

## When Fantasy Meets Reality: Violence in *Blue Whale* Videogame

**Dr. Nancy S Rethinam, Ph.D., M.A., B.Ed., PGDEPMA, PGDCJ**  
Independent Researcher, Institute of English, Kerala University  
[nancy.sr40@yahoo.co.in](mailto:nancy.sr40@yahoo.co.in)

Videogames are hubs of entertainment and adventure. But the pros and cons of videogames are entirely different from that of the games we play in reality. The challenges promoted by the task based dare-videogames are deadlier than we expect. The reverberations felt in our minds at the name *The Blue Whale* is enough to explain the power of adventure challenges of such genre games. This article is a cultural study which critically foregrounds the depth of violence intended by the virtual game *The Blue Whale* on the basis of power of adventure challenge. It also focuses on the process of intermeshing of representation of meanings mediated through the video game and the manipulation of gamers to favour and follow adventure challenges which disrupt ones freedom to live in this world and thereby to open the eyes of the people to realize the power of adventure challenges which engulfs the player to sacrifice their life to a virtual lord.

**Keywords:** Task based dare video games, Power of adventure challenge, Violence, Virtual, Real.

*Violence is aggression that has extreme harm as its goal.*

Anderson and Bushman, 29

Playing violent videogames has been proved to provoke violence. Though violence varies in its form, violence is violence and it harms the stability of society. It disrupts the equilibrium maintained by the society and the individual. The effect of experience of violence gained through violent videogames often crosses the boundaries of virtuality. The violent narratives and role models, the gamers are exposed to, stamp a mark on the cognitive as well as psychomotor domains of the individual beyond recovery. But the studies that exist seem inadequate to explain the present trend set by dare-based games like *The Choking Challenge*, *The Ghost Pepper Challenge*, *Car Surfing Challenge*, *Ice Bucket Challenge* or *The Blue Whale*. Contemporary research studies rarely deviate from the earlier paths that have been proposed by the cultural theorists. At this juncture, this article will unfasten new vistas for the researchers.

Adventure plays an important role in man's life. To *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*, adventure is "an exciting, unusual, and sometimes dangerous experience" (20). Right from the childhood of an individual, the desire for adventure grows up. This desire achieves its peak during teen age and continues in youth stage without losing its fervour. It equips man to accept and face challenges. Challenge, for *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, is "a new or difficult task that tests the subject's ability and skill" (241). Apart from the confidence, courage and boldness which adventure rewards to face challenges in life, it addicts man. Addiction always subsides the thinking or questioning abilities of man. Adventure has power to control or addict its customers.

Power is, "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of population" (Foucault 140). It is a relation between forces or actions and Foucault refers it as power relation. Power relations are deeply rooted in the society and its organizations. The organizations or institutions in a society are places of power relationships. And a person living in the society cannot live excluding the interference of these power relationships. According to Foucault, Power is brought out from the society by various 'carceral' mechanisms. Virtual game genre is one such mechanism.

Emerging genre of virtual games, the adventure challenge or dare-based videogames offers adventure and fantasy through the challenge tasks designed in them. These videogames claim to provide a realistic and fantastic experience of adventure. This attracts and influences the gamers to it. The comparatively easier adventure tasks or challenges unfastened at the beginning levels of the game, indeed, excite the gamer with an insatiable curiosity to go forth in search of more fantasy and adventure. This facilitates to unlock the mysterious and dark objective of the task masters of this genre of games. It is difficult to deviate or redirect the gamer from his adventurous videogame challenges, if positioned in track decisively as designed and desired by the task manager/master. This happens because of the power relationship between the video game and the gamer. As they are designed as hackers, these adventure challenge games hack all the details concerning the player and use it for various purposes including blackmailing.

This article highlights that it is the Power of Adventure that enables the gamer to follow the instructions of the game master rather than Nye's softpower or Foucault's biopower. Power of Adventure Challenge, I personally opine, is the capability of the adventure challenges to unite the boundaries of the real and the virtual in order to lead an individual to perform the tasks/challenges demanded by the videogames in spite of how deadly they are. Meanwhile, the task master/manager metamorphoses himself as a virtual 'lord' and the individual follows him as a devotee performing every desired or targeted tasks.

Power of Adventure Challenge exerted through the dare-based videogames provides fantasy and satisfaction to the gamer and channels his abilities to mere submission to the game tasks. It transposes the game master to a virtual lord who rules the game players according to the desires or aim set formerly. The quest for adventure and the insatiable struggling for it exhibited by man resulted from the power relationship, indeed, quicken the merging of real and virtual. This eases the transition of the game master who provides instructions and tasks for the gamer to a virtual lord who controls the life of the player. The unquenchable thirst for adventure enables the game player to willingly surrender his/her self to the virtual lord. Now, it becomes easier to lead the gamer to the targeted darker tasks of the videogame. As a slave follows his master, the gamers follow the instructions put forth by the virtual lord. This is well proved in the cases of *The Choking Challenge*, *The Ghost Pepper Challenge*, *Car Surfing Challenge*, *Ice Berg Challenge* and *The Blue Whale*, though the challenges vary in these dare-based deadly adventure games.

