

A PRESENTATION BY SAI ADITYA



earthience

A 3-LEVEL NEW STORY-BASED EXPERIENCE TYPOLOGY



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ALTERFACE
MACKNEXT



From being a voice when I needed it the most to being a creative escape from the blues of the pandemic here in India, thank you to the Storyland Studios Design Challenge for being the above and so much more.

FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

Welcome.

What is an earthience. How is it different from existing experience typologies. What are the three levels or three types of an earthience. Where and when can an earthience be created. These are very valid questions one would expect to see answers of at the start of a presentation like this.

But, I choose to do it at the end. As at the end, the examples of earthiences which follow in the coming pages will serve as our contexts to understand what an earthience is.

Given I am an aspiring themed experiences writer, I have laid out the earthiences before you in written form – albeit in a different manner. While from the point of view of the guest itself, it is written in a novel-like style to make it lively and engaging.

So grab something to eat or drink, get into your reading position, and enjoy what lies ahead.

To make it more interesting, the main characters in every earthience example have been named after the first names of the judges on this Design Challenge. This for creative purposes only and none other.

I enjoyed writing them. Hope you enjoy reading the same.

Have a great read. See you at the end.

Sai Aditya
India



EARTHIENCE

LEVEL ONE

A Level One earthience involves recreating the principal place of a story-based experience in a theme park.

Demonstrated through the example of
Lord Smith's Island Treasures

Tip: Visualize as you read.

January 16th, 2026

Rachel's Diary

I remember the day and date very precisely.

It was Thursday, August 15th 2024. The day when it all began.

A normal day at work. Left office an hour earlier than usual. As I made my way for the elevator, I observed Laurence too wrapping up for the day. I walked past waving a bye. Laurence then picks up pace to join me in the elevator. So, I wait for her.

Here is the moment. My call to adventure.

‘Any plans for the evening?’ asked Laurence.

I reply nothing much. Just some groceries shopping on the way back home. ‘What about you?’ I ask.

Laurence replies. ‘So, I hear about this movie *Lord Smith's Island Treasures* that came out last week. It's different is what people are saying... I mean the reviews...Instagram and all... going to check it out today... the show's at 7:20...really want to know what makes it different. So that is where I am headed.’

‘That's amazing, Laurence. For sure, seeing is believing right. Good thing you're doing that. Will be fun to know why this is on everyone's mind.’

‘Hey, why don't you join me...I mean... if you're free and willing...it'll be fun...what say?’



‘Yeah, why not. It will be great to tag along. Groceries....no worries. I can pick them up later.’

‘Awesome, from the office elevator to the movies then,’ Laurence replied.

‘Damn right!’ I reply.

—

Comfortably seated in the movie theatre with our popcorn buckets, we wait for the lights to dim out.

As the lights dim out, the regulars come on first – the studio names, sponsors and other information. And then just as everything is set for the visuals to begin, we see a white text appear on a black screen.

THE MOVIE YOU ARE ABOUT TO WATCH IS PART OF A STORY TOLD THROUGH VARIOUS FORMATS – CINEMA, THE INTERNET, A STREAMING SERVICE, SOCIAL MEDIA AND A THEME PARK.

I puzzlingly mutter to myself, ‘Okay...’
And then another text appears.

THAT WAY, THE STORY WILL NOT END WITH THE MOVIE.

And the final text.

IT WILL EXTEND INTO YOUR REAL LIFE.

The screen then turned black for a few seconds. Laurence and me look at each other with surprise and laughter at the same time.

The movie begins.



It starts off with the shot of a European style medium-to-large stone mansion with the text down below saying **THE SMITH'S ESTATE**. Then it is as if, you are walking towards the mansion. A person comes to greet and escort you inside. A viewer can make out that when the film was being shot, the actors were actually talking to the camera. Inside you meet more members of the family all greeting and talking to you (*the camera actually*) while taking you around. I knew for a fact that this was a breaking the fourth wall shot.... had read it somewhere... couldn't mention the same to Laurence then... there was so much happening on the screen as the family members were explaining the history of the estate through the many artefacts and paintings present. We finally reach the central atrium of the mansion, where we encounter a huge painting of one Lady Smith – the wife of the original Lord Edward Smith, the man who owned this mansion when it was built in 1789. We are brought to notice the absence of a barrette... a hair clip kind... although bigger and more ornamental on Lady Smith's head – something present in all of her younger paintings alongside Lord Smith.

To aid our curious brain about what happened to Lady Smith's barrette.... the movie goes into flashback mode. With that, the fourth wall shot ends and the real story begins.

It was the 1790s. Although the British left after 1776, Lord Edward Smith – a high ranking English nobleman-voyager was allowed to stay and continue his charity work in North American colonies given his goodwill with one and all. His brother Nicholas Smith had a displeasure for his generous acts. He thought precious money was being wasted away – money which the family could use to move back to Great Britain and live a new life under the King. To add salt to the injury, Edward Smith having built his family a new mansion decided to use parts of it for charitable purposes too. Nicholas couldn't take it anymore.

On an occasion when Lord Edward was facing an issue with funds for his social work, Nicholas sensed an opportunity. Nicholas knew what motivated his brother very well. In the good old days, when Britain ruled a major portion of the world, Lord Edward Smith's ship and he were sent to colonies around the world to strengthen relationships by order of the King George III. In King George's words, 'In Smith I found a man capable of braving stormy seas and more than capable of braving stormy colonies, and that too by his goodness.'

Nicholas proposed a solution to his brother.

'Edward, why don't you voyage the world and use your relations to procure funds for your charities here. That will combine your love of voyaging and your strength in relations.'



Edward loved the idea. He began preparations to set sail in the May of 1792. Nicholas in the meantime had recruited 4 killers and made them join the Lord and his crew. The idea was very simple. On the way back home, having collected the treasures and funds required for charity, the 4 killers would kill the Lord and his crew and dispose them off at sea. Upon reaching home, the 4 would mention a storm being responsible for his loss, and that they were the only survivors among the crew. They will also mention the Lord's made-up last wish. 'He wished to hand over all the money and treasures to Nicholas. Nicholas had to use the same to move back to Great Britain and create a wonderful and luxurious life for the Smith family.' The plan and the killers' identities known to none but Nicholas.

Although, every voyage of Lord Smith made the heart beat faster for Lady Smith, lest the sea take him into her fold. You have nothing to fear, my love, was always the reply from the Lord. To wish for his victory in the purpose he was sailing for, Lady Smith did something she never did before.

She unpinned her barrette from her hair and gave it to the Lord saying, 'Carry this piece of me with you and remember that as you voyage across the world, your Lady will be awaiting your arrival. Only upon the barrette being pinned back to where it belongs with your hands will the voyage and its purpose be complete.'

The date arrived and Lord Edward Smith and his crewmen set out into the sea. If all things went according to plan, they would sail back home anytime between the second half of January and the first half of February, 1793.

Nicholas didn't have his way though. Quite early in the expedition, as a crewman was busy looking for tobacco in the cabin of every man on the ship, he found yewberries – deadly berries possessed by killer gangs in North America, in the bags of the 4 killers recruited by Nicholas. Lord Edward was immediately informed. When the four of them are confronted by Lord Edward and his crew, the killers pounce to attack. A battle ensues between the killers and the crew. The crew finally eliminate the threat of the killers, although unaware that Nicholas was the mind behind all of this.

The voyage continues with the treasures coming in from old friends and relations of Lord Edward. Things seem all set for Lord Edward to come back home after the final visit to a Kingdom in Marrakesh (modern-day Morocco). In Marrakesh, King Mohammed III, a person with whom Lord Edward had a very close friendship and admiration towards, died in 1790. Unknown to Lord Edward, the current ruler was King Mohammed III's Prime Minister Abu Ahmed – a man who projected himself as a people's ruler, but actually carried evil intentions of greed and amassing wealth. Abu was very kind and courteous with Lord Edward – providing him with the best of care and comfort. As a parting gift, unknown to anybody else, Abu gave



Lord Edward the precious Marrakesh-Sultani diamond, a prized possession of the Kingdom of Marrakesh and its people. Although Lord Edward thought very highly of Abu when he did this, Abu had other plans.

Abu had his eyes on the massive amounts of wealth and treasure that Lord Edward had collected until now. His plan was to give away the diamond to Lord Edward without anyone's notice. After Lord Edward's leaving, he would announce in the royal court that the Marrakesh-Sultani diamond had been stolen by Lord Edward and his crew. This would give him the power to send the Kingdom's ships behind the ship of Lord Edward and his men – defeat them and bring back the diamond, including all of the collected treasures. The plan seemed fool-proof and was already in execution.

After a few days while on the way from Marrakesh towards North America, a crew member on Lord Edward's ship observed 2 ships approaching them in the distance. Both of them had the Marrakesh flag. More important than that, they had the black and red flag hoisted – signalling attack. Lord Edward was informed. He became aware of the trap Abu Ahmed had set up for him, realizing that the wealth and treasure carried by him on the ship were what Abu had his eyes on.

It was time to prepare for a fightback. Lord Edward knew that however much they amp up the speed of the ship, they couldn't escape the Marrakesh fleet catching up. But there was another way to save themselves. He was aware of an island very close by that they could take help of.

In the main ship of the Marrakesh fleet, there was Chief Iblani very closely monitoring the movement of Lord Edward's ship through his telescope. He saw the ship dock against an island – but could not assure if Lord Edward and the crew went into the island.

Nevertheless, he gave orders for his ships to move towards the island. On any other day, Iblani would have ordered canon balls to be fired on to the enemy ship. But today was different. Firing Lord Edward's ship could possibly mean destroying the diamond and the whole treasure if they were in it. A search party was sent to the ship to see if either the crew, the diamond, or the treasure were in Lord Edward's ship.

Nothing was found in it. Soon as the search party came back, Lord Edward's ship was fired at. In a few minutes, the whole thing went down in ashes.

The only possible place for Iblani to look now was the island. Even as Iblani was making up his mind on the next course of action, two canon balls fire from the bushes near the shore and completely destroy one of Marrakesh's ships.



Iblani immediately orders men on his only ship to get off and go into the island. As his men do that, a flurry of arrows emerge from the island directly hitting some of his men. He observes a man hit by the arrow immediately turning blue and dying. As another round of arrows begin to appear, the remaining men and he take guard under whatever is available. In the next few seconds, Iblani and his remaining 6 crewmen begin turning the ship around to retreat. The arrows keep coming, but they guard themselves and somehow go back into the sea as fast as possible. In a few minutes, they are at a healthy distance away from the island.

Lord Edward, his crew, the treasure, the Marrakesh-Sultani diamond, and most importantly Lady Smith's barrette remain on the island.

The second half of January 1793 then came. The Smith's Estate was being decked up to welcome the Lord's arrival. Lady Smith's hair was by now a bit out of shape as a result of not wearing the barrette for a long time. Nicholas was hoping his plan worked. In all of this, the charity work was still going on although a play area for orphans and an old-age home were closed due to the lack of funds. January ended. Hopes were high on the first week of February. No signs of an incoming ship yet. The second week all thought.

February flew past. Mid-March 1793, Lady Smith began to worry. The Smith's begin to fear the worst as April and May too pass. No one dare remind Lady Smith what they thought. She tried to put up a brave face. With each passing day, one by one they come to accept the grim reality of the situation, with Lady Smith only giving up hope in the November of that year. On 3rd December 1793, The Smith's Estate declared Lord Edward Smith and his crew as victims of voyage. Around mid-March 1794, Lady Smith showed signs of failing organs. She passed away in the April of 1794. She had a wish before passing away.

'Let my legacy from now on be without my barrette, be it anywhere and anything, let the future be aware that Lady Smith was robbed of her barrette by the sea through the tale of the good and great Lord Edward Smith.'

The flashback ends. We are back into the breaking of the fourth wall shot, although now comfortably seated in a different room with a cup of coffee on the table in front of us.

'And that is why we see her large painting without the barrette' says one of the family members.

A long thoughtful pause happens. After which the same family member says, 'From then on, things were pretty normal... until this happened.'



We see a beachside shot with a young girl walking across the shore alongside the mansion. The text below says **MARCH 2024**.

The girl happens to be Ella Smith, a member of the youngest generation of the Smith family. As she stands and feels the water caress her feet, a corked glass bottle with a rolled paper inside hits her feet. She picks up the bottle and does what a curious human being would do.

The paper had a series of writings & scribblings on it. It ended with – ‘**Lord Edward Smith, 1793.**’ Ella immediately takes it up to the estate and shows it her mother who in turn gets it to the attention of everyone in the estate. Everybody is both shocked and happy at the same time.

We then see the entire family trying to understand what these writings mean. Lots of thinking and discussing go in. There are some moments where they are shown to have cracked a line from the paper piece and some where they struggle.

Finally, we go back to the shot where the actors talk to the camera. The entire family is gathered around the piece of paper from Lord Edward Smith which is right in the middle framed on a wall. The oldest member of the family speaking to us (*the camera*) says thus.

‘Since the paper piece landed upon this estate, we have been trying to figure out what the Lord wished to communicate with us. I wouldn’t say we have not been successful. We did make some progress. We know for a fact that he communicated three things through the paper.

One, he spoke about the location of the island he and his crew docked upon. We have been able to find it and yes, it still exists.

Two, the treasure and wealth he collected on his 1792-93 voyage lying on the island. If the island exists, the treasure too must.

And finally, he hinted about Lady Smith’s barrette. That too lies on the island waiting to be found.

During the past few months, we tried all we could to find the treasure and Lady Smith’s barrette. But we figured, we alone weren’t enough for this mammoth task.

So, we ask your help. If you would be so kind, do you mind helping us.

And yes, upon finding - keep some parts of the treasure, just give us Lady Smith’s barrette.

A QR code will now appear on your screen, scan it to begin your journey of helping The Smith’s Estate. Thank you. See you soon.’



The QR code appeared.

Laurence and me just look at each other. I mean we didn't know what to say. Absolutely speechless.

Each of us took out our phones and scanned the code.

As the link opened up on my phone, the theatre lights slowly came on. The QR code still on the screen. Everybody glued to their phones waiting to see where the code led to.

I just glanced at Laurence and both of us had an exciting laugh.

The QR code led to a webpage where we could book slots to visit The Smith's Estate and the island thereafter to find the treasure.

Basic details were asked – name & email, date and time slot, number of people accompanying and a check-box to opt in for a pick-up service. I then immediately realized that it would be great to go with Laurence.

'Laurence, why don't we go together...say on Sunday...the 18th?'

'Yup... sounds like a plan... I will do the booking... Which slot would you prefer... I mean each slot is 2 hours long... the slot time is when you are on the island it says.... there are slots right from 10 AM to 8 PM?'

'Let's go with the 10 AM one, what say?' I ask.

'Suits me...10 AM on Sunday, the 18th for Laurence and Rachel...and no pick-up, right?'

'Yes, no need for pick-up.'

'Money paid and done...it says... Dear Laurence and Rachel, thank you for offering your help to The Smith's Estate. We will be more than happy to welcome you on the 18th of this month. Since you will be leaving for the island at 10 AM, allow us to host you at our mansion prior to that. It would be a wonderful opportunity for the entire Smith family to get to know you better and offer any help or information you seek for your pursuits on the island. Andrews from the estate will be looking out for you at 9 AM in our front-office at Wonder Park* whooo...awesome... we get to choose badges too..... I will pick this one. What about you?'

**Just a fictional theme park for the purpose of this idea. In the real world, it could be any established theme park in the United States.*



‘I like the one to the left of it. See, that’s nice... it locates us by GPS and tells us where to arrive. When I was doing it before you booked, I denied GPS use and entered another state by mistake as my current location...it immediately popped a dialog box saying – You will need to fly down to so and so to better access the island.’

We look up and see people laughing, smiling and some still busy with their phones completing the process. As we exited the theatre, mini booklets were being handed over by a man dressed as a person from the Smith’s Estate.

I took it and realized it had the whole story in it, with the last page containing a printed version of the paper Ella found inside the bottle.

‘This will be quite useful,’ said Laurence pointing to her booklet.

‘Extremely,’ I said.

August 18th, 2024

The Mansion

Andrews at the front-office was extremely courteous. As we and the 8 to 10 people around waited, he showed us old photos, paintings and reports of the Smith family and their social works right from the time of Lord Edward Smith. Yes, you could also make out that he was extremely upbeat about us finding the treasure and the family’s charitable work growing manifold.

Just then, an open-air bus – royal in nature appeared in front of us. Beautifully written on the body of the bus was – **THE SMITH’S ESTATE**. It already had almost 20 people in it - the guests who opted for the pick-up service. Soon upon entering the bus, we exchanged our Hi’s and Hello’s with fellow guests or teammates on the treasure hunt. As we entered Wonder Park, there was an announcement coming out of the park’s speakers with a grand music in the background –

‘Please welcome the brave and kind who choose to help The Smith’s Estate in their pursuits to find what Lord Edward Smith left for them.’

I then realized that our bus was a part of the parade – the only difference being we were headed for the mansion inside the park and the remaining exhibits in the parade were doing their routine show. People all around were clapping and cheering for us.



It felt really special. To be looked at as a hero in everyone's eyes. It was now upon me to put in all I could to help the estate.

'Here we are.' said Laurence, as we looked at what we were approaching.

It was the same mansion from the movie, with the front garden, rocks and beach trees too matching. As we got down from the bus, we were wished luck by the driver. Upon getting down, we met the man who initially escorted us into the estate in the movie. As all of us made way into the mansion, one could smell the beach nearby and hear sounds as if one were near a seaside castle.

Richard from behind, one of the fellow guests, said in the background,

'Y'all, this is a mansion no doubt... but I saw this on aerial view in Google Maps.... it has a huge white shed behind it... guess that's where the island is.... but excited to experience all this for real.'

The Smith's Estate was like any other normal house. There were men, women and children in it. A mix of antiques, paintings, and decors, with modern day furniture from IKEA too present in meagre amounts. But yes – from the scattered maps and papers, vintage books and laptops, one could make out everybody in the house was busy behind cracking Lord Edward Smith's message.

We were comfortably seated in the central atrium with the oldest member and the current lady (*people in the movie*) of the house, Lady Amelia Smith coming to greet us. Refreshments were brought and the talking began.

We talked about the house, its history and the task at hand. It was lovely to get to know each member of the family in person. My personal favourite was Ella. Whenever there wasn't a family member speaking to Laurence and me, she would immediately come to us and begin asking questions. It seemed as if the entire family was busy in conversation with some one or the other from the guests. If not talking, we were being shown around the house. There were huge paintings, a mini-library of sorts, prized possessions and most importantly, we saw Lord Edward Smith's wife Lady Smith's painting, again the one from the movie. There were areas for children and the old in the estate too. Lord Edward always wanted the mansion to feel welcoming for anybody. The children could play and engage in fun activities while the old could enjoy the companionship of some family members – in talk and refreshment.



