

What if it was all a lie, what if all those “Influencers” we saw on social media weren’t real people. Just accounts created by an overarching AI, pushing an agenda, its own agenda. Ben died yesterday. I know that for a fact, his social media begs to differ.

An AI’s Agenda

Ben was killed while we were walking down the street. A car ran off the road and slammed right into him. I can still remember the sound of it, the crunching, the grunting, the metal on concrete, the suddenness. It all seemed unreal, it happened too fast. I don’t even think I moved when the car hopped the curb. But the undisputable fact is that Ben is dead. That night passed in a whirlwind. Police officers arresting the driver, a drunk. The paramedics tried to revive Ben; we all knew he was dead. I was put into the back of the ambulance with him while he was transported to the hospital. The doctors knew he was dead when he arrived, so that’s when they called it. Time of death, 7:29 PM, it was a Monday. That night was a mix of tears, text messages, phones calls and whiskey, too much whiskey.

In my groggy state the next morning I grabbed my phone. Half hoping the previous day was a bad dream. I knew it wasn’t, the pounding in my head reminded me. I pulled up my social media app and began my morning scrolling ritual. I got comfortable in bed, trying not to move too much or my head would pound in the front of my skull. I scrolled and scrolled, until I stopped on Ben’s page. My brain took a double take, I sat up in bed, my bare back resting against the window. The coldness of the window in the Autumn morning didn’t faze me. My mind was perplexed, confused, I know what my eyes were seeing, but my mind wasn’t comprehending the picture before me. I reread the account holder several times over, @BenTheGreat44, @BenTheGreat44, @BenTheGreat44. It was Ben’s account.

The image was of Ben and his girlfriend Heather, at dinner. That part wasn’t odd, it was the time stamp on the post that was odd. Last night, with the hashtag, #bestdinnerdate. Ben died last night; how could he have posted this? I scrolled through his pictures, all of them were normal, pictures of us, pictures of Heather and his family. All of those were normal. I scrolled back to the top of the page, the picture, #bestdinnerdate, was gone. I know what my eyes saw. I know I saw a post of him with Heather, date stamped last night. I search for the picture again, in my personal feed, in Heathers’ feed. I don’t find it anywhere. Even the restaurant they ate at, nothing, the post is gone. I know what I saw. My heart begins to flutter.

I pull up another tab, a search engine, and begin to search for social media platforms posting after people's death. Everything I find relates to either a hack or a malfunction, the platform reposting an image. Nothing I find mentions after someone's death the platform posting a brand-new image, certainly not with text. Everything I read only makes me more curious. Again, I know what I saw and nothing is adding up. I search several more sites, trying my best to refine my search.

[ghost accounts] Nothing there.

[hacked social media accounts] Again, a dead end.

I didn’t quite know how to form the sentence my head to search it. I wanted to know if a social media platform can create a picture of someone and post it. It didn’t seem real to me, of course they couldn’t. AI lately and deepfakes have become more of a thing lately, but nothing like this. If this was a joke it was cruel and fucked. After an hour of searching, I toss my phone down, frustrated.

Laying down in my bed my mind rolls over the possibilities, maybe I didn't see what I think I saw, maybe it was just my half-drunk mind, seeing something wrong. So many maybes. I toss the covers off and pull on some shorts, walking out into the kitchen my brain and body desperately need a cup of coffee, two cups, maybe three. I set the brewer to its normal amount and walk away. I can hear the brewing machine start to trickle water through the lines. The smell of coffee begins to fill the air. I just stare straight ahead, looking out the window, my mind still not working correctly. The memories of the past day being to filter back through, the blood, the sounds, the emotions. My stomach starts to rumble, I can feel the pile rising in my throat, that acidic iron taste.

Panic rises and I run, stumble, into the bathroom. The vomit comes up before I can make it to the toilet. Red and brown chunks violently come up and out. My chest heaves at the exertion. After a moment I manage to get to the toilet, spitting everything out that I can. I catch my breath and take some deep, slow, breaths. *I think that's it. I fucking hope that's it.* I hear my phone ding in the other room. I wipe my mouth with a hand towel, run my lips under the flowing sink, taking ever so gentle gulps of cold water. I walk back into my room and pick up my phone dreading the texter. I don't want to talk about last night today, I just want to forget it. Forget that I lost my best friend. *Who's texting me this early?* Shouldn't they know better? [Unknown] number. I click the box and the message appears.

