

Prologue

I've never really been 'into' video games. I can remember playing that old tennis game, on a TV screen I think, back in the late 70's. When I was about 17, I played Space Invaders in our local golf club, but sort of lost interest when it was 'upgraded' to Galaxian. I preferred the simplicity of Space Invaders, which was also my favourite on the Atari in our house at that time. The 2 other options were Pacman and Frogger, I did play them sometimes, but half-heartedly at best, whereas I became very proficient at Space Invaders. I can't remember if it was me or one of my brothers who discovered a quirk, that if you quickly pulled out and put the cable back in at the same time as pressing reset, you got unlimited bullets, when normally you had to wait until one hit target or left the top of the screen before you got a fresh bullet. I think we called it a quirk? Not a hack; life or otherwise! ...Here's a strapline – 'Breathing...the ultimate life hack'...just subscribe to our newsletter and we'll tell you how. I digress. Anyway, my Space Invaders proficiency then extended to being able to 'clear' the screen before the first turn! That soon became pretty boring. I toyed with shooting games and some of the athletics and even golf-based games in my early days of going to pubs, I think I much preferred the beer, or back then, maybe Pernod and blackcurrant, or the now seemingly unthinkable Malibu and pineapple. Also, in my late teens, a friend once turned up at our house with a game called Football Manager, which we played until about 6 the next morning. I think we progressed up through the 4 English divisions and maybe won the European Cup, but it was never the same again. I didn't get hooked, and that was probably my biggest chance. I went through a wee phase of playing Snake on a Nokia phone maybe 15 years ago and fiddled with some of the generic or built in games when I first had a smartphone, but more in the way my cat plays with a mouse he's caught and gets bored of it. Like him, there's no real hunger for it, it's just filling in the spaces of boredom. I'm sure I've tried a few other games that weren't memorable enough to add to the above, but, I suppose if you stack all that up, my reality has been/is that I have played loads of computer games, maybe more than I knew...even though I claim to having never been 'into' them.

Do Humans Dream of Reality?

I'm having a walk along Byres Road in between customer appointments (I sell gas central heating boilers), and I'm really taken by the range of shops, cafes and bars here. I never really got to know the west-end. I grew up in Glasgow but have lived in Dundee for many years, so was happy when I got a chance to fill in for a colleague down here for a week. I'm feeling a bit out of touch with reality today, not in a bad way, I can't quite put my finger on it. It's like everything I see is strange and unusual, yet at the same time, recognisable, and even comforting? (you know that Aussie-style, now ubiquitous, raised inflection at the end of a sentence? Yeah? Like the way Stewie Griffin talks?) I digress, not for the first time in my life! My mind returns to gas boilers, they're being phased out you know. Progress I suppose. I better find something else to sell before they do. I've still got a couple of years...

'Pedro?' (my name is Peter, but Glaswegians have often called me Pedro, it seems to be a thing! Or Gas Meter, funnily enough. Cockneys are more famous for it but rhyming slang was very familiar to me growing up in Glasgow). I turn, 'Yes, do I know you?'

'Maybe yes, maybe no.'

'Come on, don't start.'

'My name is Dudley'

'Mmm...I've only ever known two Dudleys, one worked in telecoms, one owned a Spar shop in Blair Atholl'

'Well, I'm the other one.'

'Who are you?'

'You were just looking for me'

'How do you mean?'

'You were having a moment of clarity.'

'I thought I was being out of touch with reality.'

'You were... that's your clarity right there...none of this is real.'

'None of what?'

'This...life...life here on Earth.'

'Thanks Dudley, I'm busy.'

'I know, OK, call me by my surname then, maybe we'll get off on a better footing...it's Clarence, from the Latin for clarity.'

'Who are you?'

'That's the second time you've asked me that.'

'Well?'

'Come here, have a seat, take a load off.'

'Hey, where did that table and chairs just come from?'

'Look, sit here, it will all be clear soon.'

'I don't know why I'm listening to you. I think I'm going to regret this.'

'We can see you have been looking for meaning.'

'Isn't everybody?'

'To a degree, but you have been looking deeper than usual recently.'

'Maybe, not sure why.'

'That doesn't matter, look, I'm going to give you a 'cheat' to get to the next level, maybe give you a shot at reality.'

'You don't strike me as the drink or drugs type...schizophrenia? Or bi-polar on an 'up' day?'

'Look, I know it may sound funny, but once you stop judging everything, accept that some things are as they are, and try even a wee bit, to feel what the other person might be feeling, then you have a chance to move through the game.'

'The game? What game?'

'Earth: Reality Quest. That's the name of the game you're in.'

'You know Dudley, I swear I just realised that a split second before you said it!'

'Well done...welcome to your reality.'

'So, is that what the whole universe is? A computer game?'

'Well there are many universes, and many games. Your game is part of a series of very long running games in this universe.'

