

The Game

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English II

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Iron Stream

Mike was woken up by loud shouts from outside his window. Still half asleep, he reached across his twin bed for his phone, pulling the covers off one side. He rubbed his half-open eyes and squinted at his phone until his eyes adjusted to the light on the screen. 7:41 AM, the time read on his screen. Mike wasn't used to waking up before 9:00 AM on the weekend. But hearing the shouts of neighbors across his street, he didn't think falling back asleep would be possible.

Mike walked down the hallway, and down the stairs to his kitchen for breakfast. As he prepared his usual weekend breakfast of Frosted Flakes, he could hear his parents in the living room talking about the daily Philadelphia news.

“Michael, can you come into the living room?” his mom asked. Mike walked into the living room and met both his parents sitting on the family couch.

“Yeah? What’s up,” Mike responded.

“Did you see the news yet?”

“No,” Mike looked at the man on the TV screen.

“Millions of people’s online information and files are being stolen by foreign cyber hackers-” the man stated in a stern voice.

“So? People get hacked all the time, it's 2031,” Mike said to his parents. Mike was interrupted by the man on the screen.

“-The cyber breach was caused by an application the users downloaded, providing a gateway for the hackers. The company developing the application has avoided all prosecutions because the terms of

service allowed the hackers to access the user's data.” The man said. “It is strongly advised that people should read an application's terms of service before committing to downloading or using it.”

“Mom and dad, you guys don't believe that right? Terms of service are a total joke, it doesn't mean anything,” Mike said, chuckling. “It's probably a coincidence.”

“Mike, we live in the age of technology,” his mother said, turning off the TV. “We know you teenagers love your computers. We just want to make you aware of what could happen if you're not attentive to these things.”

“I can't believe you guys believe that stuff. Even if it is true, I'll be fine,” Mike said confidently. He walked to the fridge in his kitchen to get the milk for his cereal and was distracted by the sudden vibration of his phone. It was Caleb, Mike's best friend since middle school.

“What's up?” Mike said, holding the phone up to his ear.

“You hear about that new game coming out today? The developers said it's still pretty experimental, but other than that It's crazy!” Caleb stammered. “It's like that old movie Jumanji-or-or something. It uses this new technology that immerses you into the game. The developers said you can virtually feel everything but pain!”

“Oh yeah, I heard about it. When is it coming out?” Mike said, stuffing his mouth with Frosted Flakes.

“Next week I think, but GameGo has the demo at their store right now. If you want, we can try out the game there.”

“Yeah, let me eat my breakfast, I'll be there in 30.”

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When Mike arrived at GameGo, he walked to the electronics aisle where the demo games were. There at the end of the aisle, he saw Caleb intently watching the game showcase on the large screens. Caleb looked over at Mike and gestured for him to come over.

“Have you seen this yet?” Caleb said. “The demo looks insane.”

The large screen projected the gameplay of the demo. On the screen, A woman in tattered clothes stepped into the view of the camera.

“Hi there, my name is Wilma,” the character said. “Welcome to Adventure Island, the free immersive open-world game.”

“Aww yeah,” Caleb said.

“To start our demo please press the A button below the screen,” Wilma said. Mike pressed the button. The screen had changed to a forest landscape with 5 labeled buttons. A soft voice spoke from the game.

“Welcome to Adventure Island, please read our terms of service a-” Mike immediately pressed a button below the screen to accept the terms of service.

“Dude, maybe we should read that,” Caleb said nervously. “You know how companies are these days, you can't really trust ‘em.”

“Please dude, you sound like my parents,” Mike responded.

“I don't know I just feel like-”

“Whatever man, we're here for the demo right?” Mike said, cutting him off. The voice from the game spoke again.

“Thank you, to begin your journey, please follow my instructions exactly.” The voice said. “Step one: fasten on the provided headgear. Step two: put on the provided VR headset.” Mike picked up the headgear and VR headset from under the screen. “ Please click button A to begin-”

Mike pressed the button.

“You ready?” Caleb said:

“Yeah, as ready as I'm gonna be,” Mike responded. An electronic beeping sound played from the installed speakers within the headgear, that he was wearing.

