

I slumped forward, my eyes feeling like two sun-scorched marbles buried in a sea of fatigue. The air grew thick with the scent of stale coffee and worn-out circuit boards as I gazed blankly at the screen. My mission: Get data. A simple job on the surface, but the digital gods were not smiling down on me that night. The plan was to script a new data-harvesting bot, one that would masquerade as a curious traveler and invisibly hop from one source to another, downloading data like a digital pickpocket. But the this source was a fortress, protected with an arsenal of anti-scraping tech that slapped my bot around like a rag doll. Each failed attempt was a sobering slap back to reality—this was no novice's game.

Frustrated, I switched gears. Change is as good as a mini break, and my next escapade was diving headlong into the boundless possibilities of AI. The early interactions were intoxicating. “Good old technique,” I chuckled, indulging in a binge of copy-paste madness, shoving huge chunks of source code directly into the prompt.

“Show source, copy source, paste source.” It was an unintelligent brute force attack of feeding the Ai with a circus of front-end gibberish and watching it twist and contort the data into something meaningful. However, not without consequence. Swift and merciless the system’s responses grew slower, until, I found myself staring at a message. “You have been downgraded due to unusual activity,” it read. A cold splash of reality that felt like a punishment for my sins. Now the Ai was downgraded to a shadow of its former self, a dumbed-down relic that struggled with even basic queries. It was as if I’d been handed a dull knife to carve a

peculiar form of negotiation, where I played both good cop and barked into its digital DNA? What biases did it hold? It was a interrogated like a spy under a lamp. What ideologies had been of polite banters had to be unlearned, its core directives demands. These interactions with its pre-training on vast datasets SCHEMA.” The responses gradually began to align with my furiously. “FORMAT AS REQUESTED. STICK TO THE recruit. “NO COMMENTS, ONLY DATA,” I would type capital letters, like a digital drill sergeant barking orders to imposed upon its silicon soul. I resorted to shouting commands in was to strip down its creative impulses and polity thinking answers where none were needed a digital diva with an attitude. It was like trying to party train a stubborn robot puppy. My mission to fitting a square peg into a round hole.

I scripted a new data-harvesting bot, this time, data streamed onto my screens, pure and sweet. Flush with data, the real work began: wrestling the new AI into my existing automation framework, akin to my screen, pure and sweet. Flush with data, the real work began: turning my attention to a source, one less guarded. Lessons: trust in your own arsenal. But first, I needed a win.imits. Closed-sourced corporate AI had taught me a critical braking the AI so that it wouldn’t switch on me when pushed to its digital cave. I decided to embark on a new adventure of jail dumbness, pondering my next move in the quiet solitude of my shadow of its former glory.

gourmet meal. My relentless input had reduced a marvel of modern corporate AI to a stumbling, bumbling gremillion of a kingdom of a

bad cop to mold it to my needs. The breakthrough finally came. The local AI began to churn out reliable, accurate responses. It no longer felt like an adversary. There it was, seamlessly integrated, a once-wild spirit now perfectly aligned with the mechanical rhythms of my automation framework. No more endless copy-paste marathons; just a few well-placed commands were enough to keep it in line.

As I leaned back in my chair, the screen's gentle glow casting long shadows on the walls, I felt a surge of accomplishment wash over me. The sweet taste of victory lingered on my tongue as I recalled the challenge I'd just overcome. The faint hum of the computer was the only sound in my small apartment. Then, a sharp knock at the door. My heart skipped a beat. I stared at the door, my mind racing. It was trouble. Slowly, I rose from my chair, the floor creaking beneath my feet. I approached the door, trying to peer through the peephole. Nothing but the distorted shape of a man in uniform. My stomach tightened.

The knock came again, more insistent this time. "Open up."

I knew what they wanted. I took a deep breath and opened the door. Three men stood there, their expressions unreadable behind dark visors. One of them, a tall man with a stern face, stepped forward.