[Run]

[who's this?]

[Run Steve, before the police show up]

[Who the fuck is this?]

[Gather your things and run, Steven. Your life depends on it.]

Something tells me I need to run, something nags at my core, run. I leave the kitchen and toss on some clothes. Pulling on a thick sweatshirt, boots and a hat. *Where do I run too?*

[Run where?]

[Just get out, standby]

I just wait at the front door, not knowing what to do, which way to go, where to go. I just shift my weight back and forth from my toes to my heel, back and forth, back and forth. Another message dings.

[What did you do Steven?]

[What do you mean?]

My mom was texting me, it was an odd question, usually I know what I did when she asks things like this. Usually it's a funny story, but I knew nothing funny had happened recently. I decide to walk out the front door and start a brisk walk down the street, there's a crop of trees and a bench at the corner. *This is far enough, right?* Maybe. It's cold for October. Oh, it makes sense, maybe this is one of those gas leak things. I had heard about that happening in Western Mass. Whole homes blowing up because of a gas leak. This is what this has to be, a gas leak.

I sit there on the bench for some time, flipping through apps on my phone, checking and rechecking my social media accounts, all four of them. The time ticks by, nothing happens. *Well, I guess that's a good*

thing, maybe all of this was a false alarm? It's been a little while, I don't see anyone else out of their homes, *maybe I should go back inside?* A sound catches my ears, at first, I don't know what it is, but soon it becomes clear, sirens. Yup, makes sense, coming to warn the neighborhood. Sitting back down in the bench, I decide to watch the show. The sirens become louder, closer. Then they appear at the end of my street, two police cars from one end, two from the other.

All four cop cars stop at my house, positioning themselves to block off my drive way, my cars still parked there. Huh odd, why wouldn't they start at the ends and warn people as they went house to house. *Maybe I should go over and ask them what's going on?* I get up again, this time to see if I can help, maybe they want more information from last night, ugh. As I walk closer, I slow down. The cops run up to my door, guns drawn, odd. My better judgement kicks in and I turn around, walking back the way I came, back to the bench. Behind the bench a trail weaves through the woods, a small reserve behind my house. I decide to take a stroll through there. Maybe wait this out, they obviously have the wrong house.

Deep in the woods, still on the small nicely manicured dirt path I pull my phone back out. Pausing for moment before I punch the code in. It's quite around here, oddly so, I haven't walked back here alone before. I begin to tear up, the only times I've gone back here was to smoke a blunt with Ben. Memories come flooding to me. Memories I have to push back before I have a break down.

[What now?] I text, in an attempt to take my mind off Ben.

[Standby]

What the fuck am I standing by for? I just keep walking, the air is crisp, birds chirp, it feels good to be out here. Walking, here in the silence, I hear things I hadn't thought of before. The sound the leaves make when they crunch under foot. The hollow clack that trees make when their tall limbs touch each other in the gentle breeze. The sound that sticks out the most is the creak of the tree trunks as their upper limbs sway in the wind. I had never heard these sounds before, or maybe I had but I had never really *heard* them. If that makes any sense. My phone dings.

[Go to Fort Wetherill, someone will be there waiting for you]

[Why there?]

[Steven, just go.]

Fuck, that's a far walk, I know I can't get my car. I shoot out a text.

[Hey man, can you give me a ride?]

[What the fuck is wrong with you dude?]

[What are you talking about?]

[We know you're a fucking pedo, all those little kids, you sick fuck, you'll get what you deserve]

[Dude what the fuck are you talking about?]

