

"Drops to Zero"

by Chris Marek

December 31

Five!

The ball descended, its neon light shifting from blue to green, its beams stabbing the onlooker's eyes.

Four!

Their collective queasiness hung palpably in the silence between the counts.

Three!

Thousands of sweat-drenched foreheads caught the glow of the ball, reflecting the green, then yellow. The lower halves of their faces caught, instead, the bright white glow of the screens shining off their wrists.

Two!

That voice, like the Antichrist signaling the approach of apocalypse, — It didn't announce so much as sing out the numbers.

Commented [GK1]: Since there are multiple onlookers

Commented [GK2]: check

Commented [GK3]: Merriam-Webster says this word is typically "Antichrist" but "antichrist" is included as a less common variant

Commented [GK4]: This fragment may have been a stylistic choice, but it felt a little clunky to me.

It reverberated like two overlapping, incongruent sounds, foreign to each other, unfriendly. One voice smoothly sang its tenor libretto, guiding its audience gloriously to some zealous finale; the other sang its bass, flat, almost machine-like vibrato. It was like the powers that be had tried to replace the old hopeful shouts of the masses with an artificial counterpart, but the machine itself, rebelling even in its own indentured obedience, refused to welcome the New Year. Yellow lights became orange.

One!

Became red.

The New Year emerged in silence. Not the peaceful silence of the sequestered pasture, though. When thousands stand in silence, it's not really silence; their reverence, their awe, their anxiety, their fear, scream as loudly as any riot.

Thousands of eyes scrambled desperately over half as many Life365 screens.

Slowly, heads lifted. Voices tiptoed out tentatively. The occasional murmur preceded the occasional whoop of joy. Some faces in the crowd revealed tears and smiles like cancer patients informed of remission.

But for every relieved face, another contorted in worry. Blank eyes stared outward, lost in thought, calculating, as if planning some complicated military maneuver against an

Commented [GK5]: Here the word "like" makes it sounds like the voice isn't actually two overlapping sounds, but just seems like it's two overlapping sounds because it's reverberating. However, in the next sentence, it sounds like the voice actually does have two sounds that overlap

Commented [GK6]: Cut?

Commented [GK7]: Merriam-Webster says one word, no hyphen

Commented [GK8]: Tentative voices tiptoed out

impossible enemy. Lips moved soundlessly. Like zombies, life could only be detected in these people's physical movement, but any semblance of humanity seemed dead in them.

Clark stood at the edge of the crowd, still looking at his wrist. The same message had been scrolling sideways for about a minute now, just slow enough to tighten his chest, restrict his breathing. "10% D.E. 2025. Happy New Year!" At the end, an emoticon of a smiling face accompanied the message, apparently telling him how he should react to the knowledge that in 2025, he would have a one in ten chance of dying.

From Life As We Know It: Studies in Life365 and Its National and Global Impact, by Fischer, Fourcade, and Lara-Millan (University of California Press: 2024), p. 3:

Fundamentally, the algorithm's almost ubiquitous presence in developed countries begs the question: what is the Life365 smartwatch's effect on mankind? And the answer is: who knows? In the beta stage, close followers of its development were polarized. They, like those who eyed cryptocurrency in its earliest germ, saw it as either salvific or apocalyptic. Some believed it would launch the world into a utopia of enlightened personal and ecological improvement. Others, though, cautioned the world against any profit-driven product born in the captivity of capitalism. But who was right?

Well, so far ~~they both are~~both of them are. Or no one is.

As far as averages go, American citizens, for example, are still sitting comfortably at their same slightly overweight mean. But when we look closely, we see that more Americans have moved away from the mean, by either~~by~~ losing or gaining weight. Additionally, drastic changes to medical practices and status quo seem to stem from ~~the age of~~ Life365: doctor's visits have increased by 4,000% for Americans with 3% Death Expectancy (D.E.) or higher, medical facilities in low-income communities have tripled, and assisted care facilities in higher~~--~~income facilities have nearly doubled and so have their prices. These are just some of the many ways Life365 is shifting the world's health paradigm; the question is, what will it do next?

Commented [GK9]: Chicago 5.244

Commented [GK10]: Removed this because the age of Life365 doesn't seem to be impacting these numbers--more the program itself. Could also change to "the increased prevalence" or something like that

Commented [GK11]: Or "---along with their prices"
", along with their prices" (to avoid repetition of the word 'and')

January 1

Clark caught the penny in his meaty palm then quickly slapped it on top of his other hand. Heads. Three in a row. Almost arrogantly, he ~~He almost arrogantly~~ rolled the coin over his honeybun sticky fingers. For a moment, he let it sit, studying the Union shield and "E Pluribus Unum," forgetting what exactly that phrase meant. *Something about having to go to court?* He shrugged. His index finger snapped the coin into the air again, the copper glint flashing high above his head. While

Commented [GK12]: To avoid the implication that he "almost" rolled the coin over his hand, but didn't actually go through with it

Commented [GK13]: Italicizing mottoes from other languages (Chicago 7.62)
Would consider lowercasing as per MW, but I've found many gov sites that capitalize, so I think either works

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Commented [GK14]: To avoid the implication that he is wondering what the Union Shield means

Commented [GK15]: Consider, "He snapped the coin into the air again with his index finger"

the coin floated above him, a voice jolted him out of his concentration. "So where'd you end up?"

Clark fumbled the coin to the patio. It spun on its axis as he looked up to his sister. "Huh?"

"Your D.E.?" she clarified.

"Oh. 10%."

Lisa cracked her back, then neck, while chomping a raw carrot. She squinted in thought. "Interesting."

Clark frowned. His sister was one of those people who had a lot to say about a lot of things, but never quite told you how she felt. Since he'd moved in with her, she would tell him every terrifying fact he needed to know on either about both sides of an issue, without taking a stand either way, then toddle off all bubbly, leaving Clark questioning everything, maybe even asking questions he never would have asked without her interference in his blissful ignorance.

Life365 was one of those issues. All other conversations transformed into the topic, somehow. "You're eating bBrussels sprouts? Greens haven't changed people's percentages much." "Why aren't you looking at hourly wage jobs r too? There's no discernible connection between D.E. and whether or not you have full time wages or a higher salary." "Why are you so sad? Single men 28 and older have a better D.E. than married ones."

