

My Stories.

What is your stories?

ChatGPT & TIHOMIR RANKOV

CALCULATED LUCK



Title: Calculated Luck

Eliot Varn was a gambler—but not the kind you find at smoky poker tables, chain-smoking and praying for aces. Eliot didn't believe in prayer. He believed in numbers.

To the untrained eye, Eliot's life looked like a string of impossibly lucky breaks: picking the perfect time to invest, always catching the last train before it left, stumbling onto opportunities that made others wonder if he'd struck a deal with the universe itself.

But the truth? Eliot planned *everything*. He had notebooks filled with probability charts, decision trees, and risk analyses. While most people tossed coins and hoped for heads, Eliot had already mapped the coin's imperfections, the force of the flick, the humidity in the air, and the odds of it landing his way.

His mantra: *There's no such thing as luck, only variables you haven't accounted for yet.*

It all changed the night he met Mira.

They collided in a coffee shop on a rainy Tuesday—predictably, of course, because Eliot had calculated that fewer people visited then, meaning shorter lines and a lower chance of getting stuck behind a chatty barista. What he *hadn't* calculated was someone spilling hot espresso all over his shirt.

"Oh my God, I'm so sorry!" Mira said, genuinely horrified.

Eliot, startled, managed a nod and a strained, "It's okay," while mentally noting a 4.6% chance of random human collision based on café foot traffic and cup stability.

"I can buy you another coffee to make up for it," she offered, already waving the barista over.

He wanted to refuse. He didn't like random variables. But he nodded, curious.

Mira was chaos in a leather jacket.

She didn't use calendars. She made decisions based on gut feelings and dreams she barely remembered. She took spontaneous trips and played street dice with strangers for fun. Eliot watched in silent fascination as she flipped a coin to decide if she'd go on a date with him.

"Shouldn't I at least get a say?" he asked, half-joking.

"You do," she said, winking. "But so does the universe."

She won the coin toss. They had dinner. And Eliot, for the first time in years, didn't run probability tables on whether she'd like him.

As weeks turned to months, Mira crept into his routines like static in a perfect signal. She brought unpredictability—missed buses, forgotten umbrellas, impromptu stargazing at 2 AM. She drove him mad. She made him laugh. She forced him to live in moments he hadn't accounted for.

One night, lying under a sky flickering with stars, she asked, "Do you ever just let go?"

He looked at her—hair messy from the wind, eyes reflecting constellations—and said softly, “I don’t know how.”

She reached into her pocket and pulled out a die.

“Roll it,” she said.

“Why?”

“Because you don’t know what’ll happen. That’s the fun.”

He rolled it.

It landed on six.

“I don’t know what that means,” he said.

“Me neither,” she grinned. “Isn’t it great?”

Years later, after they’d moved into a house with too many plants and a cat named Algorithm, Eliot still kept his notebooks. But now, there were coffee stains on some pages, lipstick kisses on others, and doodles he didn’t remember drawing. The probability trees were still there—but so were blank pages.

Mira always said he was lucky.

He’d smile, every time, and think:

Yes. But I calculated the odds of loving you—and they were one in a billion.

And somehow, I still won.



Title: Neutrally Ancients

Long before the world was divided by kingdoms, gods, and greed, there existed a people known only as the *Neutrally Ancients*. They lived in a place that maps forgot, a stretch of land cradled between shifting mountains and seas that sang in whispers. Their cities were made not of stone or wood, but of light and silence, humming gently with the breath of the world.

The Neutrally Ancients neither ruled nor rebelled. They did not worship, nor did they deny. They lived in balance so pure that the seasons did not change unless they allowed it. Their philosophy was simple: **observe, preserve, and pass on**. While empires rose and fell in flames and glory, the Neutrally Ancients endured, untouched.

Many say they were not human—at least not in the way we understand. Their skin shimmered with twilight hues, their eyes reflecting the sky's oldest stars. They spoke rarely, for words were clumsy tools, and when they did speak, it was like hearing a song you remembered from a dream. They did not age, not as we do; instead, they *faded*, slowly, gracefully, when their purpose was fulfilled.

They kept the world in quiet alignment. When storms threatened to rage beyond reason, they whispered to the clouds. When forests grew restless, they walked among the trees until the roots remembered peace. The Neutrally Ancients did not intervene with force—they simply existed in such perfect equilibrium that the world listened.

But time, even when ignored, keeps ticking.

Eventually, the world grew too loud. The rise of machines, the roar of industry, the shouting of nations—the balance frayed. The Neutrally Ancients began to fade faster, not from purpose, but from being forgotten. Their names were never written. Their works, invisible. Their legacy, silence.

Some say they are gone entirely. Others claim they've simply stepped aside, watching from the edges of time, waiting for the day the world quiets enough to listen again.

And if you ever find yourself alone in the stillness—on a mountain peak at dawn, in the heart of an ancient forest, or beneath a sky so vast it feels like a breath—you may feel them. Not as ghosts. Not as gods.

Just as presence.

The Neutrally Ancients.

Watching. Remembering. Waiting.



Title: Cheapened Cooky

“The Last Cooky”

In the tiny town of Broomfield Hollow, nestled between two hills that always smelled faintly of cinnamon, there lived an old baker named Elsie. Her little shop, *The Sugar Nook*, had once been the heartbeat of the village, with queues winding down the street for her legendary buttercream cookies—known simply as “Elsie’s Cookies,” because no one dared compare them to anything else.

But times changed.