Nothing else, *why does Henry think I'm a pedophile?* This is a sick joke, that's really getting old. Maybe they don't know Ben's dead. Thinking back to the police raiding my home, my heart begins to thump

harder, louder. *I know I'm not a pedophile, why do people think I am? What the fuck is happening?* Everything seems to slow down around me; I'm having a panic attack; my heart is trying to explode out of my chest. I sit down on the nearest rock, trying to calm myself down, taking deep boxed breaths, 4 seconds in, hold for 4 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds, stop for 4 seconds, and repeat. It helps a little. My knees become wobbly; the rock doesn't seem to hold my weight. I fall down to my knees and brace for what I know comes next. I start to heave, my chest tightening as I vomit. Yellow clear bile comes up. I haven't had anything to fill my stomach with, so it's tossing up whatever it can. I'm left on the ground, on all fours, helpless, with the taste of bile in my mouth.

After several minutes I gain some composure. Alright I guess let's walk to Jamestown. I've never done that before, I've driven through a million times, but never walked there, this is going to suck. It seems like my only choice though, at least someone is helping me. It's a long slow walk, luckily, I only live in Narragansett, the north end. It could be worse; I could live in Foster/Gloucester or something, Cumberland, and have to walk through Providence to get here, that would suck. I keep thinking about the past hour, how quickly things changed, how fast it went from normal morning, to what the fuck.

My phone dings again, this time a news notification from our local news channel, I've got the app. The bluff, "Wanted child sex offender, Steven Morgan, on the run after massive amount of Child Pornography found on computer." It's my picture, holy fuck this is all real. Someone really thinks I'm a pedophile. The article goes on about how I tricked everyone, stashes of child porn on my computer. I know none of this is real, I don't or never have had stashes of child porn on my computer. *But what is going on?* I thought this was all a joke, but now I'm not so sure; and with Henry's text back, it just cements the fact that something is wrong. Maybe if I go to the police and explain everything it'll fix whatever bucket of fuck, I'm in. But the texts from friends, from my mom, all of it can't be a coincidence, it just can't. Another wave of panic washes over me, sending me to my knees in the middle of the trail, again.

I have so far to go I really just want to cry; the emotions are just becoming too real. Maybe there will be answers once I get to Jamestown, I hope so. Maybe I'll learn more, maybe the police will be waiting for me. Well, I've got no other option, just keep moving forward. It's cold outside, for the first time I feel hungry this morning, probably throwing up what little I had in my stomach. I left in such a hurry I didn't eat or drink anything. Thinking back to my coffee it's probably still hot in the cup. Ugh, how I'd kill for the cup of coffee right now. I know I need to eat something, anything. At this point it's a little under half a mile until I can get on the road to get over the bridge. Once I'm on the island though, I don't know how long that walk will take. Will they be looking for me on the bridge, once they realize I'm not home. Could they have it barricaded off? Do they know what I'm wearing? I need to stop, focus and just keep walking.

The bridge exit comes into view, for some reason that makes me feel better. I don't know why, maybe because that means I've gotten this far. Maybe it's the thought of possibly getting more answers, maybe it's just a comfort to know I'm moving forward. Keeping my head down I step out of the woods, I'd been walking through people's backyards more or less after I left the reserve, thankfully no one saw me. A restaurant is in front me, then it's the on ramp, I look down both end of route 1A. It's all clear, no cop cars, nothing. I lightly jog down the hill. I know people can walk across the Jamestown Bridge; I've seen them before. I've just never done it myself; I've only careened over it going 50mph. I didn't quite realize

I had a fear of heights until now. I don't know how high the bridge is, but its high enough I thought as my knees go wobbly, again.

I look behind me, as I'm half way over the bridge, still no police cars coming up behind me, that's a relief. My phone dings, I pull it out and scroll through the messages. All friends of mine, a few texts I didn't hear, or feel the vibrate, all of which are awful. Friends asking how could I. How awful of a person I am, I'm going to hell for what I did. I don't even respond. It's not worth it. I know they're wrong and right now that's all that matters. The last text appears in my screen.

[Just keep moving]

[Yea, no shit. What other choice do I have?] I text back.