Commented [GK16]: "and it dropped on the patio", "and it fell to the patio"? "fumbled it to the patio" might sound a little strange

Commented [GK17]: To avoid repetition of "either" (also sounds like intended sense is closer to "both")

Commented [GK18]: "maybe even things he never would've questioned without her interfering with his blissful ignorance" -would be a lot clearer and more streamlined while maintaining original meaning

Commented [GK19]: MW lists lowercase as primary usage

Commented [GK20]: Chicago 6.52

Commented [GK21]: This phrase was implied-cutting it makes the dialogue sound more natural and streamlined

Commented [GK22]: Would we like to keep this age as a numeral or write it out?

He stared at the penny. "Why is it interesting?" he asked her.

Commented [GK23]: Could probably cut this - it's already implied he's asking her a question. Could help establish reader in the scene more

"Well, not to freak you out or anything, but 10% is pretty high, isn't it?"

"Is it?"

"Well, depending on your point of view. Did you know that 99% of Americans have 3% D.E. or lower?"

He picked the last bite of honeybun up off its wrapper, functionally a plate, that was sitting on the patio table near him. "I mean, yeah, but 96% of Americans have a 10% or lower, if you want to look at it that way," he rebutted confidently, pieces of honeybun flecking his lips.

Commented [GK24]: Is "rebutted" the right since of the word here? Would "retorted" be better?

She entered the side plank pose, her well-defined abdomen protruding under her cropped gray tank top. "Like I said, depends on how you see things. Ten percent seems kind of low, for sure. But plenty of things happen to you every day that only had a ten percent chance of happening or less."

Commented [GK25]: I'd recommend reworking the sentence to have 10% as a numeral instead of written out (since this is the only place in the story where 10% is a numeral) Perhaps, "For sure, 10% seems kind of low"

He smiled at her. "Well if I find out you showered today, I'll be a little more worried."

Commented [GK26]: Same as previous comment

Lisa was unperturbed. "So what's with the penny?"

Clark stopped smiling, then looked back down at the coin on the ground. Abraham Lincoln sat pensively, looking forward, not knowing what the world would unleash upon his future. Clark picked up the penny and flipped it around.

"Well... Okay, so I was thinking about the 10%. It sounded too high for comfort, honestly. But I needed to be more practical than abstract, I guess, before I freaked out. So to make myself feel better, I decided I'd flip the coin ten times, and if I got heads nine times or tails nine times, then I could be scared."

Lisa started laughing. Clark took no offense, choosing to smile with her. "I know. It's ridiculous no matter how you look at it. But either way, I feel better."

"And why is that?" Lisa asked, wiping a tear from her eye.

"Well, my first three were all tails, which scared me, naturally."

"Naturally."

"Right, but then I got two heads in a row, then tails again, then three heads in a row. All in all, your basic averages, it seems like. Nothing like 10% at all."

"You mean nothing like math at all."

Clark frowned. "What do you mean?"

Lisa sat on the concrete and stretched her legs in a V. She leaned forward like a yoga instructor and talked to the ground below her. "I mean, the odds of getting nine heads or nine tails in a row isn't 10%. It's more like..." She sat up and tapped her Life365, then tapped it a few more times. "...less than .01%."

"Really?"

Commented [GK27]: This needs to consistently be either "ten percent" or "10%"

"Really."

Clark scowled down at Abraham Lincoln, suddenly less convinced he was the most popular president in history. Lisa burst out laughing. When she found the air to speak again, she said, "Wow. Sounds like ~~eE~~conomics majors beat out ~~mM~~management majors 100% of the time. Maybe that's why I've got a job." She started to laugh again but quickly stifled it.

Commented [GK28]: Chicago 8.29

Clark felt a stab of pain in his chest.

"I'm, uh... I'm sorry."

Clark closed his eyes and breathed deep. His frown disappeared. "Don't worry about it. It's true. So what has about a 10% chance of occurring when flipping coins?"

Lisa lay~~id~~ back and lifted one leg almost all the way back ~~toward-over~~ her shoulder, stretching out her quads and glutes in a way Clark hadn't ~~ever~~ never done. "I think ~~if you~~ ~~flipped~~flipping the same thing four times in a row, ~~that~~ has a little less than a 10% chance, though three in a row is a little more than 10%. Did you ever get four in a row?"

Commented [GK29]: I'm so proud I caught this one!!! I've never found it in the wild

Commented [GK30]: "toward her shoulder" doesn't quite make since here

Clark looked back at Lincoln and decided his face looked hopeless after all. He sensed his blood pressure rising. "Not quite. Hey," he transitioned, "Did you happen to call Mom after New Year's?"

"Nope. As far as I'm concerned, that woman is 100% D.E."

"Ouch. Does that mean you stopped paying Wild Oaks?"

Lisa grunted. "No. I'm not *that* vindictive."

Clark nodded understandingly. "Let's call it 90%, then."

"Deal." Lisa sat up. "You know, children of single-parent homes have an average D.E. that's ~~sef~~ .5% higher than two-parent homes."

"Oh~~r~~ yeah? Well, what are the odds of this killing me faster?" Clark ripped open a honeybun and slid three quarters of it into his mouth. He beamed at his sister with bulging cheeks.

Lisa shrugged. "Can't hurt."

Commented [GK31]: Chicago 6.35

From *Life As We Know It*, p. 8-9:

A Yale survey ~~from~~ⁱⁿ the ~~f~~^Fall of 2024 suggests that 47% of Americans are "doubtful" of Life365's projections. However, about 89% of Americans now own some iteration of the Life365 Smartwatch, now with three models released and a fourth on the way.

Commented [GK32]: Original makes it sound like the three and the fourth are all on the way

However, without going into too much detail, suffice it to say that Life365 is, pardon our pun, *deadly* accurate (for an exhaustive breakdown of all the numerical and statistical data proving Life365's accuracy, see Callon's *Life or Death Expectancy*, Yale University Press, 2024). With billions of humans wearing the device worldwide in an almost unthinkable number of political, social, psychological, economic, cultural, and biological contexts, with even more infinite individual

contexts of the wearers, Life365 essentially enlists

~~exponentially more~~ participants in an ongoing, unending study.

Greek oracles couldn't have more knowledge. In effect, Life365

knows more about our lives, and our fates, than we ever could,

and it only grows more knowledgeable by the second.

