

And now, allow me to present to you: **The Future.**

Will the spark fly poet stomped his feet.

“Ooooh baby- ooooh the world. The world aint ready for what I have to bring. Oooh-“

“What is it? What-?” Wills friend Abbey asked, busy, looking on her phone. They were in a Starbucks browsing AR competitions near Raleigh, North Carolina. Will braced himself and smiled a grit-eating grin, all teeth, all white.

“Max is coming to Red Hat Amphitheater.” He said in a husky voice, pulling from dramatic tension intent, but his friend Abbey didn’t catch the wind.

“Who’s that?”

“Max! Goofy’s son! Remember in that last goofy movie where he beat Loki and his army with just his bow staff?”

“OH yeah! We watched that at- Chris’ Luau? Yeah, his apartment was packed to the brim, Luau limit of 17 people! Well, there was nineteen but lets hope Apple doesn’t find out, haha, so we can keep partying with him- he’s a great curator!”

“Yeah I know! His Apple Vision System Bonsai had thirty flower nodules, and sometimes he has Mario Party games with almost that many people! I don’t know how he gets away with it. I love the design of the Vision System- I got the Orchid and I think Its cool how the flower pot houses the hardware and the flowers are the receivers.”

“Yeah, I have the see-through version. Isn’t the seventeen limit just for the fire Marshall/ fire hazard safety concern or something? Im trying to get my HOA and neighbors on board with buying a neighborhood Luau pass so we can host mini festivals with up to five houses and make some money on the app. Really, I don’t think anyone minds watching three to five minutes of ads in order to get a “Luau pass”. But Yeah. Also Im glad Disney made their characters fully live-action like Sonic. And now you can see them battle live in stadiums in AR or while we’re at home with Apple Vision, huh? My, my, my. How things have brightened, come alive.”

“I KNOW! It seemed just like yesterday when AI was- well, dumb. Took all the joy of creating out. I mean, I had fun with Grok, but it really felt like cheating- myself.”

“Exactly.” Will said, a spark of light in his eye. Abbey breathed,

“So do you still have that cash left over from when you competed to be the JoKing jester emperor whatever for a month? That Game of Throne’s interactive battle play thingy? How much did you make again?”

“Ten thousand dollars! I came in second place-“ He repeated again, grinning. “They’re going to put me in two episodes before killing me off, from what they told me.”

“Woww,” she said, underwhelmingly, not mentioning the product placements and interviews and trips round the world to meet celebrities and higher-ups. “So you think you can beat Max, huh? Only Atreaya has done that yet so far. Don’t you have to never know what you are doing? Or something? And of course if you beat Max you will need to battle Atreaya.”

“Nah, I can do it. I can be Max for a day. Maybe even a week! I just need to study him, figure out the algorithym. And as long as Atreaya doesn’t pull out his cello, I think I got him.”

“Ha! Good luck. You want me to look up when it is? Here”. Abbey said and pulled up a Bing search, which played a jazzy version of Max’s theme as a cinematic overlay to her search, following the movement of her fingers while she scrolled. There was a lilting interlude that sang out when she hovered over Orb, my up-and-coming collaborative writing game platform. She allowed targeted musical ads like these.

“Oh! Hey, have you heard of Orb? Apparently it’s a new writing game that can level you up- oh- lemme see, there’s fire for prose, water for storyline, earth for setting, air for dialogue and, oh, plasma for your , uhh, it says “je ne se quais”, or whatever that means.

“No, I know about it. That’s the secret sauce that makes people go Wow. Mine is humor.”

“Oh?”

"Yes, that's how I'm gonna beat Max. Make him laugh till his insides split in half. I'm gonna roast him on a spit and then shit him out my ass! Ha!" He snuffed. "That dog ain't got a chance! And I'll play my strat-" He said, reaching for his guitar. Abbey huffed.

"Well, you know he knows whether or not what you come up with is improvised, right? Do you wanna practice for a few hours in the Ticketmaster chat room for the arena? That's where they scout for more talent. Lemme just put the hashtag #AI on the end of my search to get into the social AI chat buzz room- okay, people are excited because Jedi Rento said he could beat Kendrick Lamar with a force lighting rain cloud. Did you want me to schedule you for a one-on-one with Rento for three minutes? There are thousands in the AI curated chat room thingy."

"I dunno. I just got humbled by the kool-aid man last week, I took a pretty public beating. That snarky ass mofo. I might need to take a rest."

"Yes, do that. Sometimes these interactive brand chat rooms can be a bit TOO hype and high pressure, if you catch me."

"Yeah." He laughed. "It's like jumping off a high dive. Woo!"

"Woo woo! Hey, YouTube AI just curated me a bunch of how-to videos and channels about beating artificially intelligent brands both in the chat rooms and in real life, wouldn't you know it! He said- this one guy uses tantric meditation to outmaneuver smart engines- the AI seemed pretty rified up about it. You want me to send you the playlist?"

