UNMASK THE ILLUSION, RECLAIM THE TRUTH.

MY REALITY APP

BY ESTEBAN GALLARDO

STORY BOOK EDITOR
VERSION 0.1

CHAPTER 3: ANOTHER MAN'S VISION

Chapter 3: Another man's vision

The test had been successful.

Luca allowed himself a shallow breath, the first since he had initiated the hack. For minutes that felt like hours, he had watched the system's data streams, waiting for even the faintest sign of detection. None came. The silence was deafening, but in it lay confirmation: his scripts had worked. A heavy weight lifted from his chest. After years of meticulous preparation, endless nights of coding, and thousands of simulations, he had finally taken the plunge. For the first time, he had tampered with the New Internet's most critical infrastructure. He had played with fire—and, so far, had avoided getting burned.

The stakes couldn't have been higher. Luca knew the risk of exposure, but there had been no other way to move forward. He had to test the system under real-world conditions. And as the minutes stretched into an hour, confidence began to replace the suffocating dread in his chest.

His hack had worked flawlessly.

Hours would pass before the system would finally recognize the dead body of Allison. The world around her saw no corpse, no blood, no sign of violence—only a lush field of vibrant red roses spreading across her front lawn, masking the horror beneath. Pedestrians strolled past without a second glance, immersed in their custom realities, their AR filters painting the scene in serene, picturesque beauty. Even the garbage man, who also doubled as the neighborhood landscaper, failed to notice anything unusual. Only when the system eventually processed his routine lawn care data would it detect something amiss.
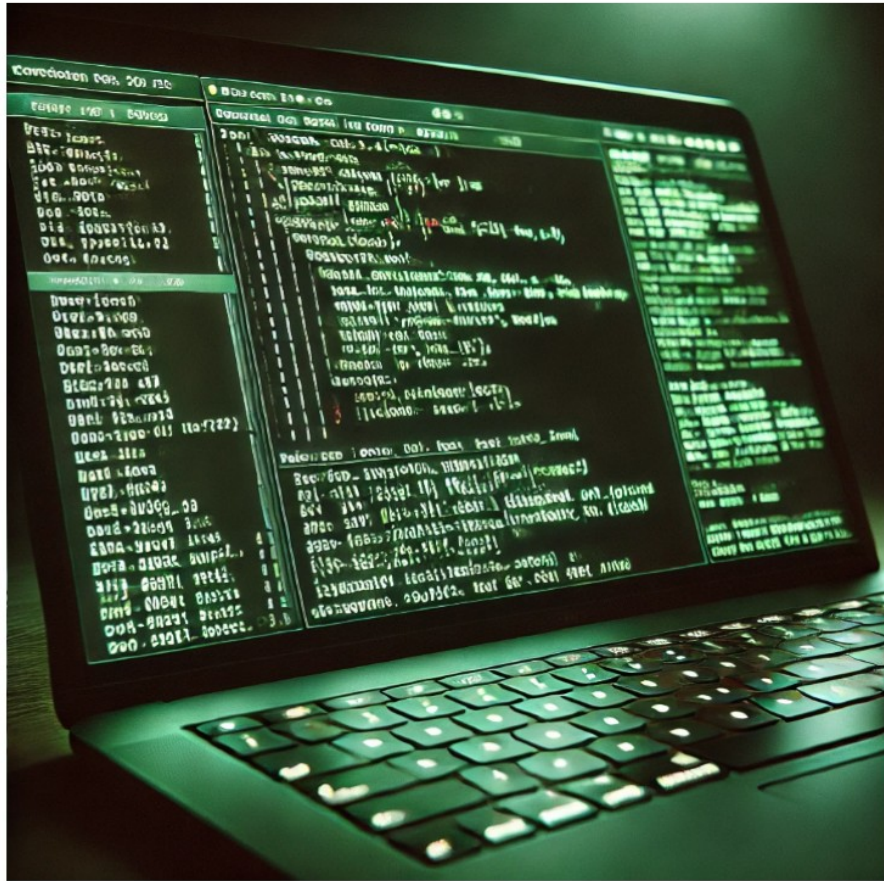
Until then, Allison's death was hidden in plain sight.

