

This is Not the Matrix

written by

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Synopsis

Reality is a simulation. Everything we see and perceive is electrical signals sent to our brains by supercomputers. Our lives are AI-generated. Lavine, an average teenage girl by day and supergenius hacker by night, has hacked the system, and all she wants is her best friend back.

Signature Song

"Out of My League" by Fitz and the Tantrums

A blank screen.

LAVINE (V.O.)

We are living in a simulated reality. Our beings exist in a dimension beyond time and beyond our physical comprehension. Our consciousness are constructs and our lives are AI-generated by ultra-high-tech supercomputers.

These computers send electrical signals for our brains to perceive the world around us. Everything we touch, feel, and see are just 1s and 0s. It is all just computer code. It is not that machines are taking over the world: the world is a machine.

FADE IN:

INT. COMPUTER ROOM - UNKNOWN

LAVINE (16), average teenage girl by day and supergenius hacker by night, sits at a desk and ferociously types on an old computer with a clunky, beige monitor. She is in a small room with computer monitors stacking up the walls. On the screens are encoded text and numbers raining down.

LAVINE (V.O.)

When I was 10, I had this best friend. We did everything together. We went on playdates, had sleepovers, inside jokes, matching friendship bracelets. The whole shebang. We were so good our teacher even sat us next to each other in class. When we got to middle school, we grew further apart. She found other friends, and I did too.

When I was 13, she came back into my life. We fell right back into place, and it was as if nothing changed.

At the end of that year, she moved away, and we went to different high schools. But for those few years, I was happy. Really happy. And she made me feel not alone.

(MORE)

LAVINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Don't get me wrong, my friends are great. I love my friends. I do. But they aren't her.

I have hacked the system, and I am going to bring her back.

Intro theme plays.

SUPER: "This is Not the Matrix"

FADE OUT:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

LAVINE walks down a hallway filled with blue lockers. She nervously scratches the straps of her BACKPACK. Her eyes dart back and forth, searching for someone. She reaches her LOCKER and tucks in her backpack. She grabs books and shuts her locker door.

Lavine is greeted by the face of VIENNA (16), her childhood best friend, grinning from ear to ear. Lavine jumps back.

VIENNA
Look what I just got!

Vienna enthusiastically waves a piece of paper in front of Lavine's face.

VIENNA (CONT'D)
It's my schedule! Thank god my parents agreed to move me back here. We get to go to school together again!

Lavine looks at Vienna's face in disbelief. She studies it. Her eyes soften. Her gaze travels down Vienna's body. She gets teary-eyed. She traces her way back up and sees a silver chain FRIENDSHIP BRACELET on Vienna's wrist. She smiles big.

Lavine tackles Vienna into a hug and burries her face into Vienna's neck.

LAVINE
(whispers)
I missed you so much, Vi.

Vienna hugs Lavine back.

VIENNA
I missed you too, Ace.

Lavine breaks away and they both smile.

VIENNA (CONT'D)
Will you show me around?

Lavine nods eagerly and walks with Vienna down the hall.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Lavine is in class, looking out the window.

LAVINE (V.O.)
The entire time I was showing her
around, I kept looking over at her.
I still can't beleive she's here.
Vienna! My Vienna!

Lavine looks down at her desk and smiles to herself.

INT. SCHOOL STAIRWELL - DAY

Vienna sits on the floor with her back against the STAIRWELL.
Her lunch is in her lap. She listens to music with EARBUDS.

Lavine walks up to Vienna with her lunch. She sits next to
Vienna. Their THIGHS press.

Vienna offers Lavine an earbud. Lavine takes it and puts it
in her ear. "Last Young Renegade" by All Time Low plays.

Lavine giggles.

LAVINE
I haven't listened to this since I
was in middle school and had my emo
phase.

INT. SCHOOL STAIRWELL - DAY (FLASHBACK)

13-year-old Lavine and Vienna sit against the stairwell of
their middle school, lunches in their lap, listening to
music. They smile at each other.