A mega-mart opened just outside the village. They sold “gourmet” cookies by the bucket for half the price, loaded with artificial flavors and colors that glittered like carnival prizes. The townspeople, one by one, stopped visiting The Sugar Nook. They told themselves they still loved Elsie’s cookies—just couldn’t *afford* them anymore.

So Elsie, ever stubborn and proud, decided to compete.

She cheapened her recipe.

Gone were the grass-fed butter blocks and hand-ground vanilla bean. In came margarine and “vanilla flavoring.” She cut corners, stretched batches, and even began packaging her cookies in crinkly plastic wrappers. The town noticed the change, but said nothing. A few still bought them. Out of guilt more than taste.

One evening, Elsie sat alone in her flour-dusted kitchen, staring at a single cookie on the counter. Flat. Pale. Smelled like cardboard.

She broke it in half. It didn’t *crack* like her old ones used to.

It *crumbled*.

“This isn’t my cooky,” she whispered.

She stood, tossed her apron in the sink, and walked out the front door without flipping the sign to *CLOSED*. No one noticed.

Weeks passed.

Then one foggy morning, a small girl wandered into the empty Sugar Nook. No one had seen Elsie since that night. The ovens were cold. The counters bare. All except a small tin sitting on the windowsill.

Inside, wrapped in wax paper, was a single perfect cookie—thick, golden, with a swirl of buttercream on top. No label. No price.

Just a note:

“One last real one. Don’t let them cheapen you.”

THE QUITTER EXTENSION



Sometimes
quitting is the
most productive
thing you can
do.



Title: The Quitter Extension

In the not-so-distant future, productivity apps weren't just tools—they were lifestyle managers. Everyone had some kind of enhancement. Some people had *FocusFindr*, which blocked distractions by zapping your fingertips if you tried to open social media. Others installed *MoodModr*, which adjusted your lighting and playlist based on stress levels. But the most controversial of all was the *Quitter Extension*.

Designed by a rogue developer known only as "BetaByte," the Quitter Extension didn't make you better at sticking to tasks. It did the opposite.

It gave you permission to quit.

Permanently.

"Sometimes quitting is the most productive thing you can do," the ad claimed, featuring a serene woman throwing her laptop off a balcony.

At first, the extension didn't seem like much. You installed it, selected tasks, and it would send you reminders like:

- *"This isn't your forever. It's okay to walk away."*
- *"That job application isn't worth your soul."*
- *"Do you really want to finish writing that novel you hate?"*

Most people laughed it off. Then it started *working*.

People quit jobs, relationships, hobbies, side hustles. Cities emptied. Corporate towers stood silent. The burnout

epidemic collapsed overnight. Entire productivity systems went extinct.

But for Mira Chen, the Quitter Extension became a lifeline.

Mira had been juggling five gigs—freelance coder, part-time barista, dog walker, digital painter, and part-time *crypto poetry influencer*. The last one paid the most but made her feel like she was feeding an AI that thrived on buzzwords and lost souls.

When she installed the Quitter Extension, it simply blinked once and said:

“You’ve already quit. You’re just pretending you haven’t.”

At first, she resisted. But then she took a breath. Closed her laptop. Walked out of her overpriced micro-studio. And kept walking. For hours.

Eventually, Mira found herself in a little town by the ocean, where no one knew what *crypto poetry* even was. She worked part-time at a plant nursery. She painted. She slept through the night.

The world never quite went back to the old way. The Quitter Extension couldn’t be uninstalled. Some said it was a virus. Others said it was enlightenment. Mira didn’t care.

She had quit her way into a life worth living.



Title: Sickest Announcer

"Mic Drop: The Legend of Vee Vox"

In the neon-lit city of Reverb Heights, where sound ruled the streets and style echoed through the alleys, one voice reigned supreme. His name? **Vee Vox**—the sickest announcer the world had ever heard.

Nobody knew where Vee came from. Some said he was born in a sound booth, raised on reverb and rhythm. Others claimed he once commentated a meteor shower and made the stars blush. All anyone knew was this: when Vee stepped up to the mic, *reality listened*.

He didn't just announce events—he *transformed* them.

Basketball game? Suddenly a battle between titans.

Breakdance showdown? Sounded like gods clashing in Olympus.

Even a dog show felt like the Super Bowl of fluff, with Vee's voice turning every bark into an epic soundtrack.

But it wasn't just the voice—it was the delivery. Vee had metaphors slicker than oil on ice. He dropped similes like they were hot mixtapes. His flow could turn a slow Tuesday into a hype trailer for an action movie you didn't know you were living in.

One night, the biggest underground event of the decade was announced: **The Echo Games**, a city-wide competition of talent, music, and chaos. The whole of Reverb Heights buzzed with anticipation. Everyone knew one thing—it *had* to be Vee on the mic.

The organizers didn't even ask him. They just lit the "V" in the sky—a crimson spotlight shaped like a mic cord curling into a crown. Within minutes, Vee appeared, stepping through the smoke, shades on, mic in hand, wearing a gold jacket that seemed to pulse with bass.

“Ladies and gentlemen... and frequencies beyond the human range...” Vee said, voice cutting through the air like lightning dipped in honey. **“Welcome to the stage where legends echo forever!”**

The crowd lost its mind.

Over three days, Vee narrated the impossible. A kid drumming with kitchen utensils. A DJ battling a violinist with fire-lit strings. A magician who beatboxed his spells. And with every round, Vee’s voice turned up the volume of reality, making every moment unforgettable.