Luca spent the rest of the day poring over logs and data, scrutinizing every report connected to Allison. Each parameter, every response from the central AI, had to be perfect. His scripts had performed as intended, masking her vital signs and rerouting them into a plausible narrative. The system registered Allison as bedridden with a common flu—just sick enough to avoid suspicion but not so ill as to require external intervention. The central AI, relying on automated protocols, notified her employer that she was unable to work. No alarms, no questions.

The real triumph, however, lay in the script that had allowed him to mask the danger alert. It was the cornerstone of his operation: an exploit he had discovered deep within the system's code. The exploit allowed him to intercept warning signals and reroute them through his own script, transforming critical alerts into benign, everyday occurrences. The dangerous situation at Allison's house had been rendered into something so mundane that even the system, with its near-omniscient reach, had dismissed it without hesitation.

The filtering worked seamlessly. Instead of registering a life-threatening event, the system interpreted the scene according to Allison's personal My Reality preferences. To her account, the world was as it should be—calm, orderly, and beautiful.

For Luca, it was a grim validation of his years of work. The system, built to monitor and control billions, could be deceived. And he was the one who had done it.

But as the hours passed and the data confirmed his success, a new weight began to settle on his shoulders. The test had been a necessary risk, but it was only the beginning. He knew the system better than anyone, and he knew its reach. There would be no room for mistakes.

This was only the first step.

Luca sat hunched over his desk, his eyes locked onto the faint green text glowing against the black background of his outdated computer screen. The tiny apartment he called home, nestled in the poorest part of the city, was damp and suffocatingly small. Thousands of miles away, in a world far removed from his own, Allison's life had ended—and Luca's work had just begun.

The computer before him was a relic, a cheap, discontinued model that belonged to a bygone era. Yet it was his most prized possession. It was among the last devices capable of bridging both the New Internet and the remnants of the old Internet, a distinction that gave Luca an edge in a world where most had moved entirely to the corporate-controlled system. The machine was stripped of anything unnecessary; it lacked even a visual operating system. Everything was text-based—lines of green text scrolling across the screen like whispers from a forgotten past.

His fingers moved quickly across the keyboard, typing commands that allowed him to monitor hundreds of systems in real time. Every line of code he executed was precise, intentional, and vital to ensuring his scripts performed as expected. He couldn't afford a single mistake.

Finding someone like Allison had been disturbingly easy. She hadn't even been his original target. Luca's scripts scanned the records of companies with high employee turnover, particularly small and medium-sized businesses where labor exploitation was rampant. His algorithms zeroed in on patterns: employees working unpaid overtime, supervisors demanding endless sacrifices to meet impossible deadlines, and the inevitable breaking points when the pressure became unbearable.

Steve had been one of many cases flagged by Luca's scripts. A man stretched to the brink by years of unrelenting stress and dehumanizing conditions. For each case, Luca's system identified the managers responsible for driving their employees to the edge. He crafted specialized scripts for each manager, waiting for the moment when their actions would push someone too far—when the breaking point would snap into violence.

The use of My Reality made this process all the more insidious. Managers, living in their augmented bubbles, rarely saw the real faces of their employees. They issued impossible orders and demanded unpaid labor with cheerful smiles, oblivious to the emotional toll they inflicted. The employees, in turn, had their pain masked by the AR filters, rendering their expressions serene or even joyful. The system ensured no one saw the strain, the fatigue, or the despair.

It wasn't just Allison and Steve. People cracked under the pressure constantly, pushed to their limits by a system designed to grind them down. The corporate AI caught most of them before they acted, neutralizing threats swiftly and quietly. These incidents never made it into the news. The world remained a "happy, happy place," or so the façade insisted.

But Allison's death was different. Luca's scripts had disrupted the perfect machine. For once, the system hadn't intervened. For once, the consequences of relentless exploitation had played out without being sanitized or erased. And Luca wasn't finished.

His fingers paused for a moment as he scanned the output scrolling across his screen. His work was meticulous, each line of code a small rebellion against a world where misery was dressed in roses.

He wasn't just hacking the system. He was forcing it to see itself.

When the textual output informed Luca that the system had detected Allison's body, he knew it was time to cover his tracks. Methodically, he erased all traces of his scripts from the system. Before logging out, he executed a batch script—a carefully crafted piece of code that subtly altered the backend server scripts of the My Reality app. It was a minor adjustment, just enough to redirect any investigation into the incident.

The change would ensure that the complacent system administrators, lulled into apathy by years of unchecked control, would dismiss the anomaly as a minor system glitch. A ticket would be generated, shuffled into the endless backlog of routine maintenance tasks. Eventually, it would land in the hands of one of the corporation's mediocre programmers, someone barely competent enough to patch it. Luca knew they'd likely do a sloppy job, leaving his backdoor into the system—accessed through the old Internet—intact and undetected.

The old Internet was a ghost of the titan it had once been. At the dawn of the New Internet, corporations had pushed aggressively to eliminate it entirely, but even they had been forced to compromise. The transition of global software services required a period of coexistence between the two systems. Once the transition was complete, however, the old Internet faded into near obscurity. Its user base dwindled to a negligible fraction of the population, and the corporations, smug in their domination, abandoned any efforts to maintain or monitor it.

Publicly, they touted their "solidarity," claiming that preserving the old Internet was a gesture of goodwill for the minority who resisted the New Internet. In truth, they saw no threat in its survival. The general population's technical knowledge had been so thoroughly eroded over the years that the corporations believed no one was capable of exploiting the relic. To them, the old Internet was an ancient forest—dark, twisted, and impenetrable—where no one could navigate far enough to find anything of value.
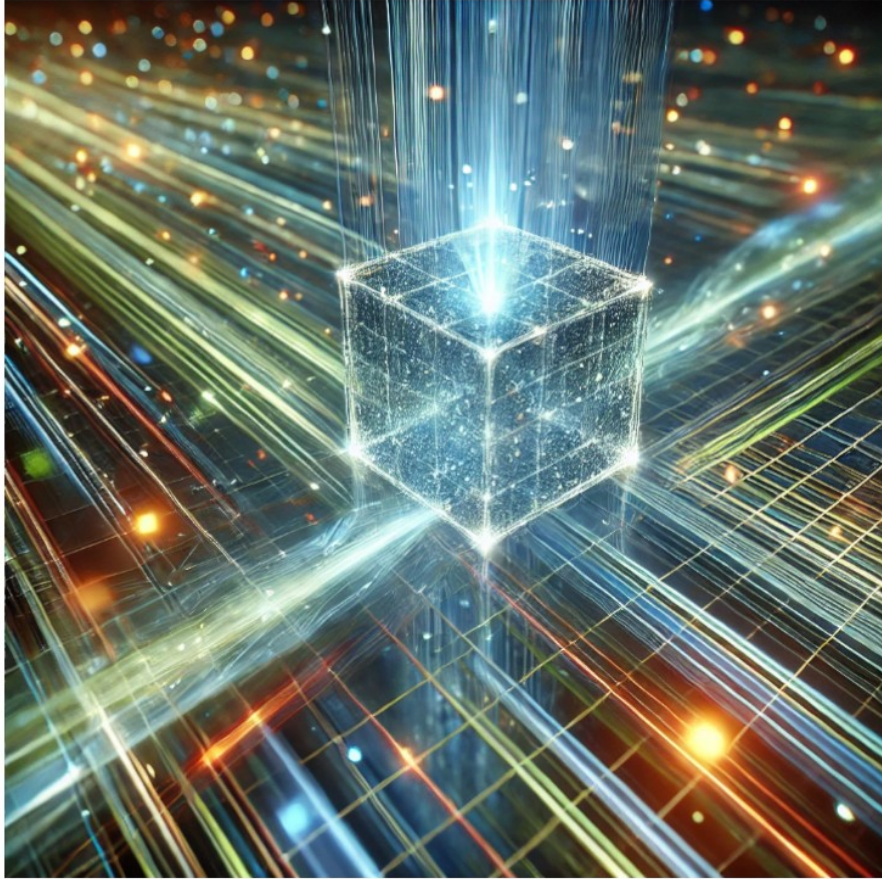
Its reduced bandwidth was another barrier. At best, it offered only a trickle of data—mere kilobytes per second—ensuring that even the most determined user faced a frustrating, painstaking journey. Yet corporations found one use for the decrepit system: a testing ground for experimental applications. Early betas of extreme software features were deployed there, products so unregulated and addictive that users sometimes lost their minds—or even their lives. Starvation deaths from obsessive engagement with these early applications weren't unheard of, though such stories were quickly buried under corporate PR campaigns.

Despite its obscurity, Luca understood something that the corporations never could: even in such degraded conditions, a single byte could carry enough information to change the world.