network and its movies, 'Johnny Quest' and 'Mask'? But now see, he does not even watch those two. Then he used to be in front of TV sharp at 6 o'clock leaving behind everything else, only to watch Jim Carrey's war-cry 'Somebody Stop Me!' in 'The Mask'."

True. Of late he does not watch programmes on TV. "Is the new game so absorbing?" Rajani asked her husband. "It is the latest" he replied. He insisted on the latest models while making a purchase - whether it is computer, washing machine, or jewellery for his wife. There was a time when he along with his wife used to frequent discount sale stalls to buy cheap items; that also after hard bargaining. Those days were not far off in the past, just five years back. Past is past; he was not interested in brooding over it. Today he can buy anything he wants. Things are just a phone call away. He is in a world of cell phones, emails and credit cards. He would strain his ears for the soft feminine sound of the pager which he tied around his waist. The pager triggered long and extended business calls, lunch, dinner, business tours, stay in five star hotels...

Rajesh raised his eyes from the screen. He is alone in the room. An insect had fallen in the glass of milk kept on the table by his mother. He had not seen such an insect before. It is wriggling in the milk. He tried to take it out with a ball-point pen. That moment he noticed its eyes. Horrific eyes! He felt scared. He looked at the clock and realized that it was 2 o'clock. Father and mother would be fast asleep upstairs. He is all alone downstairs with the strange creatures in the computer! Really, it was a life and death war. He may fall prey to the weapons of one of those strange creatures if he delays using his gun even by fraction of a second! Once the bullets get exhausted in the gun, he would run back to the weapon store and instantly be back either with reloaded guns or new guns.

His finger hit somewhere on the key board by mistake. All of a sudden the screen started blinking a warning. "Level 2! DANGER! Should not proceed without proper expertise! Return to Level 1?"

In the dialogue box options "Yes" and "No" appeared. He pressed the second button. There is no return now. The dialogue box disappeared. A terrible creature is roaring on the screen. In the bottom of the screen written in letters dripping with blood were words, 'You are great'. What that strangely looking filthy creature said with absolute scorn was also the same.

What followed next made all wars fought till then looks like a child's play. Terrible creatures came roaring. They were really enormous creatures making deafening war cries for warm blood. Rajesh confronted them by using Magma and Laser guns continually. Normal guns proved inadequate. Even a moment of distraction would be fatal.

Suddenly Rajesh felt that the screen was growing enormously big. It grew as big as the room. And he also smelt a rotten odor. Rajesh found that he was among those terrifying creatures who were oozing blood and which smelt of raw flesh and



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realized that he was now freed from the control of the key board and computer. Now the guns are right in his hands. He can use them without depending on the buttons of the key board. This realization made him insane with the sense of the ultimate power. Shouting a war-cry he ran down the corridors where light and darkness alternated!

Rajesh was not in his room. Keeping the tea cup on the table she searched for him in the bath room. No, he was not there either. Would he have gone out for playing? Usually he does not go out so early. Moreover, his cricket bat was there in the almira. Then she noticed that the main door was locked from inside. She felt relieved that he has not gone outside the house. But, after thorough search of the house for nearly ten minutes and when Rajesh could not be found, fear started gripping her. She shook Sunil and woke him up.

He woke up with a shudder. Of late he shudders quite easily for even minor things. Rajesh was in front of the computer when he went to sleep, he recollected. He also recollected what he told Rajesh about stopping the game and going to sleep; which of course did not bother him. He does not have any sense of place or time while sitting in front of the computer; may be all kids are like that.

Rajani is at the phone making frantic calls to all of Rajesh's friends. "Has he not come there?.. do not know. He was here till late last night.....I am scared....."

Sunil is standing in front of the computer. A layer of fat has formed on the surface of the milk in the glass. He touched the key board. Slowly the screen which had gone to sleep-mode brightened. Doom is continuing. Computer is playing apparently in auto mode. May be that is the game which Rajesh had saved. He is in the habit of saving games as he advances. He bent down to close the game; but then decided against it. For some vague reason Sunil thought of the Arab, his business partner in Saudi. He had gone to buy the CD of 'Doom' with the Arab. When he was with Sunil, Samad never allowed Sunil to pay for anything. "You are in my country and my guest!" Initially Sunil felt it quite odd and discomfoting. When he was buying things for his wife and son, why should this man make payments on his behalf? But gradually he gave in. The Arab was a gentleman; a man who held poetry close to his heart. Once when Sunil bought French perfume for his wife he said, "This is for the rose flower of your heart's garden!" May be it is that the Arabs think in a different way. But that romantic manner is palpable in their language; flowery and poetical. When he visited them he behaved very gently with Rajani. He addressed her as Madam. No dirty staring or unnecessary touches.