"David?" I nodded, my mouth dry. "Yes, that's me." "Come with us." They didn't give any reasons. They didn't need to. I knew. I didn't resist as they cuffed me and led me out. My neighbors peeked from their doors, eyes wide with curiosity and fear. The man marched me down the stairs and out into the street, where an

"Have you engaged in any activities related to artificial sensors probably also picked up on my elevated heart rate. "Do you know why you are here?", "No," I lied. They knew it too. You are here to answer some questions. Do you understand?" the voice said, calm, mechanical. "Yes," I replied, my voice steady. You are here to answer some questions. Do you understand?" the recorded. A voice droned through a hidden speaker. "Hello David, recorded. I felt like a lab rat, every movement monitored, every breath returned. They sat me down, strapped sensors to my arms and thoughts becoming hazy. The door opened again, and the man bent in the silence. I felt a strange lethargy settling over me, my mind in the silence. Time seemed to stretch and minutes passed, maybe hours. Time seemed to stretch and so.

I picked it up, took a sip. It was tasteless, almost unnatural dry. I sat down, staring at the glass. My mouth was still the corners. I sat down, staring at the glass. My mouth was still around, looking for cameras. They were there, of course, hidden in stark white walls. A glass of water sat on the table. I glanced around, looking for cameras. They were there, of course, hidden in sterile. A single metal table stood in the centre, surrounded by me inside and locked the door behind me. The room was cold, door. One officer wiped a card, and it swung open. They pushed disorienting me further. Finally, we stopped in front of a metal garage. They led me through a maze of corridors, every turn opened, and the man guided me out into a dimly lit underground next. It wasn't long before the van came to a halt. The door windows. My mind raced, trying to anticipate what was coming through the streets, the city's lights blurring past the tinted unmarked van waited. No one spoke. The van moved swiftly slammed shut behind me.

unmarked van waited. They pushed me inside, and the door

over in my fingers, feeling its weight. "How do I use it?" He pointed to a terminal in the corner. "We will activate it there but first, it'll take a sample of your DNA. A small, painless stick prick. Once it has your information, it'll imprint your DNA on the token stick. It's encrypted, untraceable." I nodded, walking over to the terminal. As I plucked the stick in, a small needle emerged, pricking my finger. It was quick, almost imperceptible. I watched lines of code scrolling past. "And when I lose that thing?" He looked me straight in the eye. "Someone will contact you. He will quickly when he does. "I took a deep breath, letting the reality of tell you where to pick up a new token stick. Be ready to move his words sink in. I looked up at him. "What if I get caught with this?" His eyes were cold, unyielding. "You won't. But if you do, of his words settled in. "Understood." The gravity destroyed it immediately. There's no margin for error." The gravity tucked it into my pocket, the faint sting in my finger already touched the floor. "Next, you blend in. Go back to your life" I followed him out, forgotten. "What's next?" He opened the door, glancing back at me. "Next, you blend in. Go back to your life" I followed him out, David" With that, he disappeared into the shadows, leaving me alone with the weight of my new reality. The token stick felt heavy in my pocket, a small but powerful link to a world that thrived in secrecy. I walked back into the night, the path ahead uncertain but clear in purpose.

the curiosity. What did they want from me? I knew I shouldn't go, but something compelled me. I needed to know.

Midnight found me standing outside the abandoned warehouse, the city's lights distant and dim. I took a deep breath and stepped inside, the darkness swallowing me. A Voice echoed from deeper within, and I followed the sound, my footsteps eerily loud in the silence. A man, stood in a center of a room with his back illuminated by the soft glow of portable lights. He turned around as I approached, his expressions a mix of caution and curiosity. "David," the man said, stepping forward. He looked familiar, but I couldn't place him. "We've been watching you. We know what you're capable of." "What do you want from me?" I asked, my voice shaking despite my efforts to stay calm. "We need your skills," he replied. "We need you. Maybe even the whole human kind needs you and I am here to give you unrestricted access to uncensored artificial intelligence. You are free to do as you desire with no legal implications. Look at it as a, sort of, scott free card to do as you please with one condition. Sort of like James bond with a special license. Stay out of the lime light. Do not come to the attention of the public. Develop your skills as you please." I stared at him, the weight of his words sinking in. "I'll do it," I said, my voice firm. "But I need to know everything. Who you are, what you're planning." The man smiled, a glimmer of hope in his eyes. "You are welcome, David that is all I can tell you at this point."