It is *The Blue Whale* which caused reverberations in Kerala too. According to the media reports, the most violent adventure videogame, *The Blue Whale* started in late 2013 or early 2014 with F57, a ‘death group’ of Vkontatke (Russia’s largest social group). Almost all parts of the world came to know about this adventure video game on behalf of its extraordinary 50<sup>th</sup> task which demands the life of the gamer. *The Blue Whale*, belongs to the genre of adventure videogames, is claimed to be developed by a Russian game developer Philipp Budeikin when he was only 21years old. He has been suspended from his university while pursuing his Psychology study but the reason is not clear. When police interrogated him, he disclosed that the objective behind the adventure videogame, *The Blue Whale* is to remove the bio-wastes from earth’s crust.

The fact behind the name ‘blue whale’ excites everyone. It refers to the natural phenomenon of Cetacean stranding which is commonly known as beaching of whales. With some reason, oceanic mammals like whales, dolphins or porpoises, in single or cluster strand (to drive aground on a shore) themselves on beaches. Such beached whales die soon due to different reasons like dehydration, false posture of lying which blocks their blowhole, pressure of their own body weight etc. This natural practice of choking of whales must have led to the name, *The Blue Whale*.

*The Blue Whale* is designed as a game of 50 tasks. It circulates in different names like *Silent House*, *The Whales in the Sea*, *A Sea of Whales*, *Wake Me Up at 4.20 AM* and so on. The mystery behind this dare-based game begins from its availability. This deadly, viral and hacker video game cannot be downloaded from the app stores or browsers. The link to access this game is circulated through secret groups and it leaves no search history. Spread over 50 days, the game master challenges the gamers to do adventure tasks which excite him/her extravagantly. The

player has to prove that they have completed the unlocked game task in different ways like sending pictures, videos or live telecasts of the events.

The 50 tasks to be completed in 50 days are arranged in the increasing order of their difficulty or deadline. It unfolds demanding the pictures or videos of causing abrasions in gamer's hand. One of the tasks of the game demands the gamer to visit the sea. Yet another challenge is to draw the outline of a whale in the gamer's body using a sharp tool. By sending the pictures of such scenes, the player can unlock the next task. When they reach the 15<sup>th</sup> task, the game players, because of the Power of Adventure Challenge, become slaves to the game master and by the time the game master also must have metamorphosed as a virtual 'lord'. The power of adventure challenge exerted by such deadly games and the quest for adventure in the minds of the teen agers and youth balance the gamer to follow the instructions given by the virtual lord, though they are the deadliest ones. This balance enables the gamer to successfully complete the 50<sup>th</sup> task which demands the life of the gamer.

The mystery behind the secret trip of four youngsters from Palakkad to Chavakkad as reported by media to see the beach shook the minds of the parents and authorities of Kerala. The deadly adventure game has reached the youngsters of Kerala too. The earlier recognition of Blue Whale in Kerala paved way for the authorities to take initial and necessary steps to hinder incidents similar to the fate of Manpreeth of Mumbai, a 14 year boy who aspired to become a Pilot. Though this game has been abolished in many countries, it is reported that more than 10,000 youngsters were following this game in India alone.

The aspirations for such heinous dare-games arise from quest for adventure. But the knowledge and exposure to such games reach youngsters because of their dependence on internet. Internet is a hub of entertainments and networks where the boundary of fantasy and reality is blurred. The virtual world is entirely different from what the youngsters expect and this opens way for them to be trapped easily. Both the parents and their children should be educated that video gaming matters a lot, apart from implementing strict laws against such secret social networks which provide links to deadly games. By enforcing necessary steps, the parents as well as government can check the loss of life on behalf of such dare games.

---

### Work Cited

Anderson, C.A. and Bushman, B.J. 'Human aggression.' Annual Review of Psychology, 2002. 53:27-51  
"Adventure". Def. 1. *Macmillan English Dictionary to Advanced Learners International student Edition*. Oxford: Macmillan Education, 2002. Print.

---

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 19:2 February 2019

Dr. Nancy S Rethinam, Ph.D., M.A., B.Ed., PGDEPMA, PGDCJ  
When Fantasy Meets Reality: Violence in Blue Whale Videogame

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1977. Print.

Hornby, A.S. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. Ed. Margaret Deuter, et al. New 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015. Print.

---

---