

Illustration: Ishiekaa Kapoor, XI F & Eesh Saini, XI E, AIS Saket

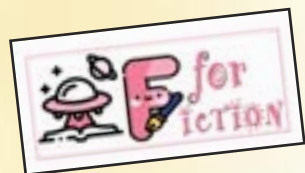
Naima Oberoi, AIS Saket, XI F

After failing and rebranding every possible scheme, the government finally snapped and declared shopping a national sport. "Patriotic consumption," the president announced, standing below the giant credit card hologram.

At the centre of this glitter-soaked madness was Anita Patel - forty-five, mother of two, champion of coupons and of end-of-season sales. She joined the National Shopping Marathon only for the pleasure of bargain hunting.

Anita tucked her chin, elbows out. This was a familiar territory. She grabbed socks with sniper-like precision, and stationery her children would lose in a week. At the end of an aisle glowing with terrible decisions, she spotted the reclining massage chair. A staff member shouted, "Ma'am, that's extremely heavy!" "So is adulthood," she grunted, deadlifting it. Level two locked the contestants inside glowing glass pods where discount equations swirled like ancient runes. One contestant screamed, "Why 37%? Why not a normal number?" Anita calmly pulled out her battered calculator. A judge tapped on the glass. "You seem disturbingly calm." "I've waited my whole life for this," she said pressing "%=". Rumours

Shopocalypse



spread that she might secretly be a descendant of mathematicians. Level three required contestants to style a mannequin. Chaos erupted. Sequins flew. Someone tried to glue feathers to a corset. Another said they were creating "post-apocalyptic maximalist couture." Meanwhile, Anita dressed her mannequin in sweatpants, apron, and rubber gloves. A judge frowned. "What is this?" "The Apocalyptic Housewife," Anita answered. Another judge dabbed a tear. "It's raw. Powerful. An indictment of society." "It's laundry day," she clarified.

Level four was 'Black-Market Maze', dim and filled with vendors whispering promises. A man

waved a knockoff hover-toaster. "This will revolutionise your mornings!" "I've raised teen-

agers," she replied. "My mornings are already a battleground."

Level five - the VR Mall, glitches swarmed and pop-up ads shouted unsolicited life advice. A hologram salesman floated over, pitching a new cryptocurrency called 'SockCoin', the future of digital finance! "Please," Anita said, removing the headset. "I'm too old for imaginary shopping." The judges gasped as if she'd spoken a forbidden truth.

Contestants rolled out with gold-plated appliances, even a robot butler that insulted you politely. Anita, however, simply walked onstage carrying a foldable chair borrowed from backstage. She unfolded it, sat, and sighed. "This is all I needed today. Everything else was merely

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passing curiosity."

An economist stood, visibly shaken. "Ms Patel, your restraint is revolutionary. You win." Confetti exploded. Cameras flashed. Anita was accepting the golden shopping trolley trophy when an intern sprinted in. "Ma'am! You forgot your lifetime supply of SockCoin!" Anita froze. "I said I don't want it." "Yes, but it auto-installs!" Her phone vibrated violently. Congratulations! You've earned 12,000 SockCoins! Warning: Phone overheating due to excessive joy! The screen glitched. Then burst into flames. Anita calmly dropped it into a nearby bucket labelled 'Burnt Hopes / Faulty Tech'. "Honestly," she sighed, walking away with her socks and her trophy, "this is exactly why I trust only real, physical things." Anita didn't look back. She had socks to take home.



Ethereal elysium

Krishna Rastogi
AIS Saket, XI C

Graphic: Aarna Bhasin, AIS Saket, XI F

At the last twinkle of dawn everyday
Silver bloom weaves a mystic array
A sanctum of calm, ataraxia unfolds
A garden of awe where magic moulds

Petals in rows, so colourful and bright
Swing gently beneath soft moonlight
In mellifluous breeze they faintly sway
A dream painted in a tranquil display

A golden glimmer flutters near by
Gleaming like flame as they pass by
Their tender wings craft rhythmic beat
To dance on blooms with nimble feet

As time flows, the sun starts to show
Dawn spills softly on the night's glow
The silver fades, the peace is no more
As magic dissolves, so ends the lore.



Read Play and Win 97

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Q.1 Name the marathon mentioned in the story on page 8.	Q.2 Name the author of the book reviewed for this edition.	Q.3 Which character's autobiography has been featured on page 5?
Q.4 The guide to avoid which question has been shared on page 12?	Q.5 What is the headline of the article on page 6?	Q.6 What fictional product has page 4 advertised this time?
Q.7 Who are the two entrepreneurs who built Zepto, as mentioned on page 1?	Q.8 Whose letter are we reading on page 9?	Q.9 Name the volcano that recently erupted in Ethiopia.

Name:.....Class:.....School:.....

Results of Read Play & Win-96: **Aviraaj Singh Bajaj**, AIS MV, III A; **Shivam Garg**, AIS Gur 46, VIII I; **Inaya Kamal**, AIS Gur 43, IV D