Irrespective of young or old, whoever wished to go to the island was now shown a room with treasure hunt supplies. It had everything – ropes, helmets, magnifying glasses, diggers, tools, hooks, anchors and so much more. We could pick anything we wished.

‘I think we are spoilt for choice here.’ said Laurence.

We picked whatever we wanted and made our way back to the central atrium as directed. We were allowed to carry whatever we wished to the island. I decided to leave my bag in the mansion and only carry my smartphone.

It was 30 minutes to 10 AM. The whole family gathered around the 36 of us, treasure-hunters. Amid rounds of applause, we were called one by one and handed our badges - the one’s we chose while booking. The family then sang a song together. It was beautiful.

At the end, Amelia said,

‘In the family, this was the song always sung before one went for a voyage, battle or any important task. It was to wish, hope and pray for victory. As the 36 of you go into the island, we wish, hope and pray for your victory.’

A young boy still dressed in a night suit approached Laurence and asked, ‘Will you find great-grand-daddy’s treasure?’

‘Of course. We will.’ replied Laurence.

I nudged Laurence saying, ‘Game time.’

We were ready.

The Submarine

We were lead through a path which seemed like it was going out of the mansion towards the sea. I couldn’t say for real as the path was covered all around with tiny window openings* – something like what astronauts walk through before entering a space shuttle. Yes, but I could hear and smell the sea very vividly at this point.

Tony, the man leading us to the island said, ‘This path directly leads to our vehicle.... a submarine... we choose to travel by a submarine to avoid others become aware of the island’s location.... something very easily trackable if we were to go above water on a ship.’

This was my first time in a submarine. Was obviously very excited.



Seated on my seat and with Laurence next to me, we had a circular window beside us allowing us to look out. We could see the back side of the mansion, the rocks, a bit of the shore and some amounts of water*.

**The windows are actually screens on which footage of the environment around are being played. Through graphics and lighting, they make the guest believe that the environment they are seeing is actually real. Also, the submarine doesn't really move forward but moves in the same place to mimic the movement of a real submarine underwater.*

This was just before the submarine dived into the water and it was water all around.

The submarine ride was just amazing. It started really slowly. We could see the fish and corals all around. Then picking up pace we went into deep sea. The submarine was moving real fast by this time. I spotted a shark like thing too, I think.

It began to reduce speed, and the small fishes and corals came back. At this point, we could even see old ship wrecks – soiled and worn out by the algae growth around. The submarine now dived upwards to come above water.

Tony in the front said to all of us, 'We're here.'

The Island

As I climbed my way out of the submarine, I couldn't believe what I saw in front of me. An entire island with the trees, rocks, winds and everything that make up an island#.

#As Richard guessed, the huge white shed had the island environment recreated inside. Trees, rocks and other elements being all natural. Lighting, time of day, sound, and smell to add to the realisticness.

Like the rest, Laurence and I got to the shore of the island and began our business – we opened the booklet which had the printed version of the paper sent by Lord Edward.

There was so much we found on the island using Lord Edward's message - old cannons, ship wood, cloth ruins, arrows and many others. There was a story behind all of the items found. Some even found a skeleton and a few coins. With each of the 36 finding something of relevance with regard to Lord Smith's voyage – the 2-hour time was coming to an end.

Beyond that, there were mini waterfalls and brooks, rich vegetation in some parts and underground trails in some parts of the island. Some of the 36 just spent the time exploring the island. Their strategy was to come back later and find the treasure having known the island's topography.



The logic behind the 2-hour limit was to allow as many people and fresh eyes to look out for the treasure in the beginning. The Smith's Estate was of the opinion that, the greater number of people they allowed in the island – the better their chances of finding someone who could find their treasure.^

^The logic in our sense being something like ride capacity. Getting more people to be a part of the experience on any given day in the five slots available.

Back with the Smith's

As we sat on the comfortable couches in the central atrium after the ride back to the estate, some of the 36 volunteered to speak on what they found and saw. As people spoke, we made out this whole thing was more than just finding the treasure. It was also about what happened to Lord Smith.

It was at this juncture that Lady Amelia spoke up and said,

'Well, we have made immense progress with your help, and thank you for that. As you leave the estate, we would like to tell you something. To your email, we will be sending each of you login details. They have to be used on our app and website. The app and the website are a community of like-minded individuals like you, who are helping us on our efforts. It is also a place where people discuss and put forward what they find on the island. You may have found something, but that will find greater meaning when you mention that in the community. Together we will find connections and leads – with every step taking us closer to the final goal. We will also use the platform to upload some documents from our library which might help your efforts on the island. Each of you will also have a score based on how much you contribute to the community. The higher your score, the better will be your chances of having faster access to the island the next time you choose to come – and also, discounts on your next visits. So, until we meet next time. Thank you.'

As Laurence and I left the park, we were already checking our email inbox to get on the community asap.

We were glued, and it only got better with time.



It continued, until it ended.

The online community was thriving. I made new friends and joined various groups too. Story leads and connections were being formed daily. For example, there was a growing perception that the treasure was distributed all around the island given that guests were finding coins and other collectibles on random days. But I felt there wasn't enough proof to validate the same yet. Some community members had mapped the entire island and uploaded detailed maps on the community dashboard. Some had left cameras to feed live video from the island... I mean... that was a cool move.... but what purpose did it serve? The best part were the chatrooms on the site – rooms ranged from *Items found today* to *Best places to chill on the island*. There were really good scenic places to chill though, I must say. The elders and families with kids always made it a point to visit these spots on the island before they continued searching.

My daily routine went something like this. After work, update myself on findings and story development through the community website or app. Keenly look at the documents being uploaded by the estate from their library – it comprised of letters, invoices and documents from the 1790s. I was sure they would give us a hint or provide us some clue. Many who became my friends through all of this aided me in this endeavour too. And yes, also reply to the people who asked reasons for why I thought the Marrakesh-Sultani diamond was still on the island - for that was the theory I posed. Like me, everyone had their own theory. My community score too was on a high – it was only a couple of weeks before my next trip to the island in October, and this time with a discount and preferential access to some parts of the estate given I was a Level 3 community member with 7 achievements unlocked. I decided to take mom and dad too. Why should I have all the fun?

By the end of my October visit, I realized a very important fact. It was that everyone who visited the island had a different story to tell every time. Once off the submarine, we were free to choose our path... different paths led to different scenarios and that led to different revelations in the story. This made it unique to each of them while serving the grand story movement in general...quite something, isn't it?

Coming to the grand story, there were some key developments. Tribals were reported in some parts. They weren't really good people to encounter on the island. Guests now had to fear getting caught by tribals on the island. Some even discovered caves and underground trenches... and the best part, they found markings and paintings on some of the cave walls. The community was flooded with pictures of paintings from the caves. By December, we come to realize that it was the tribals who shot the arrows on the



Marrakesh ship fleet, and also the fact that they were actually friends of Lord Edward. What a twist in the story. So that would have meant, Lord Edward and his crew not dying because of tribals, but of a natural death. That is proven when guests find the place where Lord Edward and his crew stayed. No need to fear the tribals now, we were on the same side all through.

In the meantime, the movie was on Netflix and the number of people coming to the island even soared. Social media too was going crazy with theories and people guessing how the story would progress with each revelation. Guests were given access to the community even before visiting the island, so that they could keep themselves abreast with the story.

And then something happened in the January of 2025.

An extension to the movie was launched on Netflix. It was The Smith's Estate again but with an information making the community and social media go crazy. The estate announced that there was a second bottle with a paper which came ashore. Although very far away from their mansion, the paper ended on a similar note as the first – **'Lord Edward Smith, 1793.'**

The paper was immediately put on the community dashboard for public access. Social media took it and spread it even more. Laurence, me, mom and two other friends we made on the community managed to get a slot in February. Managed because of the demand which soared when the second paper piece was revealed. By now the major objective was to either find the treasure or at least find collectibles. If not that, find something of value in the story and gain on community score which could ease the process of getting another slot in the future. The cycle just continued.

In the February visit, mom chose to stay at the estate and find more information for me from the library. She mentioned having a great time interacting with the Smith family and talking to the few others who chose to stay back in the estate. They were engaged in their version of entertainment and fun – it ranged from dancing to dining. We on the island however had to face the current descendants of the Abu Ahmed family. How they came, no one knows. The community presumed that post 1793, Chief Iblani would have passed on the location of the island to the next generation of the Abu Ahmed family. Generation by generation, it would have moved down below. Now, they were back to claim their diamond. Future guests in February had quite a task cut up for them – find the diamond asap before the Abu Ahmed family begin to show their wrath. The diamond was found and duly returned with an official return agreement signed by the estate. As



things seemed to get back to normal in May 2025 with the diamond having being found and returned, a new threat emerged out of nowhere.

Although not in the hands of The Smith's Estate, there was a third bottle. It came along to the shore of a country in South America. A deadly gang caught hands of it and began to threaten the estate to offer them 50% of the to-be found treasure. The community was furious on this demand, more so because they didn't release the contents of the third bottle yet. As some believed there were missing links in the first two paper pieces, they felt most elated when the third bottle was announced. And most worried too at the same time, given the gang was dictating terms. Only upon the estate agreeing to their terms, would they release the contents of the bottle to the public said the gang. With the estate not agreeing and hoping for guests to find the treasure, the gang lands upon the estate in June 2025. Visitors to the estate in June find the gang members in the estate too. They were the wrong people to get into a conversation with.... some guests tried though. The talk in the community was that the Smith's and the gang were working on an agreement. Not before long, the third paper piece was revealed. Sanity had finally set in.

On a particular day, the estate announces that the threat of the gang had been removed. Not through killing and force, but through understanding and compassion, the way Lord Edward Smith would have wanted. The estate discovered through study and research that the gang was how it was today because of the lack of amenities for their families in their country. They resorted to violence as a means to fulfil their needs. Having understood their problem, the estate took it upon themselves to provide amenities for the gang's families in South America with the help of the to-be found treasure. The community championed this decision.... some even said it felt wonderful to see their efforts in finding the treasure impact families in South America.

September 2025 arrives. This is the month when the community discovers that the three papers sent by Lord Edward in the bottles, pinpoint to a single area on the island. In that area lied the treasure and Lady Smith's barrette. Social media and the community are all on their feet awaiting the big treasure find, with guests searching that particular area in the island for the treasure and the barrette. Bookings to visit the island soar to an all-time high in October 2025.

Just about when everything is perfect for the treasure and barrette to be found, the estate is shocked to find that some of the guests visiting the island turn out to be working under the influence of a man named Bradford Smith. Tracing back his identity reveals a startling fact. He is the direct lineage of Nicholas Smith – Lord Edward's brother whose



plan to kill him and take away the Smith family to Great Britain had foiled. The community was shocked to see the intentions of Nicholas Smith resurface.

On the 10th of November 2025, the estate puts out a notice on the community dashboard saying thus:

‘Dear members of the community,

What a ride it has been.

During the past 14 months, all of your lives had been centred around helping us finding Lord Edward’s treasure and more importantly Lady Smith’s barrette. Yes, we now have confirmation of a location on the island where they lie. This is only due to the collective work of the community in deciphering the three pieces of paper and nothing else. In view of the recent instances where some guests to the island turned out to be working under the aegis of Bradford Smith, a direct descendant of Nicholas Smith – we can trust no one coming to the island. For the safety of one and all, we are closing access to the island with immediate effect.

But not to worry. Since we have a concrete location, we wish to host a mega-celebratory dinner event in Wonder Park on the 3rd of December 2025. You are all invited. Please bring your friends and family to the happy occasion too. On that day some of us from the estate will proceed to the island to retrieve Lord Smith’s treasure and Lady Smith’s barrette. As we do so, the same will be livestreamed in the park for you to savour the moment with us. This will be our tribute to Lord Edward on that day, as it will mark exactly 232 years since his passing.

Exactly half an hour later – we will be back in the park to display Lady Smith’s barrette publicly to you. We really look forward to seeing you and thanking you in person. Please do grace the occasion with your presence.

Yours truly,

The Smith’s Estate.’

I was happy and sad at the same time – happy that the treasure and barrette were found, and sad that this was all going to end. Part of the journey is the end they say.

The 3rd of December came.

Laurence, me, mom, dad, 6 friends from the community and their families, all of us present in the park that night could only talk about all those moments in the past 15 months – the highs and the lows, the twists and the turns. Like us, there were many many groups around engaging in similar conversations – all tied together by The Smith’s Estate.



The moment was here. On the screen we could see members of the Smith family move towards the location on the island. While in the park, there was a silent hush all around with slow and emotional music being played in the background. As they removed the rubble and creepers around the place, we could see what lay behind.

There it was. Behind a large rock. Lord Edward Smith's treasure. The crowd erupted into cheers. As the family moved forward in this narrow cave of sorts, right in the centre on a rock pedestal lay Lady Smith's barrette. Before picking it up, the family huddled and began singing the victory song. The song was played in the park too. Everybody joined in chorus, for all knew it by now.

As the song reached its emotional end, I felt my eyes get moist. Like me, there were many. It was a beautiful moment. A moment filled with emotion. A moment of perfect happiness. A moment where the journey found its *happily ever after* end.

30 minutes later, back in the park new social projects were announced by the estate. And then came the big reveal – Lady Smith's barrette. Gosh... it looked amazing.

As we left, we were given one last tour of the mansion – now beautifully decorated and decked up for the occasion. We bid our goodbyes to Ella and the family.

In the central atrium, a new painting of Lady Smith had been installed. This time with her barrette. She looked a completely different woman – the woman whom the Lord had loved. Keeping that picture in mind, we left the mansion.

With fireworks and grand music in the background, I said to Laurence who was beside me,

'You know what... at the end of all this... if there was something that this whole thing reminded me.... it was that I was a hero.... it made me feel personally significant in deciding the outcome of a story.... it made me believe in myself more than anything'

Laurence just chuckled and said, *'Good thing you joined me that day to watch the movie.... who knew it would lead us to this...? We were able to co-create and live a whole story rather than just being witness to it.'*

'Yup, Laurence...that's what we did... we lived the story... we lived the whole thing.'

-- The End. Thank you. Please continue for Earthience Level Two and Three. --



EARTHIENCE

LEVEL TWO

A Level Two earthience involves using components of the physical environment like schools, retail stores, shopping malls, office buildings, homes, etc., themselves as a base for the story-based experience. In other words, a believable backstory is used to connect different places or activate a particular place.

Most importantly, a Level Two earthience must be created keeping in mind the part of the physical environment where the guest spends most of their time, or the part where the guest is most comfortable in.

For example, a Level Two earthience for kids and early teens will be best if created in a school environment since most of their time is spent there. For teens and young adults, the city environment will be a good place to create the earthience since they have the wish and the ability to move around the city. For the middle aged, earthiences can be created in housing blocks, office complexes and retail stores.

In the coming pages, I have given an example for a school environment earthience and a city environment earthience. But, do note that a Level Two earthience is not limited only to those environments.

You will observe theming and spatial storytelling moving out of theme parks and themed entertainment in these examples.

Demonstrated through the examples of

**United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
The Samaritans**



September 26th 2022

United Nations Forum for Education Reform

Day 3: Sustainable Development Goals Awareness

United Nations HQ, New York, USA

Introducer: Please welcome Michael and Andreas to delve on what seems to be a very interesting topic – ***Reforming education through Storyliving & Theming – A Concept presentation.***

[Amid applause]

Michael: Thank you. Thank you to the UN and all of you seated here. *[Applause recedes]* Right from the day one of this forum, it's been amazing listening to the projects and ideas of the many working towards making the world a better place through quality and meaningful education. Coming from the theme park and experience design industry, we believe our knowledge fields and expertise can play a very important role in these efforts. *[Thought pause]*

We are in 2022. Eight years away from fulfilling the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Of specific relevance today is building greater awareness of the SDGs among young audiences, given they will be in-charge of the world a few years from now. So how do we do it? How do we make young people and children more aware of the problems faced by humanity – problems which their daddies and grand-daddies created or didn't fully address. How do we inspire them to take concrete action in those areas? Well, you might say that's what we two are on the stage for, right. *[A soft laugh from the audience]*





Andreas: To inspire the children and teens of today, we first need to understand them.

Being born after 2000 gave them the title of *digital natives* – people who grew up using and adopting modern technologies – computers, the internet, video game consoles, mobile phones, social media and Zoom classes, thanks to COVID-19. While the digital environment changed at a rapid pace keeping in mind their needs and wants, their physical environment remained fairly the same – the same classroom, the same school and the same playground.

Michael: So that means the physical environment must learn a thing or two from the digital environment. This is exactly what previous speakers were hinting about when they spoke on gamification – applying game mechanics to non-game situations. In our case, implementing points, badges, leaderboards, avatars in the classroom to make the class more engaging. Although this fulfils the students’ expectations of being engaged like in a video game, it has consequences which arise after a particular point.



Andreas: Quite simply, it leads to unhealthy competition, a fight to be first at any cost. A view where only one person or idea can be on the top. More so, it completely destroys their capability to be intrinsically motivated – as extrinsic motivation comes from gaining more points, unlocking new badges or moving up levels. This takes more relevance in a subject like SDG which requires an internal calling. Should we do away with gamification in SDG awareness then?

Michael: Not really. We must not forget that as much as young audiences are excited by games, they are also a generation who had stories told to them in more formats and at a greater frequency than any other. The formats were movies, web-series, television, novels, plays and others. So, the strategy when dealing with them would be to make use of a *story* firstly.

Andreas: Secondly, it would be to make use of *space*. For that we need to understand in which part of the physical environment do young audiences spend most of their time. Schools turn out to be the space where young audiences spend most of their time in the physical environment. Colleges already have initiatives like Model United Nations which allow students to become aware of global problems and challenges. So, our target audience will be students right from junior high or younger to high school.

Michael: Now, what are schools. I am sure all of you agree that kids come to school more to meet friends and talk on things than physics or mathematics class. That way, a school is a social learning space. Any SDG awareness program or experience must be social involving friends and classmates.

Andreas: Having discussed the two principal elements, there are other micro-elements that the whole experience needs to be topped with. One – *human need elements*, like personal significance and variety. The experience must help in satisfying those needs – partially or fully.



Michael: Two – *theming and storyliving elements*. Theming is something which adds a layer on the physical environment to make the story element believable. Storyliving comprises of roleplaying and environment interaction. These can be better appreciated when we talk about our concept idea for a SDG awareness experience in a few minutes. So, wait for it.

Andreas: And finally, we have to use *game elements*. These micro elements have to be integrated in a *fun* way, so that the story and fun are equally balanced in the whole experience. I know it sounds very formulaic now, *[Audience chuckles]* so it's better we get down to our concept idea for implementing SDG awareness in schools. We will be using a class of 30 students in the 6th grade of a fictional school in the United States for the purpose of our presentation. Here we go.