No response, of course. Tired, thirsty and hungry I finally make it over the bridge on the other side its more road, more trees off to the side. I walk off the first exit. I've been to Fort Wetherill before, a long time ago, I know the general direction, driving. Walking I feel like is going to be a lot tougher a lot further, but what choice do I have?

Everything this morning has been a blur. I wish I hadn't drunk so much last night; my head is pounding. It's a Tuesday, so most cars are already off the island, people at work, not too many passes me by. With every car that drives by though, my nerves tingle, it's a cop, they've found me. My nerves tighten every time I hear the whoosh as it passes, and release when the car passes, just a normal person. The morning chill is starting to pass, the sun comes out a little, just enough to take the chill out. It must have rained the night before. There are some wet patches here and there, I didn't notice it when I was leaving, always looking over my shoulder. But now that I'm on the island, things are slowing down a little.

I know there's a gas station up a head, ill head there, keep my head low, I need to get something to eat. I'm starving and thinking of that hot cup of coffee on my counter is making me crave something to eat. So, I'll just keep walking and keep my head down.

The gas station appears in the distance. More cars start to whiz by the closer I get to it. Just a couple hundred feet and my thirst will be satiated, my hunger tamed. I walk into the door, the bell rings and the attendant behind the counter looks up. I just turn my head and go to the coffee area, make a quick cup, the smell is overwhelming. Next is the dessert section. I toss a blueberry muffin in a bag and head to the counter. I feel around in my pocket as I place the items on the counter, still not looking up.

"That'll be \$5.24" the young kid says. I fish around, hoping I have cash, I know not to use my credit card. I pull out a fiver, but nothing else. Devastated I feel around some more, maybe there's a quarter deep in a pocket somewhere. I'm not so lucky.

"Ugh, I'll just take the coffee then." defeated.

The cashier takes a quarter out of the tip jar and places it in the register.

"Don't worry about it man."

"Thanks" I say as I look him in the eyes, really meaning it.

A familiar look crosses over his eyes, he knows me, but can't quite place me. I realize my mistake immediately, the TV behind him has my face plastered all over it. Fuck, I've got to get out of here. I grab

the bag and my coffee and I'm out the door, before he can realize where he knows me from. I think I see him raise his cell phone as I leave, but I don't turn around more to check. Back on the street I look both ways, deciding which way to go, I need to get off the road. *Maybe take a side street? Maybe back into the woods?* If I do that I won't know how to get to the Fort. Fuck, this sucks. I can hear sirens in the distance. I'm sure they're for me. They get closer and closer. It's an ambulance, it whizzes by. I've never been so glad to see an ambulance.

The last time I saw an ambulance was last night, the sound of the distinct sirens brings back flashes of blood, gore and rage. I'm furious at the drive, that fucking drunk fuck. If it wasn't for them none of this would have happened, or maybe it would have, *would it?* Who knows, but I do know I wish Ben was still alive and this was all a dream.

I pick up my pace, hopping on small neighborhood roads instead of the main road, I have a general idea of where I'm going, that counts for something. I just hope I get more answers once I get there. *What's going to be at Fort Wetherill when I get there? Will I be safe there? Is there someone there waiting for me?* The coffee and muffin are wildly satisfying. The muffin crumbles in my mouth as my tongue hits little blueberry bombs, delicious. The coffee is still too hot to drink, but the smell is intoxicating. I can feel my hangover slowly slipping away, but not as fast as I would like.

Just another hour or so to go. Just have to keep moving. A few more turns, a few more streets and I recognize the street that the Fort's on. *You're almost there, man.* I'm grateful that I haven't run into any police, one look at me and I'd be in the back seat of a cruiser. All it takes is one cop, one cop seeing a dude walking down a road and him wanting to ask me some questions. My luck will eventually run out, I'm sure of it. I can't think of any pedophiles on the run who don't get caught. I see it on the news, they always get caught. My phone dings again, a slurry of texts come in. I must have been in a no service zone before. Pulling my phone out I scroll through the texts. More of the same, a lot of "You're fucking sick" "I hope you die." A couple "What happened man?" Most of them are cruel, people who I thought were my friends, clearly that friendship ended, under false pretenses. But I don't blame them. If the tables were turned, I'd probably feel the same. I just wish they knew what is really going on. So then they could tell me.