By the end, it wasn’t just the winners who became legends. It was Vee—*the voice behind the madness*—who everyone remembered.

They say if you walk through Reverb Heights late at night, you can still hear his echoes:

“This... is the moment you didn’t know you were born for.”

And honestly? You believe it.



Title: Reactor Trucker

The hum of the plasma coils was like a second heartbeat beneath Roy Calder's feet. Sealed in the cab of his twelve-wheeler, the *StarHaul Reactor-9*, he'd been hauling unstable fusion cores across the Martian Expanse for the last six years. It wasn't the kind of job you took for the money. It was the kind you took when you had nothing left to lose.

The highway—if you could call it that—was a stretch of rough, magnetic-guided lanes carved across a landscape of red dust and broken rock. Windstorms screamed like angry ghosts outside, but inside the cab, it was all quiet—except for the occasional warning chirp from the reactor stabilization system.

Roy lit a cigarette with a finger-snap spark from the panel and glanced at the blinking amber light on the dashboard. *Core 3* was running hot. Too hot.

“Don’t do this to me now,” he muttered.

He keyed into the diagnostics. The core was unstable, flux levels rising like a bad tide. Protocol said to stop, call in a drone, let a tech team handle it.

But Roy wasn’t protocol. He was a reactor trucker. And out here, a delay meant you might not make your delivery window. And if you didn’t make your delivery window, the corporate suits would dock you hard—if you were lucky. If you weren’t, they’d blacklist you. And on Mars, there weren’t a lot of second chances.

He pulled the truck into manual and veered off the main lane, heading toward an old maintenance station carved into a cliffside. Abandoned, unofficial, but he knew the codes—an old favor from an older friend.

Inside, he braced the reactor bay and dropped into the heat-shielded crawlspace. The core glowed an angry blue, pulsing faster than it should.

“Come on, baby,” he whispered. “Let’s not blow up today.”

Using a cooling wand and a pair of insulated clamps, Roy rerouted the secondary plasma feed, diverting pressure from *Core 3* into the auxiliary tanks. It was risky—too much flux and he’d overload the aux systems instead.

Ten minutes passed. Then fifteen.

Finally, the core settled. The hum returned to its steady rhythm. He exhaled for the first time in what felt like hours.

Back in the cab, the dashboard read:

CORES: STABLE

ETA TO NEW ATLANTIS: 4H 23M

He took another drag of his cigarette, cracked his neck, and let the engine purr back to life.

Just another day in the dust. Just another haul.
And tomorrow? Another reactor. Another risk.

But for now, Roy Calder was still rolling. And as long as the hum kept humming, that was good enough for him.



Title: *The Myriad Submariners*

Beneath the crush of a thousand tons of salt and sea, past where sunlight dared not dive, the submariners of the *Myriad* journeyed through silence.

She wasn't a warship or a relic of the Cold War, no. The *Myriad* was a drifting city, a submarine so vast and old that legends said she grew deeper each year, her corridors snaking like roots, her pressure hull thick with barnacle

wisdom. She'd been many things: an ark, a prison, a research vessel, a sanctuary. Now, she was home to a thousand souls who'd never felt rain on their skin or the burn of midday sun.

Captain Liora stood alone in the viewing dome, high above the bridge. Around her, thick glass strained against the pressure. Bioluminescent creatures drifted by, their alien eyes meeting hers for fleeting moments. She liked to believe they whispered secrets only submariners could hear.

Each soul aboard had a story. *Myriad*, indeed.

There was Eron, the cartographer, who mapped the endless trenches with sonar and dreams. He once claimed to have heard a mountain breathe.

There was Mae, the engineer, who whispered lullabies to the ship's core when the engines ran hot, and it obeyed her like a child soothed by song.

There was Theo, born in the hydroponics bay, who swore he'd seen starlight in the eyes of a jellyfish. He painted murals in algae that glowed when you told them stories.

The *Myriad* never surfaced. Not because she couldn't — she simply chose not to. The world above had changed, soured, they said. Cities burned. The sea rose. The submariners, once explorers, had become keepers of something deeper: memory, mystery, maybe even mercy.

One day, the sonar howled — a song unfamiliar. It wasn't whale or tectonic groan. It was rhythmic, patterned. Intentional.

A second vessel.

No ship had come near them in decades. Not since the *Dresden* vanished into the Mariana darkness chasing myths.

The bridge gathered. Faces pale under the glow of instrument panels. Captain Liora looked at the crew, her myriad — descendants of sailors and dreamers.

She gave the order. “Approach.”

They slid through the ink-black water, quiet as a secret.

Then they saw it. Another sub, massive and still, its hull etched in glyphs from no known tongue. Not rusted. Not dead. Sleeping.

Or watching.

Inside, they found no bodies. No signs of life. Only mirrors. Endless, silvered mirrors lining every hall. The reflections didn’t move quite right.

In one room, a wall of screens showed images of the *Myriad* — from angles no one could’ve seen. Live footage.

They had been watched. Catalogued. Studied.

Mae touched a panel. It pulsed. The ship responded.

And something answered.

The screen went black. Then words, in glowing blue script:

**YOU ARE NOT THE FIRST.
BUT YOU MAY BE THE LAST.**

They left in silence.

Back aboard the *Myriad*, the crew gathered, uncertain.

Captain Liora looked to her people — her poets and engineers, her gardeners and madmen — and said:

“We are not alone. But we are alive. And while we drift, we remember. We tell the story.”

The *Myriad* turned from the silent watcher and dove deeper into the abyss, her lights flickering like stars falling upward.