INT. SCHOOL STAIRWELL - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

Lavine and Vienna break away from looking at each other and
eat their lunch.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Lavine walks down the school hallway. Her group of 5 friends walk out of the cafeteria. They cross paths. STEVEN (16) hugs Lavine. EVELYN (16) checks in on her.

EVELYN

Hey, Lavine! You didn't sit with us at lunch today.

LAVINE

(guilty)

Yeah, sorry. I was eating with Vienna.

STEVEN

Oh, she's new right? Today's her first day.

LAVINE

Yeah, she's new— actually she's old. We were friends when we were younger.

EVELYN

Wait, that's so cool! Have so much fun with her!

Her friends continue to walk down the hall. Somber, Lavine walks in the opposite direction.

LAVINE (V.O.)

Like I said... I love my friends... They're super supportive.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Lavine and Vienna walk with their backpacks towards the school exit.

VIENNA

Hey, today's Friday. Do you want to sleep over at my house?

LAVINE

Yeah, sure. Let me just call to ask my mom first.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

Lavine and Vienna are squeezed in a bus seat together. They engage in an animated conversation.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY
(FLASHBACK)

13-year-old Lavine and Vienna sit next to each other on the bus, engaged in a conversation.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

LAVINE (V.O.)

On the bus ride to her house, I tell her everything she's missed the past 2 years.

I tell her about my friends, my crushes, my favorite teachers, my least favorite teachers. I rant about my sister. I rant about my mom.

I tell her everything I could never tell my friends.

LAVINE

You'll love them. Evelyn likes cats and legos. She's tactile and likes building things with her hands. Steven's a secret softy. He hugs you everytime you see him and...
(whispers)
he's a crier.

Vienna laughs. For a quick second, she glitches.

Panic flashes over Lavine's face, but she quickly masks it with a smile.

VIENNA

When we get to my house, let's paint our nails...or go to the lake...or watch a movie.

LAVINE

We have homework.

VIENNA

We can do homework then watch a movie. Duh.

Lavine shakes her head and smiles.

INT. VIENNA'S BEDROOM - DAY

The girls lay on their STOMACHS in Vienna's bed. They are propped up and write in the NOTEBOOKS in front of them.

Vienna stops writing and looks over at Lavine, who is intense in thought. Vienna playfully nudges Lavine with her elbow.

Lavine looks at Vienna and smiles. She nudges back.

The two girls hold eye contact then burst into laughter.

INT. VIENNA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Both girls sleep facing each other in Vienna's bed. Vienna is ASLEEP. Lavine is AWAKE and takes in Vienna's face. She hovers her FINGER over Vienna's cheek then traces along the side of her face.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Lavine grabs a bowl from a cabinet in Vienna's kitchen. Vienna grabs a box of BISQUICK from the pantry. Lavine places the bowl on the counter and the girls make breakfast.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

13-year-old Lavine and Vienna make pancakes in the same kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

LAVINE

I only ever have pancakes when I'm
at your house.

VIENNA

Still like waffles over pancakes?

LAVINE

Yeah, but I'll make an exception
for you.

Vienna sticks her tongue out at Lavine.

For a brief second, Vienna glitches. Lavine startles, but tries to pretend nothing happened.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY - DAY

Lavine walks to the checkout counter of her school library. Bookshelves line the walls. The shelves in the middle of the library are half-height. MRS. GARCIA (60s), the sweet, old librarian lady, sits behind the counter.

LAVINE

(politely)

Hi, Mrs. Garcia!

(MORE)

LAVINE (CONT'D)

I hope you had a great weekend. How can I help today?

MRS. GARCIA

Oh, hello, Lavine! Good morning! If you could shelve those books in the cart over there, that would be lovely!

Mrs. Garcia points to a cart of books beside the counter. Lavine walks to the cart then wheels it towards the shelves.

