

# Contents

Prologue

Copyright

Author's note

Introduction

Chapter 1: Before I Knew Their Names

Chapter 2: The Black Card Invitation

Chapter 3: We Weren' Chosen. We Were Trapped Chapter 4:  
The Ones Who Smiled Too Soon

Chapter 5: First Blood

Chapter 6: The Grid Changes Shape

Chapter 7: Echoes of the Past

Chapter 8: Balance of Blood

Chapter 9: The Whisper Room

Chapter 10: Trust Me, or Don't

Chapter 11: The Price of Protection

Chapter 12: The Screams Beneath the Ice

Chapter 13: Blood Bonds

Chapter 14: A Voice Behind the Walls

Chapter 15: The Man in the Walls

Chapter 16: The Tunnels Beneath the Flesh

Chapter 17: The Woman Behind the Screen

Chapter 18: The Choice Room

Chapter 19: Symphony of Suffering

Chapter 20: Kill Zone

Chapter 21: The One Who Knows

Chapter 22: The Room That Breathes

Chapter 23: The Hunting Ground

Chapter 24: The Summit Bleeds

Chapter 25: The Grid's Truth

Epilogue

About The Author

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# Prologue

## The Game That Has No Rules :

They thought they were chosen. But no one ever gets chosen for something like this. Seventeen strangers. No memory of how they got here .

No explanation.

No rules.

Only a place buried far from the world — where time doesn't move forward... only the fear does.

In The Hollow Grid, trust becomes a weapon.

Kindness becomes a mistake.

And survival?

That's not guaranteed — it's designed to be impossible.

This isn't a game where you play to win.

This is a game where you're played to die.

And the only thing more terrifying than what happens inside...is who's watching from the outside.

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## Author's Note

When I began writing *The Game That Has No Rules*, I didn't want to create another story where people just play mind games or solve puzzles.

I wanted to create something real.

Something brutal, emotional, and terrifyingly possible. This is not just a game. This is about seventeen human beings—flawed, scared, guilty, broken—thrown into a nightmare they never agreed to. There are no rules here, just like life. Only choices. And consequences. You will grow close to these characters. And you will lose them.

But that's the point of this story. To make you feel the pain of trust. The weight of fear. And the cost of survival.

Thank you for entering *The Hollow Grid*.

You won't leave the same.

— Vikas Patwari

# Introduction

Hidden deep in the silent folds of Tungnam Valley, Himachal Pradesh, lies a place not found on any map.

A place the outside world never knew existed.

They call it: The Hollow Grid.

No one knows who built it.

No one knows why.

But when seventeen strangers wake up trapped inside — with no phones, no exits, and no memory of how they got there — one thing becomes clear:

This is not an experiment.

This is not a coincidence.

This is a game.

But a game where there are no rules, no mercy... and definitely no fairness.


Each room is a trap.

Each moment, a test.

Each decision? A possible death.

As alliances form and betrayals unfold, survival becomes less about being smart — and more about what you're willing to do when the lights go out... and only one person is meant to walk out alive.

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A man with a beard, wearing a dark green shirt, stands on a balcony with a metal railing, looking out over a city at night. The city lights are visible in the background under a dark, cloudy sky. A red watermark 'VPBOOKS' is visible diagonally across the image.

# Chapter 1

## Before I Knew Their Names



# Chapter 1: Before I Knew Their Names

(Day -3: Real World, Multiple Cities)

## *Delhi – Kabir Singh*

Time: 6:42 PM

The sky looked bruised — a dull mix of grey and violet — as Kabir Singh leaned on his apartment balcony, staring at the city that used to fear him. He looked nothing like the decorated ex-cop from the headlines. His stubble was uneven, his hair unkempt, and his eyes... dull. The kind of dull that only guilt can cause.

Down below, a child cried on the street. A mother scolded her. A couple argued about groceries. The world moved on. But Kabir didn't.

He hadn't left the building in three days. Not since his neighbour recognized him and whispered, "That's him. The cop who shot the kid..."

He closed his eyes.

That's when he heard it — a knock at the door.

Slow. Hollow. Once.

He opened the door expecting no one. And that's what he got. No footsteps. No visitors.

Just a black envelope, resting on the doormat like a dead bird.

It had no stamp. No seal. Just silver lettering:

> KABIR SINGH

You have been selected.

A new beginning awaits. Say nothing. Pack light.

A vehicle will arrive. Trust the process.

He picked it up. The paper felt expensive. Heavy.  
He should've torn it apart. Instead, he stared at it like it had answers. And somewhere inside him... he hoped it did.

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### ***Kolkata – Meher Chopra***

Time: 10:03 AM

Meher sat on the floor of her office, surrounded by chaos. Tissues. Empty water bottles. Torn appointment notes.

She had just finished her third back-to-back therapy session. All clients cried. None of them knew their therapist cried harder — in silence — between appointments.

She was good at fixing people. Except herself.

On the wall was her degree. On her phone were screenshots of a breakup. On her computer were browser tabs about "Symptoms of Dissociation" she Googled at 2 AM.

Then her office phone rang.

She didn't answer. She stared at it as it rang.

It stopped. Then a text message appeared on her personal number — from a blocked contact:

> You understand people.  
But do you understand yourself?  
Go home. Check your mailbox.

She stood up slowly. At her apartment door, her mailbox was open. Inside — the same black envelope. She opened it. Her name. Her silence. Her chance to vanish without questions. She looked around the hallway. It was empty. But her heart was loud.

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### ***Mumbai – Aisha Rana***

Time: 11:45 PM

Aisha was live on stream. Hundreds of people watching her talk, smile, pose, flirt, laugh.

> “So yeah, don’t forget to like and follow! I might drop the big collab news soon,” she winked.  
When she ended the stream, she collapsed into her bed — her real self finally exhaling.  
Her room was spotless, her face perfect, her nails sharp. But her mirror told a different story: a girl tired of pretending to be someone else for followers. She peeled off her fake lashes and looked at her inbox. No new brands. No real friends. Just attention.  
And then — a doorbell. She opened the door. No one. Just a black envelope.

> AISHA RANA  
You show people what they want to see.

Come find out who you really are.  
She clutched it like it was the first honest thing anyone  
had sent her in months.

---

### ***Indore – Neil Joshi***

Time: 8:20 PM

Neil raced through traffic on his delivery bike,  
headphones in, ignoring the world. Another pizza.  
Another fake smile. Another customer who didn't tip. He  
hated his job, but it paid just enough to keep his younger  
sister in school. As he returned to the delivery hub, he  
saw something on his seat. No one around. A black  
envelope.

Inside:

> NEIL JOSHI

The world never sees you.

But we do.

He looked up. All the buildings had windows. But none  
were open. He didn't know who sent it.

But for the first time in years, he felt... noticed.

48 Hours Later – Seventeen Black Cars

Across 17 cities, 17 cars pulled up — silently.

Some were in posh neighbourhoods. Others in alleyways.

But they all looked the same.

Black. Clean. No driver.

Each character stepped in. Some hesitated. Most didn't.

Kabir lit a cigarette and slid in.

Meher clutched her bag and whispered, "This better not  
be rehab."

Aisha wore sunglasses, already imagining a vlog.

Neil muttered, “Screw it,” and sat down.  
The doors locked automatically.  
The windows darkened.  
The engines started — soundless.  
No GPS. No phone signals. No turning back.

> “Seatbelt, please,” a soft voice echoed from the dashboard.  
And like that, the road to The Hollow Grid began.

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