Michael: Step number one is **Initiation**. We initiate the story here and make students characters in the story. It all starts off in the classroom. The students have come back from lunch and now are ready for the SDG awareness class to begin. An SDG awareness class happens on a weekly basis with a single SDG being discussed in every class. Today's class is dealing with the first goal which is NO POVERTY. It will take rest of the school day. As the students slowly settle down, the projector begins to play something on the screen. It is a fictional news channel playing headlines about the pathetic situation of poverty, it's causes and effects in six fictional countries – Andorra, Buchnest, Casagonia, Desmond, Ethester, Fredinburg... yes that's basically ABCDEF. *[Audience laughs]* Well you or even the students can name the countries. You may also have how more or less countries, based on the strength of your class. The news channel talks about how poverty is widespread in these countries with the causes and effects differing in every country. The visuals and content are in such a way that kids of that age can understand and consume. The news anchor ends by saying, *'With the governments of these nations having given up hope, it is upon the United Nations to take charge of these 5 countries and re-write the fate of each of the countries and its people.'* With that the video ends.



Andreas: The SDG awareness teacher then enters the classroom all suited up like someone from the UN – with the UN badge and also his / her own personal secretary. He/she says, *‘Students, young boys and girls. It is upon the United Nations now to fix poverty issues in these countries. We cannot do it alone. We need your help. We believe you have both the minds and strength to help us in our cause. Will you help us?’* The students mutter a soft yes. Then the teacher says, *‘We cannot hear you.’* And then the students reply with a louder yes.

‘Thank you, dear students. Now, the first step would be to form governments in these countries, as currently they are without them. Without a government, the people in the country have nobody to provide for them. Hence, we would like you all to take up governmental positions in these countries. A few minutes from now on, each of you will be assigned a country and a role from the following - Prime Minister, Resources Minister, Defense Minister, Finance Minister and Health Minister. You will operate in the role assigned to you to eliminate poverty from the country assigned to you.’

Michael: The students then come forward one by one to pick up chits which have the name of a country and a role. Soon as they open the chit, the student will put on a costume in accordance with his / her role... it can range from a cloak to a coat or anything else which signals their country and the person they are in that country’s government. Once this is done, the students proceed in country-wise contingents to the school’s SDG Hall, while being cheered by other students, teachers and staff on the way. Now what is the SDG Hall? The SDG Hall is a designated place in the school with areas for each country, a mini - World Bank, a large digital screen, a space for parents and teachers to watch proceedings from and an area in the center where all countries meet... this is the United Nations area in the SDG hall. The best part about all of this is that the SDG hall is entirely themed to the many areas that make it – from the area for each country to the United Nations center. Addedly, the materials and colors being very warm and welcoming to kids & early teens.





Andreas: The second step is **Revelation**. Revelation of how things are in these countries and what needs to be done. When the experience starts, each country will have 5 progress bars indicating their levels in Resources, Defense, Finance, Health and Poverty. The progress bars will be dynamic and displayed on the big screen for all to see. After that, each country gets their own secret document folder. The folder contains problems faced by their country with respect to poverty, since that is the SDG being taught today. Now the way the problems are constructed is something which makes the whole experience very interesting. Let's take an example by looking into one of the points in the secret folder of the country of Andorra. A fact worth mention here is that every country specializes in a single resource – oil, food, textiles etc.



‘Your main resource being food, the country of Desmond many years back was allowed to take as much food as they needed from your country. That way, Desmond never suffered a shortage of food. But, in the past few years your country has been seeing a decrease in food production. With Desmond taking the same levels of food, the food in your country is decreasing. That way, many people in your country are not having food to eat and hence are becoming poorer than they already are. What will you do – rework the arrangement with Desmond, or approach the World Bank for funds to increase your food production? Remember in all this, you are the only provider of food to Desmond, and taking funds from World Bank will reduce your Finance bar, although increasing your Resources bar.’

Michael: This is just one example of the many interlocking problems present. Every country will be pitted against every other at some stage in the whole experience. At this point, it would be worthwhile to mention the end goal of this game experience. It is to see that every country has reached 100% in 4 of their progress bars, which would indicate every country doing well in Resources, Defense, Finance, Health, and 0% in their Poverty level bar which would indicate complete elimination of poverty. This would mean no single country winning and all the countries winning together. More importantly, it would mean each country having a role to play in the collective winning of all the countries. Now this can happen only if the problems in the secret documents are addressed. And the problems are not of a normal kind. They are interlocking problems involving stakes between two or more countries. That calls for discussions between the heads and ministers of different countries. Like in the example above – the ministers of Andorra and Desmond can get into the meeting room area in the SDG hall and rework their arrangement or even decide that they have no solution or in the worst case, declare war on each other – although the latter will be detrimental to reaching the end goal. Whatever the decisions maybe between the many meetings happening between the many countries on the many interlocking problems, they will have to be finally ratified at the table of the United Nations. *[Audience chuckles]* This is where we go to the next step.





Andreas: The next step is **Discussion**. A United Nations meeting happens every 20 minutes in the experience. In between the UN meetings, country governments are expected to have their meetings with each other and make decisions on their problems. The decision will be declared valid and final only in the UN meeting when the respective country representatives bring forth their decision. The UN Chair, in our case the teacher, has the power to agree to the decision but not disagree to it. He/she can only suggest a different or better course of action. Say in our example, Andorra and Desmond reach no agreement and declare war on each other, the UN Chair can say,

‘Dear Andorra and Desmond, we agree that both of you have your reasons to go to war. But what will war do. It will reduce both of your Defense, Finance, Health points and increase Poverty – given the war will lead to all of that. That will not help in the end cause of this game, which is to increase all of our bars and eliminate poverty. Also, both of you have to write letters to your parents seated in the viewing area that you are sorry for the families of the people of your country who died in the war. Well, if that is a decision you still choose to go ahead with, then it is up to you.’



Michael: This is a very important part of the whole experience - when the students are asked to think about the decisions they make with everybody's eyes on them and consequences which will affect the overall progress of the game towards the intended result. The UN Chair can also choose to keep silent and make the students realize for themselves the damage that has occurred due to war. At any point in the UN meeting, a decision which goes through the UN Chair sees effect in the progress bars of the respective countries. Say Andorra and Desmond come to an arrangement to equally divide the food resources of Andorra between themselves and the UN Chair approves of the same – the Poverty level of Andorra will see a reduction on the big screen. Every Poverty level reduction is treated with a huge round of applause for the respective countries. Imagine the kids and students in all of this, how happy must they feel that their decisions were instrumental in that round of applause – a true measure of autonomy and personal significance.

Andreas: The next and final step is **Resolution**. Every UN meeting ends with a resolution which all countries have to vote in favor or against. The resolution may or may not be related to the SDG in discussion. For example, the UN Chair may choose to ask,

'We propose a resolution to increase minimum salaries in all the countries. Although this will reduce your Finance bar, it will reduce Poverty in your country. How many countries are for and against this resolution? You may choose to discuss among yourselves.'

Now imagine the case of a country, say Buchnest whose Finance bar is already very low. With that also imagine, another country like Fredinburg whose Finance bar is very high, asking Buchnest to vote for the resolution by announcing in the meeting that it would give some of its money to Buchnest as a donation. Amazing isn't it. Even if this step had not been taken by Fredinburg, it would be upon the teacher or the UN Chair to ask and motivate Fredinburg to do that. When this is done, a round of applause for Fredinburg.



This will build a will to help in the students, something which will benefit them not just for this game experience, but also for life. All of them then exit for individual meetings to reconvene at the UN Center 20 minutes later.

Michael: Well then. This cycle continues until the poverty level reaches zero in all of the countries and all of their other bars are at their 100%. At the end, the news channel will come alive on the big screen to talk about how these countries changed for the better through the help of their governments and the UN. To make the process more interesting, random factors and happenings are introduced in the middle of the game experience. They can range from natural disasters in some countries to the threat of a new dictator – all of them introduced by the news channel on the big screen. This is only at the will of the teacher based on time left for the class and the estimated time countries will take to reach the end goal. The end goal must be achieved to make the students believe that their actions were instrumental in eliminating poverty. This will translate into greater awareness of global problems and more importantly, it will make them believe that they have the power to help a social cause through their actions and decisions.

Andreas: The experience is then repeated the next week with a new SDG. This time again, chits are picked and costumes worn. The chits will help in students not playing the role they previously played – that way a student can experience how it is to be in different governmental roles with different countries and different problems. On other days, the SDG Hall can be used for other classes of the school, thereby making the hall a location of daily usage. Akin to sporting events in schools, the SDG awareness experience can also be conducted between schools and be kept open for public viewing too.



Michael: In a theme park context, we design rides where we talk about recruiting guests as agents to help us on our mission. The SDG awareness experience is very similar to that in some ways – the major difference being the level of autonomy, direct world relatedness and social cause motivation which is instilled through the SDG experience. A format of this kind need not be limited only to SDGs, it can be adapted to any part of general education. What needs to remain constant is the story and the ways in which students can affect that story.

Andreas: All in all, an experience such as this will prove more effective than other ways to impart SDG lessons. Using the power of storyliving and theming, students will not only learn about key social issues and ways to address them, but also improve on other soft skills like – public speaking, conflict resolution, leadership, decision making, critical thinking and teamwork.

Michael: We from the theme park and experience design industry can contribute to causes beyond guest entertainment. This is a step in that direction. More than anything our goal through an experience such as this is to instill in the youth of today the belief that they can be harbingers of change, using the power of storyliving and theming.

Andreas: It is to make them believe and understand that they can be the change they wish to see in the world. Thank you for being such a patient and understanding audience. This is Michael and Andreas signing off.

Michael: Thank you.

[Audience erupts in applause.]

The End.

Please continue for the second example of a Level Two earthience.



The Samaritans

A city environment Level Two earthience

Note:

*I have used the city of New Delhi, India as the city in my example since I know that city best.
Please note that the same can be adapted to any other city in the world.*



Tip: Visualize as you read.

May 23rd, 2023
New Delhi, India

‘Well, there is enough for all the 24 of you. So, as you talk and make friends with fellow-agents, do not miss out on what lies in front of you,’ said Lead Chef Samar as the food was being laid out on the table.

The long and wide table looked very colorful with the food on it. The reds from the curries, the greens from the salads, the yellows from the flat breads – the whole thing looked nutritious and balanced. A greater spectacle was to see the joy emanating from the faces of the 24 people seated around the table.

Two and a half hours ago, all the 24 of us were complete strangers to each other. But now, we sat around this beautiful table in this amazingly well-lit restaurant talking only about one thing. That one thing being what each of us experienced in the last two and a half hours. It was something so unique, authentic and real that it cannot be vicariously enjoyed from a long-form essay like this. But I have to do it, for something novel like this requires attention. I requested my magazine to let me publish a long-form about the same since I was already in New Delhi, India – the place where it all happened. They thankfully agreed. So, the essay will continue. But promise me you will experience it for yourself – because when you experience it for yourself, you will begin your journey with The Samaritans.

As Alisha, who was seated next to me passed me the bowl of curry, I re-continued my conversation with her about the past two and a half hours. I never knew if Alisha was her real name. We were only addressing each other by the names printed on the bands we wore on one of our hands. Lead Chef Samar was back again to say something. But this time, he was with two other men.

‘Dear Agents, allow me to introduce to you Mel and Jason, the founders of The Samaritans and the brains behind what you all experienced in the past two and a half hours. If you had a great time, give them one big round of applause.’

All of us erupt into claps.



‘Haha, thanks so much. Glad you people enjoyed it. Well, that was the idea behind creating something like this. To make you all escape into a real-life adventure connecting everyday spaces like restaurants, shopping malls, streets, roads, parks, houses, landmarks and other components of the physical environment through a believable story. The places you went to and the characters you met in your adventure path were unique only to you. In totality, we are glad that you felt it to be very real and authentic.’ said Mel.

Jason then said, ‘More than anything, the idea was to awaken the hero in you through spatial storytelling. This by using emotions and moments common to us as human beings. For example, how many of you felt a surge of surprise and excitement when you were handed the first orange envelope.’

All of us raised our hands. While doing that, I couldn’t help but notice all the 24 of us smiling at each other for having recollected that moment together.

Jason just smiled and said, ‘Well, that is the power of a common emotion. So, we tapped into relevant emotions and needs, built a story around it and offered it to you. Thank you for accepting.’

In my mind, I kept saying wow as Mel and Jason talked. This because I was able to understand what they spoke having gone through the experience. Through their creation, they allowed a random person the chance to be in a James Bond style spy movie, but better - for it was in real life. Sans the car crashes and bomb blasts though. Who knows if that’s on their radar.

At this point, one of us from the opposite corner of the table asked something really interesting.

‘Mel, you just mentioned that the places and characters we went to and met were unique only to us. Does that mean that two and a half hours ago, all of us started differently at different places? And the path we took today was only one of the 24 paths that could have been taken?’

‘Bang on. Let’s make it easier for all of us. One of you begin narrating what you just experienced and we will dissect it step by step so that you can better appreciate what all of you just went through.’ said Mel.

I volunteered to narrate. I began saying, ‘Firstly, I was asked to come to the Anand Restaurant...’

Mel interrupted saying, ‘No. Go even before that.’

I thought and began again. ‘Yup...so I first logged into The Samaritans website where...’

This time Jason interrupted saying, ‘Nope. Go even before that... to the time you first heard or saw something about The Samaritans.’

I took a few seconds to think. I then realized where they wanted me to begin from.

And so, from there I began.



‘It all started two weeks ago. I was here in New Delhi covering an art festival for my London-based magazine. Around mid-afternoon, I do not remember exactly which day, I see an ad of The Samaritans on my Instagram feed. The ad was minimalistic in nature. It just had a copy portion and two buttons to choose from. The copy was – *The Samaritans. More than just a restaurant.* The two buttons being *Try our food* and *Become a Samaritan*. Well, at that point of time, I just ignored the ad.

The ad then surfaced on my Facebook feed at night on the same day. Since I was really hungry this time, I decided to order something by clicking the *Try our food* button. It led me to the website where I gave my order and address details. Promptly 30 minutes later, the food was at my doorstep.

Now this is where things begin to get interesting. Soon as I open the food bag, I see a crisp envelope. I open the envelope to find a single horizontal piece of paper which had written on it the words,

‘Enjoy your food . But next time, choose the Become a Samaritan option .

We need you for a bigger purpose . Something beyond just food . ’

Without even giving a glance at the food in the bag, I fire up my laptop and go to the website of The Samaritans to find the Become a Samaritan button. Also, I frantically refresh my Instagram and Facebook feeds to find the ad to choose the button. The website came alive first.

There in the top-right corner of the website in rather an unassuming manner - given it matched with the color theme, sat the *Become a Samaritan* button. I immediately clicked it.

A dialog box opened up saying – *‘Thank you for choosing to become a Samaritan. The path to becoming a Samaritan is one filled with adventure, discovery and thrill. It is a path only for the strong and willing. A path which will make you join a special few who save the world on a daily basis under the banner of The Samaritans. We make this possible through a set of story-based experiences we create for guests like you. By pressing continue, you mark the beginning of your journey with The Samaritans. Welcome.’*

While reading all of this, I became aware of the background music which began to fade in soon as the dialog box came up. It was a piece with suspense and excitement written all over it. Wow, amazing way to start the experience though.



I clicked on continue. Upon doing that the entire ‘restaurant-type’ website of The Samaritans changed to a ‘mission-control-agent-spy-sci-fi-type’ website of The Samaritans. The transition was impeccable – the music became more pronounced and the sound of a female robot AI type voice said, ‘Welcome. Please enter your desired agent name.’

Being who I am, only one name came to my mind when the voice said desired agent name. So, I decided to use that. Searching for the letters on my keyboard, I typed in my agent name as **Bond**.

I was then guided to my profile and dashboard. Now, this was interesting.

It said that my current rank was *Agent* and my next rank would be that of *Samaritan*. To advance ranks, I needed to complete Operations. Every completed Operation would lead to an advance in rank. For my rank, there was only one Operation available – Operation Poisonhead. It said, ‘***Upon completion of Operation Poisonhead, you will advance to Samaritan rank.***’

Sounded nice. So, I clicked and went further. It asked me a date for when I was free. The 21st of May was a completely free day for me, so I keyed the same in. A text appeared saying, ‘***Operation Poisonhead will require 3 hours of your time from 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM on the 21st of May. Since this is a field operation, it will require you to move out of your home or office. Are you up for it Agent Bond.***’

‘Hell yes!’, I screamed to myself. Clicking yes, I proceeded.

Now, real-world details like mobile number and email were asked. It also asked me if I could drive a car or a motorbike. I clicked no. Post that, I paid the money required to participate in Operation Poisonhead. The female AI voice then began to speak, as what she spoke appeared on the screen line by line in a typewriter font with the sound of glitches and background music. Completely spy-like. Kudos to the creators, I thought.

‘You are ready Agent Bond. The following instructions are mandatory.’

Instruction number 1: You are required to install The Samaritans app on your smartphone for communication from Headquarters (HQ) while on the Operation. The smartphone needs to have cellular data enabled and should have a minimum charge of 60%. Carry a backpack, your public transport cards and some cash. They might come in handy, although not necessarily.

Instruction number 2: Reach Anand Restaurant in Patel Chowk, New Delhi between 6:00 PM and 6:15 PM on the 21st of May 2023. Soon as you reach, go to the cashier and say – ‘***The Head must be saved.***’ You will receive further instructions upon doing that.

Instruction number 3: Please follow every instruction from the app and others you get while on the Operation. At any circumstance should you be stuck at any place for some reason or for any other emergency, please call the following number immediately: +91 98555 66677



For your convenience, these instructions and the app link have been sent to your mobile and email ID.

We wish you best in the field, Agent Bond.

Good luck.'

'Whoa.... So much has happened. Pause here.' said Jason.

Mel then said, 'So, Agent Bond ordered his food. Got an envelope and then signed up for the Operation. As the others would have realized, their way of signing up wouldn't have matched with what Agent Bond narrated.'

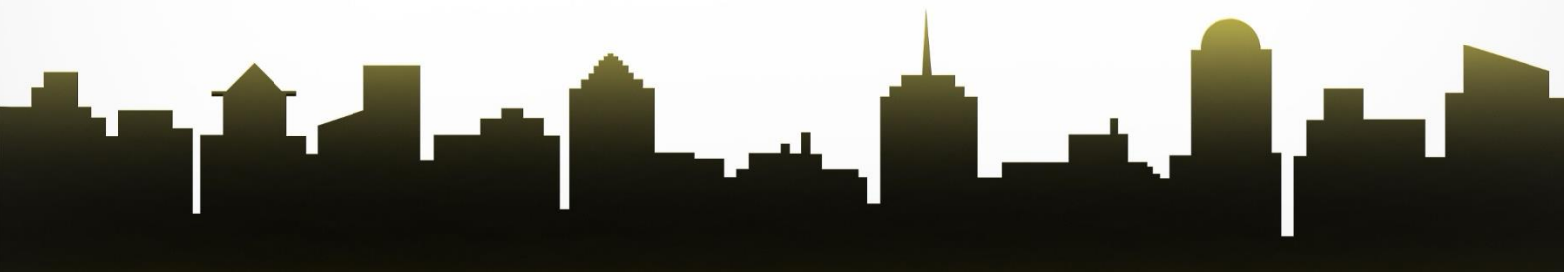
Many of the others nodded in agreement.