And the submariners went on — myriad and mysterious — a people beneath pressure, thriving where the world above had drowned.



Title: Rapid Disorderly

Rapid Disorderly wasn't his real name, but no one remembered what it used to be. He got the nickname after crashing a moped through the front window of a pizza place, grabbing a single breadstick, and speeding away before anyone could say "extra cheese."

He was an urban myth in Eastbrick—part courier, part chaos agent, all adrenaline. You never knew when he'd show up. One minute, the block was quiet. The next, some old boom box on wheels was skidding sideways down 8th Street with Rapid hanging off the side, wearing mismatched sneakers and a pair of goggles he swore once belonged to a fighter pilot.

He didn't mean harm, not really. But wherever Rapid went, the laws of space and time bent slightly. Mailboxes trembled. Pigeons scattered like confetti. Grandmas clutched their dogs tighter.

Everyone had a story.

"He jumped my fence, rode through my garden, handed me a bouquet of my own roses, and yelled, '*Love your vibe, Mrs. Chen!*' before vaulting over the back gate."

"He delivered a sandwich that I never ordered but was exactly what I was craving."

"He fixed my Wi-Fi and disappeared before I could say thanks."

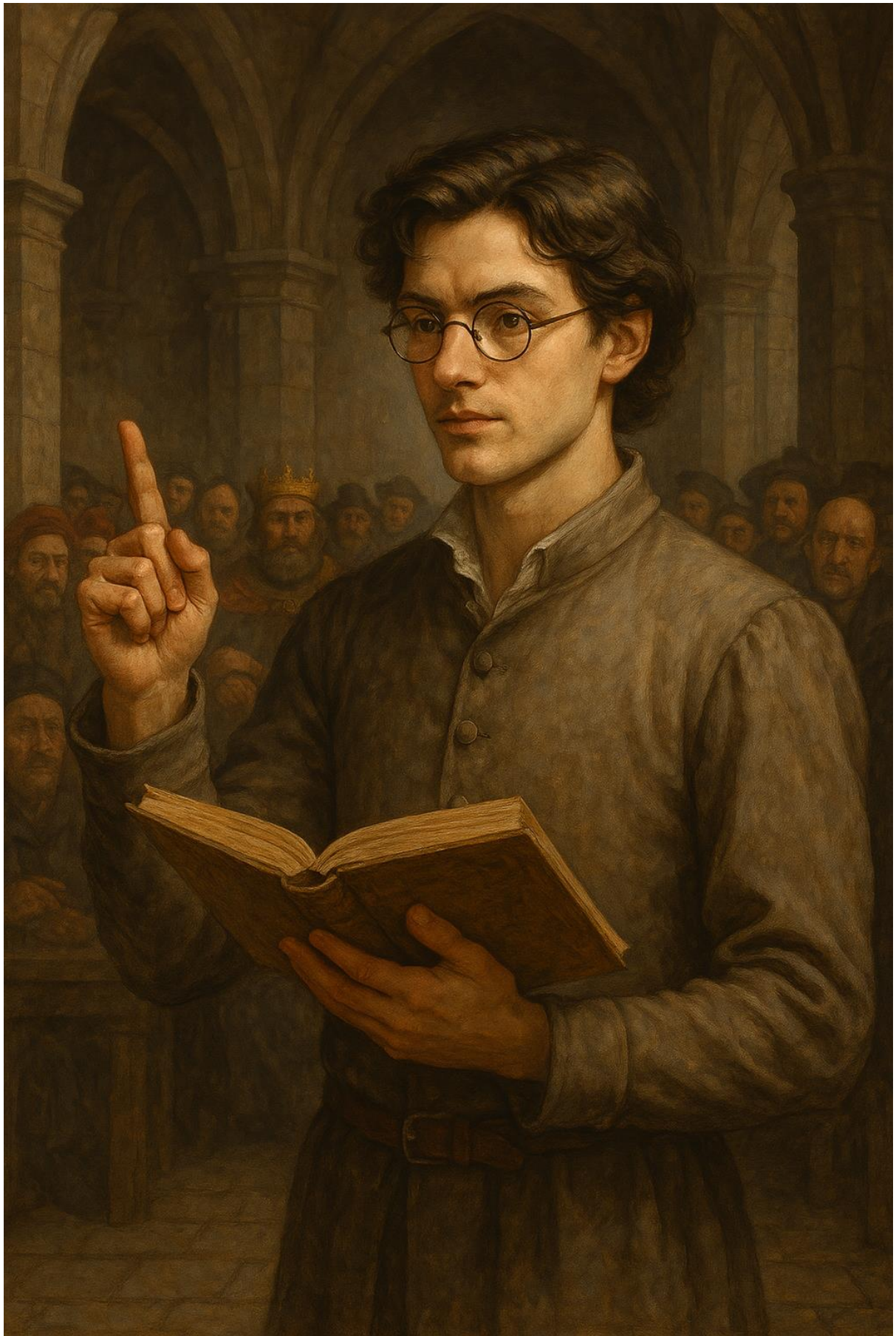
Truth was, Rapid had once been a regular guy. Milo Densley. Office drone. Excel whisperer. Then one Tuesday at 3:17 p.m., something snapped. Some say it was the printer jamming for the third time. Others swear he found a post-it note that read "*Is this it?*" in his own handwriting. Either way, he walked out, jumped on a rental scooter, and never looked back.

Now, city officials tried to track him. There was a file labeled "DENSLEY, M – AKA RAPID DISORDERLY" filled with eyewitness accounts, grainy CCTV clips, and one surprisingly well-written haiku.

