

ing about five cents a click) and spent the remainder of his 100 clicks there, increasing his payoff. At the end, Albert inquired about his score. Kim smiled as she told him it was one of the best so far.

ALBERT HAD CONFIRMED something that we suspected about human behavior: given a simple setup and a clear goal (in this case, to make money), all of us are quite adept at pursuing the source of our satisfaction. If you were to express this experiment in terms of dating, Albert had essentially sampled one date, tried another, and even had a fling with a third. But after he had tried the rest, he went back to the best—and that’s where he stayed for the remainder of the game.

But to be frank, Albert had it pretty easy. Even while he was running around with other “dates,” the previous ones waited patiently for him to return to their arms. But suppose that the other dates, after a period of neglect, began to turn their backs on him? Suppose that his options began to close down? Would Albert let them go? Or would he try to hang on to all his options for as long as possible? In fact, would he sacrifice some of his guaranteed payoffs for the privilege of keeping these other options alive?

To find out, we changed the game. This time, any door left unvisited for 12 clicks would disappear forever.

SAM, A RESIDENT of the hackers’ hall, was our first participant in the “disappearing” condition. He chose the blue door to begin with; and after entering it, he clicked three times. His earnings began building at the bottom of the screen, but