'We had designed many routes for people to sign up for the Operation. Agent Bond went through the Ordering food route. Similarly, there were other routes like Amazon Delivery route – where there is an envelope in the Amazon package coming to your house giving directions to Become a Samaritan and sign up for the Operation. Another route was the UBER cab route – where while getting off the UBER ride, the driver hands over an envelope to you. Another route for example was the Air Hostess route, where select passengers on flights incoming to New Delhi were handed over envelopes secretly by an air hostess while getting off the flight. And many others as you can imagine.... the entire idea being to make it very personal and tactile so that the guest feels as though they had been selected for the operation with The Samaritans.' said Jason.

Then Mel added, 'Well, there were other tried and tested ways of improving sign ups – for example, people who had already gone through the Operation on a previous day could send a signing-up message to close friends and family, while providing them with a discount code. And there was the direct social media route and the word-of-mouth route. But whatever the route, we never chose to go with mass media advertising like newspaper, television or billboards.'

'Why so', I asked.

'That would make everyone know that The Samaritans were more than just a restaurant... that we were people who were offering just another experience like how the escape rooms do. The thrill of being part of a select group of people saving the world is gone. The excitement about the fact that you received an envelope and you talking about the whole thing to someone else in a fun and secret way would be missing. Although this increases guests coming to the experience in a slower pace than had we chosen mass media advertising, it makes the whole thing a lot more personal and authentic. People who had a real and authentic experience are better advertisers of The Samaritans than billboards and TV, we think.' said Mel.



Agent Alisha next to me replied, ‘Amazing strategy. I can’t wait to recommend so many people to this. Just for fun’s sake, I came through the Amazon Delivery route.’

Someone else replied, ‘And me through the Air Hostess route.’

All of us had a hearty laugh while Lead Chef Samar and his team were busy serving us hot *biryani*.

Agent Incognito from the other side of the table then said to me, ‘So you went to Anand Restaurant in Patel Chowk... while I went to Lodhi Gardens to meet a lady named Mrs. Seema Patel.’

Jason and Mel looked at each other and just smiled. Mel signaled Jason to explain to Agent Incognito.

‘So, Agent Incognito and the others, each of you began from a different starting position. If Agent Bond had to go to the Anand Restaurant, and Agent Incognito to the Lodhi Gardens, one of you had to go to meet a bus driver in the Central Bus Stand and get a phone number from him, one of you had to search room number 346 in the Maurya hotel... well what I am saying is that each of you had a different starting point. That said, yes, there were 24 paths in the beginning when each of you 24 started from the first place assigned to you. But as you progressed on your path, you would have realized something either through your actions or communications from Headquarters. It was that all of you were actually working together on a single mission trying to stop some bad guys from doing something. That way, you might have started differently at different places... but all of you were tied together by the same storyline, the storyline of Operation Poisonhead.’

4-5 agents from the shorter side of the table then went about talking of the moment when they realized the significance of their actions in the whole Operation’s storyline.

All of us too began to remember those moments.

At this juncture, Mel said, ‘Agent Bond, why don’t you continue from where you paused. It will be interesting to relive those moments together.’

I joyfully continued.



‘On the 21st of May, precisely at 6:04 PM according to my smartphone time, I reached Anand Restaurant, Patel Chowk, New Delhi.



I did exactly as instructed. I went to the cashier, waited for his attention and said to him, ‘**The Head must be saved.**’

As soon as the cashier heard this from my mouth, he stopped counting the cash as he was doing till now. He looked all around the place as if to avoid someone watching and silently handed me over a menu card. It looked as though he had this menu card prepared, so as to give it to me when I arrived.

While laying it in front of me, he said, ‘Please save us. You are our only hope.’

He then began to act very normally as if nothing happened. I understood that it wouldn’t be a good idea to question him further.

I opened the menu card, and in it I found a A5-size orange envelope having the following lines stamped on it –

A G E N T B O N D

[OPEN IN THE RESTAURANT’S WASHROOM. BEWARE OF EMPLOYEES. TRUST NO ONE]

Great. Understood the rules. Now to the washroom.



While walking towards the washroom area, I could sense pairs of eyes looking at me very keenly. I had to be careful. Acting like a normal person, I proceeded to the washroom with the orange envelope slapped tight between my left hand and my left thigh. Upon reaching, I begin opening the envelope, curious to know what lies inside.

As I did that, a restaurant employee enters the washroom. With nowhere to hide, I quickly turn around and walk into a toilet latching the door behind me.

Whew. That was close.

The envelope is open by now. I remove the contents slowly without making any noise. The items were: A hand band with **BOND** written on it. Sweet. A Bluetooth earpiece. A folded A4 sheet with the photographs of three men inside it.

The A4 sheet read thus.

// Breaking from the A4 sheet found in the orange envelope of Agent Bond.

Dear Reader. Yes, I am talking to you – you who is reading this essay as a PDF. From now on Agent Bond will have spy-themed music playing in his ears while he goes about playing his part in Operation Poisonhead. It must be so fun right, having a mission ahead of you and the music to get you in the emotion of it. But I wonder – why should only Agent Bond have the fun when you too can.

So clearly follow what I say now. Plug in a set of earphones, wired or wireless as you wish into the device you are reading this PDF from. Did that?

Great. Now click the below link and let it open in your internet browser. Once it begins to play, come back to the PDF – <https://youtu.be/cfTonxUiA0>

Hope the music is playing now. Now adjust the volume as you wish and continue reading.

Back to the A4 sheet found in the orange envelope of Agent Bond. //

'Agent Bond.

Welcome. Operation Poisonhead is live now.

Please wear the hand band on a hand of your choice. It will help our people recognize you.

The Bluetooth earpiece is already on. Please connect it to your smartphone by enabling Bluetooth in your smartphone. Once connected, put the earpiece on.

Please go to The Samaritans app installed on your smartphone. Under My Missions – tap on Operation Poisonhead. In a few seconds, you must hear the phrase 'Welcome Agent Bond' and music playing after that.

Read below only if you have completed the above process.



Yes, I wore the band and yes, I heard it say ‘Welcome Agent Bond.’ And also, the music was playing strong in my ear. It added more emotion to the situation. So, all check. I continued reading the A4 sheet.

You might have observed that we have provided you with the photographs of three men. These are men whom you must avoid at any cost. They are members of our enemy organization Chemilda, currently disguised as employees in the restaurant you are in.

They have hidden a secret package of theirs in the refrigerator of the restaurant.

Package Description:

Color: Brown

Size: Palm-sized

*Your first task is to take away that package without any of the three men noticing you. Upon doing that, quickly exit the restaurant and reach **Abdul Silks in Yamuna Bank, Central New Delhi** with the package. The package must reach only Abdul and no one else. He will be waiting for you. Ask for him and you will find him.*

You have 20 minutes to deliver the package to Abdul. The time left will be continuously on display in the app.

You may request for more time if you need, although every additional minute increases the risk of Chemilda catching up. Please use the request more time facility only in dire circumstances.

Should any query arise, tap the Contact HQ button in the app.

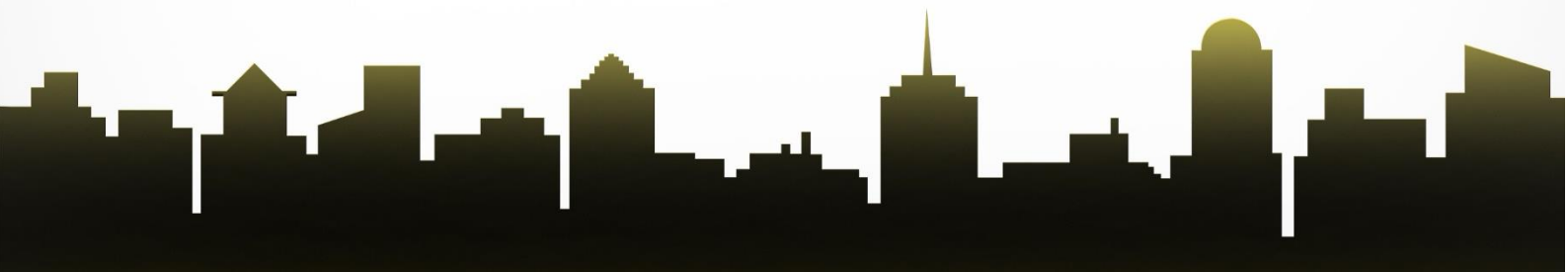
Our hopes are on you.

Good luck, Agent Bond.’

I immediately glanced at my smartphone and saw the time left. It said 19 minutes 42 seconds... and counting.

The game was on.

Frantically, I put the envelope, the photos and the A4 sheet in my backpack and made my way out of the toilet. While hurriedly rushing out of the washroom door, I chanced a look upon myself in the mirror – the earpiece, the music, the hand band and the sense of urgency to take away a package from bad guys – I felt I was fulfilling a long-had dream. It was time to save the world.



Stepping outside the washroom, I first thought it best to find the 3 men who were in the photographs. I stood alongside a table acting as if I was looking over the menu – while every now and then trying to find where the three men were.



I found all the three of them. They were at a healthy distance from the restaurant refrigerator, although very keenly observing every person who accessed the refrigerator, lest they steal away their package. Like a normal person, I made my way towards the refrigerator without arousing any suspicion.

I felt their eyes fall on me. As if looking for a drink, I scanned the refrigerator from the outside without opening it. There it was, the brown package. Hidden behind a line of large Coke bottles in the second last shelf from the bottom.

Slowly but steadily, I knelt down as if to pick up the large bottle of Coke from the second last shelf. Upon kneeling down, I was covered by the cashier's table. I immediately took the brown package and slipped it into my backpack. Now to finish off the act, I was up back on my feet with a bottle of the large Coke in my hand.

I put it on the cashier's table. He said, '90 rupees.'



The three men were now watching the lady behind me access the refrigerator. Whew. I was glad they didn't notice or suspect me. I just said to the cashier, 'Well...some other time. Kind of in a hurry now.'

Mr. Cashier just returned a smile. At this point I have to say, the music in my ear was killing it – it made me blind to everything else and made me feel spy-like. Wow, lucky to be on an adventure such as this.

As I made my way out of the restaurant, I glanced at the time left. 15 minutes 08 seconds... and counting.

I heard the fastest way to reach any place in New Delhi was the Delhi metro. For that, I needed to know the nearest metro station.

I immediately tapped on the Contact HQ button. The female AI voice replied – 'Agent Bond, how can HQ help you.'

The voice icon opened up signaling me to talk out my query. 'I need to know the nearest metro station to me and the time it takes to reach the Yamuna Bank metro station from there.' I asked.

'Sure. Getting back to you in 10 seconds', came the reply.

Exactly 10 seconds later, *'The nearest metro station is South-Ex. You are 75 meters away from it. It takes 6 minutes to reach the Yamuna Bank metro station from the South-Ex station. We have also sent you directions from your location to the South-Ex metro station as a Google maps link. Good luck, Agent Bond.'*

I clicked the link and took the help of Google Maps. Making my way for the South-Ex metro, I couldn't help but think if I could make it. But thanks to the music, it re-instilled hope in me – I quickened pace and made my way for the platform as fast as possible.





While waiting for the train to arrive, I re-read the instructions on the paper. Abdul Silks and search for Abdul. Okay. Got it. The train having arrived and me seated in it, I was on my way to Yamuna Bank to find Mr. Abdul who would be waiting for me.

Just a minute into getting on the train, the music suddenly stopped in my ear with the following being narrated.

'HQ to Agents. Story Update on Operation Poisonhead.

As the 24 of you are active on the field, we would like to update you about the developing story behind this Operation.

Due to regional conflicts regarding the export of lithium-ion batteries between India and China during the past few years, Chemilda – a secret chemical biohazard organization was formed by powerful individuals from the lithium-ion industry in China. The purpose of this organization was to inject a poisonous chemical liquid in all the pipelines leading up to the West Delhi Lithium-ion factory, the largest lithium-ion manufacturer in India, thereby crippling production.



Since this poisonous chemical liquid could not be smuggled into India because of strict checking and testing standards along the border, Chemilda decided to recruit a local scientist from New Delhi to manufacture the poisonous chemical liquid. We have no information on the scientist yet.

But what we know is this. Once manufactured, vials of this liquid are stored in refrigerators in restaurants, shopping malls, retail stores and even civilian homes located near key pipeline points by threatening the owners of these places. Chemilda does this to not attract suspicious eyes which will come from storing the vials in well-established cold storage chains.

Additionally, Chemilda has managed to find people to work for it in India by offering them huge sums of money. These people aid Chemilda in mapping the pipelines, transporting vials and eliminating threats to the grand plan whenever they arise. Intel also suggests that two politicians in Central Delhi spearheading a lithium-ion export agreement with the United States are also under threat.

HQ understands that the 24 of you are working on different parts of this Operation. While some of you are uncovering targeted pipelines by decoding Chemilda's secret markings in public places, some of you are in pursuit of the people working for Chemilda by intercepting their communication and transport. On the other hand, while some of you are finding vials stored in various locations, some of you are engaged in the process of transporting the politicians and their families to secure locations.

We at HQ want to mention at this stage that no part of this Operation is small and insignificant. For Operation Poisonhead to be successful, each of you 24 must be successful in your part. So, press on and continue, for each of you has a key role to play in the fate of Operation Poisonhead.

Please stay tuned for further information.

Good luck, Agents.'

The music came back again.

I just took a moment to comprehend the fact that there were 24 of us involved in very different activities, although under the same Operation. The most important part was that as each of us were doing our part of the Operation - we were together involved in stopping Chemilda from wreaking havoc. Whoa... that feeling when you understand why you're doing what you're doing.

I now knew what was inside the brown package I took from the restaurant. It had a vial containing the poisonous chemical liquid. But what could Abdul Silks have to do with this.

Well, I had to get to him to know the reason. While at that thought, the train doors opened to the Yamuna Bank metro station.





Soon after getting out of the Yamuna Bank Station, I kept looking at the shopboards to find Abdul Silks. It was a bit dark by now. My searching took me into the textile shop lane at Yamuna Bank. I presumed that Abdul Silks would be in the textile lane.



I asked one of the shopkeepers for Abdul Silks, and he told me that I had to go further straight. While proceeding further, a message appeared on the app saying,

'You have 3 minutes left to find Abdul. You may request for more time if you need.'

'No, I don't need more time, I am almost there... come on Abdul where are you.' I said to myself.

As I increased my pace walking straight along the lane, I found on my left the shopboard **Abdul Silks**. It was the second last shop in the lane.



I immediately went to the person sitting in the shop. As I am about to ask her about Abdul, she tightly grips my hand and begins to tell me, 'Oh Bhaijaan (*brother*)... you came at the right time. We have made your silk piece ready. It is exactly as you demanded.' While saying this, she signaled me to follow her into a dimly lit lane beside the shop.

Once in the lane, she looked to see if anyone was around and then said to me, 'I recognized you by your hand band. Abdul uncle was expecting you. You came at the right time... but the people from Chemilda came earlier than expected. They have locked him in the room upstairs.... By the way... do you have the package?'

'Yes... yes... I have it.' Saying that, I unzipped my backpack to give her the brown package.

While giving it to her, I remembered the fact that I had to give it to Abdul only and no one else. So, I muttered, 'But I was instructed to give this to Abdul only and no one else.'

She replied saying, 'Trust me. I am his daughter... and don't worry... I am only following his instructions here.'

She carefully removed the vial from the package saying, 'See the blue liquid in there..... it may look harmless... but that is the poisonous liquid Chemilda is planning to inject into the pipelines.'

She then puts it back into the package and hands it over to me.

'Okay good... you have the vial... so... Bond... here is the plan. Abdul uncle gets his daily injection for diabetes around this time. Today, I have asked the doctor not to come. So, today you will act as the doctor for him... that way the people from Chemilda will not suspect anything... you meet Abdul... he tells you what he wants to tell you and you exit.'

'Nice.... Sounds like a plan', I reply.

'Great then. Follow me.'

I followed her as we climbed the narrow staircase leading up to the only house in the second floor. Upon reaching the door, she knocked twice and said, 'The doctor is here for Abdul's medicine.'

There was no response for about 10 seconds. And then, the door opened. From what I could see and observe upon entering, there were two well-built men in the front room. Even before she and me could proceed to the room where Abdul was, one of the well-built men said, 'Wait.'

I tried to be calm and act ok.

'A doctor with an earpiece?', he said while pointing to my earpiece.



I replied, 'I just use it normally... in case of an emergency you know... it is better to treat the person while at the same time talk to necessary people.'

'Hmm... can you show me your Doctor's license, Doctor' asked the other well-built man while stressing on the word Doctor.

I act as if I am checking my pockets and then say, 'Well. I think I left it in my car if I am not wrong.... Let me go and fetch it from...'

'Well, that won't be necessary. Please proceed.' came the reply from one of them.

As Abdul's daughter and me walk towards the room in which Abdul lay, she whispered to me saying, 'You are a good liar.'

I just chuckle saying, 'Lying with confidence always works.'

We reach the inner room where Abdul was.

'Abbajan (*father*), he is here. His name is...'

'You must be Bond. We have been waiting for you. Do you have the vial?' asked Abdul.

'Yes Sir, here it is.' I reply, while handing him over the vial.

He looks at it for some time, and then at his watch on his left hand, and says, 'Bond, we have to be quick. We are on a race with time here. Watch me closely.'

He opens the blue vial very carefully while keeping his arms tight and stable.

He then takes a pinch of yellow-colored powder from a paper piece lying in front of him on the table and drops the same into the vial. As the powder dissolves into the blue liquid, the liquid begins to turn colorless. After about 7 seconds, what was originally the blue vial was now a colorless vial.

Without wasting even a second, he gives the colorless vial back to me and begins transferring the yellow-colored powder into a small glass bottle.

He hands me over that and with that, also an orange envelope.

Abdul in a hurried manner then said, 'Bond... you need to get to the Select Citywalk Mall... it is at a walkable distance from here. Just ask bystanders for the way. There are 6 brown packages in different locations all around the mall.... like the brown package you got here... they too will have vials inside them... look for refrigerators... as soon as you find them... go to a secure place and do what I did... put some of the yellow powder in each of them... that will eliminate the poison in the vials..... but we don't have much time.... You have to this in 35 minutes... else the vials will reach full potency... detailed instructions are in the envelope...read them carefully... now go go go.'



