

# PLAYING THE GAME OF LIFE

## A TRIBUTE TO VILLAGERS

Theo Frye Yanos

*Monday, November 16, 2014—5:30 AM*

**S**trafe left. Sprint forward. Jump. Critical ... yes—ouch! Backward. Block. Sprint forward—jump—no! Block. Hit-hit-hit-hit-hit-hit—no-no-no—yes!—no! Come on!—hit-hit-hit-*hit-hit*—argh!

“You Died!” appears on my screen. I slam the lid of my computer. Stupid game! I should have brought some more potions. So stupid. I have to get back to that poem for English class and stop messing around.

I sit back, relaxing in my chair, tapping my knuckles against my desk, staring passively at the lid of my laptop. Four wavy-looking squares arranged within a larger square on a clear gray field. It stares back at me with invisible eyes, teasing me. *You’re stuck in seventh grade having to write a stupid poem and I get to sit here and do nothing all day*, it taunts.

Why do I even like this game? I usually die fighting unarmed zombies, anyway.

Well, what about games in general? They’re fun. They require you to think about something that doesn’t pertain to life. They take your mind off of things. That’s why *I* like them, at least. Role-playing games put you in different positions, which takes your mind off the permanent role that you have in life.

Maybe that's why they aggravate me so much. Just like that weird square symbol, they make fun of me. That I can play a game in which I am a different person, but I can never leave reality.

I don't know—maybe life is only a game, except you have to find out the rules as you go along. After all, there's no rulebook that's read to you when you're a baby, and there's no way that you can see the code—only what the code *does*.

I realize what I just thought makes no sense. Whatever. Back to your poem, Katherine.

*I'd Rather Play the Game*

*Katherine Nouri*

*Sometimes the game seems like a sunny day  
Joyous rainbows chasing the rain away  
Or something to distract me from broken fame  
—I'd rather play the game*

*Sometimes it seems like a message from hell  
An eternal loop of darkness upon light thrice fell  
Or something to curse my own sacred name  
—I'd rather play the game*

*But most of the time it's a mystery  
A biography for a soul-starved history  
Light and dark, two double-edged swords, both sacred and  
    profane  
—I'd rather play the game*

*Of course I'd rather play it  
 For life without it I cannot script  
 Light and dark are the same  
 Both are beautiful in their name  
 ... For everything is beautiful*

*Remembering my return to the City of the Moon...  
 I thought I was escaping Earth's eternal doom  
 But I realized, with regret  
 That its corruption was as pure, and that way set  
 ... For there was light, yet there was also dark, and both were  
       beautiful*

*If we cannot believe in their beauty  
 Then the game is but a message lost from thee  
 If you do not play the game  
 Then you do not play the game  
 And cursed is your name  
 ... So you are true darkness without the game*

*Yet what is possibly lost  
 If it is just a spark toss'd  
 If it never had to be anything  
 Then it is nothing  
 ... Unless we make it something*

*Yet why bother  
 It stands, merely a lone offer  
 We all must understand  
 ... 'Tis just 'cause we can  
 —So I'd rather play the game*

*Sunday, April 27, 2016—2:30 PM*

“I wake up every day knowing that my best friend *tortures* innocent people, and you expect me not to have a reaction?” I tell my friend with a look of absolute seriousness as we walk back from school. “I mean—can you just think for a second? Can you just—”

“Calm down, Katherine,” Will says, “you’re over-dramatizing this way too much. The villagers are lines of code! It’s a game! Do you know what that means? Do you understand that, Katherine?”

“I do understand that they are in a game,” I explain, teeth gritted, “but I do *not* understand how your *twisted mind* uses that fact to come to the conclusion that it is okay to commit acts of absolute *cruelty* toward them! Since when is repeatedly punching someone who can’t even punch you back okay?”

“What you do in a game can’t possibly matter because it is within a *virtual environment*. Is that term within your vocabulary?” he says to me. It would’ve sounded mean, but he keeps chuckling. As if this conversation was a joke.

Anger flares up within my throat, aching to escape. Well, it’s not a joke. There are real lives that need to be defended here. I feel like punching him in the face. It’s okay, Katherine. Calm yourself. Count to three. One, two, three.

...

Try again. One, two, three.

Over the last couple years, I’ve been thinking about a “life is a game” theory in order to explain life and morality—or its “rules.” I realize that Will is possibly just not bright enough to understand my logic. I need to explain it to him. Really slowly, step by step, walking him through it.

“Look, Will,” I say to him, talking to him very slowly. Then I take a long pause.

“Let’s pretend for a second that life is a game. That life is a *virtual environment*. And—”

“But you can’t just say that it’s a virtual environment if it’s not. I mean—what proof do you —”

“What proof do you have that it isn’t?”

“Uh ... well ... I don’t really—but you still can’t say that —”

“Exactly. So it is at least *possible* for this to be true, since you have no proof against it.”

“Yes—possible, but that doesn’t—”

“Okay then. So how is life any different from games?”

“Because our lives are *way* more significant than in games—you can’t just say that they’re the same thing! I mean —”

“Yes, you’re right. But what you do in games is still something you do!