"Sure." He said, fiddling on his instrument. "Can you look on Luau to see if any nearby AR parties need music? I'm really trying to get better at playing in the pocket. That's my secret sauce."

"Okay! This one's playing Dance Dance Revolution Battle Zones- with a guitarist needed. Want me to see if you qualify for the vibe check?"

"I hope I do! I got a little too tipsy at the last dark souls boss battle extravaganza and told this wizard to shit a brick. I will always remember that moment." He giggled to himself. I have almost 3,000 subscribers on Bloo - you know the sample and song sharing platform? For ten bucks a month you can subscribe to up to forty musicians/producers! Each artist gets 23 cents a month so that's about seven hundred dollars a month for me!"

"Wow, okay, so I guess we know who is paying for lunch." She laughed. "Lemme use Siri AI to find me the best restaurant in town- oh wow, the ad that I had to watch to get the best results is a cool synth battle game like from Scott Pilgrim Vs the world. The winner gets a spot at the Electric Daisy Carnival. You interested?"

"Nah, that synth stuff is for wusses. You don't even need to know how to play the piano, ha! My guitar magic will get me more places anyhow."

\_\_\_\_\_ Five Years Later \_\_\_\_\_

Abbey and Will met in Win D, my XR arcade/diner to catch up.

"Hey Will! Did you see my commercial for White Claw? With the drunken dogs?"

"Oh god. I saw the live AI chatroom where you pitched it, yeah. I never saw the finished product. Did you wanna play some 3D dungeons and dragons? Or 5D chess?"

"Nah, I am curious about what you have been doing. Tell me, did you ever get a character arc on Rick and Morty?"

"Nah, I came close. I've really been working on unifying my faction in Cyberpunk 2077: Rift Machines in Apple's fully immersive VR. That shit is addicting!"

"Ooh, I heard of that game! Personally, I am content with building my community and economy in Pokemon Plasma- I trained a gaggle of psyducks to hypnotize Mega Charizards to do my bidding! I became a gym leader in Ohio for a bit, even earned some money from sponsoring! Hehe. Its fun."

"Nice. Well the fully immersive VR, if you heard, is where you use Neuralink hardware and muscle memory techniques to fully, deeply control your gaming experience."

"Oh yeah! I heard of that. Isn't that like a handheld controller times twelve? Fully immersive, huh? Tell me about it!"

“Well, it takes a few minutes to get used to, but after a short while it gets really fun really fast. You just barely flex your muscles forward and around to control your character and environment- you even feel weightless when you fly around! The sky trawlers have six factions that are all battling for economic control over the skies, with twelve dominating the land- each has unique power over each other, like rock/paper/scissors.”

“Or like Pokemon! Fire beats grass, water beats fire, right?”

“Exactly. Some tech doesn’t work for some factions so we all have to battle for the ability to fully function and dominate in our sectors. I even won a ford mustang flight for three months- a flying car from the in-game tournaments!”

“Ooh lucky. I can’t afford a flying car yet- isn’t that like 300,000 dollars brand new?”

“Yeah, but if you have the money, its worth it, even just to timeshare it. Apple is even developing flying cities for people to play in like amusement parks in the sky! They use super light weight materials and everyone will be equipped with a “sonic moon bounce” tech so we can fly from platform to super giant platform! I was one of the first to beta test the experience- Youtube is going to release the Ad soon!”

“Haha damn. You are a lucky duck. Here, lemme buy you a drink, and maybe we can play Shadow of Colossus with a team, I got better at collaborating to fight the giant monster puzzles. Maybe some of your luck will rub off on me and I can get a flying voltwagen ladybug! Those are the cheapest, but also my favorite!”

“Okay, but lets not drink too much because I wanna play you in Mario Kart: Rumble. Im glad at least the rich can afford flying cars so the rest of us can duke it out on actual roads with our actual karts- I still cant believe that the AI system connected to the game can so easily bypass traffic with zero actual crashes!”

“Yeah, when you combine algorithms, things just work out easily.”

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Two Years Later

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“Abbey!” Will yipped, giving his longtime friend a bear hug. “Long time no see! Wow, how have you been?”

“Will! So glad to see you in sky Disney Land! Let me tell you- you are my favorite Iron Man, by far, even though you only had three days of that identity. So you got beaten by Tom Cruise as Dr. Doom, huh?”

“Yeah, he is just too- floridly psychotic for me to handle. Gives everyone the jibblies, like in that one movie Magnolia. You feel it Down your spine. What could I do? Everyone loves Tom Cruise. Ugh.”