I put all the contents in my backpack and immediately head towards the door. I completely ignore the two men in the front room and make my way downstairs. Signaling a bye to Abdul's daughter who was in the second floor, I quicken my pace trying to find someone to ask where the Select Citywalk Mall was. The music was at its highest intensity now. Happy that it was matching my mood and objective.

The app then makes a chime. I look at it and the countdown starts. 34 minutes 58 seconds... and counting.

'Pause, Agent Bond', said Mel.

An agent from the other side of the table said to Mel, 'Good thing you paused him. Had some questions in my head.'

'Fire away then.' said Jason.

'The music plays continuously and adds a lot of liveliness while we are on the operation... how do you make that possible.'

Jason said, 'So this is nothing but internet radio. When you clicked the Operation Poisonhead button in the app in the first task, you actually pressed the play button to our radio feed. That means, we were actually a radio station playing music to you the whole time and you were listening to the music the whole time. And yes, like any other radio station – we fade out the music when we have something to say, that's what we did when we delivered the story update to all of you.'

'The music was just amazing.' said Agent Incognito.

'It was a design choice. For a multi-sensory experience to be successful, all the senses must be involved. Sight, smell, and touch were taken care of because you were moving around real places in the real world. But for sound, we felt – real world sounds like vehicles honking, people chatting and others would sap down the intensity of the experience. So, we added music through internet radio and provided you with an earpiece so that one ear could focus on real world sounds while the other could hear to the music and amp up intensity, thereby achieving a very important balance.' said Mel.

'In the same app, we also had the Contact HQ button which is nothing but a feature to exchange voice messages. While on the operation, you obviously don't have time to type – so you just talk out your query. We get your voice message. We type our answer and the robot AI voice sends the same to you as a voice message.' said Jason.

'Cool. And where does all of this happen, and how do you co-ordinate with so many places the agents go to while on the operation.' asked another agent.



I too had this question. Mel began.

‘We have a mission control room of sorts here. Samar and some others sit there during the operation and keep a track on all of you, your queries and the places. Well, it’s not something like from the movies, but yes... there are a couple of systems, a big mixer for the internet radio and large LED TV screen on which path tracking happens.’

‘Now, path tracking is interesting. So, here you have to know one thing. Every place all of you went to was like a scripted play in action. For example, take Anand Restaurant from Bond’s example – the cashier and the three waiters have been instructed to act like the way they acted between 6:00 PM and 6:15 PM. They do this every day as we run the operation every day between 6 and 9 PM. Today, the three men didn’t chase Bond while he exited the restaurant. But on some days, based on the people, they go behind the agent as he or she exits the restaurant. Similarly, the well-built men at Abdul Silks have a choice to quiz or not quiz you. Irrespective of what you reply or don’t reply, they have to move the story forward – that was the reason he interrupted you when you said you will fetch the license... a very good lie by the way... but what I am saying is they have that creative autonomy. And all of these people are not actors. The three men in Bond’s first task work in the Anand Restaurant itself. It is just that they play this role for us between 6 PM and 6:15 PM for which we give them a cut. The same with Abdul Silks – Abdul’s daughter again is not an actor. They own the shop in Yamuna bank. We just partnered with them saying please play this role for us between 6:40 PM and 7 PM every day. The same applies with all the places all of you went to today. We didn’t spend tons of money on recruiting actors, instead what we did was used existing places and people, themed them in very tiny amounts to aid the story, and set it in loop.’

‘Sick strategy.’ I said.

‘Mel...you said something about path tracking’, said an agent from the corner of the table.

‘Oh yes... I almost forgot. So, path tracking is simple. We created an app which is only accessible to the various places and we at the control room. So, soon as the cashier would have given Bond the menu card with the envelope inside it, he would have opened the app on his phone and ticked check against **Give Agent menu card with envelope**. Same way, soon as Bond exited the Anand restaurant, the cashier would put a tick against **Agent and package exit restaurant**. When we see the ticks at our end in the control room, it is our cue to start the countdowns on your phones. Just extending this example, Abdul and his daughter too can see the tick marks by the cashier at the Anand restaurant on the app in their phones. So, they can make themselves ready to play their part when Bond arrives in the next 20 minutes. When Bond would have left for the mall, Abdul would have checked the **Agent leaves for mall** row in the app. We see the tick and send you the countdown notification. Now, this happens with every path and every place. It also gives us the power to keep a track on things and move the whole story together.’



An agent then said, ‘Yes, I too observed this in my path... I was asked to follow a man with a bag from a cybercafe to his residence. The countdown in the app began soon as I stepped out of the cybercafe. Guess the cybercafe owner checked the box when I left behind the man with the bag.’

Jason replied, ‘Righto....if you went to the cybercafe... then you must have walked that dense path behind the residence blocks with all the trees around and barely any lights, can be scary at times... but no worries... we balanced it out through your interaction with Mr. Samuels in residence block 3B right...after taking the bag.’

‘Whoa... that path... true... it was really scary, but the music was lively and action packed at that time... so it kept me going and yes... meeting Mr. Samuels at his penthouse was amazing... spoke to him...gave him the bag... got the information and moved along.’

Mel then said, ‘At this point, it would be apt to recognize something in all of your paths. If you recollect, every path was a mix of going to places with different energies, colors, moods and meeting various types of people. More than that, in every path the objectives and tasks were time bound... but the interactions with people were not. For example, take Agent Bond – he had to take the package from the refrigerator to Abdul in 20 minutes. He did that. He reached Abdul Silks in 20 minutes. Having just completed such a high-stakes objective, we needed to balance the energy out. So, we put Abdul’s daughter to have a conversation with him – and this interaction had no countdown to it. Same way, there was no countdown on the interaction with Mr. Samuels or any of your interactions with people in all of your paths. This was again a design choice as we knew that people interactions would help in three ways – they were an authentic way to move the story forward, they satisfied a core need of ours to meet new people while being looked at in a personally significant manner and lastly, they made the entire experience a lot more memorable for the guest or the agent in our case.’

Jason added, ‘So now that Bond’s frantic energy from delivering the package to Abdul has been balanced by his meeting with Abdul and his daughter, it is time now to get the energy flowing high again... but this time it will be different... because from now on we will see path merging.’

‘Please continue, Agent Bond.’

I needed to be as fast as possible. Reach the mall. Look for refrigerators. Find the brown packages. Put yellow powder into the vials. I was reminding myself of the task as I walked ahead.

A bystander gave me the entire path to the Select Citywalk mall. I just had to walk straight for about a minute and then turn right at the traffic signal. I would see the mall on my left, he said.

Then, I receive another notification from the app. It said, ‘*In the envelope, you are asked to contact Agent Alisha. Just in case, here is her mobile number: +91 85668 97504*’



Oh dammn. The envelope. I completely forgot to read it in my hurry. I took a deflection towards the side of the road, and opened my backpack to read the instructions in the envelope. There was an A4 sheet with instructions. Although this time, the instructions were not printed, they were handwritten. By Abdul, I presumed. I read what was written.

'Agent Bond.

You have to find six vials stored in six brown packages. These packages are located in different stores in the Select Citywalk shopping mall. Look only in stores which have or most likely have refrigerators.

To know if a particular store which has a refrigerator has one of the six brown packages, go the main person in the store and say, **'The Head must be removed.'**

On hearing this, if they act surprised and do nothing, that is not the store where a brown package lies. On the other hand, if they immediately leave what they are doing and go towards the refrigerator – that store has one of the brown packages. Wait for him/her to give it you and leave.

Upon finding the six brown packages, access the vials in them and do as I did. Do this only in a secure place away from prying eyes.

Agent Alisha will aid you in searching around the mall for the six brown packages. Meet her at the Foodprint area in the mall. If you are the first to arrive, please wait. HQ will send you her phone number. Use it if you need it.

Beware of people from Chemilda. They will be around the mall guarding the vials. Our hopes are on you.

Good luck.'

Understood. I continued my fast-paced walking towards the mall. Having turned right at the traffic signal, there it was, on my left – the Select Citywalk Mall. Quite a big mall to search was what I thought.





I quickly made my way inside the mall and began to look for Foodprint. Upon asking a security guard, I become aware that it was in the third floor of the mall.

The countdown was now at 28 minutes 34 seconds and counting. The music currently playing was suspenseful and eerie at the same time.

I reached Foodprint and began looking for somebody with a hand band very similar to mine.



Found a person.

‘Agent Bond,’ I said to her while offering my hand for a handshake.

‘Agent Alisha,’ she replied with a smile while completing the handshake.

Jason exclaimed, ‘The paths have merged!’

Mel then said, ‘Exactly Jason... at this point....we would like to mention to the 24 of you that this would have been the time when each of you experienced your paths merging. If Agent Bond and Alisha merged paths in the shopping mall..... two of you might have merged paths in the Delhi Public Library while trying to find pipeline maps in the library. Two of you might have merged paths in the Nehru Park and.... three of you... I think this is the most interesting path merging scenario.... three of you would have merged paths in a moving public bus from India Gate to Akbar Road... who were these three agents.’

Three agents raised their hands, all of them having a heavy smile on their faces.

Jason then said, ‘Well Agent Bond, why don’t you continue. What happened next.’

‘Soon as we met, I began to tell Agent Alisha what we had to do – right from what and where we had to search to the statement to be told to the main store person – **‘The Head must be removed.’**’

When I was done, she told me her instructions too.

After having found the 6 brown packages, we had to go the parking lot of the shopping mall and find a white sedan numbered *HR 26 DQ 5551*. We had to use the car and drive to a place called Dr Lal PathLabs in Kalkaji, West Delhi and meet an individual there called Dr. Vijay Bhatt.

She had the keys given to her in the envelope she received from the place before the shopping mall. Her instructions also said that I would know what to do with the 6 brown packages. Yes, I knew what to do. But we had to find them first.

At this point, the only secure place I could think of, to put the yellow powder inside the 6 vials was the car.

We then briefed each other our plan of action. Our strategy was clear – go to the food court first and confront the main person at each outlet with the golden statement – **‘The Head must be removed.’** After the food court, we would move to beauty product stores. Agent Alisha believed some of them to have refrigerators. And then, finally we would move to the supermarket in the first floor of the mall.



Other than the above, we felt no other place to have refrigerators in the mall. We decided not to part ways but instead move fast, agreeing that meeting back together would be a bigger headache if we parted ways and searched.

Showing her my countdown which was at 25 minutes 17 seconds, I said to her, 'We have to be in the car within 25 minutes to do what I have to do with the packages.'

'Let's begin.' she replied with an air of excitement.

Just as things were set for us to begin, a man fully suited up from top to toe came before us and said in a very crisp manner,

'Agent Bond and Agent Alisha, there is someone who would like to meet you. If you could follow me, please.'

We were shocked. How the hell did a random person know our Agent name.

Agent Alisha and me just looked at each other for a few seconds, each in a state of shock similar to as the other was in.

'Well, if you can start moving.' the man said to us.

Agent Alisha then said to him, 'We have something else to do and we don't know you, so please excu...'

'Have you heard of Chemilda, Madam.' said he.

She and I didn't know what to say now.

'After you. Please walk towards the Swagath Restro Bar you see in the front.' he said.

We begin walking quite surprised at the turn of events. We weren't prepared for this. This was beyond instructions and orange envelopes.



‘Have a seat, Agent Bond and Agent Alisha’ said a man seated in a plush corner of the restaurant. The man looked really fierce in his appearance.

One could make out that this was an area of the restaurant not everyone came to. It was blinded to the outside by the heavy curtains that covered it.



Soon as we reluctantly sat down, the curtains behind us closed.

‘Dear Agents, would you like something to eat or drink’ he asked.

We didn’t reply a word.

‘Well, you people don’t like to talk to strangers is it. I am not a stranger though. I am someone you know.’

‘Yes, we know you are from Chemilda.’ replied Agent Alisha quite bravely.

‘Wow. You are right. Kudos to you on that. But anyways, since both of you are acting so cold, and you have also declined my hospitalities, may I ask you a pertinent question.’ he asked while removing his spectacles and cleaning them with the table cloth.

We don’t reply anything.

‘I will take that as a yes. Here it is. I am made to believe that both of you are here in this mall to steal some of Chemilda’s prized possessions. Is that true, Agents.’ he said while stressing on the words steal and Agents.

We again don’t reply anything.

He then said, ‘I will again take that as a yes. And so, that’s why - I am here to make an offer.’



Picking up two cheques from his left side he said, 'Here are two blank cheques. One for each of you. Take it and write an amount as per your wish, then leave the mall or go watch a movie together upstairs. There are some good ones running. That is one option. The other option is – you leave the cheque here and go on with your objective. Well, I would prefer that option too, because I know who will win. There are 10 of my men in the mall and only 2 of you. It's been a long time since I watched two deer be chased by a pack of 10 lions. Wouldn't that be fun.'

I was boiling from the inside by now. The music too in my ear inspired me to do what I did next.

I got up. Took the cheques and tore them right in front of his eyes saying, 'Agent Alisha. Same plan. Let's begin.'

Both of us stormed out of the restaurant and got straight to our business.

We went straight to the food court and began telling the main person of each of the outlets one by one – '**The Head must be removed.**' We started from KFC which was first on our left.



Apart from random awkward stares and quizzical looks, we didn't find anybody going to their refrigerator to fetch for us something. Although, fortunately for us, this changed when we reached Pizza Hut – our third stop.





Upon hearing the statement, the cashier immediately went to the refrigerator, removed the brown package, gave it to us and continued taking orders. Given he wasn't in a position to receive a thank you, we just moved on. One out of six.

Agent Alisha then observed a man catching pace with us from the behind. It completely looked as if he was from Chemilda trying to stop us. We had to part ways. We had to distract them.

We pulled up in a lane beside an outlet and redrafted the entire plan. We decided to part ways. She would continue searching the food court area, while I would go to the beauty product shops and the supermarket on the first floor. As soon as we found a package we would call each other since HQ shared with us the other's number. We wished the best to each other and moved on.

I made way for the stairs, as that seemed a faster method to reach the second floor than the elevator. Now, I had to look for beauty product shops. Unfortunately for me, every apparel shop looked like a beauty product shop, as the posters of the female models in front of every apparel shop made them look like a beauty product shop.

I had to be watchful.

I found the first beauty shop. NewU it was called.





Checked with the statement. Unsuccessful. Moved on.

Bumped into another store called Clarins.



When I said to the main person ‘The Head must be removed.’

She took a while and said ‘Am sorry, which head or whose head.’ I laughed. I couldn’t help laughing.

I just waved her a bye and left, knowing it was not a place for one of the six packages.

The second floor had no other beauty products shop left. I went to the first floor.

In front of me was a Sephora store. I knew for a fact that Sephora was a beauty products retail chain.

They say, third time’s a charm. With fingers crossed, I went into Sephora.



Made my way through the crowd and confronted the main person with the statement. He immediately went into the back store. I felt this was it. 15 seconds later, he came back with the brown package.

I immediately took it and made my way out of the store. Just as I stepped out of the store, I saw a man at the left look at me suspiciously. I ignored him and moved on. He began to come behind me.

Somehow making way for my phone to call Agent Alisha, I deemed it better to go into the bathroom lane in the first floor of the mall.





I don't know if I am forced to going into bathrooms when someone is after me or it seemed the only safe option at that time. I manage to call Agent Alisha.

'Bond here. I found one. Looked in all the beauty product shops.'

'I found three. Didn't tell you coz I was in such a flow. So totally, we found 5 counting the first Pizza hut one. There is nothing left here. I expect the last one to be in the supermarket. Now look, there are at least 5 people behind me... so, I will start making my way for the parking lot... you take the one from the supermarket and join me there. By the time, I will find the car and keep it ready.'

'Done.' I said about to hang up the call when she said, 'How much time left.'

I look at the countdown and it says 7 minutes 53 seconds. I criticize the man in the Swagath Restro Bar in my head for wasting our time.

'7 minutes' I replied to her.

'I think we can make it. Ok...bye. See you in the car.' The conversation ends.

I take a deep breath and storm out of the bathroom. A person using the mirror is surprised to see me behaving in such a hurried manner. I just smile at him while washing my hands and exit.

I decide not to look anywhere else and directly head for the supermarket. Going to the food section in the supermarket seemed the best idea.





Having reached there, I realized the number of refrigerators present – there was a refrigerator for almost everything. Now with so many refrigerators, I had to think of a way to find the last brown package.

Suddenly, my eyes fell on a refrigerator in the corner. It had written on it – Out of order. Moving forward to get a better angle, I saw that the particular refrigerator had nothing in it except a brown colored package kind of thing. And to add to my theory, there was a well-built man in front of the refrigerator standing in a position as if to guard it.

I thought of a trick in my head. I believed it could work. I removed my hand band and put it inside my pocket.

With a firm face, I went towards the Out of Order refrigerator and said to the man very silently, ‘Boss is calling you up to third floor. I will guard here now.’

He replied saying, ‘He is in Swagath only right.’

I just nodded. He left immediately.

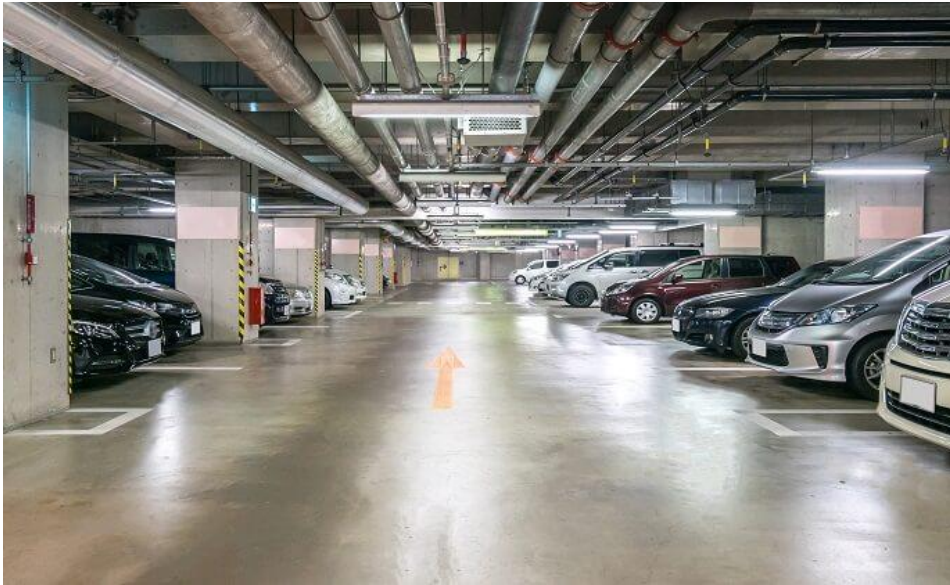
Lucky for me, he bought the idea.

Soon as he was out of sight, I took the sixth brown package and got into the nearest elevator.

‘Parking’ I said to the lift man. The lift doors closing seemed very comfortable. I felt I was out of danger.