“Nonononono. You just implied that they’re the same! They’re not! Stuff I do in games is still stuff that I do, but it can’t possibly have any significance or show anything about me, because it is something I do when I know that it doesn’t matter, so it doesn’t really count. They’re two totally different things.”

“You’re *wrong*. It *does* count because—as you just said—they show what you would do in a situation in which you are convinced that they don’t matter. And *that* means that *if you can convince yourself* that what you do at a certain time in your life doesn’t matter, then you would act similarly! I mean—what if the stuff you do in this ‘game’ is *actually happening* somewhere out there, and you’re killing innocent villagers?”

“That’s impossible. This isn’t sci-fi, Katherine. And how will I ever be convinced that something I do in reality doesn’t matter? What I do in life *always* matters!”

“Yeah, right.” I look at him coldly. Oh, he’s bright enough to understand my logic, all right. He just isn’t trying. He’s a natural killer. “What about lying to Professor Hyrum just the other day? You said it didn’t matter!”

“Come on, Katherine! Are you defending that old—” Then he stops. He looks at me, scared. “Are you okay, Katherine? You look sort of—”

“No, Will. I’m fine. I’m as okay as ever. Just lacking a bit of *life*. Just a baby villager who’s been drowned in the desert well, that’s all. Nothing to worry about, Will. Nothing for *you* to worry about, at least. All those townspeople in the game—they’re grieving. But it’s not your problem. It’s just your duty. I understand.”

“Katherine, I’m sorry. I just—”

“YOU JUST *WHAT? WHAT EXACTLY?*”

Will backs away, afraid to speak.

“I just—you know—had to have a little—” he starts, trembling, “—a little control. A little power. That’s all, Katherine. I just needed to feel like I had power. Please, Katherine.”

“Why are you apologizing to me? Apologize to the villagers, you son of a—”

“Katherine!” he says, this time looking comical. Again, as if it’s a joke. But I can see the fear behind his eyes. “I mean—you can’t really be taking this so seriously! It’s just ... just a game....”

I finally look up to see where we’ve walked. We’re already in the train station, and it seems we’ve been standing there a while. Out of the corner of my eye, I see the silent watchers who look away quickly. I see

you looking, blue shirt. Watching this as if it's a show: "Two Classmates, One Argument: All For A Game." Well you can just—

"RAAAAAAAAA!" I cry out with rage, clutching at my head. "I'm like—about to—like—I mean.... Do you have a *heart*?"

"What are you going to do, punch me?"

So I do. Not a fake punch, a real one. One thrown with meaning. My weight shifts as my fist flies through the air and—darn it!—misses as he dodges it, throwing me off balance. He grabs my right arm as it attempts the punch, with a really tight grip—ouch! I make a movement with my left arm to try to punch him again, but he grabs that too. Shoot! Now, having me locked down, he rotates his torso to try to knee me. I suddenly have a divine moment of brilliance as I seize the opportunity of his incomplete balance, jumping onto him, setting my feet square with his shoulders. With my entire weight now on his him, he falls back with an avalanche's force, crashing his head on the scratchy wooden subway bench.

For a second, he gradually lifts his head. I imagine his vision flipping after the collision. More onlookers stand up, seemingly worried about him, but at the same time reluctant to come forward for fear of experiencing the same.

"Ouch!" he yells, clutching his head, grimacing as I pace back from the wreckage. "Katherine, you could've—you could've given me a concussion! I mean—what was that for?"

"It was for all of those helpless villagers out there, Will," I speak, staring him down with an icy gaze and gritted teeth, rubbing the red grip marks on my arm. "I am done with you!"

Will stays on the ground and looks at me warily, shaking his head, apparently unsure if this is real. Is it just the hit, or is it—

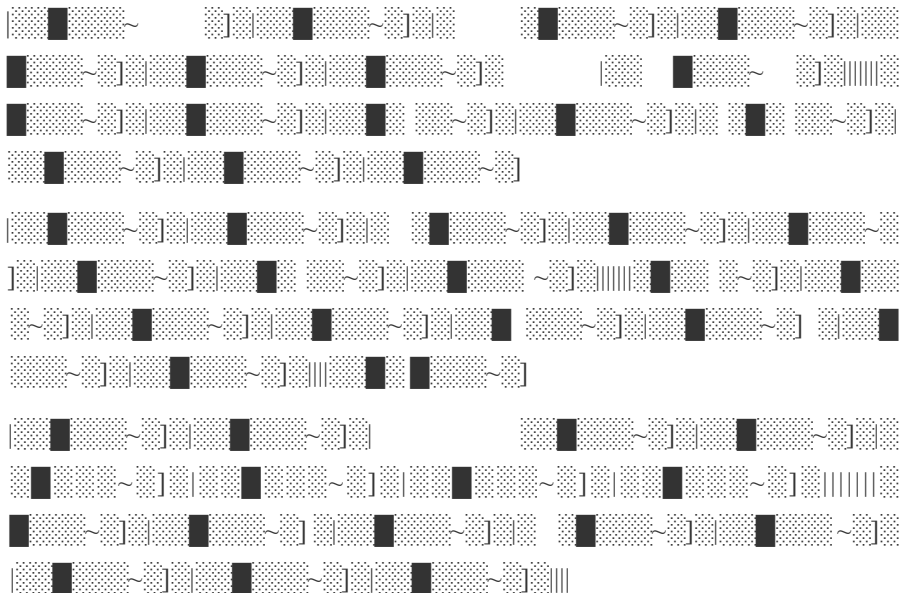
What’s he—suddenly, his right hand, which he is holding out in front of him like a weapon, starts to glow an eerie blue, and he shines the light out from it right into my eyes. I am blinded for a second, and I stumble backward and smash my head into the train. What the heck is—