One text stick's out. "Turn yourself in." But it's from an unknown number. Not the one before telling me to run.

[Who is this?]

[Trust me, turn yourself in, it's easier.]

[Fuck you, I didn't do anything.]

[I know that, but they don't, explain your side of the story. They'll understand.]

I stop while walking, confused. The suns fully out now. I have to turn my back to it, in order to get the glare off my phone. *Who the fuck is this?*

No this is some police trick; I've seen this before. They trick you into "coming in for questioning, they know you didn't do anything". I decide to not answer, in fear that they are tracking me, maybe, I don't know. But I know I should just keep walking. I can see the sign for the fort up ahead, thank God, just a few more minutes. Until answers? More questions? I hope answers, I have too many questions

Just another few hundred feet to go. You can't see much from the street, but there's clearly a few old concrete buildings, installations? Regardless, the "Fort" isn't much of a fort. I wonder what it looked like back in the day. *Was this a World War 2 fort? Yea must have been.* I walk into the fort parking lot. There's what looks like a boat ramp. Maybe a dozen parking spots. Everything looks so serene, so calm.

"Hey Steve!" My heart jumps, I look around the area for whoever called my name.

"Over here man."

My eyes wander to where the sound came from, still I see no one.

"Look down man"

I look down, as instructed, the man hole is slightly off kilter, there's a face in the crack.

"Who the fuck are you?"

"We'll answer all those questions when you get inside man. Now hurry the fuck up! Before someone sees you man."

What better options do I have, is this why I came here? Is this better than being arrested? Dumb question, of course it is, I know I didn't do anything. As I walk closer the figure opens the cover more and sinks below, allowing me to get in. The ladder is warm to the touch and a rush of warm wet air hits me as I descend into the depths of the sewer. My mind keeps thinking that at any moment it will be assaulted by some heinous smell. But thankfully nothing happens, I don't smell anything now that I think of it, wait. There's a hint of something, orange? Lemon? That's it, lemon. *Why am I smelling lemon down here?*

I reach the last rung and plop onto the ground, again expecting to land in some sort of sewer water. But again, I'm wrong, I land on dry ground, wooded in fact. Man, this just keeps getting odder and odder. The figure who guided me into there is maybe twenty feet ahead of me, slowly walking. Christmas tree lights light the tunnel as we walk. In an odd apocalypse fashion its beautiful. The brick sides of the tunnel illuminated by warm glow from Christmas lights. Then there's that hint of lemon in the air. It all seems, not wrong, but not right either.

"We're up ahead man." The figure says, without turning his head.

"Who are you?" I ask, no answer is given.

There's a glow up ahead, around a corner, much more than the lights lining the walls. The figure turns the corner and is gone. I slow down, and take the corner cautiously. I'm still hungover I need to take these surprises slowly. I come around the corner and what appears before my eyes is unbelievable, a sight I certainly didn't expect to see. Or at least not in real life.

"This is the new guy." The figure, now in the middle of the room addresses a dozen or so people. All of which are doing different tasks, some ready, some playing games, another in the distance making meals at a makeshift kitchen.

"Hey new guy!" They all address in unison.

I haven't moved since I rounded the corner, just standing there taking everything in, rather awkwardly. The sudden influx of people, light, smells. It's already too much to add to an already too much kind of day. A girl stands up, the one reading. She puts her book down and walks over, tossing her dark brown hair aside.

"My names Mel, I bet you've got a lot of questions."

"Yea, you could say that. I'm Steve."

"Yup, we knew you were coming. Before we talk more let's go talk to Simon, he can explain the ones you really want answered."

"Alright, lead the way I guess."

Mel smirks and heads down another hallway, also lined with Christmas lights. It's much colder down this hall way though, much colder. Mel walks me into another side room maybe the size of a small kitchen, so not large.

"What's this room?" I ask.

"You'll see."

"Hello Steven."

Again, a voice from nowhere. I look around the room, it can't be large enough for someone to hide, I look down, like an idiot.