'So, what's the overall game called?'

'Empires of the Almightyes. (I sniggered) What? What's so funny?'

'Nothing...just sounds a bit grand and pompous.'

...'and so it should. You know what your problem is?'

'Yes, yes...I do actually...I'm a middle-aged Glaswegian, reasonably intelligent, with a nagging feeling I've never really done anything with my life...so I just make a big fucking joke out of everything.'

'Close, but it's not a Glaswegian, or even Scottish or British thing, it's Universal Error 424242, named due to the first realisations coming on at around 42 years of age and you normally get 3 chances in a normal lifespan to reverse it. Not many do!'

'Shit. Do you know if I've still got a chance left?'

'Only you can tell that.'

...'but I don't know'...

'Yes, you do, you're just not being properly.'

'Being properly?'

'Yes, you are a human being, not a human doing. I mean, we really gave you such a massive clue there! Yet, everybody seems to be doing instead of just being. Very few get that one!'

'I have tried just to be...but it's not that easy sometimes.'

'It's the easiest thing in your world...it's what you were originally programmed for...there have been a few periods in Earth history as you call it, when more people were getting it, the Mayans for instance, they were pretty cool with being human. These days most people are trying to be something they're not.'

'OK it does sound easy on a certain level, but things just get in the way.'

...'because you try to make things too complicated for your simple 'being' programming. You see, you think you are sentient beings, but you are only about 15 per cent truly sentient, most of you is just a character in the game. You can reach a life of pure reality, but not many do so.'

'How many do?'

'From this planet, we average 2 people per year who find the link to the next level. It used to be one every 5 years...we think the mindfulness craze has helped.'

'So, how do they do that?'

'Have you heard of 'string theory'?'

'Yes, I've seen an advert for guitar lessons in Dundee called 'Bob's String Theory.'

'That's it.'

'What do you mean that's it, I was joking!'

'No, that's the link to the multiverse. Everything...ever.'

'What, in Dundee?'

'Yes, in Dundee, there are others though.'

'I once nearly phoned Bob's String Theory.'

'You would have just heard a message saying – can't take your call right now, please leave your name and number, we'll get back to you as soon as we can.'

'Then what?'

'They don't get back to you, the number only works properly if you call it from a phone that operates on many more dimensions than the ones currently in use on Earth.'

'What happens if you call from one of them?'

'Pretty much whatever you want to happen...it's a portal to every wormhole that's ever been in existence. Of course, wormholes are theoretical objects in your 'earthscience', but in reality, are 'cheats', or hacks if you insist (sighing). There's also

a café here in the West End of Glasgow that has an extraordinary number of unsuspecting customers who end up going through one. We're not entirely sure if it has to do with the demographic of the clientele in being young, a lot of sci-fi aficionados maybe, open to new ideas – or if it's a physical earth property. There's a tributary-like splinter from the Highland Faultline from Stonehaven to Helensburgh that runs underneath the café and during times of high solar sunspot activity there seems to be a surge in the appearance of wormholes. You do the math. Sorry, I've always wanted to use that one ludicrously inappropriately, with just a scintilla of verité. Sorry...oh, oh, wait, there's one coming now. Look, I'll show you on my phone.'

'What...what are you talking about?'

'A customer at Café Vermicelli is just about to discover a wormhole, look, I can tune in online'...

We both huddle around his phone, huge screen, clear picture, perfect sound quality, as a 30ish year old guy is standing at the takeaway coffee bar of Café Vermicelli. The scene begins with the waiter Surat acknowledging customer Danny, putting a few dishes back in place on a shelf, and then turning back to him.

Surat – how can I help you sir?

Danny – oatmilk cappuccino, big man.

Surat – certainly sir, anything else?

Danny – naw that's fine, where ye fae pal?

Surat – Azerbaijan

Danny – Aw, Azerbaijan eh...whit's the word oan the street in Baku this time eh the year?

Surat – mmm...impeachment?

Danny – aye, impeachment awright, some eh oor wans should be impeached. No mistake.

Surat – (laughing) yes...on what charges.

Danny – eh...fuck...eh...wait...'bawbaggery', that's fur a start...'cuntfuckery', oh aye...and...eh...eh...oh, 'nogoatafuckinscoobydooism'. Aye, guilty as charged your honour. Take them down.

Surat – sorry, my English is not very good.

Danny – Naw, naw, your English is perfect big man, better than ma Azerbaijani. Naw, it's me...let me explain...bawbaggery is the condition of no bein very nice.

Surat – Misanthropy?

Danny – aye, misanthropy...belter! Noo, cuntfuckery is mair making a arse o everyhin. Useless.

Surat – ah, yes...and the other thing?

Danny – at's a soart a rhyming slang based on a 1970's cartoon type a deal.

Surat – Something to do with Top Cat?