Commented [GK33]: Removed since growth probably isn't actually exponential if billions are already wearing the watch. Also, the purpose of the sentence seems to be about the research collected--not necessarily continued growth

Commented [GK34]: Might be more sub editing, but this sentence feels out of place, especially for a scientific research article. Mostly because Greek oracles didn't actually have any knowledge.

February 1

Clark snapped awake. He didn't set his 6:00 a.m. alarm on most Saturdays, but today was different. Sometimes on the first

day of the month, he liked to wait, imagining what his watch

would reveal to him. He examined and reexamined several life

choices ~~he had made~~ and events ~~in his life~~, all in light of

several hypothetical percentages he might see on Life365. The

importance of his divorce, his layoff, his health, and dozens

of other discernible variables ~~all~~ soared or plummeted ~~in his~~

~~estimation as he ran them by different possibilities as he estimated~~

~~their impact on his possible~~ D.E.'s. Then he would look down at

the real number and begin the real reaction, think about the

real consequences, conduct the real analysis required.

Commented [GK35]: Do we want to fully write this out as 6:00 a.m.? Or keep as-is?

Commented [GK36]: The original sentence was a little confusing and ambiguous. I tried to revise it to make what's going on a little clearer

He tapped the watch. 10%. While this didn't initially make him feel better, it also didn't make him feel worse, which, in a way, made him feel better. He had come to terms with the number a month ago, so seeing it again left him comfortably assured. He could wait another month to react.

He tapped and swiped the watch. 6:17 a.m. He swiped again to see his daily to-do list. Somehow, he always forgot what he planned only a few hours earlier, even though it was always the same: exercise, meal plan, look for jobs, read for thirty minutes, watch Netflix for one hour or less. Today's also added, "cCall Mom" between "meal plan" and "look for jobs."

He swiped and tapped again to see his messages with Kayla. It showed "Read at 10:11 p.m." underneath the message he'd sent yesterday afternoon. She'd never responded.

Clark locked the screen and fell back asleep.

At around 1 p.m., he woke up, starving. He trudged to the kitchen, then threw leftover pizza into Lisa's new multipurpose air fryer and convection oven. He'd had spent all day the day before yesterday learning about the machine, telling Lisa all the ways it could help him with his diet. "What diet?" she'd asked.

At 7 p.m., Lisa walked in the door and found Clark asleep in the recliner, drool making a trail down the corner of his mouth onto yesterday's shirt. Her television asked her, "Are you still watching?" She turned it and the overhead light off, retreating quietly to her room. Clark lay dead asleep.

From *Life As We Know It*, p. 39-41:

In general, American morality, depending on how one defines it, has not improved as a result of Life365, contrary to many

Commented [GK37]: Or "kitchen and threw"

Commented [GK38]: "trailing"?

Commented [GK39]: This section doesn't really talk about morality--it talks about more about consumption/addiction. I would consider changing this word to "consumption" and removing "depending on how one defines it"

early hypotheses. For every American who quits smoking, another one ~~took~~-takes it up. For every drug user who ~~kicked~~-kicks the habit, another ~~geets~~ hooked, perhaps seeing their D.E. as a gateway. In general, Americans have never consumed as much as they have since the advent of Life365, as if for the first time in history everyone ~~was-is~~ ~~totally-completely~~ confident in what they need~~ed~~ to be eating, drinking, smoking, or otherwise putting in their bodies. Generally, Life365 tells us that Americans are either trying to beat their D.E. through consumption, or they've accepted their own destruction, still evident by over-consumption of "sins" the world~~s~~ has always provided.

Commented [GK40]: Since the rest of the article talks in present tense, I changed this to match

Commented [GK41]: Or, "people are"

Commented [GK42]: "totally" sounded a little too casual for this, so I changed it

March 1

Clark's eyes blinked hard at his watch.

12%.

He tried to do some math. How much worse is a 2% increase?

Obviously, it was statistically negligible. But was it? Of course it was worse, but should he even react to it?

It felt a lot worse.

He let his arm fall limp at his side as he stood naked in his bathroom, glaring at himself in the mirror, his feet cold against the tiles. He felt a sharp line of numbness run through his arm and into his fingers, then he felt his fingers ~~cle~~-inch

Commented [GK43]: MW says this is the word we're looking for

and flex like there was a cramp in his hand. Sweat filmed over his face and bulbous body. He felt disgusting. But some part of him knew he ~~hadn't~~~~didn't~~ ~~felt~~~~et~~ as disgusting before he looked at the watch.

He stepped onto the scale, ready to confront another number. Three seconds stretched into what felt like hours of self-loathing and anxiety. He imagined his watch waiting on the result predatorily, swallowing the data and inflating his D.E. for every piece of bad news in his life. He held his hand behind his back as if to hide the watch from the data, but he told himself the number was already 13%, that the watch knew. He watched the scale settle onto 271 pounds.

Commented [GK44]: In a previous paragraph, the watch's number was listed at 12%-- has it gone up since then? It doesn't sound like it has

A pound and a half? How could he have gained a pound and a half? Hadn't he gone for his walks every day last week? He'd even got ten a wrap instead of a pastry at Starbucks while he was job hunting, and that 'd taken~~took~~ some effort.

His phone buzzed on the counter. He sprinted in place for three seconds to counteract the three seconds of inactivity on top of the scale. His phone buzzed. He grabbed it, even though he could check it just as easily on the watch. "New Voicemail, Kayla M." What? Why did it go straight to voicemail?

He ignored the message and tapped Kayla's name. It rang out and went to her voicemail.

"Hi, you've reached Kayla Arnaud at Frontline Realtor's Group. Please leave a message so I can return your call!"

He hung up before the beep. He hadn't heard that kind of joy in her voice in a long time.

From *Life As We Know It*, p. 76-77:

In July of 2020, Scott Kolodziej—otherwise known as Scotty K to his legions of fans and followers—began building and coding the Life365 app (he quickly changed the name from GrimReaper ~~to~~). The then 23-year-old computer science student released a beta for his project, encouraging thousands to use the app so it could build data for its complex algorithm.

Within a year, Scotty K had ten million users, a rapidly growing number, and he proudly proclaimed 98% accuracy for users, a percentage which was also rising rapidly.

Famously, in January of 2024 Scotty K abruptly announced ~~an~~ abrupt he had a 69% D.E. His company's ~~s~~Stocks dipped significantly. After doctors diagnosed Scotty K free of any terminal or serious health problems, however, the upstart millionaire looked to his obesity and licentious lifestyle as culprits.

Scotty K used social media to chronicle his journey to physical fitness and sobriety, raking in the side profits from his various social media accounts, of course. By October that

Commented [GK45]: Chicago 6.13

year, the stocks had evened back out, selling for about what they sell for today.

Commented [GK46]: This doesn't quite make sense--wouldn't his stocks continue to increase? No one wants the stocks to plateau. It also wouldn't quite make sense for this phrase to appear in a published book. Perhaps "the stocks had evened back out and returned to their steady rise"?

By the end of 2024, Scotty K sold his former graduate school side project for \$605.8M, citing the need to "work on himself" without the pressure of running a billion-dollar company. He now ~~makes his homelives~~ in Belize, blissfully detached from Life365, having thrown away his watch soon after selling his company.

April 1

Lisa increased the resistance on her elliptical. "Maybe it's time you did something about it."

"Like what?" Clark asked. His eyes flitted across the chess board on his phone screen, his shaking hands precariously sliding his white bishop. He counted'd captured four pawns, both knights, and both bishops to his credit. The black side held his white--square bishop and a knight, as well as four of his ~~own~~ pawns.

Commented [GK47]: Are these the pieces he has captured? Because on my first readthrough it sounded like these were the only pieces he'd had left. I revised the sentence to make that less ambiguous

"Like take better care of yourself or something."

"You said yourself that the data doesn't really suggest that diet and exercise affect high percentages much."

Commented [GK48]: Perhaps just "other bishop"? The reader might not care whether it's his white-square bishop or black-square bishop--unless maybe if they're really into chess

The black pawn at a7 crept out of its starting position for the first time, moving forward two spaces.

"Right, but maybe it will help you long term. 25% isn't as bad as it looks, but you're trending the wrong direction. Even if you make it—"

"Gosh, Lisa."

"Even *when* you make it through this year, you'll have to make it through the ones after, too." She ~~started~~ ~~squeezingsqueezed~~ water into her mouth, her eyes tethered to her tablet. "If you don't change your habits now, you won't need to keep looking at your D.E. You'll just be D."

"Your critique of my life can go ahead and d ~~D-~~ right now, sis."

Clark moved a pawn forward, tempting his artificial ~~opponent's~~ recently moved pawn. As he held his finger down and scanned the pieces, white and black blurred together for a moment. Clark inhaled deeply. Then his eyes refocused and he lifted his finger.

Lisa shut off the iPad and stepped off the elliptical. She studied Clark as she towed sweat from her face. "Mom called me last night. I caved and answered. She told me a couple of interesting things."

Interesting. That word again. "And?"

"For one, her D.E. is 89%."

His brows lifted minutely. "Wow," he muttered nonchalantly, studying the board.

Commented [GK49]: Since there is only one opponent

"I mean, I know we ~~didn't~~ expect anything less. She's kind of old." She shrugged. "And sad."

"Statistics don't like that, huh?"

"No. They don't."

Clark looked up at his sister. "Well, doesn't seem like we need to plan ahead with Mom then, does it?"

The artificial player took the bait, attacking pawn to pawn. Clark smiled. *You ~~could-can~~ always count on ~~B~~beginner difficulty, he thought. ~~It'-was~~ predictable.*

Lisa frowned, then let her face soften somberly. She bit her lip. "No. I guess not."

"But I'm with you. I don't need to wait until I'm at 89% to start making changes. I promise you, sis, I'll be up and running, literally, tomorrow morning. I'm going to plan my future, one move at a time."

Clark looked back at his game. He stroked his chin, his jowls jiggling in contemplation. His thick finger moved the white queen out diagonally to take the pawn. Check. The black pawn at d7 stepped forward one space to protect its king, leaving itself vulnerable.

Clark looked back up at his sister. Her hands were on her hips. "Oh. Right. **The other thing?**"

Lisa let her arms drop and sat down next to Clark. "Mom said Kayla called her yesterday."

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Commented [GK50]: Perhaps change to "Oh. Right. Mom said something else?" Just because the reader might not remember that Mom told Lisa more than one thing (since it was a page earlier) Could then change the next dialogue to just "Kayla called her yesterday"

His chest tightened. ~~Suddenly~~ ~~He~~ he felt like he was coming up for air. He hoped he hid the staccato exhalations, his heaving chest, his moistening brow. "Oh."

"Apparently ~~Kayla~~~~she~~ was upset you didn't try to call her Thursday. The 30th."

Clark's face did everything it could to contain the confusion, the desperation he felt, not to mention the guilt at having forgotten their anniversary, something he did all too often when they'd actually had anniversaries.

"Have you called her lately?" Lisa asked.

"Who, Kayla?"

"Your ex-wife, yes."

"Sure. I tried yesterday, actually. In the morning. She must've gone into work early or something. She's a workaholic, I guess."

"What time did you call her?"

Clark checked his Life365. Tap. Swipe. Tap, tap. "8:36. She doesn't ~~even~~ start work until 9."

Lisa frowned distrustfully at her brother. "Give me your watch."

Feigning nonchalance, Clark snapped off the watch and handed it over. Then he moved back to his game. He moved his remaining knight into position to set up the trap, pretending to

ignore his sister tapping through the settings on his Life365. Suddenly a black rook slid down the board to the bottom. Check.

"Clark!" She slapped the watch ~~back~~ onto his lap and pointed to the world clock settings. "Are you even alive? You do realize the world keeps moving forward even while you laze on my chair and play freaking chess and eat all my food?"

Commented [GK51]: Since it wasn't on his lap to begin with

At first confused, Clark looked down at the watch, wondering what she meant. Then he remembered. He set the time forward an hour and closed the watch, putting it back on silently.

She went on, "I've told you so many times that your stupid outdated watch doesn't automatically update with daylight savings. Get a freaking new one." She ~~started to stormed~~ from the room but stopped at her bedroom door. She turned back to him. "I know we have problems with Mom, but there's something nice about the fact that Kayla still calls her, right?"

Commented [GK52]: Since actually storming from the room implies she leaves

Clark stayed silent. He moved his ~~k~~king up the board to break the check.

"And have you thought about what a good sign that is? You still have a chance."

Clark looked up at a picture of himself, his mother, and his sister on the wall, everyone looking happy. He looked slimmer, sleeker. "It's like you said: you need to start planning a few more moves ahead, or you're going to lose her for

good." As she disappeared into her bedroom, she left him with, "Call your ex-wife," like a time bomb.

Clark clutched his chest, which felt swollen, constrictive. He looked back at his phone as the black queen slid down to the second to last row, covering his king, who was pinned near the corner.

Checkmate.

From *Life As We Know It*, p. 186-187:

Of course, historically, with any massive cultural shift comes a vocal, sometimes violent ideological response. When pProtestants challenged foundational church norms, when women challenged voting laws, when American people of color have, and do, challenged social and economic inequality (as they still do), and all were met with violent resistance.

Life365 hardly seems to qualify as worthy of the same revulsion and revolt, but that hasn't stopped various groups from emerging to, railing against Life365, Inc., its software, and anyone which is to say, everyone wearing the watch.

One of the early and more disturbing social reactions to Life365 was the activist organization Antilife. Its members marched made their mark marching into heavily populated areas, outside local and major federal political buildings, and even hospitals and other medical facilities. In the beginning,

Commented [GK53]: The original wording of this sentence "American people of color have, and still do, challenge" doesn't work because "have challenge" is grammatically incorrect. Another possible revision is to change it to "When American people of color have challenged" because the present perfect tense already implies that the challenges are on-going. (That might actually be the better revision)

Commented [GK54]: The original wording of this sentence makes it seem like the things listed were the violent ideological responses. I added "when" to make it clearer for the reader that the items in the list were all building up to something

Commented [GK55]: This phrase is a little unclear--does "everyone" mean to say that "everyone" is wearing the watch? I would recommend cutting it--it's a little confusing

Commented [GK56]: They didn't really make their mark by marching--they made their mark with what happened next

Commented [GK57]: For parallelism; "national" would also work

~~though,~~ the rallies were tame, with Antilife members singing songs like "What a Wonderful World" while holding hands peacefully. Eventually, at a rally in North Carolina, this ~~potential violence~~ peaceful protest became actual violence as many cells of Afterlife took it upon themselves to send a message against becoming "slaves to Life365." Antilife members, toting legal firearms, chanted, "Don't hate your fate!" and carried posters of Nikolay Ge's painting "What is Truth?" but with Pilate wearing the Life365 while conversing with Christ. As the crowd mocked the ~~protestors~~, a cardboard cup of sweet tea smashed against Jesus's face. ~~Furious~~ Antilife members opened fire on ~~the~~ surging crowd of their detractors and other confused passersby. Such events have become a regular part of America's weekly news.

In Lana Valenzuela's famous photograph of an Antilife protestor standing on the neck of a black man in Birmingham, Alabama (see fig. 3.2, p. 42), the protestor, curiously, wears a Life365 smartwatch just below the hand holding up his AR-15.

Ample data reveals the average Antilife sympathizer who wears Life365 has an average D.E. of .6%.

May 28

Clark's watch showed him various numbers he couldn't interpret. "5.2 mph" inside of a ~~wing-tipped~~ shoe. Swipe. "158

Commented [GK58]: Changed since it doesn't sound like they're doing anything that could even "potentially" be violent at this point

Commented [GK59]: Clarified it was a painting so uncultured readers (like me) would be able to have a little more context

Commented [GK60]: Chicago 8.198

Formatted: Font: Italic

Commented [GK61]: This is more a sub edit thing, but this sentence feels out of place in the paragraph.

Commented [GK62]: From MW and various shoe websites selling wingtips

bpm" inside of a heart. Swipe. "61 cal" burned inside of flexing bicep. Swipe. "44 min., 57 sec. remaining" inside of a track-shaped oval. Tap.

He'd lost almost twenty pounds in less than two months. The first ten or fifteen **are** the easiest, he'd heard, but it felt good either way. Still, he tasted bile in the back of his throat as he jogged on, beating back the temptation to sit down in front of the nearby bagel truck he knew would sing its siren song. He tapped his watch, and there it was. The 37.4% staring him in the face.

Commented [GK63]: Not sure what to do about tense here. Is present fine, or does it need to be changed to past?

He swiped the number away like a wasp, then paused the 5K training app to take a reprieve. Hands on hips, chest heaving, he shook his head in defeat. A block ahead, he saw an old woman in a long skirt and loafers, a comically oversized tote slung over her shoulder, waiting at the crosswalk across from ~~athe~~ Metro bench where a few haggard travelers ~~awaited~~sat. Her face was ghostly pale. He wondered where she had to go. Maybe she was running away. Her D.E. crossed his mind. *Upper eighties at least.*

Commented [GK64]: Since Clark can't know whether the travelers are waiting for something

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He thought of his mother. He heard the judgment in Kayla's voice again as she told him his mom was now above 96%. Or maybe her voice was pleading. Either way, he knew he needed to call his mom. But something held him back. He couldn't shake the

thought that the dead were easier to deal with after they were actually dead.

The sun crept out from behind a cloud. Two pigeons fluttered and danced on the white crossing signal. It lit up. The old woman began her long journey across the road. Her feet scraped slowly across the pavement. Clark wondered how the tortoise ever beat the hare.

As she got about three--quarters across, she dropped her handbag. Clark's jolt of hospitality was easily suppressed by distance and carelessness and the belief that someone else would help first. He eased back, watching as the woman knelt gingerly over to retrieve the-her handbag. A woman stood up from the bench. "You need some help, ma'am?"

"I'm alright, thank you, dear," the old woman said politely in a raspy, pained voice. *Maybe more like lower nineties*, Clark thought.

The air exploded in a piercing shriek of screeching rubber. Clark's head flicked to the right just in time to see the flash of a red sedan, its driver trying and failing to hold the car back like a charging horse. The old woman never even looked up.

Clark hadn't heard a sound like that before. It was a short bass note followed by a louder baritone crash.

Vuh-DUNK.

That was the sound of the end. That was the wound of 100%.

Commented [GK65]: Chicago hyphenation table

It was amazing how clean pedestrian car collisions could be. There was a bit of glass. Some scattered remnants of her tote. Her wig landed delicately on top of the roof, giving it a comical clown car look.