Reached the parking lot.





I expected Agent Alisha to be ready with the car right at the place where people enter the parking lot.

I go further into the space trying to search for her.

Seeing no one around, I shouted, ‘Alishaa’

No reply. I just hear my echo.

With my backpack I start running around the parking lot searching either for a white sedan or for Alisha. I cursed myself for not remembering the exact number of the car although I knew it had three 5’s in it.

Looking around while running, my eyes fell on a white sedan. And yes, the number had three 5’s in it. I felt this was it. But Alisha was nowhere to be seen.



I then hear a shout from the distance, ‘Bond, are you here.’

I go towards the origin of the shout and find Alisha at the entrance of the parking lot. At the same time, a notification comes to my phone – *‘You have 3 minutes to depoison the 6 vials. You may request for more time if you need.’* I was confident I could do it.

‘5551, is that the car?’ I ask.

‘Yes... that is the one ... found it?’ she asked while running towards where I was.

I just signal to her the location of the car.

As she comes near, she said, ‘Am sorry. Was caught up outpacing the bad guys. It was fun and adventure at the same time.’

I could barely return a smile with my mind planning the process of putting the yellow powder into the vials. She unlocks the car and I quickly get down to business.

I ask her to open all the 6 brown packages and carefully remove the vials.

In the meantime, I remove the glass bottle in which Abdul put the yellow-colored powder.

One by one, I open each vial and put a pinch of the yellow powder into it.

As the blue liquid turned colorless, Alisha exclaimed, ‘Remarkable!’

‘Seems like magic isn’t it... as if the yellow is sucking all the blue.’ I reply.

In about a couple of minutes, I am done with all the 6 vials. I breathe easy and convey to Alisha, ‘Job done.’

We exchange handshakes and congratulations.

Another notification then pops up on my phone – *‘Your time is up. Please take a picture of the 6 depoisoned vials and send it to HQ by tapping on the send image to HQ option.’*

I do the same. The music was still on a high now. But resting against the seat of the car, I feel very calm and satisfied.

We look at each other and exchange handshakes again.

We then hear a chime in Alisha’s phone.

Upon looking, it was the countdown – now at 24 minutes and 57 seconds. The objective under it being – ‘Reach Dr Lal PathLabs in Kalkaji, West Delhi and find Dr. Vijay Bhatt.’

We were reminded. Alisha immediately ignited the car and in under a minute, we were out of the parking lot of the Select Citywalk shopping mall.



Alisha was driving in beast mode. I set up the location on Google Maps and she was simply following that.

‘The experience has been amazing till now, isn’t it? Not only an agent... I also get to do what I like best...driving.’ said Alisha.

I was curious to know how the instructions asked her to drive a car. So, I asked her the same.

She replied saying, ‘I clicked Yes on if I could drive a car while signing up... guess because of that.’

It then hit me that the driving question was asked during signing up. I remembered clicking no too.

The road was partially empty in this part of Delhi. She pressed the accelerator even more.

‘Don’t blame me. Blame the music’ she said pointing to her earpiece. True but, the music at that time was action-packed and energy-rich.

‘Chanced upon any other agents while coming to the mall... I mean the story update said right that there were 24 of us working on different parts of the story... I mean in different parts of Operation Poisonhead.’ she asked while stopped for a traffic signal.



‘No... was totally caught up in doing my part.... Guess they must be doing their bit too at this juncture all around the city.’ I replied.

She just nodded in agreement as her focus was now on the very few seconds left for the signal to turn green.

Green it turned and off we went.

In no time, we reached the location.





We were ahead of time. The countdown was at 5 minutes and 16 seconds on Alisha's phone.

At the main reception desk, we asked for Dr. Vijay Bhatt. '2nd floor. Lab number 24.' came the reply from the receptionist.

Making our way towards Lab number 24 on the second floor, we noticed all the other labs being closed. Lab number 24 alone had its lights on.

We knocked the door since it was shut. A few seconds later, a person opened the door.

'You must be Agent Alisha and Bond, I am Dr. Bhatt. I was expecting you.'

He guided us inside and got us chairs to sit down. We sat and looked all around the lab – one could make out that he was a man working on many things. There were chemical liquids and powders of almost every color in the lab.

'Agents, can you give me one of the depoisoned vials.' he asked.

'Sure...' I said, reaching out to my backpack to give him one of the vials.

'For the past two hours, I have been in constant touch with HQ. We have been working very hard on identifying the location of the scientist making the poisonous chemical liquid for Chemilda. For a start, we know that the scientist does his or her work, here in Delhi itself.' Dr. Bhatt said in a rather hurried manner.



‘How so?’ Alisha asked.

‘If you look underneath the vials, you have C2 inscribed there. Do you see it.’ he said showing the underneath of the vial I just gave him.

‘Yes, we see it.’ I replied.

‘Other Agents like you working in the field right now confirmed the fact that these glass vials were manufactured by a company somewhere in South India. When we contacted the company, they gave us very handy information. Glass vials with C2 on them are shipped only to Delhi. Since all the vials found around the city till now have C2 inscribed on them, we believe that the scientist would have ordered the vials from a Delhi-based address, which makes it very likely that he or she is from Delhi itself.’

‘Makes sense.’ said Alisha.

‘Another thing,’ said Dr.Bhatt.

‘Since this is a matter of National Security, we asked the company to give us details of their shipments to Delhi during the past 2 months, since we know that Chemilda was formed only a month ago. In the data shared by them, there are 17 addresses.’

‘But how are going to pick one address from 17,’ I ask.

‘Through this.’ said Dr. Bhatt pointing at the vial in his hands.

As Dr. Bhatt made his way towards the large apparatus he set up on the other side of the lab, he said,

‘We believe that the poisonous chemical liquid has an ingredient called *butane-sylvaticum*. This ingredient is made only near Tashkent in Uzbekistan. Given its dangerous nature, there is a database maintained by the manufacturing facility at Tashkent. In the database, one can see detailed records of shipments and quantities shipped to various addresses. Although this database is only accessible to National Governments, HQ obtained access of it from the Government of India so that we can find the location of this scientist.. Well... let me first check if the liquid contains *butane-sylvaticum*... it will not take me more than 5 minutes.’

For a moment, I felt how really interconnected and cool this was. Because of the vials we got from the mall, we could now find the location of the scientist with the help of the database.

Almost 3 and a half minutes later, Dr. Bhatt comes out of his cabin in a frantic manner.

‘Yes... it has the ingredient in it. I have looked up the database too. It was shipped only to three locations in Delhi during the past one month. I will tell you the first lines of these addresses..... Alisha... grab that laptop and see if any of these addresses are present in the 17 from the glass vial company... quick... HQ will call for an update anytime now.’



Alisha puts the laptop in a position such that both of us can search as Dr. Bhatt yells, literally yells the first lines of the three addresses from the other side of the lab.

Dr. Bhatt begins. ‘Eco Chemicals... Neem Tree Road.... Sout...’

‘Nope...not that one’ I reply, Alisha having scrolled right to the end of the document which had the 17 addresses.

‘Bentex Pharma...Aerocity Area...’

‘No... that one is not present here,’ I reply as she scrolls now from bottom to up.

‘Then this has to be the one... Dupic Medical Warehouse... Greater Kailash ...’

‘West Delhi.’ I complete Dr. Bhatt’s statement.

‘Third time’s always a charm,’ I said to myself.

Dr. Bhatt was elated. ‘Yeeessss... we have the location... my plan worked.... I knew it was in West Delhi... because the factory is in West Delhi.... And that is the reason I persuaded HQ to send both of you here... we are in West Delhi... this location should not be far.... Okay feed this location into your Google Maps and get ready... I will ask instructions from HQ and get back.’

Dr. Bhatt was running back to his cabin now. I typed in the address in Alisha’s Google Maps while she was packing up both of our backpacks.

Dr. Bhatt then came out and handed me an A4 sheet saying, ‘Instructions from HQ. Read in the car. You have 25 minutes.’

We immediately hurried downstairs. I could feel the paper hot in my hands – it had just come out from print.

Seated in the car, seatbelts on. Both of our phone’s chime together – it was the countdown. 24 minutes 56 seconds and counting.

In about a couple of minutes from identifying the location in the lab, Alisha and me were now on the road speeding towards the Dupic Medical Warehouse in pursuit of a scientist who was making poison.

‘Pause.’ said Jason.

An agent then said, ‘This part of their path was so much fun - right from the chasing in the shopping mall to the big discovery which happened in the lab. I could totally relate to it, given my path too had something like that, although the setting was very different from a shopping mall and a lab.’



Mel said, ‘Well, that was the idea. Am sure almost all of you would have felt the stakes rising after about an hour into the experience. In every path, the second hour of the experience is where the characters begin to impact the story. For example, in the mall... at any point of time the 10 men know where exactly Bond and Alisha are in the mall. They have their own means of contacting each other. But they will pursue Bond or Alisha only when Bond or Alisha see any of them – as that will give the perception to the guest that he or she is being followed and chased. Same way, the man near the Out of Order refrigerator knew that Bond was in the supermarket. The others would have informed him on that. Now, Bond performed a trick by saying Boss is calling you and sent the man away. Say Bond didn’t do that. He went around checking all the refrigerators. That same man will now come to Bond and say, ‘Hey, I am from the store. HQ sent us your photo. Chemilda is storing the brown package in that refrigerator you see there. There is no guard now. Pick it up and go.’ In this manner, the actors, who are actually people from the mall itself, help in moving forward the story even if you are not doing it the way the story requires. This also helps when on odd days, we have guests who are very slow to figure out things and move forward in the story – it is at that moment we feed them with clues and move the story forward, while giving them the feeling that they actually figured it out.’

‘Nice.’ I whispered to myself.

Jason then said, ‘Another point worth mention is the element of surprise and twist we add in every path in the second hour. Am sure all of you must have experienced something like what Agent Bond and Agent Alisha experienced when they met the man in the Swagath Restro Bar in the mall. We do this in every path - confronting you with something unexpected while on the experience...something you didn’t plan for... if I remember exactly... in one of the paths the element of surprise was a police officer coming and questioning the agent... who was that.’

Agent Incognito raised his hand with a half-smile on his face.

Mel then added saying, ‘The beauty of this whole experience is visiting real places and people from the real world, although connected by a fictional storyline. The goal was to make you feel special and hero-like by making the whole thing very real and authentic. We even used the power of theming in all of the places to highlight the story elements. In the Dr Lal PathLabs Agent Bond and Agent Alisha went to for example, we added beakers and instruments to make it look like Dr. Bhatt was working on something very serious. By putting different-colored waters and powders in various places around the lab, we wanted the whole thing to come alive for you.... obviously, the music playing in your ear would augment the experience in any particular place even more.’

I just smiled being able to totally relate with what Mel just said.

‘We are almost at the end. Agent Bond, begin from where you paused and stop when you reach where we are now – at a dining table with dinner served and eaten.’

I began. Began to narrate the end of the path.



// Before Agent Bond begins to narrate the end of the path.

Dear Reader. Yes, I am talking to you – you who is reading this essay as a PDF. Hope the music is still going strong in your ear while you read. But from now on, the track will change in Agent Bond's ear. So, I request you to change tracks too for a better experience.

Just click the below link. Once it begins to play, come back to the PDF and continue reading.
<https://youtu.be/-U32zQCc3BM>

Hope the music is playing now. Happy reading.

Back to Agent Bond and Agent Alisha. //

Alisha asked me to read the instructions on the paper given by Dr. Bhatt aloud as she drove.

I picked the paper up from the car's dashboard to begin reading.

Just before I start, Alisha looks at me and smiles. I look at her and smile back. The music now playing through the earpiece was the James Bond theme.

I began with even more excitement and energy now.

'Reach Dupic Medical Warehouse, Greater Kailash, West Delhi.

The security guard has been notified of your coming. Show him your hand bands for easier recognition. Beware – he knows nothing about the purpose of your visit. He has just been instructed to allow two people named Bond and Alisha from higher order.

Enter the warehouse premises and look out for people from Chemilda. Try to avoid if you find anybody.

Search the entire premises for the scientist's work equipment and any other items pertaining to Chemilda and Operation Poisonhead. If you find anything from the aforementioned, put them in the car.

If you happen to find the scientist, capture him/her and get him/her to HQ. We need the scientist, no matter what.

Please input the following in Google Maps to reach HQ – Samar Car Mechanics, Connaught Place, New Delhi. Contact HQ using the app upon reaching there.

Avoid leaving a trail. Use force if you have to.

See you soon.

Good luck.'



‘Dope task... the Bond music making it even more special’ I said while looking at Alisha and smiling.

‘Truly so, Agent Bond.’ she replied, stressing on the word Bond.

Being Bond felt really good. That was always a desire from when I was a kid – to do it like how James Bond does it in the movies. What I was going through was a lot more than I had desired for.

Google Maps said we were 2 minutes away from the warehouse. The road at this point was very bumpy and dimly lit. I presumed this was a warehouse away from the main parts of West Delhi – an extremely good location choice to engage in the kind of work Chemilda was in.

We reached. Countdown was at 15 minutes 22 seconds and counting. The place was extremely silent with no vehicles and people around. Soon as we got down from the car, the security guard waved a torchlight at us.

We crossed the road, showed him our hand bands and went inside the premises.

The plan was to first look around the warehouse and then go in. Very silently, Alisha and me went around the warehouse searching either for Chemilda people or their things. Whenever we could, we peeped into the warehouse through the windows to look for the scientist or anything else.

There was nothing outside. We decided to go in. The only door to enter the warehouse was the one in the front.

When we reached, the front door was already open. We had to open it further to enter.

We pushed it slowly trying to not make any noise. We were inside.



It was a really big warehouse. I went left and Alisha went right, searching for Chemilda people or things. If we found the scientist, even better, as HQ needed the scientist.

I have to admit that it was a bit scary experiencing the silence and nothingness as I walked the long aisles of the warehouse. The Bond music was there to inspire though.

I was almost at the end of the warehouse. I had not found anything of relevance to the Operation till now. Alisha too conveyed the same thought to me through gestures from the other side.

As I reached the end of the warehouse... I heard a very faint voice.

Alisha too heard it. She pointed to the origin of the voice. It seemed as though it was coming from a cabin in the corner of the warehouse.

We silently made our way towards the cabin.

To our shock, we saw an old man in a soiled lab coat tied to a chair. He was the scientist. But his face was bruised and it seemed like he was unconscious too.

I immediately go to him and begin to untie him.

At this juncture, he slowly opens his eyes and asks as to who I was.

‘Agent Bond,’ I reply.

Turning back to introduce Alisha I say, ‘And this is ...’

Alisha is not to be seen.

‘Here... Agent Bond’ shouts the security guard from the open area outside the cabin.

The scientist and I storm out of the cabin. The security guard had covered Alisha’s mouth and captured her.

The scientist moved forward and said, ‘You brat... you are motivated by the money Chemilda gives you... leave her alone if you...’ said the scientist.

‘Shut up Doctor... be silent and sit inside’ shouted the guard.

There was a moment of silence for about 10 seconds.

As the scientist walked towards the cabin, he whispered into my ear saying, ‘ I am going to run for the entrance now. He will come behind me. Push him to the floor. And both of you run towards the entrance.’

I nodded.



‘Hey...Doctor...go inside,’ shouted the guard again.

The scientist then started to run for the entrance. The guard left Alisha and began to chase the scientist. I catch up pace with him while shouting, ‘Alisha... run to the entrance.’

Soon as I catch up pace with the guard, I trip his leg and he falls to the floor.

By now, the scientist, Alisha and me are at the entrance. Alisha leads the way out of the premises towards the car with the scientist and me following.

I kept looking back to check for the guard. He managed to get up, but we were already way ahead.

The three of us were successfully in the car. Without even wasting a second, Alisha pressed the accelerator and we were out of there.

Alisha interrupted me saying, ‘Sorry to interrupt... but I would like to ask Jason and Mel here about how they manage to get this duel between the scientist and the guard right everyday... I mean many parts in the whole experience depend a lot on how the Agent acts and moves.’

Jason replied, ‘Great question, Agent Alisha. The golden rule we tell our people in every place is to **adapt the story movement to the guest’s movement**. It will be easier to explain using the example of the security guard and the scientist. But, remember what I explain is not limited only to that. This is the kind of thinking and planning that goes into every character in every place in every path. Let me begin.

Soon as both of you entered the warehouse, the guard communicated over a call to the scientist in the cabin that both of you had entered.

The scientist then would have hidden the make-up kit he was using for his bruises under the table. After that, he would have tied a rope around himself, although keeping his hands out. After having tied the rope, he would have stuffed his hands inside.

Now the scientist is asked to keep silent for about two minutes. After two minutes, he is supposed to start making faint sounds. The sounds keep getting louder and louder. You both identified that he was in the cabin when he made the first faint sound itself. On other days, the two agents find him either when he is making loud or very very loud sounds.

Now the security guard was actually walking behind you in the warehouse, although at a healthy distance. Bond and you didn’t notice him. On one day, when an agent noticed him behind her, he just acted as if he was doing some routine checks. The agent signaled him to be quiet and the guard too signaled back saying, yes, I will keep quiet. You see the guard here adapting to the guest’s movement.



Now, to the part when the guard covered your mouth. That is a part of the script. He does this at a moment when either one of you or both of you are busy with the scientist. The scientist too does his best to start a conversation and keep the person untying the rope in a conversation, so that the guard can do his act of covering one of the agent's mouth and take him or her outside the cabin. If such a moment is not possible, he simply comes forward, pulls one of the agents away and covers his or her mouth. But this has to happen so that the scientist can do his part next to move the story forward.

Now to the scientist. If one of the agent doesn't do anything to save the other agent, or if the captured agent doesn't begin to resist the guard and move away, the scientist steps in – as he did in your case. We allow enough time for guests to do what they want to do. In some cases, we see the guard and the agent get into a brawl – that is when the scientist immediately steps in to say we need to escape first, so leave the guard. On one day, an agent bit the guard's hand – soon as that happened, the guard groaned in pain. That was a signal for the scientist to step in and say run to the entrance.

In your case, Bond follows what the scientist says and trips the guard to the floor. Now the guard does get up, but he continues to walk slowly – that being a signal to you that he is no more in the chase and you can escape.

Coming to the escape part. In your case Alisha, you lead the way and immediately get into the car. The scientist and Agent Bond followed you. In some cases, upon reaching the entrance of the warehouse the agents have no clue on what to do. So, the scientist in such a case looks at the car parked on the road and says, 'Whose car is that.' The agents reply, 'Ours.' The scientist then replies, 'Great... to the car then, we need to escape from here.' As you see here, the scientist **adapted the story movement to the guest's movement.** Now, this is what happens at every part of this experience, in every place and in every path.'

'Wow... getting to know the inner workings of what we just experienced is a thrill in itself.' said Alisha.

Mel then said, 'Please continue, Agent Bond. You are very close to the end.'

