

# The Statesman

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## Luck is a lady

Kavitha Yalavarthi spends a few hours every day playing games online. But she didn't know her hobby would make her a millionaire, writes Kajari Bhattacharya

A million dollars. How will you spend it? Rather, how will you earn it? Robbing a bank is not a sensible option, purchasing shares in the stock market is risky and printing notes is forgery. How about by playing video games? That's right. Being a casual gamer will help you win a million dollars and Kavitha Yalavarthi has proved it by winning the FUN Technologies Award.

"My million dollar prize is to be paid out in annuity form ~ \$100,000 every year for 10 years ~ with the first installment to be paid on 1 January 2007. While I haven't received any money yet, I have been somewhat more liberal with the money I already possess and have been spending more than I normally would on redecorating my apartment. When I receive the money, I do not plan on making any risky investments. I have looked into more low-risk options, such as treasury notes, bonds, and money market funds. The only other investment I am considering is in that in Fun Technologies itself ~ the company who owns SkillJam and is responsible for making the tournament a success. As for the money that I do not invest, I will be putting it aside for law school tuition for myself, for medical school tuition for my fiancé, for my honeymoon, for a new car, and for any exciting travel opportunities that I get. It will be a wonderful thing to graduate and get married without being saddled by debt," says Kavita.

Kavita was born and raised in Odessa, Texas and went to college at the University of Texas at Austin. She double-majored in an interdisciplinary honours programme called Plan II and Philosophy honours with specialisation in "classical civilization". "Currently, I am working at a domestic violence shelter in Austin, but next year I will be going to law school ~ hopefully in the same place where Vishal (fiancé) will go to medical school. I am interested in being a healthcare lawyer as well as an advocate trained in arbitration and dispute resolution. I have played the piano since the age of three and according to Vishal this has helped me strike keys faster while playing games."

But what prompted her to take up the challenge? "It was my fiancé, Vishal, who encouraged me to attempt to qualify for the tournament around one year ago. I was somewhat skeptical about the online qualifier round that was supposed to grant me a free trip to Los Angeles to play in an international tournament for a million dollars. At first, I didn't think it was much more than a joke, or perhaps even some kind of elaborate scam. However, Vishal reasoned that I had nothing to lose by trying and that it would be fun to get a free Los Angeles vacation and engage in friendly competition with the people I usually play with online, but had never seen in person. I was quite surprised to win the 400-person online qualifier and didn't fully believe that I would be going anywhere until my plane tickets and documentation began arriving many months later. In retrospect, I owe quite a great deal to Vishal because it is not just this tournament, but our life as a whole, in which he has encouraged me to try new things, to challenge myself, and to have fun while doing it."

Kavita has been a casual gamer for sometime and she dedicates mornings (and before hitting the sack) to video games. "I probably play for two or three hours on SkillJam's site and make around \$100-120 per day. I am good at Bejeweled 2, Zuma and Jewel Quest. As far as other video games go, I play them occasionally..."

"My first feelings after winning the competition were that of shock, disbelief and elation ~ in that order. When my name was announced, I was looking out for Vishal's face in the crowd because I

felt his expression would make me happier. However, I couldn't see anything around me due to flashing cameras. So, for sometime I was in a state of shock. Then, several pounds of confetti dropped on me, and I started to grasp the fact that I had just won. I couldn't believe it. Amy, my competitor in the final round, had been ahead of me by a large margin before they turned the monitors showing our game play off. They turned off the monitors in the last three minutes of our last seven-minute game in order to heighten the suspense, and so that Amy and I would not know immediately who won. During the last three minutes, I was able to set up several amazing combinations in a row of very high scoring Zuma moves, and ended up defeating Amy by one click of the mouse ~ only 50 points. When it finally hit me that I had succeeded winning the big prize, I felt elated... My father had no idea that I was even in Los Angeles and had no clue that I was in a tournament of any kind or that I even play games online. He tends to be highly skeptical of such things and didn't really believe it when I told him that I had won. I refrained from telling him about the tournament because I was certain that he would dismiss it as a prank... But soon enough, even my father was overcome with joy."

One million dollars is not a small amount of money. What's the logic behind spending such a fortune on a gaming competition. Says a representative of Fun Technologies, "The casual games industry is a rapidly growing segment of the online games market, expected to reach \$1.56 billion by 2008 with 198 million members worldwide. In recent years, hard core video games have received attention for awarding prizes no more than \$100,000. In reality, the percentage of players playing hard core games is minimal compared to the masses playing casual games. Based on the explosive popularity of casual games, we wanted to give these games the attention they deserve and show the world that casual games are serious business." Fun Technologies recently signed a licensing deal with Hasbro Properties Group to develop Scrabble Cubes, a modern twist on everyone's favourite word game. Future plans for Fun Technologies include content on mobile devices, phones and on TV (satellite or cable).

So, keep clicking and you too can be a millionaire.