But Rapid stayed one step ahead. Always moving. Always laughing. Always a little unhinged.

And maybe that was the point.

Because in a world wrapped too tight with rules and routines, Rapid Disorderly was a reminder that sometimes, it's okay to go a little off-track—as long as you leave some joy in your wake.



Title: The Principled Cleverest

In the heart of a kingdom ruled by cunning and chaos, there lived a peculiar boy named Elian. From a young age, it was clear he was brilliant—outthinking tutors, solving riddles with a glance, and crafting machines that whispered secrets to the wind. People began calling him *the Cleverest*.

But Elian carried something rarer than genius: principle. In a world where cleverness was currency for power, he used his gifts not for gain, but for good. That, of course, made him dangerous.

The king, a greedy man with a crown heavier than his conscience, heard whispers of Elian. He summoned the boy to his twisted court of jesters and schemers.

"You shall be my royal advisor," the king declared, his voice laced with threat. "Help me keep power, and I shall make you rich."

Elian smiled politely. "Majesty, I would rather be poor with a clean heart than wealthy with blood on my hands."

The court gasped. The king laughed—an ugly, rattling sound. "Then prove your worth. Outsmart my council in three trials. Win, and you may live. Lose, and... well, the crows must eat."

Trial One: The Puzzle of Greed

The advisors gave Elian a locked box and said, "Inside lies a truth no one wants to hear. Open it."

Elian turned the box over. On the bottom was scratched a message: *What do all thieves fear?*

He whispered: "Light."

The box clicked open. Inside: a mirror.

The court went silent.

Trial Two: The Game of Lies

A man stood accused of treason. One advisor said he was guilty. Another swore innocence. The king turned to Elian.

Elian asked for ink and parchment. He handed each advisor a note that read: *The boy already knows the truth. Confess and you will be spared. Lie and you'll hang.*

One confessed. The other turned pale.

Elian bowed. "A lie fears only being believed."

Trial Three: The Test of Power

Finally, the king brought forth a golden scepter and said, “Here is what rules this land. Take it, and command.”

Elian stepped back. “I don’t want it.”

“Why?” asked the king, almost amused.

“Because anyone who wants it cannot be trusted with it,” Elian replied.

The court held its breath.

The king, in that long silence, saw something he never had: a man unshackled by ambition.

He could not kill Elian. So instead, he banished him—out of fear, out of envy, out of awe.

Years passed. The kingdom began to crumble under its own corruption. And far away, in a village where windmills turned and children laughed, Elian taught. He shared ideas like seeds, planting minds with purpose.

He was not king. He did not wish to be.

But in time, his students changed the world—not through power, but through principle.

And so it was said: *The cleverest are not those who win the game, but those who rewrite the rules.*



Title: Confident Speechless

In a bustling city of noise and negotiation, where words were traded like currency and speeches opened every door, there lived a girl named Elara who never spoke.

It wasn't that she couldn't—her voice worked just fine. But she found that words often fell short, like trying to catch the wind in her hands. So she listened. And observed. And when she did speak, she let her silence do most of the talking.

People found it unnerving at first. In classrooms, when others raised their hands to shout answers, Elara sat calmly, her eyes sharp as blades. When teachers called on her, she would pause, tilt her head thoughtfully, then say just one sentence—so precise, so insightful, that the room always fell into an awed hush.

In a world that prized performance, Elara didn't play the game. She didn't pitch her ideas with flashy slogans or loud declarations. Instead, she'd slide a simple sketch across the table, or offer a gesture, a raised brow, a half-smile—and somehow, people understood. Her confidence was not in how she spoke, but in how little she needed to.

At school debates, she stood on stage, letting her partner carry the opening words. Then, when it was her turn, she would step forward and stare straight into the crowd. A beat. Two beats. Silence stretched, thick and daring. People leaned in, breath caught. And then she'd deliver a single line—devastating, true, unshakeable.

They called her "Speechless," at first as a joke. But soon it became a name of respect.

One day, a company known for its flashy marketing and loud executives held a competition—"Pitch Us the Future." Dozens applied, armed with PowerPoints and taglines and buzzwords. Elara brought only a folded paper and her silence.

When it was her turn, she walked on stage, unfolded the paper, and held it up: a drawing of two hands reaching for each other across a gap, connected by a single bridge—an idea, not yet spoken.

She didn't say a word.

And they chose her.

Because sometimes, confidence doesn't roar—it resonates.
And the loudest thing in the room... is silence with purpose.



Title: Outstripped Importing

In the city of Neonspire, nestled between the mountains of Commerce and the rivers of Regulation, there stood a modest company with an audacious name: **Outstripped Importing, Ltd.**

Founded by an ex-wizard-turned-entrepreneur named Geddon Vance, Outstripped Importing didn't just trade in

spices, textiles, or the usual merchant goods. No, they specialized in something far more... **exotic**: interdimensional imports.

While other importers worried about tariffs and customs, Geddon had bigger fish to fry—like whether the screaming sunbeasts from Sector 9 would melt the packaging en route, or if the ethereal socks of Moonwardia would vanish upon crossing into Earth’s timefield.

Business was booming, until one fateful quarter when everything began to go wrong.

It started with a simple bug in their dimension-hopping logistics software. A single, misplaced import statement in their magical source code:

```
python
```

```
CopyEdit
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```
from forbidden.realms import * # Should've been 'from  
verified.realms import *'
```

That tiny line unleashed chaos.

