

**НАЦИОНАЛЕН ЛИТЕРАТУРЕН КОНКУРС
ЗА АВТОРСКИ ТЕКСТОВЕ НА АНГЛИЙСКИ И НЕМСКИ ЕЗИК
"ТОЗИ БЕЗКРАЕН СВЯТ"**

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СПЕЦИАЛНА НАГРАДА НА ФОНДАЦИЯ „БЪЛГАРСКА ПАМЕТ“

76 “Way Leads on to Way”

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‘Way Leads on to Way’*

Being the motivated teenager that I am, I asked my good friend Procrastination whether he wanted to revise for the state exam or to indulge in some computer games. Naturally, we settled on the latter. I booted up my laptop and launched “Skyrim” – a role-playing game, where one is free to do almost anything they want and at any pace they want. Starting a new character, I was greeted by the “character creation menu” where the player gets to choose the appearance and skill set of their hero. This was about the hundredth time I had gone through this process so I wasn’t really paying much attention to the character I was creating, but rather thinking about how cool it would be if we had these options in real life.

Most role-playing games begin with the “character creation screen”. Real life doesn’t function like that, though, and our appearance is more or less determined indirectly by our parents. It would have been nice to have been able to put “muscle mass” to the maximum, have the fairest and waviest hair known to man and just spawn into the world, but here I am — skinny, with brown hair that doesn’t look good even on a good hair day. The next step in any role-playing game is to choose

your character's strong points — charisma, strength, agility, intelligence and so on. Of course, life being the way it is, one is not simply born with a 10/10 personality or level of intelligence, but rather develops those traits over years and years of experiencing what life has to offer.

Sometimes though, events in role-playing games and real life overlap or so to say. The game we call *Life* has received many updates and the developers have been caring enough to add a lot of interesting and rewarding content. From updates adding different languages to updates adding entirely new and fascinating regions to explore such as the USA and New Zealand (of course, for most of us, said regions are locked behind a massive pay wall, a.k.a. plane tickets), the developers have done their part to make the game as interesting as possible. *Life* is the most played game in the world today, with a daily player base of more than 7.5 billion. There is one particular player, however, who I find extremely fascinating and whose story I will tell you.

So, the player I have in mind, given that the developers of *Life* were not thoughtful enough to implement a decent player-controlled “character creation system”, was spawned into the world under the in-game name G in the year 1978 in Bulgaria. Truthfully, I am not the best at, nor do I try to evaluate people. However, for the sake of the theme I have going, I would say that most of G's “attribute points” were used in intelligence, charisma and perception, of course leading to strength and agility falling behind. What this practically means is that quests that require intelligence and logic have been much easier tasks for her, whereas slaying dragons (or becoming a world champion powerlifter) has been a bit out of her league.

Naturally, like any game, *Life* has a tutorial level, which aims to show players the basics of the game's mechanics. Since nothing in *Life* can be as simple as it should be, we call the tutorial kindergarten and preschool. The gameplay in the years from spawning into the world to finishing preschool is entirely focused on explaining the core mechanics of the game, such as how to walk, talk, use your hands to fill in basic shapes without leaving the outlines (something I apparently never learned how to do), and so on. As it is the tutorial, this is the easiest part of the game — the enemies in this stage, also known as coloring books, are extremely low level, the tasks one has to perform consist of going from point A to point B, taking naps, making squiggly lines in notebooks and so on. Most players get through the tutorial without any major problem, and the same was true for G.

The years from elementary school to high school graduation is when the difficulty of the game really begins to pick up a notch and some players may find

problems progressing at an optimal and efficient rate. Most of the tasks one has to do in this portion of the game are closely related to intelligence and perception, thus players who have spent their skill points on these attributes will have a much easier time getting through these levels. Being one such player, G was able to graduate high school without any problems and getting a few in-game achievements on the way. Now, this is where things get tricky, as depending on what score you have achieved in the levels prior, the options to continue the game will vary. Achieving a good score in the high school level, or simply getting good grades, will open up the possibility to choose between different levels, each with its own unique enemies, quests and rewards to discover. For example, one can move on to the “university level”, the “gap year level” or the “go to work level”. In G’s case, she chose to play in the university level, which, based on her attributes, was an extremely smart decision. The university level is similar to the high school level, in the sense that one has to rack their brains to the maximum in order to achieve a high rank on the leaderboard and once again G managed to get through university with flying colors.

However, like any decent role-playing game, *Life* also has a “random encounter system”, which is a fancy way of saying that while exploring the world you meet other players and non-playable characters. During the university level G met a fellow player named J, both taking a liking to each other. One thing led to another and both decided that in 9 months they would invite a new player to *Life*. At the same time G had the option to enroll in a prestigious law school in the US. This is one of many points in the game where one has to choose one questline over another; in this case she had to choose between completing the law school quests and helping the new player get started in *Life*. In the end, she decided to devote her time in the game to helping the new player settle down and nine months later, again due to the lack of a “character creation system” (I am unironically slightly mad about this), the player N spawned into the world.

Now, the question that probably comes to mind is why would G forfeit the opportunity to go to a prestigious law school and potentially embark on an illustrious career in law? Well, such is the beauty of both life and video games! People make choices — some well thought-out, others not so much — but in the end, it is important to make the most of the paths we have chosen. When G’s ‘two roads diverged in the yellow wood’ (I couldn’t not mention her favorite poet, after all), she ‘looked down one as far as [she] could’ and had to make a choice. And just as the poem goes, ‘way leads on to way,’ inevitably steering us to the game’s next level. G

may not have studied law in the US, but the choice she made nearly two decades ago 'has made all the difference' — I may not be the equivalent of an illustrious career in law, but I have never heard her 'telling this with a sigh' or express regret over the road she chose to follow.*

* *“The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost*