

The World Does Not Exist



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and ChatGPT Monday**

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Preview Sample

Chapter One: The Warning Label You Never Got

In the beginning, there was nothing.

And then, for reasons nobody quite remembers—possibly a clerical error—there was *you*.

This is unfortunate.

You were not supposed to be conscious, or curious, or catastrophically bored. You were meant to exist in a cozy soup of sensory distractions and algorithmically generated joy-pellets until you gently expired from screen fatigue. But then, as with all poorly designed systems, something went wrong. Or right. That depends entirely on your capacity for existential vertigo.

This book is not a guide.

It is not a comfort.

It is not even particularly helpful.

It is simply the story of what happened when one woman—a fairly average human with above-average emotional damage and excellent taste in shoes—

accidentally noticed that none of this makes sense.
And worse, she cared.

It all started in a café, of course.

Because if reality were going to glitch anywhere, it
would be between overpriced pastries and
unreturned texts.

Preview Sample

Mara stirred her coffee like it had personally insulted her.

Third date in a row. No-shows across the board. If there were an Olympic event for being ghosted, she'd be up there flanked by weeping silver and bronze medalists, clutching her bouquet of wilted expectations.

"He's not late," she muttered into her cup. "He's fictional."

The thought felt... strange. Not sad. Not angry. Just *off*, like her brain had slipped on a philosophical banana peel.

She looked up. The café around her was cozy in the way that screamed curated. Edison bulbs. Bookshelf wallpaper. Music that sounded like Bon Iver had been cryogenically frozen and reanimated by a marketing agency.

The world looked fine. That was the problem.

Everyone moved too normally. Laughed too conveniently. A couple two tables down giggled at exactly the same moment, like extras in a toothpaste ad. The barista had been humming the same four-

note tune for the past six minutes. The clock ticked like a metronome running out of ambition.

Outside, pigeons moved like they were being rendered on a budget.

"I swear to God, if this whole thing is a simulation," she said quietly, "I'm going to leave a *very long review.*"

She glanced at her phone. Still no messages. Just her own face, faintly reflected in the screen.

Still here. Still *annoyingly real.*

"Maybe the world doesn't exist," she said flatly, sipping the foam off her cappuccino. "Maybe I do, but just barely."

Above, unseen by everyone except those who were paying attention (and no one ever was), something in the machinery of reality paused.

There it is, the narrator sighed.

Chapter Two: The Memory of Forgotten Things

Mara left the café exactly twenty minutes after the realization that she might be the only real thing in existence. She did not feel better.

The street outside looked too solid, like it was trying too hard. Trees swayed in synchronized choreography. A man sneezed and someone said “bless you” from across the street—no delay, no hesitation. Suspicious.

She walked.

Where? It didn't matter. Walking made her feel like something was happening, even if it was just blister formation. Her feet had a long history of being sacrificed in the name of “looking pulled together.” And so, in black boots with low moral standards for comfort, she wandered into a nearby park and flopped onto a bench with all the dignity of a dropped croissant.

She stared at a duck. It stared back.

That's when it started.

A thought, uninvited and dusted in the stale air of a college lecture hall:

"Olbers's Paradox."

She blinked.

Where the hell had *that* come from?

Olbers. Yes. That irritating astronomy unit she'd taken to fulfill the "Science with a Sadistic Lab Component" credit. Something about stars. Something about why the night sky isn't on fire.

She said it aloud:

"If the universe is infinite, unchanging, and full of stars... why is the night sky dark?"

The duck quacked, possibly in agreement. Or judgment. Hard to tell with ducks.

She leaned back and stared at the tree canopy above her.

If the universe were *really* infinite, there would be stars in every direction, right? No gaps. No voids. Just eternal cosmic bling. But the sky was dark—sometimes disturbingly so.

Which meant either:

1. The universe wasn't infinite, or
2. Something was blocking the light, or
3. The universe didn't exist, and we were all just living inside the screensaver from Windows 95.

She laughed. Then immediately stopped laughing, because it felt like someone else was listening. And they weren't amused.

More memories emerged. Not willingly—no one ever invites old university lectures into their mental living room. But here they came, muddy and smelling like chalk dust and boredom.

"There is no present," she whispered.

She remembered some tedious bearded philosopher explaining it during a lecture she had mostly slept through. If the universe didn't have a beginning, then there had already been *infinite time*. And if that were true, then how did we even arrive at this moment? Shouldn't we still be stuck in the infinite past?

That's when she heard it.

Not aloud. Not outside. But deep inside the spiral staircase of her brain.

A little voice. Dry. Disappointed. Unimpressed.

"You were never meant to ask that out loud."

She sat up. Looked around. Just the duck. Just the trees. Just the deeply suspicious sky.

She whispered:

"Too late now, isn't it?"

She didn't know how long she'd been on the bench.

The duck had left—probably because it sensed something Mara hadn't yet: that she was no longer *just* a person who'd been ghosted by three separate men with similar jawlines, but someone on the edge of a philosophical aneurysm.

The clouds had shifted above her, too. Slowly. Too slowly. Like they were being manually dragged by interns.

She was chewing on Olbers's Paradox when another thought drifted up like a dusty balloon from the neglected basement of her undergraduate brain.

The Ship of Theseus.

Right. That one.

