



MY REALITY APP

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CHAPTER 8: TRACKS



****Chapter 8: TrACks****

The report came through in the early hours of the morning, just as William was pouring his third cup of coffee. He scanned the details, and his heart skipped a beat. Another incident.

For months, William had been chasing whispers—complaints or reports of interruptions in the constant stream of advertisements fed into people’s augmented reality. Most citizens didn’t bother reporting such anomalies. Who would? Ads were an intrusive, despised part of daily life, a price everyone paid for access to the conveniences of My Reality. People grumbled about them, accepted them begrudgingly, and moved on.

But this... this was different.

The new report detailed a sudden, unexplained interruption. The affected individual was a college student in the sprawling cafeteria of a major university. On the surface, it seemed unremarkable: just another young man who likely chalked up the anomaly to a glitch. But to William, it was a beacon of hope—a thread to pull.

The first report had led nowhere, a dead-end investigation in a busy public space. But now, with a second incident in the same location, his instincts told him there was more to this than coincidence.



William dove into the video footage from the cafeteria during the reported time. The student in question seemed ordinary enough, his profile revealing nothing suspicious. But the cafeteria was a hive of activity, teeming with people coming and going. Over the course of an hour, the student had likely encountered over a thousand individuals—an overwhelming number of leads to sift through.

Still, William persisted. Methodically, he cross-referenced every face that appeared in the footage with the profiles logged in My Reality's database. His eyes burned from staring at the endless stream of data, but he pressed on. He couldn't let this slip through his fingers.

The profiles were as mundane as expected. Most of the students were preoccupied with trivialities—swapping lecture notes, nursing hangovers, or finding clever ways to purchase alcohol underage. There was no hint of a skilled hacker among them.

William turned his focus to the professors present during the hour. He flagged 20 individuals for closer scrutiny. Two, in particular, caught his attention: one from the electrical engineering department and the other a computer engineering specialist.



The computer engineering professor immediately piqued William's curiosity. A hacker, perhaps? Someone with the skills to manipulate My Reality's systems? But after a full day of digging into the man's background, William found nothing remotely incriminating. The professor's most notable pursuit was an independent video game project he'd been working on for five years. The poor guy was waiting for corporate approval to publish it—a near-impossible feat for anyone outside the Reality Labs conglomerate. William couldn't help but pity him. Another dead end.

The electrical engineering professor proved equally unremarkable, with little to his name besides a penchant for heavy drinking. The rest of the professors—specialists in medicine, economics, literature, and the like—led quiet, predictable lives. William noted their love of books, conferences, and academic musings but found no evidence to suggest any of them were capable of the level of sophistication required for the hack.

For three long months, the investigation ground to a halt. With no new reports, William began to lose hope. Each passing day without progress eroded his confidence, the weight of the unsolved mystery pressing heavier on his shoulders.



Then, another report landed on his desk.

The same university cafeteria. A different student. The same anomaly.

This time, William combed through the footage with renewed determination, scanning every frame for a lead. As before, the affected student appeared to be nothing special. But this time, something caught his eye.

A face.

Among the countless individuals captured in both incidents, one person appeared in the footage from both events: Sofia Carter.

William froze, his mind racing as he pulled up Sofia's profile. A historian and professor, her credentials seemed far removed from the technical expertise he'd been searching for. Yet her consistent presence in both cases was too significant to ignore.

Who was she? A coincidence? A connection?

He leaned forward, scrutinizing her records. Her history was unremarkable on the surface, but William's instincts told him there was something more. She didn't fit the profile he'd been building in his mind, but patterns didn't lie.



For the first time in months, William felt the spark of a lead. Sofia Carter had just become the focal point of his investigation.

And he was going to find out why.