“But now you have so much brand power! What on earth are you going to do with all of that craziness?” She almost whispered, in awe. “The thirty thousand person crowd went wild regardless-“

“Personally, I decided to keep going full subconscious immersion via the police trip sitters and play in the red light-blue-light sentient color immersive identity thingy. That! That is where the true artistry lies- to strip away all knowledge or awareness in dream mode of anything that could ever be apart from the game itself. Shew! No wonder it is only for people who are 25 and up. So many times I felt like I accidentally destroyed the planet or even died until a police officer shook me awake basically. There were a few times where they acted like a therapist, cautioning against love of violence and an affinity for the dark side.”

“Yeah, cuz they can relate, huh? Heheh. Love that redemption arc for the police.”

“Yeah! Last week I played as Rick from Rick and Morty and I was trying to keep my identity as “basically space Jesus” but Morty found an atlantean glyph based tech I was working on that accidentally created utopic peace throughout the universe!”

“That’s right, I remember awhile ago you were looking to be hired by Rick and Mortyverse. And now you are as a writer! Are you- are you okay? From that psychotic break?”

“Not yet! Haha, As rick, I was so incensed that my job of saving the universe was easily completed by Morty translating these glyphs-turned-words into the minds of all the universes’

villains! ! I got so upended that in order to get info on how to reverse it, I ended up fighting against an AI that somehow became all matter and consciousness in that dimension- building planets and suns and planet-sized space stations in a blink of an eye. It was wild! Basically Inception type shit haha. But I ended up deleting an entire dimension! Of universes! Accidentally! I was so absolutely terrified, that I had kind of a “scrooge moment”- a wake up of the soul and now I am just thankful to be alive and not the literal destroyer of universes, you know? Like OH MY GOD- I feel I have a new lease on life now!” He shook and took a deep breath. Abbey was worried and put a hand on his shoulder.

“And you felt that, all of the ramifications of deleting so many universes, completely, right? Kind of like a creative psychotic episode? Like, are you okay?? That sounds way intense. I don’t think I could do that.”

“Yes, Times twelve! I had to sign a release form and now I have therapy appointments, whew. I don’t care, really, this shit is too much fun. The coolest thing about subconscious immersion is that if you ever get close to a certain point of panic, something in the game tells you that you are just a human experiencing the vibrancy and awareness of the color red, and if you keep playing after that, its like having a lucid dream times blagahgahgah! Literally the coolest feeling imaginable. They know it too, haha, the corporations, as it costs about three hundred and fifty dollars to even have that experience.”

“Scary. Very amazingly scary. Haha. I could not handle that craziness. Well I for one am having fun with Soon- have you heard of Soon?”

“Yeah, the floating interactive acting game cruise company? That evolves with your every decision with the crew? I heard that gets SICK with AR. What brand or franchise or whatever are you working with?”

“Pirates of the Caribbean! We battle other pirate ships through group dance and AR magic weapons that level up as we go along. My troupe almost found Davy Jones’ locker! That interactive game show would have netted all of us at least forty thousand dollars each, but Instead we got invited to the pirate king’s lagoon in Nassau where we partied for a week and spent our in-game coin to procure a time-share in an avant-garde M.C. Escher-like castle playground/mansion, also in Nassau. We really bonded! Most of the time we spent making fun, acting reels for our many followers. I keep updating my modifiable clothes I bought from the Disney store to immerse my clothing to power up my AR weapons and creative lab instruments and potions and stuff. I love it when I see someone out and about wearing my faction’s sleeve magic cannon, for instance! That was partially my idea! You know how each faction starts with a specific sleeveless tee or warm vest and you can keep adding sleeves or pant legs and accessories and whatnot? And it all comes together amazingly in AR! Oh yeah. The lore and the meaning goes crazy deep there, I love how it keeps evolving. Im having a good time.”

“Wow. Wow. Wow wow. Wow. I spent all of my money on gambling on the like six dozen different tech-based sports that surround us now. I really wanted -“

So there you have it, friends. I see the future. And now the vision is yours. Look! Look at what riches, spoils, and fun that can be mined from my brainity brain! You are looking for something new and exciting, yes. I am here for you. Do you want to stay on the forefront of Spaceship Earth’s technology manifold? Be the forerunner of all things state of play? Which can be fun, eh? You think? I am sure, but hold on. Wait a minute. Let’s stir a little imagiNate into it. What if? What if you could not just be the sail on the ship that moves your vision forward, but the rudder as well? What if you could continue to steer the course of history not as a way to be immersed in a stellar device but as a starrydust dynamo state of play composium? What if you could have your cake and eat it too? What if you could make the internet great again, reaping the bounty from TRUE demand- which is collaborative generative competitive social gaming? And the like? Fun! Are you ready for fun? Because change is the only constant my friends, and my only wish is that you would join me in the new daydream complete as we steer your ship into the golden age. To the victor! The spoils! Ahoy?! Total Cosmic Amusement Park Land Ho!