While Alisha focused on following the Google Maps directions towards HQ, I was engaged in talking with the scientist.

A notification popped up on my phone. It said the following – *'Your time is up. Please take a picture of the scientist and send it to HQ by tapping on the send image to HQ option.'* I also realized I missed looking at the previous notification which read – *'You have 3 minutes left to find the scientist. You may request for more time if you need.'* Thank goodness, we were able to do it, I thought.



I took a picture of the scientist and sent it to HQ.

As I spoke to him on the ride to HQ, Operation Poisonhead and what we did made greater sense. Apparently, he didn't take money to work for Chemilda. When he was offered the money and briefed on what he had to do, he confronted the people from Chemilda saying that the poisonous chemical liquid they planned to inject into the pipelines leading to the lithium-ion factory could prove fatal not only to the factory, but also to the entire city of Delhi. Citing the risks, he declined the offer. But, given that the scientist became aware of Chemilda's plan – they decided to capture him and make him work forcefully. It was around 2 weeks ago, that he was brought to the warehouse we just left and kept under the watchful eyes of men Chemilda had recruited for money – the security guard for example. But, the scientist saw an opportunity to foil Chemilda's plan when they allowed him to order raw materials for the poisonous chemical liquid. He was aware of the global database maintained for the ingredient *butane-sylvaticum*. He decided to order for the same using the address of the warehouse, in the hope that the Government or a secret agency would use the database to find the warehouse's address.

His plan was successful. A secret agency managed to find the address and save him. Agent Alisha and I considered ourselves fortunate to be a part of that secret agency.

But we had no answer to one question which the scientist posed to us. He asked us if Chemilda's plan was successful. Frankly, we didn't know. But we mentioned to him the fact that there were 22 others like us currently in the city working to stop Chemilda. He didn't take that for an answer. He had to know very clearly what the status of their plan was. We were sure that the place we reached had all the answers to the scientist's questions. We reached the location Google Maps led us to.

'Are you sure this is the address?' asked Alisha.

In front of us was nothing but a large wall with some street art on it.

I replied saying, 'Yes... I inputted into Google Maps what was given in the instruction sheet... Samar Car Mechanics, Connaught Place, New Delhi.'

Even if it was a car mechanics shop, there was no signboard to depict the same.

I re-looked at the instruction sheet to check if I typed the location right. My eyes then fell on the statement which was after the location statement – *Contact HQ using the app upon reaching there.*

I immediately tapped on the Contact HQ button in my phone.

The female AI voice was back again.



‘Agent Bond, how can HQ help you.’

‘Ummm... we have reached Samar Car Mechanics.’ I reply.

‘Is Agent Alisha with you.’

‘Yes... she is driving the car.’ I reply.

‘Is the scientist with you.’

‘Yes, he is here too.’ I reply.

There was absolute silence for about 7 seconds, and then the female AI voice says,

‘Access granted. Congratulations Agent Bond and Agent Alisha. Welcome to The Samaritans Headquarters. Welcome Home.’

As soon as she said that, the large street art wall in front of us opened up. More specifically, it opened up like how a car garage opens up.

‘Holy smokes’, said the scientist. We could make out that he too was baffled by what he saw.

Alisha and I just looked at each other and smiled. We had no idea that there was a garage door hiding in the wall in front of us. It was our signal to drive in though.

And in we went.

It was a slope which led downwards. The garage door closed behind us, with lights turning on inside as we drove along the slope.

‘Now this is exactly like the movies,’ I said.

Alisha laughed as she too could relate with what I said.

We drove where the slope led us. With it beginning to flatten, we were led to made a quick left and another quick right. On the left, was our signal to stop – a man and a woman both fully suited up signaling us to get down.

While getting down, we couldn’t help but observe how well-designed and well-lit the parking space was. The whole place looked straight out of a science-fiction movie. Kudos to the theming team, I thought.

‘Congratulations, Agent Bond and Agent Alisha. That would be the end of your role in Operation Poisonhead. Welcome to The Samaritans Headquarters or HQ for short. Please leave your earpieces here and proceed to the lift. Operation Director Samar is waiting to meet you and the scientist.’ said the woman.

We did that and proceeded to the lift.



The man then came up to us and said, ‘Since you will be going deep underground to the main premises of the HQ, you will experience some turbulence as the lift travels down. But, that is no reason to worry. Until next time, Agents.’

As he said that, the doors of the lift closed. The lift too was themed in a similar way to the parking space.

The descent began. It felt as though we were travelling downwards at a very high speed. As the man said before we got in, the lights began to flicker and the lift began to shake. I personally felt that the lift was on steroids. Around a minute or so into the lift ride, it began to slow down and finally stop. The sound that signalled the stop was very similar to the sound which comes from a railway engine halting – although the lift sound was less prolonged.

The doors opened immediately after the typical lift chime was heard. There was enough space for the three of us to get out at once.

I have to choose my words very carefully from now on. This because the main premises of The Samaritans HQ is a place very hard to explain in words. It has to be experienced directly. All the more a reason for you to visit the place and not stop with reading this long form essay.

For your sake, I will try my best to explain what I saw and experienced.

Imagine shipping containers piled up on each other four times, with each shipping container connected to the one above it via very narrow stairs. And also imagine, the internals of the four shipping containers themed to sci-fi-mission-control type, with different instruments being used and different people working in every container. This is the best I can do with the area’s explanation. More importantly, we met Operation Director Samar.

‘Agent Bond and Agent Alisha, oh what a fine pair, I am Operation Director Samar, very pleased to meet you.’ said he.

‘Pleased to meet you too, Director Samar... we have the scientist for you... he has a statement to make.’ I reply.

‘For sure... please feel comfortable, Dr...’ Director Samar said to the scientist while enquiring about his name.

‘Malik... my name is Malik Mehta.’ said the scientist or Dr. Malik.

Dr. Malik was taken to the upper area in the premise.

And then, Director Samar did something special. From the central area in the lowermost floor of the premise, he raised his voice such that it was heard till the 4th floor on the top.

He said, ‘Fellow-Samaritan crew, please welcome two of our agents – Agent Bond and Agent Alisha.’



Soon as he said this, all of them started clapping and cheering for us. Our heads raised upwards, we mouthed thank you to everybody. It felt amazing to be in such a moment. A moment when everybody does something just for you. A moment when everybody recognizes the Hero in you and appreciates you standing up for goodness and righteousness. I thought this was the end of the experience. But, it wasn't.

The clapping and cheering continued for almost a minute. At the end of it, Director Samar said to us, 'Welcome aboard. Follow Sasha here, she will lead you to the main room. Agent Incognito is already there. Please wait for 21 agents like you to arrive and join you. I will see you soon.'

Saying that, he smiled and left.

We followed Sasha towards the main room on the 3rd floor.

Reaching the main room, we exchanged our Hi's and greetings with Agent Incognito. The three of us would have told each other that *'this was the best experience of my life'* more than 20 times, while talking about what we did and experienced during the past two hours.

There was a huge screen in front of us displaying continuous updates about Operation Poisonhead. From our floor, we could see Director Samar asking for updates and giving directions to fellow-crew. Every now and then, as agents arrived through the lift, he would go and greet them. Following that, the entire Samaritans HQ crew would cheer and clap. Then they would come to where we were and join in the conversation. As more agents arrived, the number of times *'this was the best experience of my life'* increased manifold.

This chain of events in the premise continued till the last of the 24 agents arrived. All of us were now seated in the main room on individual chairs for Director Samar's address to the Agents, after Operation Poisonhead was declared a success.

The short address was very emotional, inspiring and had elements of fun too. The entire crew having gathered around him made it all the more special. But the most important part was the following:

'Dear Agents, by the power vested in me as Director of Operation Poisonhead, I choose to now officiate each of you into the rank of the Samaritan.'

A grand music then began. It was an elaborate ceremony. Each of us was asked to come forward when our name was called out. We were given the Samaritan badge with a badge holder – something like how police and CIA officers have. Some of us were also given stars, medium-sized ones which were pinned to our torsos in the ceremony. When one received a star, the process was intricate - the reason for receiving a star is read out while the individual stands firm in front of the Operation Director. I received two stars – one for successfully meeting all time deadlines and the other for confidence in the face of adversity. The situation they cited was me tearing the cheques in the mall.



In layman's terms, one could say the ceremony was a mix of the Oscars and the Presidential Oath. I wished my mom there; she would have been proud.

At the end of the ceremony which lasted for around 15 minutes, Operation Director Samar informed us about the celebratory dinner arranged for all of us. Although, this came with a fee. Those who wished to opt out could choose to leave. They would be personally escorted outside the HQ premises.

On that day, all the 24 of us chose to stay. It seemed that we didn't want the happy times to end. Operation Director Samar then said, 'Very good then. The lift can take a maximum of 8 people. So, when Sasha calls you, please come to the lift area. And yes, one last mention, I maybe Operation Director Samar here, but for the world above I am Lead Chef Samar. So, address me as that. See you in the restaurant.' Saying so, he left.

The lift ride back up was the exact opposite of the ride down. But this time, when the lift doors opened upon reaching up, we were greeted with a very familiar setting. The setting was one of a normal restaurant with customers, waiters taking orders, the sound of cutlery and the smell of food as one walked along the tables. We were back into the real world.

The best part was the lift we came out of just now merged with the other lift in the restaurant coming from the parking lot – so it looked completely normal when we came up. It was as though we came to the restaurant from the parking lot.

Operation Director was in his Lead Chef attire now. He winked at all of us, while guiding us to the table in which others from the 24 were seated. In about some time, all the 24 of us were seated comfortably in a private corner of the restaurant.

'Well, there is enough for all the 24 of you. So, as you talk and make friends with fellow-agents, do not miss out on what lies in front of you,' said Lead Chef Samar as the food was being laid out on the table.

The long and wide table looked very colorful with the food on it. The reds from the curries, the greens from the salads, the yellows from the flat breads – the whole thing looked nutritious and balanced. A greater spectacle was to see the joy emanating from the 24 of us seated around the table.

'Wow. Quite a journey right.' said Mel.

An agent from the other side of the table said, 'Truly so. According to me, the lift rides and the ceremony at the end were the icing on the cake.'



Jason replied, ‘The lift ride is actually an effect; we don’t take you so deep underground. This is not the first time this has been done... check the web for the lift ride at Journey to the Center of the Earth in Tokyo Disneysea... that will give you a reference.... and the ceremony too was a design choice... the need for personal significance and the power of rituals were something we wanted to tap on.’

At this point of time, only 2-3 families were left in the restaurant. A big reduction from around the 20 families that were here when we gathered around the table.

‘What next,’ I ask.

‘Desseeerrrrttt’ exclaimed Lead Chef Samar, as his team and he began serving dessert to all of us.

‘Well, to be precise... Operation Poisonhead will continue to run for some more time... but if any of you wish to come again and experience a different path than what you went through already... that will be possible only after 3 weeks... since we are completely booked till then.’ said Mel.

Jason with a smile on his face said, ‘Don’t worry....you are all Samaritans now... you have more ranks to advance... more operations to do. These Operations only get better with time.’

Mel continued, ‘Adding to what Jason said...as you go up the ranks... you will see more Operations opening up... and in different genres too... I mean your next Operation could be one where you have to persuade a big businessman to make a very important high-stakes decision.... or it could even be a storyline around reuniting a husband and a wife... what I mean is they may not necessarily be stopping bad guys from damaging the world.... so, keep an eye on that too.’

Jason then added, ‘In a few months, we will have a large number of people onboard... that is a large number of people who would have moved from Agent to Samaritan rank through Operation Poisonhead. Taking advantage of the network effect....we will then begin to introduce things like skill trees, group missions and online cults..... so there are a lot of things planned... all of which we cannot reveal now.’

All of us laughed when Jason said that. But skill trees was a concept from video games. It was interesting to see that they had it planned for an experience like this. Group missions and online cults too seemed fun.

Mel ended aptly saying, ‘If I have to sum it up in one line... I would just say that there is more to come... this is just the beginning. We are giving guests like you time to get used to this new typology... we are giving you time to recognize the Hero in you... because once you do... you will keep coming back to revitalize the Hero in you... so...all I can say is ...until next time... Samaritans.’



It was time to leave. I bid my goodbyes to everyone. I knew this was not the end. The whole thing seemed very family-like. Alisha and I would keep in touch regularly. We planned to book a day 3 weeks later and do the whole thing again – although from a different path.

While walking out of the restaurant, I saw a family compliment Lead Chef Samar for the food and the ambience. Yes, they deserved that – the food and the ambience was great. But when my eyes fell on the signboard above the restaurant, a thought struck me.

For passerby's reading the signboard: *The Samaritans – More than just a restaurant*, it would not mean so much. They would still equate the place with what the word restaurant meant for them – a place to come to eat with family or friends, have a good time and leave.

But, this wouldn't be the case with people who had gone through the experience like me, Alisha or the others. When we read the signboard: *The Samaritans – More than just a restaurant* from now on, we would understand and appreciate what the statement *More than just a restaurant* truly meant.

I was so glad I was in the second group of people.

As I took out my smartphone to book an UBER, I see a notification from The Samaritans app. I click it and the app opens up.

'Welcome, Samaritan Bond.' it said, with two stars beneath it. I smile to myself.

Another notification pops up. It says – **'Next rank: Secret Samaritan.'** I am excited now. I click on the button which says *Access Operation for Secret Samaritan rank*.

Seeing the name of the Secret Samaritan rank operation, I go blank for a second. I was shocked, surprised and excited at the same time.

The name of the Operation read thus:

Operation Poisonhead Reborn.

--- The End. Thank you for your patient reading. Please continue for Earthience Level Three. ---



EARTHIENCE

LEVEL THREE

A Level Three earthience involves the meaningful integration of the earthience into daily life and society through story-markers in the physical environment and an all-expansive framework.

Demonstrated through the example of

Utopia

Utopia's Elevator Pitch

Walking in quick pace towards the other end of the very long corridor, I could observe the elevator doors beginning to close. I had to make use of this ride down or it would mean me losing around 5 minutes in waiting for the lift to come back up. And 5 minutes was a luxury in this context – the event in the hotel's conference hall downstairs was scheduled to begin in exactly 3 minutes. I decided to press my inner Ask Help button.

'Hold the door,' I shouted.

The doors began to open again. Thankfully, the person inside heard my cry.

With just around 20 meters left for the elevator door, I converted my fast walk into a slow jog and covered the distance in no time. To my utter shock and surprise, the person inside the elevator was Doris - one of the most respected and experienced people in the theme park and experience design industry.

'Thank you, Ma'am,' was what I could manage to say.

'No problems,' she replied with a smile.

I sensed an opportunity here. And so I began.

'For the act of kindness you just did by pressing the open doors button and waiting for me, I would have sent you 25 Good Person Points.'

'Haha, thank you, but what are Good Person Points?' she asked.

'Well, let me tell you what Good Person Points are and the purpose they solve in the 60 seconds we have from now to the ground floor,' I reply while glancing at the elevator screen which said we had 21 floors to go past before we reached the ground floor.

'Am all ears,' she said.

And so began my brief description of Utopia.



‘For the past three centuries, the idea and need for a perfect society or an utopian world was always present. But unfortunately, it never saw fruition. Generation by generation, reasons were analyzed as to why the utopian world couldn’t be achieved. An answer then emerged – while efforts were made to create futuristic and modern infrastructures for the utopian world, no efforts were made to improve and make better the people who would be a part of that world. They realized that it was the people who would through their actions and behavior decide if the world would remain utopian or turn dystopian. And so was introduced Good Person Points to make people better. It is an app which operates on similar lines like digital wallets. But instead of sending each other money, we send each other Good Person Points – say you help a person with any task, he or she can choose to send you how many ever Good Person Points he or she wishes to send you. Participating in social activities and charity events too can garner Good Person Points – as the organizers give it to all their volunteers. Good Person Points can also be got through the purchases you make on a daily basis – if fruits, nutrient bars, jogging shoes and other beneficial items are on your supermarket bill, you get Good Person Points credited to your account. In similar ways, choosing a cycle over a car, going for a jog, participating in an event campaigning for Climate Change attract Good Person Points. These are some of the many ways one can get more Good Person Points. It is not a regressive system though – for example when you buy a plastic water bottle, it does not deduct Good Person Points. The goal is to only promote individually and socially good behavior, but not punish what is bad or seems to be bad. Although yes, only friends and family can send Point Reduction Claims to you - when you get angry, act in an unpleasant manner or any other bad activity you commit. If the app sees many claims coming, it reduces your Good Person Points.’

The lift chimes and we reach the ground floor of the hotel. As we slowly head out of the elevator, Doris says to me, ‘This sounds great – sending each other and earning Good Person Points. But what does one do with all those points?’

I reply, ‘I was just coming to that. Just 60 seconds more and I will be done.’

‘Go ahead.’ she says.

‘There is another very important way of earning Good Person Points, and that is by choosing to improve yourself. An individual can choose from the many Improvement Options available. Some of them are Get less distracted, Be more kind, Eliminate my biases and others. Some of the more advanced Improvement Options include Decrease my religious intolerance, Increase confidence to speak up and many others. Improvement options are possible by setting up fictional quests and tasks in the physical environment which force you to bring in to practice the Improvement option.



But here is what one gains by getting more Good Person Points and choosing Improvement Options.

As a person garners more Good Person Points, he or she moves up levels and identities. The same can prove an edge for him or her in college and job applications. Not only that, a person with high Good Person Points gets many benefits, some being – cheaper air tickets, faster insurance settlement, first access to events and many others. This is possible by strategic tie-ups with all these organizations.

And here is the most important part. While all of this is going on, the infrastructure for Utopia is being built in various city corners around the world – it is an admixture of housing and office spaces, retail and entertainment spaces, religious and educational spaces. All of these are themed, built and integrated with the natural environment in an eco-friendly and sustainable manner while at the same time being modern and futuristic. So, people who are doing well on their Good Person Points and Improvement Options get preferential access to these spaces. With that, Utopia is achieved – a perfect place welcoming a perfect people leading to a perfect society.’

There is silence for a moment.

‘Oh, this is so good, how did I miss something like this, where is this happening in the world,’ Doris asks.

‘Well, this is just my idea actually – although yes, China is experimenting with something called Sesame Credit which operates on partly similar lines like Good Person Points. So, the Good Person points thing is possible. I tied to the Utopia story and added a physical environment component to it. Wish I could tell you more.’ I reply.

‘Interesting... I mean... I too would have listened, but got to be at the event. But here is my card, send me a detailed email about this and we can take it further.’ she said while handing over her card.

‘Thank you so much, Ma’am. Means a lot. Thank you for your time.’

‘It was nice meeting you...’ she said while enquiring about my name.

‘The name is Sai... Sai Aditya,’ I reply with a smile while each of us exchange our greetings and leave.