LAVINE

Of course! I'd love to.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Lavine passes by the cafeteria with her lunch. Through the double-door opening, she sees her friends sitting at a table and immediately feels guilty.

INT. SCHOOL STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

Lavine sits on the floor next to Vienna. She places her lunch in her lap.

VIENNA

Hey, Ace!

LAVINE

(weakly)

Hi.

Lavine slumps over, looking down. Her eyes go fuzzy as she tries to focus on her lunch. Vienna tries to peak at Lavine's face. She takes her bag of CARROTS and plops it onto Lavine's lap.

Lavine gives a small smile. She takes her COOKIE, splits it in half, and hands half to Vienna.

Vienna glitches and Lavine grows even more sad.

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - NIGHT

Lavine sits at a table in a university-style public LIBRARY with large shelves of books behind her. Textbooks splay open around her. Her PHONE is facedown on the table. Lavine reads a TEXTBOOK open to a page containing the heading:

"Artificial Intelligence: Retraining a Model"

LAVINE (V.O.)

I'm not dumb, I know what this means. The machines are fighting back. The computers are overriding my code to try to take Vienna away from me again.

Urghhh...I'm sorry I'm just a 16-year-old girl who couldn't beat the supercomputers!

So, I'm here. In the library. Reading up on any article that can give me a clue as to how to mark my injected code as priority over the trained model.

Lavine's phone rings. She flips it over to see who it is. The screen shows Vienna's contact and she slides to answer.

Lavine interrupts before Vienna has a chance to speak.

LAVINE

Sorry, I can't talk right now. I'm busy doing research.

VIENNA

(hurt)

...Oh. Okay. Yeah. Text me when you're done?

LAVINE

Sure, yeah. I'll talk to you later, bye.

Lavine ends the call and continues reading.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY - DAY

Lavine shelves books in the school library, looking worn out and tired. She stands in front of a book shelf half her height. A cart of books is beside her. She grabs a BOOK from the cart, checks its SPINE, and places it in between two books on the shelf.

Vienna walks up from behind her.

VIENNA

I didn't know you work in the library mornings.

You could have told me. I would have helped out.

Lavine's expression shifts, and she tries to hide her horror.

LAVINE

(urgently)

No, no— It's okay. I wouldn't want
to put you through that.

(quietly)

I like having mornings to myself.

Vienna looks at her confused. After a while, she shrugs.

VIENNA

Okay, then I'll just sit over there
and read.

Vienna points to one of the CATALOG CHAIRS and walks over.

Lavine's shoulders drop. She slowly returns to shelving books.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Lavine walks by the cafeteria with her lunch. She sees her friends sitting at a table. She furrows her eyebrows and clenches her jaw. She is hit with guilt and frustration.

INT. SCHOOL STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

Vienna sits on the floor with her lunch. She listens to music. Lavine sits next to Vienna against the stairwell. Vienna offers her an earbud. Lavine takes it. "Drops of Jupiter" by Train plays.

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - NIGHT

Lavine sits in a table surrounded by open TEXTBOOKS. She concentrates on the book in front of her.

Lavine hears a notification on her PHONE. She flips it over and sees a text from Vienna on the lock screen:

"Good luck with your research :)"

Lavine blinks at the screen, turns the phone face down, and returns to her book.

INT. SCHOOL COMPUTER LAB - DAY

Lavine codes on a COMPUTER in an empty computer lab. A teacher sits at the front desk, looking at his own computer.

Lavine types swiftly on the KEYBOARD, eyes glued to the code editor on her screen. She clicks with her MOUSE then continues typing.

Vienna walks into the room. Lavine doesn't notice.

VIENNA
You didn't eat with me by the
stairwell today.

At the sound of Vienna's voice, Lavine looks up. Lavine's face looks paler and the bags under her eyes have grown.

LAVINE
Yeah, sorry. I wanted to finish my
assignment for AP Comp Sci.

Vienna's expression falls, hurt in her eyes. She glitches. She nods slowly, turns, and silently walks out of the lab.