Clark, stunned to stillness, followed one blurred object as it was propelled from the accident, unsure why this caught his eye and not the dead woman or smashed vehicle. Clacking on the ground a few yards to his left, the set of dentures settled on the pavement, facing him, smiling menacingly.

That night, he called his mother.

From *Life As We Know It*, p. 42-43:

In America, the President's D.E. ~~currently~~ stands at a disconcerting 47%, as of the 2024 State of the Union (where he said his heart was "pumping the blood of the American pPeople, so why should [he] be afraid to die?"). Many analysts believe his D.E. to have influenced his canceled visit to Uganda. Nonetheless, if the ~~U-S-~~ and other "first--world" countries have closed themselves off in their tortoise shells of caution, less developed countries, like the one the president avoided, have seen minimal use of Life365. The little data available shows an average D.E. of 9% per year in the so-called "third world," significantly higher than the United States and ~~similarly~~ ~~developed~~ countries. ~~Though~~ with residents of less developed

Commented [GK66]: Since "currently" and "as of the 2024 State of the Union" are a little contradictory

Commented [GK67]: Checked previous SotU addresses and this is how they capitalize American people

Commented [GK68]: May be better just to write "United States"? Since it's used later in the same paragraph spelled out

Commented [GK69]: To focus the similarities on level of development--as opposed to other similarities (such as language, location, age, etc.)

Commented [GK70]: Moved the "though" to more clearly signal the shift to the reader

~~countries making~~ few discernible lifestyle shifts as a result of Life365's predictions, ~~though,~~ Andrez Kleber conjectures that, essentially, "9% doesn't seem so bad in [these countries]."

Commented [GK71]: Changed to avoid a dangling modifier (that would imply that Kleber is making these lifestyle shifts

July 1

50% *is the worst*, he thought.

Clark didn't know how to process it. He tried to think of it the way he thought about the weather. If there were a 10-40% chance of rain, he'd ~~think had always taken that as meaning it would~~ it would definitely rain a little. If ~~there~~it were a 60-90% chance, he ~~just'd~~ assumed it would ~~definitely~~ rain a lot ~~and~~ he'd get an umbrella.

But 50%? That felt like it might rain, or it might not, and that's all the information ~~you have~~available. Fifty-fifty. ~~You have to~~ The only thing to do is to wait in anxious anticipation of the storm.

50%. What does that mean? 50% dictated a lot in life. ~~You have about~~ There was a 50% chance of getting male or female sex organs. ~~You have~~ there's about a 50% chance of winning a hand of war, or drawing a black card from the deck. Apparently, there was ~~you have~~ about a 50% chance of staying married. Though he felt those odds must be a little lower.

Commented [GK72]: Revised this section to remove second person--since it's the only place it appears in the manuscript it sounded a little out of place

He clutched his tightening chest. Then, remembering something Lisa told him about her yoga class, he sat up straight

in bed, closed his eyes, and inhaled slowly. Nothingness took over. After a minute, his chest loosened.

Vuh-DUNK.

His eyes snapped open. His chest tightened again. Tiny daggers poked his fingertips.

Things had been going better. He was down to 237 pounds. Kayla's voice had more of its old, lovely spark when they spoke. Things were even improving with his mother. ~~Apparently Before,~~ she had been refusing her meds for months, sneaking away pills and storing them up for a big coup de grâce. ~~Whenever he visited, Kayla at his side, his mom's wrinkled face made her appear to scowl constantly. He never could tell whether she smiled or not. But he knew she was happier.~~

Their visits had started in June, when her D.E. was up to 98.1%. In July, it was back down to 85%. Things were looking up. Or down. Whichever was better.

So why was his number still rising? He didn't get it. He'd stopped fighting with Lisa and started listening to her, and he felt better, more alive. But his watch taunted him. It taunted him as badly as his sister's 1% did.

Clark got out of bed. *Still early enough to get a run in before my interview,* he thought. He walked wearily over to the dresser, assessing himself in the mirror, as if he could see what the watch saw. He sighed. *Less fat, but still fat.* ~~he~~

Commented [GK73]: This might be more of a sub edit, but it might make more sense to move this sentence to the next paragraph (after "Their visits had started in June, when her D.E. was up to 98.1%.") since this sentence talks about what their visits were like

~~thought.~~ Never good enough. He cast his eyes down despondently.

He noticed a penny among other loose change, tails up.

Lincoln couldn't stand to look at him~~r~~ either.

From *Life As We Know It*, p. 232:

Many have sensationalized the Life365 software, turning it into a powerhouse subject for contemporary media. Celebrities, for example, ~~make it their business to~~ update their D.E.'s monthly on social media, which has led to one of the more sordid and fascinating consequences of Life365: "Death Betting." Bookies have learned the software inside and out, and at any given moment, you can place bets, up to three years ahead, on various important personages' fates, based on their registered D.E.~~'s~~ (which, for politicians, ~~for example~~ is a matter of public record).

Perhaps, as Pearson conjectures, "Flirting with death has never been so fun."

September 19

Kayla gently removed her hand from his as she got into her car. The sharp edge of the diamond against his skin awakened him to the fact that his ex-wife wore the ring today. He hadn't even noticed, of course.

Commented [GK74]: Perhaps "He hadn't noticed that before."--since he did notice in this situation, so the original might be a little confusing

It felt like she' ~~had~~ been wearing it for a while, though. Or rather, it felt like she might as well have been ~~be~~. The last couple of months had been ~~were~~ the best he' ~~had~~ had in a long time. He'd been working for a logistics company for a month and a half now. He was saving money for a deposit on an apartment. He' ~~had~~ seen his mother almost every week since late June. She' d told him earlier this month her D.E. was down to about 59%. A miracle, really.

With Kayla, at first he thought maybe she was shallow, that she only came back to him because he was looking better. Less embarrassing to go out with. But what had she said? "Who you are on the outside is only the evidence you need that the inside is changing for the better." She' d never stopped loving him, she said. She just couldn't stand to watch him not love himself.

Another reason for his happiness was that he hadn't worn his watch since July. Which gave him a sense of... what was it? *Freedom*, he thought. He just lived. He might die, but for now, he would just live. And that more than anything made it so much easier to be the man he'd been the last few months.