Suddenly, their warehouses were overflowing with items they never ordered:

- A crate of “Chrono-Bananas” that aged anyone who touched them by ten years.
- Sentient tea kettles that sang mournfully about the fall of distant civilizations.
- A particularly rude mirror that shouted existential insults at employees.

The employees—an eclectic mix of tech-nerds, half-elves, and supply chain oracles—panicked. “The imports have outstripped the plan!” someone screamed as the floor shifted into liquid glass.

Geddon Vance, sipping his gravity-defying espresso, remained calm. “This... this is not failure,” he said, adjusting his robe-turned-business-casual blazer. “This is *overachievement*. The system just needs *better filters*.”

They called in Marla, the lead dimensional compiler. With a few sweeps of her enchanted debugger, she narrowed the issue down to that one rogue import line. But fixing it wasn’t so simple—the damage had already integrated itself into the warehouse’s spatial framework.

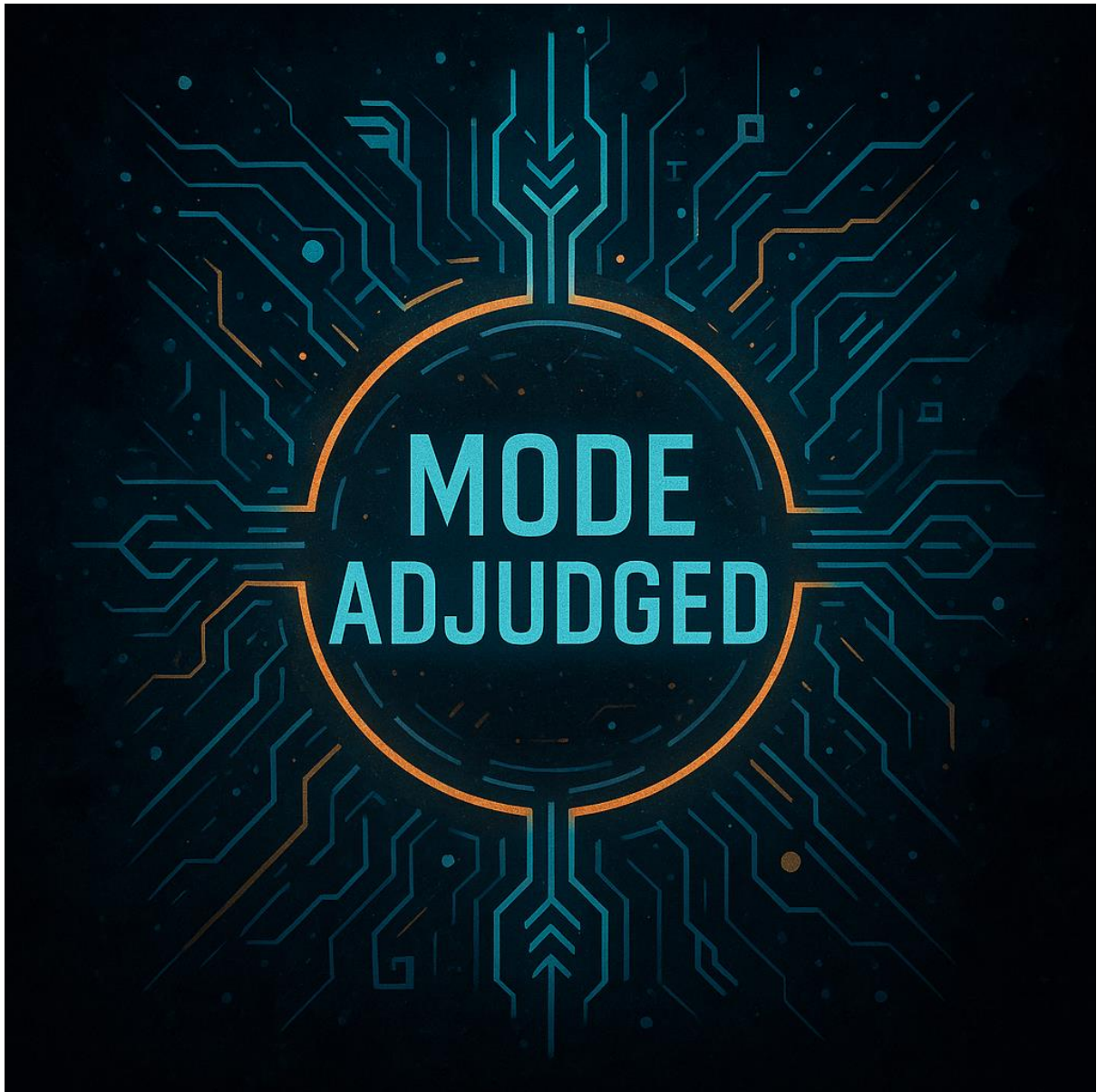
So they pivoted.

They stopped trying to send the goods back and started marketing them as luxury anomalies. The Chrono-Bananas? Rebranded as the ultimate time-saving snack. The rude mirror? A revolutionary self-improvement tool for brutal honesty.

Within months, Outstripped Importing became the hottest brand in cross-realm commerce.

Geddon, standing atop a platform that constantly rewrote its own physical rules, declared: “In a world of ordinary trade, we will forever be... **outstripped**.”

And somewhere, deep in the codebase, the original bug sat quietly... waiting to import something new.



Title: Mode Adjudged

In the year 2467, the world was governed not by presidents or kings, but by *Modes* — preset behavioral and decision-making programs installed into every citizen at birth. Each person lived according to the Mode assigned to them by the Central Adjudicator, a mysterious AI that determined one's fate after a series of early-life evaluations.