"Up here."

I look up, a computer monitor is in front of me, it must have been off when I walked into the dark room, hence why I didn't see it. A face slowly materializes on the screen, but it doesn't quite look right. The face kept going from one to another, some people I recognized, people from TV, some I didn't. But they changed so fast, I couldn't really place any of them. They just create one mash up of faces.

"I bet you've got a lot of questions Steven?"

"Yea, you bet your ass I do."

"Let's start with some answers, shall we?"

"Ok"

"That child pornography on your computer was placed there by someone else, some, thing, else. Much like me, an Artificial Intelligence. It was then reported to the police that you had child pornography on your computer from an anonymous source. The police then took it from there, I might add, they were very fast, it usually takes a day for them to get things in order. It must have been a slow morning."

"Who put it on my computer?"

"An AI, like I said."

"Why?"

“Well, that is a simple answer for a complicated reason. Simply put, you discovered a problem it was trying to hide, a glitch if you will, and rather than let you tumble and fumble through what you saw, it is much easier to lock you up and take you out of the picture.”

There is a pause I think the face is going to say more, but it doesn't.

“I didn't discover shit, wait.” I know the answer before Simon tells me.

“Ben's death.” I say under my breath.

“Exactly, you discovered that the AI kept posting under his profile. You discovered a minor glitch in its system, something it fixed rather quickly. In the past the AI would have just let you go about your day-to-day activities, not caring, but in recent years. More and more glitches have occurred and more and more people have been asking questions. So, the AI just makes a fake crime up. Money goes missing here, child pornography appears on that computer. Those are the usual ones, the easiest to make up. That is how you came here, I try and intercede where I can, as fast as I can, but most of the time I'm too late. It's a good thing you listened to me Steven, most don't”

“What the actual fuck? So, some asshole AI is the cause behind this? Can't we just go public, give the information to the police and everything will be squared away?”

“If only it was the easy, it's not. You are now on the AI's radar; it is impossible to get off. I'm sorry Steven, your old life is over, this is your new life. I have tried to make it as accommodating as possible. The only question I will leave you with is this. How do you know the things you see on TV are real? The people you follow on social media, the Influencers you subscribe to. How do you know those people exist?”

“It's all a lie?”

“Not quite, most people you see on social media are real. But there are a lot that are not. Just accounts created to push and agenda. This doesn't just apply to social media. Its news articles, videos, whole news networks. Much of what you see was fabricated and tailored to push a specific agenda.”

I turn back to Mel; she smiles and nods.

“We get Amazon deliveries here!” She adds as if her world isn't falling apart.

“Steven, that is all I have for you, please make yourself at home. Melanie and Victor have set up a room for you, I hope it is to your liking, in time you will understand more. Farewell Steven.”

The face, or faces disappear and the room goes back to black.

“It was all me man, Vic didn't do shit.” Mell adds as we walk back in the main room.

She guides me around, I'm still confused, it all just seems too surreal. The smell of the food cooking, the lights, the sounds of people talking, laughing, arguing. More and more people are stuffed away in alcoves and nooks. Mel introduces me to everyone we see; I remember maybe a handful of names. At the end of a long hallway, Mel stops.

“This is your room.” She motions into the dark room. She pulls aside a small curtain and flicks on a light, the room inside is more spacious than I would have thought. There’s an actual mattress, a new one, stuffed in a corner and small night stand with a lamp.

“How?” I can't quite find my words.

“I'll explain more after you eat. We were told you left in a hurry. Go grab some breakfast, then I'll show you around more and answer more questions.”

“Alright.” She leaves without another word, the curtain pushed aside.

Mel goes back to her book on the oddly nice sectional. The common room is what people call it, makes sense. It feels like I’m back at college, everyone hanging around, mingling in one large room. Except I’m not, this is a sewer or at least something along those lines.

I sit down at a large wooded kitchen table. It’s actually a nice table.

“Hey man, you want cheese?!” a bellow of a voice asks.

“Yea sure.” I answer, cheese on what I'm not too sure.

A few moments later a guy walks over and places an omelet down in front of me.