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At first, Mike thought he was hallucinating, it felt all too real to him. He looked around at the tall trees that surrounded him and could feel the subtle warm breeze and cool vegetation under his bare feet. The familiar voice from the game spoke again. “Welcome to Tall Woods, one of the 7 locations on Adventure Island. If you ever need to quit the game, say the keyword ‘attention’,” The voice said. “You are free to do whatever you'd like on the island, the possibilities are endless!”

Mike was still in awe of the realisticness of the game. Even his cloth underwear, the only thing he was wearing, felt too real. Mike took a few steps forward to examine a tree and felt a sharp pain underneath his foot. He noticed a tiny rock lodged in his foot. *What the hell?* Mike thought. *I thought the game said I couldn't feel pain. Whatever.* After what felt like hours of building and hunting on the island, Mike thought it was time to quit the game. "Attention," Mike said.

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Mike blinked a few times, he was still in the woods once before. "Attention, attention, attention, attention!" said Mike in frustration. Again, he blinked repeatedly, thinking it was only a slight bug in the game. *There's no way im stuck in a video game, there just has to be a way out,* Mike thought. When Mike thought all hope was lost, a black and red woodpecker fluttered down from a tall branch of the surrounding trees. Mike started at the woodpecker, questioning if it was a hallucination or not.

"Are you lost friend?" the bird said in a high-pitched voice. Mike jumped back, falling to the ground.

"Y-y-yes, I can't quit the game," Mike said.

"I see, so you'll need to get to Rocky Mountain if you want to manually quit the game," the bird said. Mike was relieved and confused at the same time. *Why on earth do I need to get to a mountain to quit the game? Maybe I should have listened to Caleb,* Mike thought.

"How do I get to Rocky Mountain," Mike questioned.

"Well, there are many paths on Adventure Island that can help you reach Rocky Mountain. Follow me." Mike followed the bird through the forest until it led him to a path covered in rocks and bordered by twigs. "Here is the path that will help lead you to the rocky mountain. You will encounter many forks on this path. The beginning of each path will have a wooden sign describing what it leads to, make sure to read these descriptions carefully," the woodpecker said, flying away.

"Hey come back!" Mike shouted hopelessly.

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As Mike walked down the pebbled trail, he wondered if he would ever get back home. *Why does this stupid game have to be so buggy,* Mike complained. After about 2 miles on the path, he was met with

a two-way fork. Like the bird had told him, there were two signs which stood in front of him. Out of carelessness, Mike ignored the wooden signs and chose to continue on the path to his left. As he continued on the path, the environment around him began to change from a quiet forest to a damp jungle. Mike felt a slight soreness in his legs and decided to sit against a tree not far off from the trail. While resting, Mike heard a quiet hissing sound from above him. Mike tilted his head upwards to see a bright green snake staring directly at him. The snake quickly lunged at him, biting his left arm. In pain, Mike ran back to the path and continued until he found another fork in the trail. This time, Mike took careful consideration into which path he would take. Mike read the heading of both signs, the left read *23 Miles To Sunny beach* and the right read *30 Miles to Rocky Mountain*. *Great, I finally know where I'm going*, Mike thought. Once again Mike started on the trail toward Rocky Mountain.

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After hours on the path, Mike could see Rocky Mountain in the distance as the trail opened onto a field of long grass. When Mike arrived at the base of the mountain, his legs were numb, and his feet were black. The sun had begun to set on the island. Mike started up the rocky mountain and could feel the sharp pain from the rocks underneath his naked feet. Once he reached the top of the mountain, a large white button labeled “quit game” on a large rock stood in front of him. With no hesitation, Mike slammed his hand on the button.

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“Mike, Mike!” Caleb said, shaking his shoulder. Mike looked at Caleb and began touching him to make sure what he was looking at was real. “Woah dude, you alright,” Caleb said, looking at him up and down. “You’re sweating like crazy.”

“How long was I playing for? Mike questioned, staring at the tiled floor.

“I dunno, maybe like 5 minutes.”

“It felt like I was there for an entire day,” Caleb responded. “The game wouldn't let me quit. I don't know if it was a bug o-o-or something.”

“Maybe you should have read that terms of service,” Caleb said, jokingly.

“Yeah, maybe.”