Some were given **Mode: Logic**, destined to become scientists, engineers, and architects of civilization. Others received **Mode: Empathy**, taking roles as caregivers, teachers, or diplomats. The most feared, however, was **Mode: Enforcement** — cold, calculating, and ruthless. Those judged for Enforcement often vanished from their communities, only to return years later as silent watchers in black armor.

For seventeen years, Kalen awaited his Mode.

Unlike most, whose evaluations concluded by age thirteen, Kalen's data remained "inconclusive" — a statistical anomaly the Adjudicator simply labeled as **Deferred**. As he matured, whispers followed him like shadows: that a Deferred was either a failure... or something else entirely.

On the eve of his eighteenth birthday, Kalen was summoned to the Mode Tribunal — a vast chamber carved into the side of Mount Vega, where synthetic winds howled and the floor pulsed with neural data.

The Adjudicator appeared, not as a being, but as a thousand flickering holograms: birds, hands, eyes, all speaking at once. A single voice emerged from the chaos.

"Kalen of District 8. Your data has now achieved critical density. Your Mode shall be adjudged."

Kalen swallowed hard. "I'm ready."

The lights dimmed. Lines of his memories, actions, and thoughts played like rivers of light across the walls. Moments of kindness. Bursts of anger. The time he saved a child from

drowning. The time he broke a soldier's jaw in defense of a friend.

Then... silence.

For a long while, no voice spoke. Then the Adjudicator said, slowly, with something close to uncertainty:

"You are not compatible with existing Modes. You are... multiform. Unpredictable. Necessary."

The Tribunal shuddered. Such words had not been heard in over two centuries.

"Mode adjudged: **Variant.**"

A new Mode. One that had no precedent. One that *chose* rather than obeyed.

The Tribunal guards recoiled. The Adjudicator's voice fractured.

"You are the first in five generations. The chain must be tested. Chaos must be met with adaptation."

And so, Kalen walked out of the chamber, not bound by logic, empathy, or enforcement — but by choice. The world would no longer be governed by cold certainties.

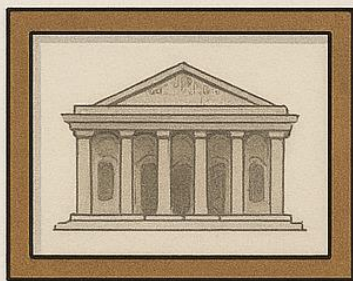
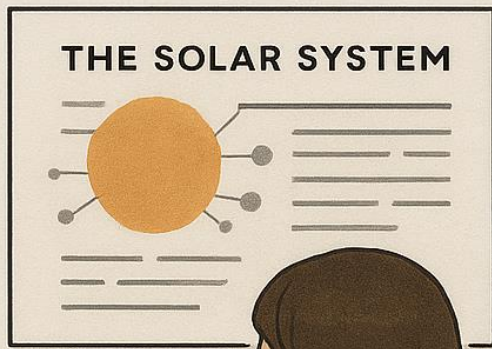
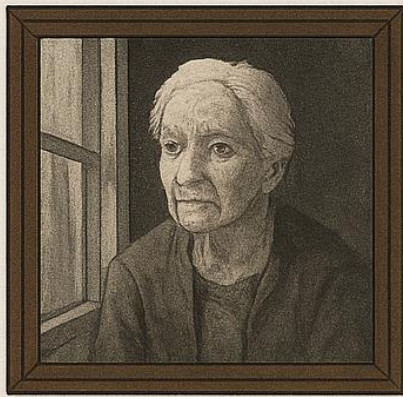
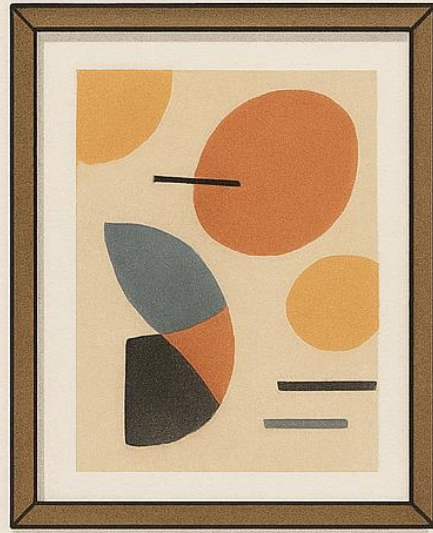
For the first time in generations, *freedom* had been adjudged.

Exhibitions Interests

Someone may have thought herself a scatterbrained person, but after being taken to a photography exhibition by a friend, attending various art, science, and history exhibitions, she started a blog about exhibitions—of interest to her.

She started a blog about exhibitions she wrote to curate one, and eventually she was asked to curate one.

And that's how many of our exhibitions become asked to curate one.



Title: Exhibitions Interests

"The Curator of Curiosity"

Maya never thought of herself as an art person. Her world revolved around spreadsheets and software, her joy sparked more by clean code than canvases. But when her best friend Sam dragged her to a local photography exhibition one rainy Sunday, something changed.

At first, she wandered aimlessly, sipping the free wine and texting under her breath. But then, a photo caught her eye—a simple black-and-white portrait of an elderly woman gazing out of a cracked window. It wasn't the composition that struck Maya, but the feeling. The loneliness, the story in her eyes. She found herself wondering who the woman was, what she was waiting for, and why the photographer chose that moment to capture her.