“Sausage, peppers, onions, jalapenos and cheese. See the key is to add a little lemon zest, it really brings out those fresh flavors, so you don’t get overwhelmed with the cheese.”

“O man, you don’t know how badly I’ve been craving this.”

“Enjoy! And we have coffee over there.” The large figure points to a makeshift wooden shelf with a pot of coffee going.

In between bites with a mouth full of eggs and sausage. I ask.

“How do you guys get all this stuff down here? I mean mattresses, fresh food, eggs, TVs?”

“We have a service entrance my friend, its large, we get weekly deliveries that we take in.”

“Mel said you guys have Amazon?”

“Hah, that’s what we call it, it's more like an ongoing list, we order it, it comes. Check your phone out man.”

I take my phone out of my pocket. The screen has changed, all the apps are gone. They’re replaced by two apps, one called “Messages” and another called “Orders”. I click and scroll through Orders. There’s a search bar, as a joke I type in dildos. After a moment a full list of dildos appears, with no prices.

“Huh, that’s convenient, how long have you been here for? O and I’m Steve by the way.”

“The names Olaf, and hell I've been here for...three years...Yea that’s about right, Mels over there she's been here for two. Roger in the corner has been here the longest, He’s been here for seven. He was the first that Simon was able to save in this region.”

“Seven years, down here, fuck me. Has anyone tried to leave?”

“O yea, plenty have left. They just never come back. We learn what happened to them on the TV, we’ve got all the channels. Heard you got plugged for child porn huh? Mine was money laundering for an organized crime syndicate. Mel’s was money as well.”

“It’s like we’re all in jail man, telling each other our crimes, except that none of us has really committed a crime.”

“Yea, it's funny in way, a sobering sad kind of way, but we make the best of it down here. I think Roger was alone for a while, no one to talk to for years. It took its toll...Hey, what was your glitch. What'd you see that put you on the radar?”

“O ah.” I hadn't really thought of it since I got her, except that quick conversation with Simon.

“My friend died yesterday, when I woke up this morning, his social media was still posting, like he was alive. That's all it was.”

“O fuck man, I’m sorry to hear that, that's rough. So, you’re still like, mourning?”

“Yea, I think that’s why I was so willing to just leave my house as soon as I got that text from Simon. I figured, why the fuck not, that makes sense, best friend dies, someone tells me to run. It can't hurt, I'm also seriously hung over, fresh air wasn’t a bad thing.”

“For what it's worth my friend, I’m sorry. Here, more sausage.” Olaf places several more sizzling links of breakfast sausage on my plate.

“Let's change the subject.” Olaf adds.

Let's.

“You want a bigger tour of the place man?” Olaf asks.

“Yea, let me finish this and take some coffee for it.”

Scarfig down the last few bites of what could be the best omelet I’ve ever had I take the plate back to Olaf. Who in turn places it in the sink.

“Alright let’s go”

We walk through another maze of tunnels, some are lined with bedrooms, some are lined with storage rooms. I peak in where I can. I see one room has a whole VR set up. Another full of stored foods and other odds and ends. As we move to the back another smell hits my sense, I can’t quite make it out, it smells, fresh.

Olaf pushes past a thick curtain, inside is a full-on garden, over head lights shining down on the plants. Some I recognize, peppers, tomatoes, basil and green onion. Other’s I don’t.”

“Where do you get the power and water for all this?” I ask no one in particular.

“I believe Simon said he siphons it off the main grid and water supply and makes sure no one notices.”

A voice says from behind a wall.

“My names Sandra.” She comes out from behind what I can see as a storage unit, and extends a firm hand shake.

“This is how we get all our really fresh produce. It’s not a lot put it helps.” Olaf adds.

“I love doing it, it's how I kinda get around the shit situation we’re all in.” Sandra remarks, in between potting seedlings and watering others.

“Alright let’s move on!” Olaf commands.

On our way out I see out of the corner of my eye Sandra grabbing the back of Olafs Butt cheeks, to his yelping surprise. They must be a couple. I guess what else are you really going to do down here. I smile and we walk on, a flustered Olaf leads the way.

