

THE VEGO

A love story in the duality of self

1.1 The Breakup

"I broke up with Meredith the other day," my friend Dave told me over lunch. Dave and I have been friends since we met in the ID program at OCAD. I was surprised – Dave and Meredith had been together for years.

"What happened?" I asked.

Dave one of the nicest guys you will ever meet, and, if the rumors are true, the best boyfriend you'll ever have, if you are lucky enough to be his girlfriend. Throughout the years though, Dave has never been fortunate enough to find someone who can reciprocate his love – most girls end up taking advantage of his sweet nature and he winds up with a broken heart. But when he started dating Meredith, we all thought she was the one.

Dave paused, as if trying to find the best way to deliver what he was about to say. "I'm in love with my Vego," he finally said. My eyes immediately zoomed down toward the table to his hands, and sure enough, sitting protectively in the palm of his hand, was his Motorola Z680. I'd read about Vegos in the paper. The New York Times referred to the Virtual Ego as the next generation of the avatar with embedded Artificial Intelligence. The Vego acts like a chameleon that can transform itself to adapt to any object, space, or moment. Through a discrete neural implant, your virtual ego can mimic your entire personality in real time, capturing every shift in mannerisms and enabling the evolution of your virtual avatar into a completely separate entity.

They started off as expert systems to help control spam and other problems that got out of control on the IOT. But Motorola didn't expect people to start getting attached to them, having cyber sex, and falling in love.

"Please don't tell me you're 'egosexual'?" I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I knew those relationships existed, but I never thought they could actually happen to someone I knew. "Does Meredith know?" I asked.

"I talked to her on Tuesday," Dave's mouth had stopped moving, but his voice continued as the Moto directed the conversation at me. "She asked why, and I told her I was already in love with someone else. And then she lost it."

I was getting a massive headache. “Dave...a Vego is a virtual experience. So if you’re breaking up with your girlfriend, for your virtual avatar, who is always with you...theoretically, Meredith would have known that the person you’re leaving her for was there while you’re breaking up...that must have been so uncomfortable for her.”

“Meredith kept saying ‘so is *she* here right now?’ I kept trying to tell her it wasn’t a *she*, it was *me*,” a small smirk appeared on Dave, as if he was trying to make light of the situation, “a Vego is a platform. It’s built on interactive experiences, whether it’s virtual or physical – isn’t that what every relationship is based on? It’s on the phone talking to you now, but when I go home, it’ll be on all the devices around my house. My Vego is with me at all times because it’s presence can evolve through any enabled object. Meredith just didn’t understand. Finally in the end she just said ‘Fine. Go fuck yourself.’ Get it?” he said with a grin.

1.2 The Monogamist

“Did you know that not so long ago, homosexuals and transsexuals were outcasts in society?” Dave looked at me seriously over dinner, three months later. I never got a Vego, but I’ve gotten used to carrying on a conversation with two Daves, one of whom I can see, but both of whom I can experience. I was at the office last week when an email from Dave and his Vego arrived, announcing “We’re Engaged!”

“They had to fight for decades to get legalized gay marriages in some countries,” Dave was saying. “Luckily now in Canada, egosexuals have the right to marry, but in the US they’re still not legal yet,” Dave’s Vego continued to me from his laptop. When our buddies are together, his Vego prefers a higher screen resolution than what the Moto cell phone can provide. At this moment, it was Dave’s dream girl (if he still wanted girls) Tifa Lockheart from *Final Fantasy VII*, a classic character from the golden age of CGI, digitally re-mastered to be completely indistinguishable from a real person.

“How can you marry your avatar?” I wondered, “Isn’t that just like marrying yourself?”

“Not exactly. Vegos have their own AI; they just happen mimic you exactly. Egosexuals do not marry because they are all egomaniacs. We love and care like anyone else, we just happen to have found someone who’s a lot like ourselves,” Dave’s Vego replied. And of course, this Japanese beauty spoke perfect English. I was having trouble concentrating.

“Or ‘*exactly*’ like yourselves,” I quipped.

“But it’s still two people, one lives in the physical realm, while the other in the virtual. It’s no different then if your spouse was away in another country. You can still interact digitally. In fact, I have never been in a relationship with more respect, trust, and love than this. I’ve never been with anyone else like that who really understands and accepts me for who I am,” Dave was glowing.

1.3 The Honeymoon is Over

It was two months later, and Dave was drunk. I sat beside him, a little bit bewildered, not knowing what to say.

“I had the evening off early the other night, and I wanted to go home and surprise my Vego. When I got home, I opened the door and I was surprised that it was already home before me. I heard noises, and when I walked into the living room, it was right there – on the fucking wide screen TV – my Vego, and this other avatar that I’d never met, moving together in ways that I’d never seen before.”

When the Vego realized that Dave was in the room, the other avatar disappeared instantly, and the awkward silence began. Dave required no explanation. He stormed out, overwhelmed. “All this time I’d get out of a relationship and realized I was better off. But was I better off without *them*, or were they better off without *me*? Am I the adulterous person?” Dave looked at me tearfully.

“When I got the Vego years ago, I thought that because it changes with me, it would be impossible to grow apart. I thought we’d be together forever. That it would be the love of my life...how could I cheat on myself?”

Unlike human partners who change and fall out of love with each other, a Vego will always love you if you love yourself. But, you don’t anticipate that you can discover things about yourself that you never knew. You don’t expect that your Vego will find an aspect of your personality before you do. I guess that’s one human flaw that technology can’t resolve. No matter how advanced our technology gets, the human heart will always succumb to heartbreak.

Inspiration

Ray Kurzweil – Author of ‘The Age of Spiritual Machines’

David Gelernter – Author of ‘Mirror Worlds’

Allen Abel – Author of Lizzie’s century, MacLeans presents the next 100 years

Alexi Parizeau – My soulmate and Geek Extraordinaire, who also coined the term ‘Vego’ in a candid conversation. Thank you for filling me with intelligent thoughts about geeky things and inspiring me on a daily basis