Danny – naw...good shout but...naw it's Scooby Doo, no goat a scooby, no goat a scooby doo, no goat a clue.

Surat – Clueless?

Danny – Aye, but mair aboot tuning in, empathy, aye genuine empathy, no that bullshit call-centre 'oh, yes I've had the same problem myself, I know how you feel' set-up empathy...it's mair aboot no hivin the clue particularly about the masses, the working class, the underrepresented...the divide between the political class an nearly aw cunt else.

Surat – Do you wonder how some of our politicians get like that?

Danny – how d'ye mean get like that. It's how they ur.

Surat – Maybe, however some evidence would suggest that a lot of behaviour is small part genetic predisposition, large part early years environment, with perhaps medium part emotional self-development in adult life.

Danny – Haud oan...ladies and gentlemen of the jury I give you Teresa May, Donald Trump, Boris Johnson.

Surat – Do you think they were all just born with certain traits?

Danny – Aye...well tae a certain extent.

Surat – Exactly, to a certain extent, and then life gets in the way, you are moulded and develop according to a huge range of factors.

Danny – that ye cannae dae anything about!?

Surat – Well, yes and no, and maybe...there are controllables, partly controllables, and totally uncontrollables. That's life.

Danny – So that gies bawbag politicians a free pass?

Surat – No, I'm, not saying that, I'm just suggesting that there may be some extenuating factors for their behaviour.

Danny – Such as fur instance?

Surat – Well, I don't know...let me think. Yes, consider some of our senior male politicians from the past, and the type of schools they attended.

Danny – Private wans.

Surat – Yes, although strangely often referred to as public schools?

Danny – Bams!

Surat – Just consider...those young people, at the end of every school holiday period...looking into their mother's eyes...'mummy, why are you sending me away to live with bullies and rapists?'

Danny – Fuck me, never thought eh it like that. It's privilege but no a privilege ye particularly want eh.

Surat – Now I'm not saying that is everybody's experience, but if somebody did live through anything like that, then how could they ever show compassion for another person. If they didn't feel protection, safety or even liked by their parents then why would they then display the opposite behaviour toward others?

Danny – OK, fair play, ah wont citizen's arrest, try, and summarily execute them then.

Surat – Good man. If you see bad behaviour from another, then you behaving badly is not going to help...and of course you are also then promoting bad behaviour so how can you question it in someone else?

Danny – naw, ah know...and another thing. Ah like the effect eh this coffee ah've been drinkin. Ah'm feeling wonderfully non-judgemental all of a sudden.

Surat – yes, indeed, and by the way, you don't have to pay for your cappuccino now, just step through that arch, you'll find some more insights through there. Nice to meet you.

Danny – eh, how did that get there? Are you sayin go through that? It looks mental! But ahm strangely drawn to head through still. Ooyah...

We see Danny head through McDonalds style arches, except they're a dark shade of purple, the image fades from the phone screen.

'Wow, what was that?'

'Danny has been looking for meaning too. One of the games masters has spotted that and sought permission from *Her* to send him through a wormhole to the next level. He will now get one of these phones. We hope that he uses his insights gained to one day come back to Earth and further the quest to get everyone here to a state of reality. That's the ultimate goal.'

'What about Danny's language?'

'English?'

'No, I mean, sort of...bad...language.'

'We don't get up nor down about that kind of thing. We are far more interested in intention. Good intentions. Everybody starts out with them, but many let their minds be twisted by salespeople.'

'Hey, I'm a salesperson.'

'You tell people you're a salesperson, so that's fair, upfront. A lot of problems arise from people who are selling services, ideas, products and anything else you could think of without making it clear that it's a business transaction. Almost every war on Earth, especially the past 100 years or so, have been about sales and marketing.'

Some people develop a 'want/need' for ludicrous amounts of money and as pockets of your society reach a tipping point of these personality types, they become more and more insular. They must turn others against each other to keep their growth going. It often then gets to a level that requires war, which you would think would bring everyone back to their senses, and it occasionally does, but sometimes just ebbs and flows over time so that most of you become desensitised.'

'God, we sound horrendous.'

'Thanks, but I'm not God...and no, we don't judge you, I mean we could just fix everything, but that wouldn't be fair to all the other games masters. We will just keep allowing you the odd 'cheat' to help you find the best path.'

'So, what if that doesn't work, what if we blow ourselves up?'

'Earth has been the longest running game in history and *She* really, almost desperately, wants it to succeed. You always seem to get so far, right throughout your history, you have come so close to achieving clarity and therefore 'realness', but then something always seems to happen. In these past 100 years its almost as if you are actively thinking up ways to destroy yourselves, but *She* always sends one of us down to restore a little bit of balance before it's too late. Although, the word on the street is that things have got so crazy, *She* is going to come down herself this time.'

'*She...Her...who?*

'The Great One'

'The Great One?'

'Or in the Universal Language – Greta.'