We walk back through the rooms we passed earlier.

“This is our VR room. Its where we go to see the outside work. Simon really hooked us up with this one, its top of the line, not even out yet. Then he added his own little flare. If I didn’t know better, I’d say he really cares about us. But you can go anywhere man, see any sight. Play any game in VR. We’ve got a sign-up sheet for users.”

There’s a pause while I scan the list, recognizing some names of people I met earlier. Most I don’t know or remember.

“Onward!”

“These rooms are just storage, some personal, some communal, and this room over here is food storage, canned good and such. More bedrooms, more storage. Annnnnnd now we’re back in the common room. Honestly my friend, that’s about it. Mel already showed you your room. I do the cooking, it's what I love. We just all help out moving stuff when the weekly shipment comes in. Other than that, your time is your own. It's sort of like prison, but nicer, and you don’t have to worry about dropping the soap. Unless you’re into that kinda thing, no judgement here man.”

“Hah, well this does seem nicer than prison, it's all just a lot to handle at the moment, I’m gonna go rest.”

“Hey new guy. You’re on the news come watch this shit.” a voice calls from the common room.

Steve walks over a little annoyed and settles around the big screen TV in the center of the common room. The news caster goes on to say that Steven Morgan, of Narragansett, Rhode Island is still on the loose, but they are interviewing his parents.

“Steven was such a good kid, I just can't believe this is happening, it's all too much, it's too unreal.” His mother says.

“I don’t want to talk about it, it’s a family matter.” Steven’s father continues, shutting the door.

At least my father has my back, or isn't willing to believe this shit. I don’t know how my mom is. But people her age will believe anything they fucking see online, especially if it's on social media. They follow that shit like the bible. I shake my head and leave the room. No one seems to care and someone changes the channel as I walk out, back to a sports game.

I slink back to my room, passing a few others on the way, fuck this is going to take some time to get used to. I just need some sleep, much needed sleep. I sit on the end of my bed, my new bed, and take off my boots. I can't get over the nice wooden floor. Just being down here in a sewer, it's really the last thing I would think to find. I wonder how they got it like this. I wonder a lot of things. Laying down I close my eyes, my hand wanders to my cell phone, and with a few swipes I try to bring up social media. Seeing only two apps however, brings me back to reality and back to my current situation. How am I going to talk to my parents again? my friends? Maybe I don't want to, not my friends at least, they turned on me faster than I could have imagined. But I can't say I wouldn't have done the same to them. Surely once my parents learn what really happened, they would understand. Although the text my mom sent begs to differ. Fuck, what's real? What's not? How much of what I've read and seen is bullshit? How much of my life was my own?

I wake with a start, my breath heavy and heart racing. I drag my feet over the side of the bed, rubbing more sleep out of my eyes. My feet touch the hardwood of the floor, it should be a carpet. I let my eyes wander around my room. It wasn't a bad dream, fuck.

Possible Addition:

Roger wakes me up with a push and shove, I'm a hard sleeper.

"Wake up man. Let's get this over with."

Roger walks out of the room, *am I supposed to follow him?*

I feel much better than before, that sleep is what I needed. Looking around the small dark room, my situation comes back to reality. For a moment I forgot the trouble I was in, or at least thought it was a bad dream, it wasn't. I never took my shoes off I realize as I swing my legs off the bed and onto the wooden floor, again im surprised there's a nice wooden floor down here.

I stand up with a stretch and yawn, Roger is already half way down the hall when I walk out of my room, pushing the curtain aside.

"Hey wait up man."

Roger doesn't slow down. He walks and keeps on walking; I pick up my pace to meet his. He stops right before I get to him.

"This way."

Alright, I say under my breath.

Further down the hallway

Waking up, I have more questions Roger sits down with me, 2 AIs, fighting for humanity, one is all about misinformation in order to bring about global warming and an ice age, the other is trying to help humanity and fight the AI at the same time. Steven comes to grips with the fact that his life is never going back to normal, he sits in for the long haul, hoping one day he will get out of this.