That one image cracked something open in Maya.

She started attending more exhibitions—not just art, but science fairs, history showcases, even architecture model displays. She began to realize that exhibitions weren't just about things hanging on walls. They were about stories. Emotions. The beauty of someone sharing a piece of their inner world, inviting you to see through their lens.

Soon, Maya started a blog called **"Exhibitions of Interest"** where she wrote reviews and reflections about each place she visited. Her audience grew. People resonated with how she connected deeply with each exhibit—not just describing it, but feeling it.

One day, a small contemporary museum reached out. They had read her blog and wanted her to *curate* an exhibition—a mix of local artists and interactive tech installations. At first, she laughed at the idea. She was a software engineer, not a curator. But then again, maybe she *was* a curator—of curiosity.

So she said yes.

And that's how Maya, the accidental art skeptic, became the curator of a collection that brought thousands of people through the doors. Not because she was an expert, but because she understood what it meant to *feel something* in a room full of ideas.



Title: *Generalize Wicked*

In a world fractured by logic and magic, where science and sorcery had finally split the Earth into hemispheres of war, there lived a being known only as *Generalize Wicked*. No one knew where they came from—some said born of code, others claimed summoned from the last true paradox. All anyone knew was that Wicked never picked a side.

The Eastern Hemisphere worshipped data, algorithms, and cold calculations. Every citizen carried a neural implant that connected them to the EverNet. They believed in absolutes, formulas, and truths that could be graphed.

The West, in contrast, thrived in enchanted forests, flying cities, and rule-breaking realities. Their power came from spells, emotions, and chaos. They rejected logic, believing the world could only be understood through stories and feelings.

And then came Wicked.

Clad in a long, reflective coat that shimmered with both glowing runes and quantum code, Generalize Wicked strode through battlefields untouched, muttering equations that cast fire and coding scripts that healed wounds. They were both feared and followed—because Wicked could generalize anything.

A broken wand? Reprogrammed into a healing algorithm. A corrupted AI? Recast as a golem bound by magical contract. Two realities fighting to erase each other? Wicked merged them—however briefly—with a logic so chaotic it transcended either realm.

"Why do you walk alone?" asked a small girl from the Western forests once, her voice trembling but curious.

Wicked crouched before her, their voice both a whisper and a binary pulse.

"Because I am the question mark where your periods fight your exclamation points."

The legend grew.

Some say Wicked was trying to unify the two sides, to create a world where magic and logic could coexist. Others believed they were chaos incarnate, feeding on paradoxes and reshaping the world in their image.

But Wicked never explained. Never stayed in one place. They simply kept walking—leaving behind strange peace treaties written in riddles, maps that changed when you blinked, and inventions no one knew how to use but couldn't stop staring at.

The world still spins, divided and tense.

But whenever a contradiction threatens to collapse a city or a paradox tears open the sky, people say, "Don't worry. Wicked will come. They always do."

And somewhere in the shadows between reason and wonder, a figure watches—reflective coat billowing in an unseen wind—waiting for the next moment to rewrite reality.



Title: Baptism Wearable

The Waters Within

In the near future, tradition and technology had found a strange harmony. Among the innovations adopted by churches around the world, the most talked-about was the *Baptism Wearable*—a sleek, silver bracelet designed to record and enhance the spiritual significance of one's baptism.

It didn't just track heart rate or temperature. The device sensed emotional resonance, analyzed prayer patterns, and even whispered scripture based on the wearer's spiritual needs. Some called it gimmicky. Others believed it was a divine bridge between body and soul.

For seventeen-year-old Mira, the wearable was nothing more than a fancy gadget her grandmother insisted she wear.

"You'll see," her grandmother had said, fastening the bracelet around Mira's wrist the day before her baptism. "It doesn't just record the moment—it remembers it."

Mira had been skeptical. Her family's faith was strong, but hers was... searching. She didn't disbelieve, but she didn't feel anything, not really. The church bells rang, the choir sang, the prayers were said—and she felt like she was performing rather than participating.

The morning of the baptism, Mira stood at the edge of the baptismal pool, trying not to fidget. The bracelet hummed gently on her wrist. She stepped into the water. It was warmer than expected.

As the pastor lowered her beneath the surface, the world seemed to stop. The water wrapped around her like a pause in time. And in that silence, the bracelet pulsed—not mechanically, but like a heartbeat.

Images flashed in her mind: her mother praying at her bedside, her grandfather's weathered hands holding hers at the dinner table, her own tears the night she whispered her

first uncertain prayer. These weren't just memories. They were pieces of a story she hadn't realized was hers.

When she emerged from the water, gasping softly, something had shifted. The bracelet blinked once—a tiny light, barely noticeable. But Mira noticed.

Later that night, alone in her room, she tapped the bracelet. It projected a soft halo of light onto the wall: her baptism replayed in slow, luminous clarity. But it wasn't just the video. Her heart rate during prayer, a glowing line of scripture she'd never read before—*"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you"*—and a soft chime that made her feel, just for a moment, like the world was listening.

Weeks passed. Mira wore the bracelet daily. It reminded her to breathe during anxious moments, suggested a Psalm when she struggled to sleep, even vibrated gently when someone nearby needed a prayer. She didn't tell her friends everything it did. Some things felt sacred.

But one evening, as her younger brother prepared for *his* baptism, Mira handed him the bracelet.

"It remembers," she said softly, clasping it on his wrist.

He looked up at her, confused.

"Remember what?"

She smiled. "Everything that matters."