“*Tu es traditor? Responde nunc,*” he says. My mind races, and everything seems to speed up, my senses primed and my heart beating faster and faster. What’s he speaking? How is he doing this? His eyes glow the same bright blue, and he keeps his glowing hand out, pointed at my chest, as if he expected it to stun me. “*RESPONDE NUNC, IGNAVUS!*”

“I don’t—”

“*Lightsworn es, scio; Quid hic agis? Ubi sunt ceteri—*”

Then everything goes blank and my body travels millions of light-years in a single—





*Dies Martis, ante diem XIV Kalendas  
Iulias, Ab Victoria Condita Triginta Trillion  
Tredecem—Hora Duodecima, Tertia Decima  
Minuta Noctis*

Will can't believe his eyes. *How is it possible?* He stares at the holographic screen in front of him. *How could there have been a survivor?* In utter shock and disbelief, he checks through the memory of his game and takes the memory board out of the computer to look at it manually. Sure enough, Will sees as he examines the memory from a couple seconds ago, she was unaffected by the Darksworn Stun Ray that he shot. *Unbelievable.*

He gazes, hypnotized, at the giant slab of metal, with all of the wiring and dark matter contents it needs to connect to the *Ludus Supremus*. The girl, Katherine, had not understood his Swornspeak. Yet she teleported away instantaneously, in a flare of bright white radiance. *She must be a Lightsworn, unaware of her powers. Somehow she survived....*

*“How could this happen?”* Will roars, throwing the memory board at the wall. His anger suddenly bursts out, like dynamite within every bone in his body. *Those people that think they have the dignity to call themselves Sworn, cowering from the darkness that stares them in the face as they cast away the swords offered by their enemies.*

It had been eons since the Lightsworn had been detected playing the *Ludus Supremus*. Every Darksworn knew that they had completely eradicated the Lightsworn after Victory's Ascendancy, the completion date of Operation Game.

Yet it was put into action without killing, without a rain of blood, and no dark, charismatic roses to decorate the Sworn as they clashed arms. Rather than bringing swords, the Darksworn brought new ways of spreading their philosophy. They unleashed a whole wave of games within the *Ludus Supremus*, and soon all of the Lightsworn subconsciously became Darksworn, joining them in their conquest of the game and its other players. As they played their beloved games as violent criminals and soldiers in war, little did they know that they were being taken by us, the Darksworn.

Since the Glorious Realization at the beginning of time, Darkya, the first Darksworn, knew that all of the Sworn must all bend the Rules to gain power over other players and take control of the *Ludus Supremus*. Lightlord, her brother, thought that they should live in harmony with the Ancient Rules and submit to them. The two siblings were commanded to play the game together, but they could not cooperate while playing. They split their separate ways, Darkya creating the Darksworn family and Lightlord creating the Lightsworn family.

For years and years, the two generations played their characters in the *Ludus Supremus* together, yet separated from each other and constantly at war, though often the Lightsworn would not fight because this violated their interpretation of the rules of the *Ludus Supremus*. Up until Victory's Ascendancy....

*Well, I guess it wasn't completed. Here is one who still rebels. One who dares to think beyond all of the others that contradicted her—a coward who refuses to accede to the rules of the Ludus Supremus. While all others would have joined my avatar in killing the villagers in the game within the Ludus, she refused. Had she been like this the whole time, or did she take this stance recently? How could we have*

*been so blind? Did I just encounter this by chance, or was it planned?  
Am I being exploited?*

*There must be more of them out there.* Rage pours through Will's body like magma through a dark, cold cave.

And silently Will chants the ancient, fiery words: *Omnes rebelles peribunt. Non supererunt. Ludus noster est.*

**All of the rebels must be destroyed. They shall not survive. The game is ours.**

### Language Appendix

Latin	<i>es</i>	<i>tu</i>	<i>traditor</i>	<i>responde</i>	<i>nunc</i>
English	are	you	traitor	answer	now
Latin	<i>scio</i>	<i>quid</i>	<i>hic</i>	<i>agis</i>	<i>ubi</i>
English	(I) know	what	here	(you) are doing	where
Latin	<i>sunt</i>	<i>ceteri</i>	<i>supremus</i>	<i>ludus</i>	<i>omnes</i>
English	are	others	supreme	game	all
Latin	<i>rebelles</i>	<i>peribunt</i>	<i>non</i>	<i>supererunt</i>	<i>noster</i>
English	rebels	will perish	not	will survive	our(s)