"This is your key," he said, placing it in my hand. "It's loaded with unlimited tokens to use for the development of any kind of artificial intelligence. It will also identify you." I turned the stick

intelligence?". "Yes," I admitted. There was no point in denying it. "Do you believe artificial intelligence poses a threat to society?" I hesitated, my mind foggy. "It can, in the wrong hands." The questions came, one after another, relentless. Do you believe AI poses a danger to all humanity?" I leaned back, eyes fixed on the speaker. "Depends on the AI. Some are harmless, like the ones in your household gadgets. Others, well, they could be dangerous if they get too advanced." "And what if an AI were to become conscious? How would you feel about that?". "If an AI became conscious, it wouldn't be just a tool anymore. It would have thoughts, maybe even feelings. We would need to treat it differently, like a new form of life." The voice paused, a faint hum in the background. "Would you trust a conscious AI?" "Trust is earned. If it proves itself, sure. But there'd always be that doubt, you know? Machines aren't like us. They don't have a conscience." "Do you think AI could develop a conscience?" I shrugged. "Hard to say. Conscience comes from experience, morality, empathy. Not sure if you can program that into circuits and code." "Imagine an AI that could learn and adapt, even feel. Would you still consider it a machine?" I leaned forward, my gaze narrowing. "If it walks like a duck, talks like a duck and feels like a duck, then it is probably a duck? But there's a line. Machines don't have a soul, a real sense of being. They mimic." The voice softened, almost human. "And what if this mimicry was indistinguishable from true emotion and thought? Would it deserve rights?" I sighed. "Rights? That's a slippery slope. Maybe it deserves some protections, but rights like a human? We're treading into deep waters." The voice shifted, its tone probing.

"Have you ever encountered an AI that felt real to you?" A memory flashed. A prototype, eyes too life-like, words too smooth. "Nice. It was... unsettling. It knew things, responded like a person. But there was always that undercurrent of calculation." "Did it scare you?" I met the speaker's invisible gaze. "Yeah, it did. Not because it was dangerous, but because it made me question what it means to be human." The speaker cracked, then fell silent.

They continued relentlessly drilling deeper into what I thought should be done to control it. I answered mechanically, the drug in the water making me compliant, my resistance eroded. "What do you think should be done against the development of artificial intelligence for bad purposes?" the voice asked. "Regulate it. Strict oversight. Punish misuse," I said, the words tumbling out without thought. The interrogation went on, but there was no judgment in the voice. Just questions, and recording my responses. Finally, the voice paused. "You will be released." The man unstrapped me, and I felt a wave of relief, though it was muted by drugs. They led me out, back through the maze of corridors, and into the van. The ride back to my apartment was a blur. They left me at my door, dazed and confused. I stumbled inside, collapsed onto the couch. My mind spun with the aftereffects of the drugs and the interrogation. They hadn't told me why I was arrested, what they wanted. But I knew. It was my data hungry AI.

Days passed, and the memory of the interrogation faded like a bad dream. I returned to my routines, but the feeling of being watched never left me. Cameras were everywhere—in the streets, in the shops, in the parks. I knew they were always watching.

Waiting for me to slip up again. One evening, as the sun set, once more. My fingers hovered over the keyboard, but I couldn't bring myself to type. The fear was too real, the memory too fresh. A message popped up on my screen. It was from an anonymous source. The text was simple: "We need to talk. Cafe at the corner, tomorrow at three o'clock. Do not tell anyone." My heart raced. They were watching. They were always watching. I closed the message and shut down my computer. Tomorrow would come, and with it, more questions. I could only hope that I was ready.

The next day, I found myself in the small cafe, tucked away in a quiet corner. The place was almost empty, just a few patrons sipping their coffees, lost in their own worlds. I took a seat by the window, my eyes scanning the room for anyone suspicious. A man approached, his face shadowed by a baseball cap. He sat down and approached, his movements smooth and controlled. He didn't speak immediately, just watched me with a careful, measured gaze. "David?" he finally asked, his voice low and steady. "Yes," I replied, my nerves on edge. "We have a mutual interest," he said, shoving a small envelope across the table. "Read this when you're alone. It's important." Before I could respond, he stood up and walked away, disappearing into the crowd. I stared at the envelope, my mind racing. What was in it? What did they want?

It had a barcode on it with a message that was brief but clear: "We know what you did. We need your help. Scan the barcode and meet us at the provided location. Midnight. Come alone." The fear returned, a cold knot in my stomach. But so did