Kayla pressed her palm to the glass window in goodbye. Clark returned the gesture. As she drove away, he stuck his hands in his pockets, feeling the smooth band of his watch calling to him. He still missed it. Every day, he fought the urge to check his D.E. But this moment felt right. Things were

Commented [GK75]: To specify that he had just now noticed, but she had probably been wearing it for a while

going well. He ~~'-had~~ proven to himself he didn't need the watch; he just wanted it. And that was an important and, he believed, healthy distinction.

He pulled out the watch and looked it over. Before he knew it, his fingers accessed their muscle memory and quickly propelled him to the screen he wanted most. There, in bright, foreboding digits, sat a new number. He blinked a few times, making sure it was no mirage.

83.8%.

The numbers disappeared, replaced by the words, "Incoming Call: Mom."

Swipe.

From *Life As We Know It*, p. 280-81:

American schools provide their own interesting, opaque data. The number of high school aged teenagers diagnosed with clinical depression has decreased dramatically, resulting in fewer student visits to the counselors. It seems high D.E. has a direct effect on lower diagnoses of mental illness, but many scholars believe this is indicative, not causal. The number of school shootings has also decreased dramatically. Richard A. Carranza, Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education, says, "D.E. monitoring policies and protocols have allowed us to identify problem areas in our over 1,800 schools,

much like a doctor finding inflammation on the body or a defect in the nervous system. Most dangerous behavior is rooted out before it can explode."

October 1

"90.0%. Seek personal care. Click for medical practitioners in your area."

Swipe.

"New Message from Mom."

Tap.

"Missing u. Kayla and me r worried. Love, Mom."

Swipe.

"New Message from Lisa."

Tap.

"Be back in a couple weeks. CALL KAYLA. And Mom."

Swipe.

"New Message from Kayla."

Tap.

"Last chance. If you want to talk, call me. But call your Mom first."

Swipe.

From *Life As We Know It*, p. 281:

A logical hypothesis might be that the elderly would see the least spike in mental illness of the age groups. Not so, says N. R. Hooyman:

"It's almost too simple, really. The higher one's D.E., the higher one's chance of a clinical diagnosis for various psychological disorders and mental illnesses. Age doesn't exactly seem to come into it, except in so much as the elderly have higher D.E. averages. Life365, unfortunately, is a sad reminder even to the exceptionally healthy aged person, that death, for them, is closer at hand than for their children and grandchildren."

In the world of Life365, logic and the human reaction to his or her D.E. rarely go hand in hand.

Commented [KTG76]: I think this is what the "spike" is referring to, but I wanted to flag it for you to check.

Commented [GK77R76]: Sounds right to me!

Commented [GK78]: Is this part of the block quote? If no, fix formatting

November 27

Clark read the letter again.

Dear Clark,

I'm sorry to be so dramatic. I know you hate that. Also know I wasn't the best mom. well what's one more mistake? I really liked you coming round these pass months. Looking real handsome. Kayla looks good too. guess I understand why you didn't keep coming. I don't blame you. must be stretching you thin, by the looks of you. I don't want to

*be no burden no more, Clark. I love you. I'm so proud to
been your mom, even if I wasn't always the best, like I
said. I don't know what to say. I don't know what to do
anymore. I miss you and your sister. I always miss you. I
don't want to miss you no more. don't worry about me. Take
care of yourself, Clark.*

Love,

Mom

Clark thought, *See you soon, Mom. Vuh-DUNK.*

From *Life As We Know It*, p. 282:

Old surveys from anonymous consumers suggested that more than 80% of Americans will eat expired food as long as it is less than two months past the expiration date. In comparison, a 3% chance of death seems a minimal risk. But perhaps old milk and one's life are measured differently; hence, there has been a 3200% increase in suicide attempts across all age groups in America and a number of many other developed countries. One might postulate an emotional logic to such a severe increase in suicides in developed countries: Life365 and the notion of a Death Expectancy has left the developed world trudging about with death constantly on the brain, staring at their wrists before gazing up at the stars like so many Hamlets.

Commented [GK79]: These statistics might be a little extreme.
Current suicide rate is 14 per 100,000 people (not including failed attempts). A 3200% increase would mean 1 in 200 people die from suicide every year.
Current attempted suicide rate is 512 per 100,000 people. A 3200% increase would mean 16 out of 100 people attempt suicide every year (or about 1 in 6 people).

And of course, some people just don't like to be told what to do.

December 24

"Goodbye, Clark. And good luck."

Clark read Kayla's last text for the thousandth time. Or rather, he looked at~~saw~~ it. His brain wasn't firing enough to read, to process.

Lisa walked into the living room, snapping her earrings into place. She positively beamed in her gorgeous red dress and Santa hat, balancing chic and sexy with fun and careless.

"You gonna be okay?" she asked passively, looking at her reflection in a glass frame of an old family photo.

"Sure."

Her eyes shot to his reflection, then just as quickly returned. She turned to look at him. Silence stood between them. Then she continued, "You can't have a 99% chance of dying in the next seven days, Clark. It just... it doesn't make sense." After a moment, she smiled. "And I don't own a gun, so that has to drop you a couple percentage points, right?"

Vuh-DUNK.

"I know I'm hilarious. You don't have to laugh." She walked quickly to her brother and kissed his forehead. "I know you hated that. But I love you. I know you hate that, too."

He stayed motionless. She made for the door and opened it.
"I'll see you in January, Clark. Take care of the place for me,
yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Goodbye, Clark."

He nodded back as the door shut.

Tap.

"Goodbye, Clark. And good luck."

Swipe.

From *Life As We Know It*, Epilogue

While the application ~~cannot's efficacy cannot~~, as of now,
be reasonably determined to be beneficial or detrimental, one
thing is clear: almost every decision Life365 owners make has
been and will be calculated ~~starting from~~by reading their
wrists. The world has become a statistician's playground. In
fact, we all, in a way, have become statisticians, each of us
dangling from the monkey bars of our own, near certain futures.

December 31

Normally Clark's panting drew glances from people around
him. His anxiety had gotten so bad he didn't usually dare leave
Lisa's house ~~since~~when she left him alone. Tonight, he made his
way through hordes of Dionysians. Clinking glasses and champagne

showers surrounded him; bodies writhed into and around him. He grabbed his chest viciously, as if trying to tear out his heart. He breathed through his nose, sucking in as much air as he could as he fought his way out of the joyous debauchery.