"Do something." Rajani said. She was on the brink of weeping. "Would anything have happened to our son?"

He does not know. He was thinking about his trips with Samad. Sunil was cruising in Samad's huge Rolls Royce at the speed of 150 kmph. It was then that Samad spoke about the Satan of Jhumra. "Satan is always the person of temptations. Since the time of Adam Nabi, he has been fighting against God's dispensations wielding the weapon of temptation." Samad stopped for a moment before continuing. "Or, are we all not the children of Satan? What material is there to prove that we are the children of God?"

He switched on the television in the car with the remote. By some coincidence the scene of pilgrims pelting stones at the Satan of Jhumrah appeared on the screen. It is a ritual during the return journey from Haj pilgrimage. But then this was not Haj season. It was only a repeat telecast of the documentary by BBC on Haj.

"Did I say anything wrong? If God is all powerful; so is Satan. Whatever we see around us; are they not temptations of Satan? This car, the television we are



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viewing now, bombs produced and kept ready for use by many countries; are they all of the Satan's? Are we not certain that in God's scheme of things there is no place for any of these? Could we have achieved all these had Satan not tempted Eve to relish the forbidden fruit?"

"It may be God who created this universe. But all those have slipped from God's hands. Today Satan is in charge. And these people pelt stones at this very Satan! What a contradiction!"

Dangerous line of thinking, Sunil thought. Rajani used to go to temple twice a day to pray. She used to fast on Mondays as penance. He too was a believer. But it was during that period that they suffered the most. He was employed in a low paid job; that too with uncertainty hanging about permanency. No money was left after tenth of the month. As he had no money to buy petrol he never took his 1978 model bike out. He had just enough money to travel in a bus. He hated to recall the sense of inferiority he felt when he had to accompany executives from their Delhi office or foreigners to a five star hotel, dressed up in faded shirts and tattered shoes. While taking full-course lunch or dinner along with them at company expense, the thought of his wife and son eating rice and rotten sambhar at home would haunt him. He would feel the piece of meat he was chewing choking his throat. The day before he had this five star lunch, he had mercilessly beaten up his son. Rajesh's fault was that he cried as his father had failed to bring him toffee costing just two rupees! His son's weeping face came to his mind and his eyes turned wet. He attributed it to the chilies in the dish, thus avoided embarrassment.

The Arab continued, "You know how the two world wars spurred great advancement in science. Is it not the quest for efficient weapons to quickly destroy the enemy in masses that got man interested in science? Each invention is the result of man's quest for destruction. Later they experimented to see if these can be used for increasing man's comfort. As a result we have the consumer goods of today. Just think of it. After killing man, the same technology is used to produce things which are needed for his comfort! Actually what he needs is a coffin only, isn't it?"

Sunil was indeed aghast. He was witnessing the intellect of a high order which he did not expect from a rustic Arab that too a smuggler. Samad explained everything with clarity and in good English. He had his education in Oxford. He also had lot to say on smuggling. "We are not selling stolen goods. We sell goods of high quality which we buy from the market. If it has to be imported into your country you have to pay duty. But what do the ministers and officers do with the money you and me pay as duty? Do you agree with that? Therefore, first thing to be stopped should be their looting. Let me repeat; we are not stealing; just not paying the unjustifiable duty they impose."

It was in a hotel that he had his first encounter with the Arab. He had finished lunch with two foreigner clients and was leaving the hotel after escorting them in their rooms when the bell boy approached him and said the Arab wanted to meet him. The Arab was well ensconced in the softness of the sofa in the hotel foyer. He asked Sunil to sit beside him. He took a visiting card from his pocket and passed it on to Sunil. Card was in Arabic. Sunil stopped for a moment feeling at a loss.

"Turn the card and see."

On the reverse was printed the Arab's name and address in English.

"First lesson is this. Not only the coins, but everything has got a reverse side. Even a face has two sides; one side serious and the other side smiling. Can't you show me the other side of your face?"



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At that instant he realized how serious he was looking. Slowly the tension lightened. He smiled. Arab said. "You are wasting your time for those people. If you wish to do something better, please come and meet me. I am in Room No 304 and will be there till day after tomorrow."