Lavine hesitates then returns to her code.

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - NIGHT

Lavine is in a table sprawled with open TEXTBOOKS. She looks even more drained and run down. She focuses on the book in front of her.

LAVINE (V.O.)
I know how this looks. It hasn't
been the best couple of days for
us...I don't know. Things just feel
different...But I can fix this.

I don't know if I can keep her
here, but I'm going to try.

Lavine closes her book and gets up. She starts packing up her things.

EXT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - NIGHT

Vienna sits on a bench outside the public library. Lavine trudges out and sees her.

LAVINE
(tired)
...Hey, Vi. I didn't know you were
going to be here.

VIENNA

(sincerely)

I knew you'd be here...I feel like we haven't been spending a lot of time together the past couple of days, and I wanted to try to catch you on your way out.

Lavine sinks and takes an exhausted breath.

LAVINE (V.O.)

This might be the last time I see her.

Tears build up in Lavine's eyes.

LAVINE

I'm sorry. I'm so so sorry.

Vienna gives a sad smile.

VIENNA

It's okay.

Vienna glitches.

Lavine breaks down. She grabs Vienna's face and pulls her close. She presses her forehead against Vienna's.

LAVINE

I love you. I love you so much.

VIENNA

(softly)

I love you too.

Vienna pulls away. She searches Lavine's face.

VIENNA (CONT'D)

Do you want to come over this Friday?

We can watch a movie? We can watch "Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes." It's the new *Hunger Games* movie. We watched the whole series together when we were younger. It'll be just like old times.

Lavine tries to smile, but it doesn't reach her eyes.

LAVINE
Yeah, that'd be great.

FADE IN:

INT. COMPUTER ROOM - UNKNOWN

Lavine is in the room of SUPERCOMPUTERS. The encoded text on the screens move fast and chaotic. The computers around her are OVERHEATING and exuding loud exhaust sounds. The room seems more CRAMPED.

Frustrated, she codes on the central computer. While the cursor is typing, a large chunk of code gets highlighted and deleted.

LAVINE
What the—

Lavine tries typing again. Her lines of code get highlighted and deleted. The blood drains from her face.

Lavine panics and rolls away from the desk. She paces around the room, hands in her hair. Her heart beats fast.

LAVINE (V.O.)
In that moment, I knew I had to
choose.

Lavine comes to a stop. She sits back down and takes a deep breath. Her heart still beats fast.

Lavine interlocks her fingers and flexes her palms outward, stretching her wrists. She bends her head left and right, cracking her neck. She starts typing on the computer, this time with purpose.

INT. COMPUTER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Lavine presses "Ctrl+S" on the keyboard.

FADE OUT:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Lavine closes her locker. There is no one waiting for her as the door closes. Her expression is dull and gloomy. She sighs and walks down the hall, holding her lunch.

INT. CAFETERIA - MOMENTS LATER

Lavine approaches her group of 5 friends sitting at a table.

LAVINE
(sheepishly)
...Hey, guys. I'm sorry I haven't
been around much the past week.

Her friends all look at her, confused.

EVELYN
Lavine, it's okay. We know you get
busy sometimes and can't see us
some weeks. We'll always be there
when it's over.

Lavine's expression softens and her tense frame relaxes.

STEVEN
We heard Vienna moved back. We're
sorry.

LAVINE
Uhhh...Yeah...Her parents ended up
not being able to close on the
house, and she had to move back.

STEVEN
That sucks. I know you both really
wanted to be together...Do you want
a hug?

Lavine gives a small smile.

LAVINE
Yeah.

Steven bounces up and gives her a bear hug. He guides her to
sit with them at the table.

Lavine settles herself and breathes out. She takes in each of
her friends' faces.

LAVINE (V.O.)
These are it. These are my friends.
I love them. They are supportive,
and they are great.

She nods to herself.

LAVINE
There's something I need to tell
you guys...