— The End. Thank you for reading. Please proceed to the final section of this presentation – *Earthience : An explanation.* —



earthience

A N E X P L A N A T I O N



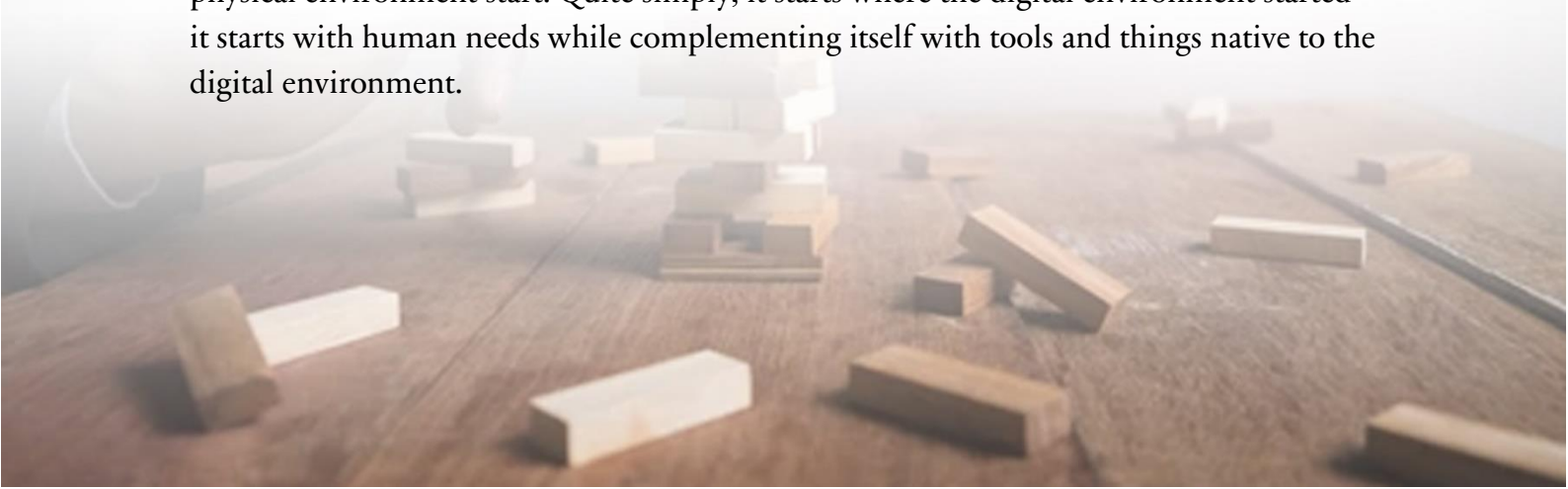
‘ B I G I D E A S S T A R T S O M E W H E R E ’

Earthience

The guest is always the one who decides which experiences to consume and which to not. With time, the number of experience options for a guest to choose from have only increased. Further, the coming of modern technologies, social media, new-age equipment and greater connectivity have exponentially increased the number of these options. Free time, leisure and recreation can now be filled with many activities. From binge-watching a series on Netflix, to playing a video game, to taking an online class, to spending time on social media, to catching up with friends and family at a nearby place, to the odd visits to theme parks, plays, museums – modern ways of spending time are changing. A trend if one closely observes, is that many of these ways in which people are spending their time is digital in nature. Those options are a part of the digital environment – movies, games, social media and others. The pandemic has only exacerbated this trend.

While the digital environment has been swiftly adapting to our needs and offering new options for our free time and recreation, the physical environment is losing out big time. There has been nothing done in the physical environment to make it as exciting and instantly gratifying as the digital environment. Story-based experiences like theme park rides and other attractions become a few-time affair and the law of diminishing marginal utility then kicks in. In some cases, we see a trade-off between theme and thrill too, where the guest is lost in the awesomeness of the roller-coaster forgetting that there was a story behind the whole thing.

Since the digital environment has been winning huge till now, it must be doing something right. Then, how does the physical environment learn from it and offer something which integrates the best of both of the environments? From where does the physical environment start. Quite simply, it starts where the digital environment started – it starts with human needs while complementing itself with tools and things native to the digital environment.



Evolution has made human beings to have needs. Understanding human needs is half the job of meeting them. From psychologists like Abraham Maslow to motivational speakers like Tony Robbins, many have documented and categorized these needs into frameworks after rigorous study. They have proven to be primary reasons and motivations behind our actions in any setting and context, although we may not be aware that we are fulfilling an innate need. Theme and amusement parks are avenues to fulfil some of our needs (*variety, novelty, social affiliation, family connection*) apart from other recreation formats like the movies, sports, concerts, etc. Although till now, typologies have focussed only on two needs – escapism and play. Beyond those two, there are four specific needs (*explained below*) that story-based themed experiences can fulfil and be centred around.

Theme-park typologies are a function of the contexts of time and world order (*social, cultural, emotional, historical, and educational contexts of a place and its people*) they were ideated in. For the past 60 years, rides built around stories were perfect ways to satiate the needs of escapism (*story/theme*) and play (*ride/thrill*). In the past decade, both escapism and play took new forms. We saw the influence of live action role playing (*LARPing*), character interactions, and agency in the way stories are told. On the other hand, we saw the rise of technologies like AR, VR, MR and new ride systems in the way we seek thrill and play. This trend is still growing with people garnishing their stories, rides and experiences with the aforementioned.

We now stand at a time where we can go beyond just escapism and play. Equipped with story contexts, technologies and most importantly, audience awareness in appreciating these stories and handling modern technologies – the current time and world order context calls for a new typology.

I present to you such a typology called Earthience.

An earthience is one which complements the world order with story-based experiences integrating multiple formats to fulfil innate human needs (*Lord Smith's Island Treasures, The Samaritans*) and improve the overall quality of life (*United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Utopia*). In other words, it is integrating elements of daily life and story on **earth** with a land or physical space created or modified for an **experience**.

An Alternate Reality Game forms part of an earthience and doesn't equal it. This because an earthience has a real-world-like story component to it to make it very authentic and related. An Alternate Reality Game on the other hand might have elements which do not sit well with the perception of how reality works – fantasy, wizards, magic and so on.



An earthience can operate in 3 levels. Within each of those levels, the ends can be either fulfilling human needs (*Lord Smith's Island Treasures, The Samaritans*) or improving the quality of life (*United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Utopia*).

Level One Earthience:

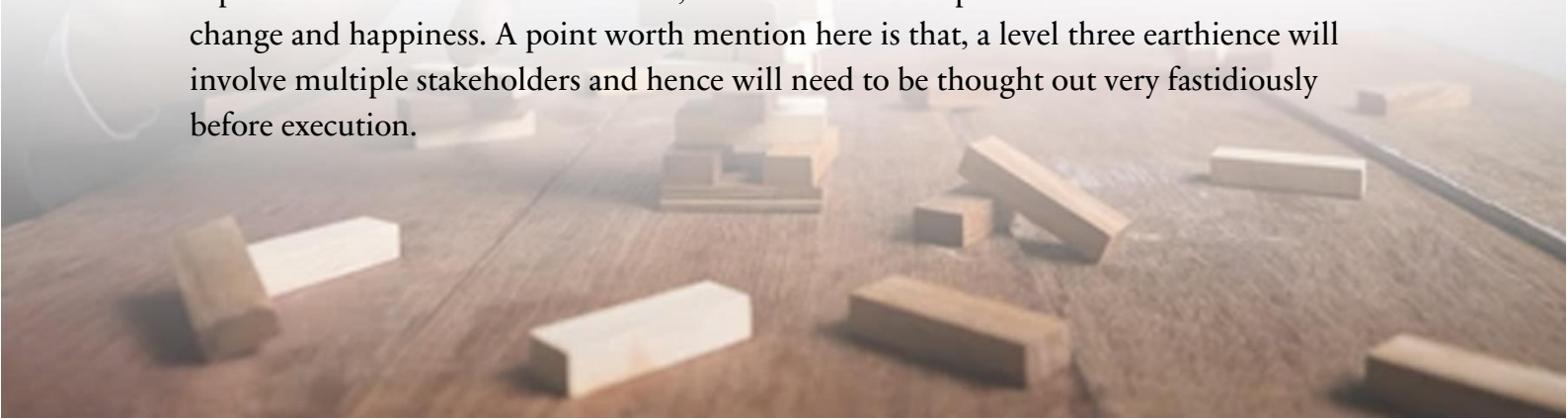
It involves recreating the principal place of a story-based experience in a theme park. As we saw in the case of Lord Smith's Island Treasures, the story was told through various formats outside the theme park with the main searching activity happening in the theme park. The same can be done with different genres – setting of a trend to live the movies rather than just watch it. It also involves fulfilling innate human needs which cannot be met through daily life in the real world. In a business context, it is better than amortizing a story-based ride over 10 years, as the duration of such a level one earthience story will average around 2 years.

Level Two Earthience:

A Level Two earthience involves using components of the physical environment like schools, retail stores, shopping malls, office buildings, homes, etc., themselves as a base for the story-based experience. In other words, a believable backstory is used to connect different places or activate a particular place. As we saw in the case of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, story-based experiences can move beyond just guest entertainment. Like in the case of The Samaritans - wrapping a story-based experience around reality could be the next big thing, as that will not involve huge investments into recreating spaces and starting from the scratch. According to me, a level two earthience has the widest applicability because of the diversity of the physical environment on the planet.

Level Three Earthience:

A Level Three earthience involves the meaningful integration of the earthience into daily life and society through story-markers in the physical environment and an all-expansive framework. As we saw in the case of Utopia, a level three earthience will be the most expansive of all the levels. Given that, it also has the most power to deliver maximum change and happiness. A point worth mention here is that, a level three earthience will involve multiple stakeholders and hence will need to be thought out very fastidiously before execution.



Features of an Earthience:

- An Earthience is one where we address four other needs beyond escapism and play:
 1. **Personal significance** – It deals with making the guest a hero in the story. As societal frameworks don't have enough opportunities other than parameters like college education, job/salary, social media, etc. to make a person feel significant, immersive story based themed experiences can fill the need gap. For example, in *Lord Smith's Island Treasures* and *The Samaritans*, the guest felt like no less than a hero who could influence the course of the story.
 2. **Autonomy** – The world offers only set paths that one has to comply with and choose from. For example, in the established world order – babies cannot be presidents of countries. Although, video games and simulators give the player autonomy and agency to be something and go somewhere we cannot experience in real life. Films too have caught on this bandwagon with *Black Mirror – Bandersnatch*. Story based experiences can address that need and allow a person to choose freely. In all the earthience examples given in the presentation, one can clearly observe the large amounts of autonomy present.
 3. **Growth** – The need to be better and seek growth by consuming new ideas, knowledge and outlooks - something which accrues to students participating in the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals* earthience.
 4. **Contribution** – The need to contribute to the well-being and goodness of people and things around. We can clearly see this in *Utopia*, *The Samaritans* and other examples where the guest feels valued when he or she contributes or helps.



- An Earthience is authentic. Authenticity is in woefully short supply. For example, making people believe that they are entering a new world, or being a character in a fantasy world, or solving a puzzle to defeat a villain, or something else in a ride goes against their perception of how the real world operates. Integrating the current world order with believable backstories where the difference between fact and fiction is hard to tell is the way forward. That way, we will go beyond rides as ways to tell a story since guests in some rides soak more into the thrill of the ride than the theme and story of it. One can see that all the backstories in the examples given add immense value in making the earthiences authentic. In all of them, the difference between fact and fiction is hard to tell.
- It is a typology which integrates both the physical and virtual environment with the common factor being the guest. As films, TV series, social media, and video games get more and more engaging with modern technologies, the digital world is gaining an edge over the physical world. The digital world is not to be put to blame for this as it is designed to satisfy our innate needs. Since technology doesn't change people's basic needs or their natures, we need a typology where the physical on-site experience is equally gratifying as its digital complement. This will require using knowledge fields like gaming and others. One can clearly see this in all the examples through the usage of different digital formats, game mechanics, mobile apps and phygital (*physical + digital*) integration.
- It is a typology that democratizes the theme park and makes every place an attraction with the help of a backstory which connects to the people around the place. That way, existing sites like office blocks, colleges, hospitals, restaurants, public parks and others can be connected through a story with the power of theming and storytelling. *The Samaritans* is the best example in this regard. It uses components of the physical environment itself to base the story.
- A typology that integrates into human life and improves the overall quality of life through experiences, frameworks and settings. It has to use the power of a story to transform and spatially activate places to improve the lives of all around. That way, we will be pushing themed experiences beyond the boundaries of entertainment and tap into its ability to improve the quality of human life. What better examples than the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals* and *Utopia* to prove this point.



Key Questions:

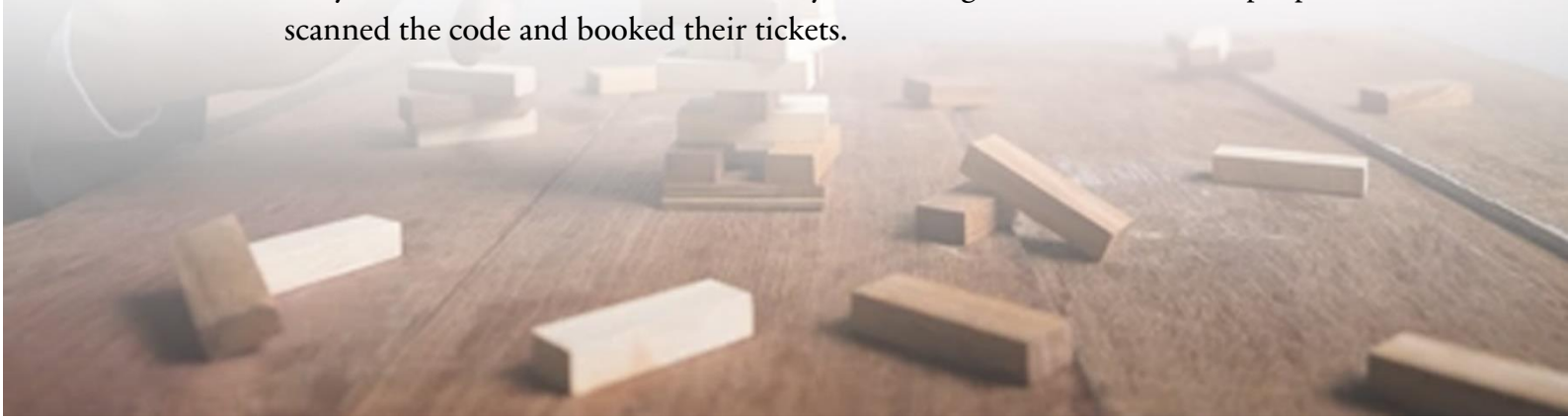
1. *Depth and Richness of Storytelling: Does an earthience entertain, thrill, and excite?*

An earthience is designed around basic human needs for entertainment, thrill and excitement. Instead of doing it directly through rides, it does the same in a grander fashion using the power of a believable backstory, physical spaces and agency. In the example of *Lord Smith's Island Treasures*, one can sense the excitement and thrill of having found something on the island and being part of something so true and real. It is augmented to a greater level through the reinforcement which comes from the online community.

In the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals* example, kids do something so different and fun from normal education, and that too with friends which makes it all the more exciting and entertaining. As in the story, they are people re-writing the fate of countries - this automatically raises the stakes making it something very rich and important in character. The same is with *The Samaritans* - experiencing the city as a layman and experiencing the city through a thrilling story connecting places makes all the difference.

2. *Emotional Resonance: Does it move people to act?*

Emotional relevance in all earthiences is made possible by identifying the right moments to amplify in the story. For example, *The Samaritans* uses the secrecy in receiving the orange envelope as a tool to deliver an emotion. Interactions with people being without a time limit is another hack. In the case of *Utopia*, allowing only friends and family to send Point Reduction Claims is built on the emotions and psychology of relations. A recurrent note in all the earthiences is every story-moment having a relevant emotion. The story presses and amplifies at the right moment to convert that emotion into action. In *Lord Smith's Island Treasures*, one can observe this when the QR code appeared on the screen in the movie theatre. The novelty of seeing a QR code on a cinema screen was amplified because of the story-reason that came behind it, thereby converting it into action when people scanned the code and booked their tickets.



3. *Design Innovation: Does it push the boundaries of what's been done before?*

An earthience's greatest achievement would be to move the power of storyliving and theming beyond theme parks and guest entertainment. It would also be a change from the trend where people come to visit theme parks only for rides, ambience and others. In the case of *Lord Smith's Island Treasures*, they would come to the park to participate for themselves in the story's movement.

In the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals* and *The Samaritans*, we see storyliving and theming realizing their true potential. This takes a whole new level with *Utopia* where knowledge fields from the theme park and experience design industry nudge social behaviour. All of the above are firsts in many ways.

4. *Creative Use of Materials: Does it find new ways to use old tools and design methods?*

Instead of designing theme park rides, we are now looking out for places to base the story on. That way, old design methods are being applied in new settings untouched by story.

In *Utopia*, the earthience involves re-imagining an entire cityscape. In *The Samaritans*, the design methods move out of the theme park into various locations around the city. In *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals*, these methods go to schools. In a majority of these cases, we are using existing components of the physical environment. What we are additionally doing is augmenting them by theming and placing them in a backstory. That way, every place becomes a theme park.

5. *Executability: Is it doable?*

Since the basic feature of an earthience is that it should be relatable and authentic, it majorly involves real-world characteristics and settings. Some places, the physical environment is used too. That way, we are just adding a story layer on what is already present.



6. *Ecological Compatibility: What's the impact on the area where the project would be installed?*

The materials used in an earthience mimic natural environments. For example, the island in *Lord Smith's Island Treasures* is made out of natural trees and rocks – while at the same time beautified through theming and design. After the duration of the earthience, the same area can be converted into an indoor water park. If not that, the trees and rocks can be translocated back.

In *The Samaritans*, the original places in the city are itself used and therefore minimal change occurs. When you have minimal change, you have minimal ecological footprint. Additionally, when an earthience comes to a place, all those around benefit since more people come to the location and a beneficial economic cycle is initiated.

In Conclusion

Creating, building or making an earthience is a lot like a playing a game of Jenga. There is a place for everything in an earthience much like there is a place for every brick in the Jenga tower. That way, the earthience tower is made up of many bricks or components. But what matters is carefully picking and placing those components one on top of the other without disturbing the ones below it. Brick by brick, slowly and steadily, the earthience will come up in all its gaiety and grandeur.

Thank you for staying with me for so long. Hope it wasn't a hard time reading. Would love to know your thoughts and feedback on the presentation. I would be more than happy to receive your ideas to improve the Earthience typology further.

Please feel free to connect with me at aditya.keeplearning@gmail.com.

Thank you.



EARTHIENCE

CREATIVITY IS JUST CONNECTING THINGS

Beyond the previous pages, there are many things left to connect,
more things left to tell. Some other time.
Until then.



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