"Shall I call the police?" Rajani was crying. "Why are you not doing anything?"

He was afraid of the police. Police has no place in his scheme of things. He said, "Let me inquire; you remain calm without worrying like this."

Computer monitor had again gone to sleep. May be Doom is running in the background. He was afraid of touching the key board once again.

Outside there was the noise of vehicles halting to a screech. He looked through the window. Two jeeps and police. When the police rang the bell he opened the door.

Two officers entered first after showing their identity cards.

"Warrant" they said, "for search."

"Can you stop for a minute? We are worried as our son is missing. I am pre-occupied with that problem. If it is not inconvenient for you, another day....."

"We have orders."

They were forcing themselves in. Customs officers were in white uniforms and policemen in khakhi. One Customs officer in white uniform entered the computer room. Hitting the keys he sat in front of the computer. Rest moved on and started searching other rooms in the house. They pulled diaries and account books out of the almirahs. An officer was preparing the list of items on a paper placed on the table.

Sunil went to the computer room. The officer sitting in front of the computer had turned pale. He was rebooting the computer countless times. Each time it would come back to the game "Doom". It would have been somewhat easy if he could reach auto execution. But he was not able to reach even the settings. Finally he could enter settings and he searched. He could not identify the problem. What he saw on the screen could not be explained with what he had learnt during training. Panicking, he was pressing each key in a bid to resolve the issue. After pressing a few keys he would press escape button as if he wished to get freedom from this ordeal. Monitor was nonchalantly showing the scenes of the horrendous war. He ducked sideways to escape from the bullets whooshing out from the screen. He had played "Doom", but not so terrifying a game like this one.... even in the cool of the air-conditioned room he perspired. With pale face, he looked up at his senior officer who was approaching him.

"Sir, there is some problem, which I am not able to figure out. It could be some virus. But I am unable to load the antivirus package."

He held the anti-virus diskette up as if to show to his boss the truth in his statement. At the same time he continued to fend off himself, like an acrobat, from the screeching bullets shooting from the screen.

Sunil once again told him, "Please do come another day. I am troubled not finding our son. You are taking from me the precious time that I need to spend in search of my son."

Customs Officer did not say anything. There was no change in his facial expression. He was a only a typical government servant bereft of any emotion. Nobody had taught him the meaning of word 'kindnesses'. Sunil knows the trick to transform the officer's stony look into smiles and cordiality. But today he was in no mood for that. Even if they search with a sieve they are not going to get anything



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incriminating. All accounts in the computer are coded. They appear like a quatrain poem only!

"You please stop this drill." the boss admonished his junior officer. He was irked by the sight of his junior ducking each time to escape from the bullets. "It is just a game."

"O.K., Sir" he said. He again pressed the escape button. Suddenly he pressed his hand on his forehead and turned. There was blood on his forehead. It dripped down his fingers. For a moment only, then his head sank down and rested on the key board.

Customs Officer shouted in panic.

"Call an ambulance..... Or hurry.....we will take him in our jeep itself."

He then felt the pulse of his junior who was sitting still. And he said.

"No need to hurry now. It is enough you call an ambulance."

They sat in the sofa. The senior customs officer was shaken. Others too stopped the search and came back to the room. Blood dripped down from the key board onto the table and then to the floor. It drew the picture of a red sun on the white ceramic tiled floor.

From outside came the sound of the approaching ambulance.

The ambulance went out screeching followed by the jeeps. A lone police man kept vigil outside the gate. Sunil went to the computer room. There was dried blood on the table and key boards. He soaked a cloth in water and slowly wiped all the blood and stains clean. He went to bath room and washed his hands with soap. As he returned and sat in front of the computer, he saw that the game had stopped. Now what were visible on the monitor were the Windows desktop and the short-cut icons over it. Those icons were now rearranged in a special manner and he saw a new one in the middle. His heart skipped a beat. His heart sank. In the agony of a cardiac failure he realized that Rajesh had turned into an icon in his computer!

Before pressing the mouse on the new icon, in a flash, he thought of the Satan of Jhumra.

-1998

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<http://www.e-harikumar.com/SINGLECOLUMN-STORIES-PDF/JamrayileChekuthanSC.pdf>

Notes:

1. The present generation will be completely unaware of the configuration of a personal computer back in 1998, where a hard disk having a capacity of 1000 Mb was considered pretty big. It was a time of transition from Windows 486 class to the Pentium class (around the year 1993-94).

2. The game Doom I, II, III etc. were very popular those times. The story is woven in this background.