Soon he was out, nearly alone in the eerie no man's land between the few self-absorbed celebrators—low D.E. folk, no doubt—and another group, almost the first's antithesis. He wondered how the two groups silently split in some mitosis of de facto segregation. Clark sunk and disappeared into myriad, portentous bodies, chests heaving, faces drooping beneath bleary eyes. He breathed a little easier. He'd found his fraternity.

He remembered when New Year's was a celebration for everyone. When the gathering masses beat back the bleating chimes of clocktowers around the world. Before the New Year beckoned you to live in fear, rather than to live.

But now he just waited for the knell, overwhelmed with his own dead rapture.

He looked up at the clocktower, its red beam flooding his face. *Less than four minutes left*, he thought.

His right arm went numb. He tried shaking life back into it, but that just embedded the needles further into his fingertips. His forehead perspired and he felt dizzy. He made his way over to a curb and plopped down next to man with a purple Mohawk who looked to be in his early twenties.

"You okay, bro?" Mohawk asked, flashing an unconcerned smile.

"Yes," ~~Clark~~^{he} replied flippantly. Then he sat up, breathing in deeply, feeling sharp pain in his chest. "Actually, no."

Mohawk focused in. "You're looking a little worse for wear there, man. Like you're about to croak."

Clark looked up at the clock. Two minutes left. He started laughing, quietly at first, then louder, more raucously. "I think I am."

Mohawk grinned. "Hey man, that's the spirit! Forget worrying about your D.E. Who cares?"

Clark started to relax, his breathing becoming lighter and steadier as he finished laughing. He shrugged. "What's there to care about?"

"Right on man. Hey, are you one of those ponies that's got a high percentage or something, and you're worried about getting through the next..." Mohawk looked up at the clock. "...ninety seconds?"

Clark tapped his Life365, swiped over, and showed Mohawk the numbers. "99% chance I die in the next sixty seconds, pal."

Mohawk squinted down at the watch screen, then cast an addled look at Clark. "You're buggin', dude. You're right as rain, man."

"Huh?" Clark took back his wrist and looked at the watch. "14.3% D.E." *What?* Clark wondered. Then he realized he hadn't looked at his watch in hours, assuming the inevitable. "I don't believe it!"

"Believe it, man. That's the first model, right?"

"That's right."

"Check the time on that thing," Mohawk recommended.

Even as Mohawk said it, Clark thought, *Spring Forward*. His eyes bulged. *I forgot Daylight Savings!* Tears welled in Clark's eyes; he was never so thankful that he never used his watch to tell the time. He looked at Mohawk, then suddenly hugged him ferociously. "Well, life's little miracles, huh?" Mohawk said. "Not too often you get to see your future, and know it's good."

Mohawk looked at his friend next to him, another young man in tattered clothes, this one sporting a green mullet. They nodded to each other. Mohawk turned back to Clark. "Right on, man. Say, you want to join me and my brothers here for a drink to bring in the New Year?"

Clark looked over the group. They looked like they ~~had~~ had more than just drinks. But he didn't care. "Bring it on."

"Alright, bro." They passed over a plastic cup containing some red liquid. "This is our special cocktail, bro. Drink in the New Year!"

Clark took the drink and high-fived some of the guys around him. He'd just met them, and already he felt a part of something, and more alive than he'd felt in years. Mohawk's friend clapped him on the back and hollered, pointing up at the clock tower. "Ten seconds, dude! You're not gonna have a heart attack on us, are you?"

"No way," Clark said. And he believed it. He felt good. Like ~~his~~the stress was stripped away. He took a deep breath, drinking in the air as he would the cocktail in his hand. The pain in his chest disappeared. Time slowed down for Clark. He beamed out at the crowd of partiers and downtrodden he'd come to join and wallow with, those who awaited an end that seemed so stupid to him now. Like all of them were suddenly going to die all at the same time because of a number on an idiotic watch.

There was something peculiar in that slowed down world in front of him. The sheer number of people in front of him, both joyous and defeated, holding their breath.

Five!

Clark and the group around him started clinking the plastic cups and cheering together. "A toast!" Mohawk yelled.

Four!

"What a wonderful world!" Mohawk's friends sang out in unison.

Three!

A woman in Mohawk's group collapsed suddenly.

Two!

He noticed the same red cocktail he held, spilled over the girl's clothes as she lay lifeless.

One!

In a microsecond before the end, it dawned on him: Daylight Savings Time was a horrible idea.

Vuh-DUNK.

From *Life As We Know It*, Epilogue:

For better or worse, life as we know it has been unutterably and perhaps irrevocably altered ~~with-by~~ the advent of the Life365 software. ~~Nevertheless, he~~ software itself may ~~now~~ be largely responsible for the rampant violence and terrorism ~~borne~~ of this new dawn in human history, even as we discover other harmful ripples cascading from near--certain knowledge of one's impending death. For our part, the authors of this exhaustive treatise have a simple question for a world recreated in the image of Life365: Did we not already know our days were numbered?

Commented [GK80]: One thing--it's not quite clear when Clark actually drinks from the cup. I don't know if this is what the author intended stylistically, but I thought I'd point it out just in case

We have him taking the drink (in his hands)
"Clark took the drink and high-fived some of the guys around him."

We have him planning on drinking
"He took a deep breath, drinking in the air as he would the cocktail in his hand."

We have them toasting
Clark and the group around him started clinking the plastic cups and cheering together. "A toast!" Mohawk yelled.

We have him looking at the drink the girl spilled
"He noticed the same red cocktail he held, spilled over the girl's clothes as she lay lifeless."

Commented [GK81]: Removed "nevertheless" because this is a continuation of the idea of the previous sentence instead of a contradiction

Commented [GK82]: I think "born" is right, but your guess is as good as mine: Chicago 5.250 *Born* is used only as an adjective {a born ruler} or in the fixed passive-voice verb *to be born* {the child was born into poverty}. *Borne* is the general past participle of *bear* {this donkey has borne many heavy loads} {she has borne three children}. It is also used to form compound terms {foodborne} {vectorborne}.
See also "born of necessity" in MW

Commented [GK83]: I like the capitalization of this question after the colon. There were some questions after colons in the first excerpt that weren't capitalized, so I don't know if we want to make those consistent