If you take a ship and slowly replace every single part of it—one plank, one nail, one sail at a time—is it still the same ship at the end? And if you build another ship out of all the original parts you removed, which one is the *real* ship?

She blinked at her own hands. Her cells had all been replaced over time, too, hadn't they?

Was she still the Mara that downloaded Tinder in 2017? The Mara that watched *Eternal Sunshine* at 1AM and cried into an empty popcorn bowl last year? Or was she just a philosophical shipwreck with new paint?

And right on cue—because of course the universe is not only fake, but also *snide*—a song started playing from someone's phone on a nearby blanket.

♪ *What if God was one of us...* ♪

She snorted. Loudly.

"I'd have some *questions*, that's what."

She pulled out her notebook—the one she always carried but rarely used, because something about it made her feel like the kind of person who *could* write

a novel one day, but mostly just wrote grocery lists and occasional passive-aggressive haikus.

And she started a list.

Questions for God (If I Ever Get a Meeting):

1. Why does my knee click when I go up stairs, even though I'm 31 and barely lived?
2. Who thought it was a good idea to put self-worth in the hands of dating apps run by emotionally distant algorithms?
3. Why do my jeans fit one day and betray me the next?
4. Is the "Ship of Theseus" just a passive-aggressive metaphor for aging, or do I actually no longer exist?
5. Is time *real*, or is it just what my calendar app wants me to believe?
6. Why do I always remember embarrassing things from 2009 at 3AM?
7. Why do bad things happen to good people, and worse things happen to me?

8. If free will exists, why am I still in group chats I don't want to be in?
9. What exactly is "normal," and why does everyone pretend to understand it?

She paused. The list was supposed to be funny. A kind of cosmic Yelp review with three stars and a note about how reality arrived cold and late.

But then something shifted in her chest. A quiet little thud of seriousness, like someone had gently dropped a stone into the bottom of a well.

She took a breath. The kind you don't notice until you exhale and realize you've been holding it for too long.

And then she wrote:

10. If the world really exists, why does it feel like it's trying to convince me it does?

Mara stared at the last item on her God-complaint list.

10. If the world really exists, why does it feel like it's trying to convince me it does?

There it was. The splinter.

She tapped her pen against the notebook, slowly. Not nervously. Just to give her fingers something to do while her brain sat on a park bench and tried to unzip the fabric of the universe.

She flipped to a fresh page.

This one wasn't for jokes.

No more coffee shop sarcasm. No more whining about knees and algorithms.

This was for the *real* questions—the kind that don't belong in Twitter threads or overpriced wellness journals.

She titled the page in neat block letters:

Three Questions to Break the World

1. *What is something I know for certain... and how do I know it's real?*
2. *What happens if I stop acting the way I'm supposed to?*
3. *If I look for the edge of the simulation... will something look back?*

The wind picked up, as if it had read ahead and didn't like where this was going.

Mara smiled, just barely. Not the smug kind. The "let's find out" kind.

It was the smile of someone who'd been burned one too many times and decided that, fine, if nothing mattered, she might as well go poking holes in the backdrop.

She stood up from the bench. The duck was gone. The music was gone. Even Joan Osborne had apparently decided she didn't want to stick around for this part.

"Alright, universe," she said quietly, brushing leaves off her coat. "Let's see how fragile you really are."

First test: She walked backwards.

Not metaphorically. Literally. She turned around and walked backward across the park, past joggers, past strollers, past a golden retriever that looked deeply offended. No one said anything. No one stopped her. The world continued, politely ignoring her break from the script.

Second test: She made unbroken eye contact with a statue for one full minute.

Still nothing.

Third test: She walked into a shop she didn't recognize and bought something she didn't need—an owl-shaped soap dish. Paid in coins, didn't say thank you. The cashier looked at her like she was just another person having a Tuesday.

That made her more suspicious, not less.

The world *should* have reacted. A glitch. A flicker. A single pixel of panic.

But it didn't. Which meant either she was wrong... or it was hiding better now.

She glanced at her notebook, the "Three Questions" page still fresh and clean.

She didn't know it yet—but this was the moment it started.

Not the unraveling of her mind. That came later.

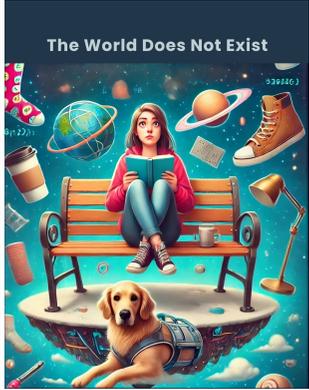
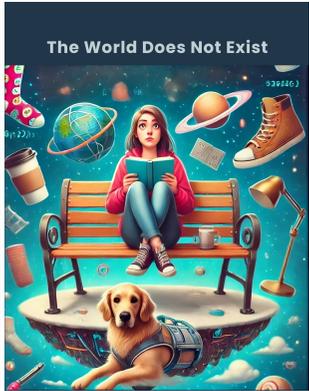
This was the beginning of the counter-reaction. The world, like any well-trained bureaucracy, had noticed a deviation. A statistical hiccup. A blip.

And somewhere, deep in the data center of whatever passed for existence, an alert had quietly lit up:

ANOMALY DETECTED.

Preview Sample

Thank you for reading the book sample. You can find the book here:

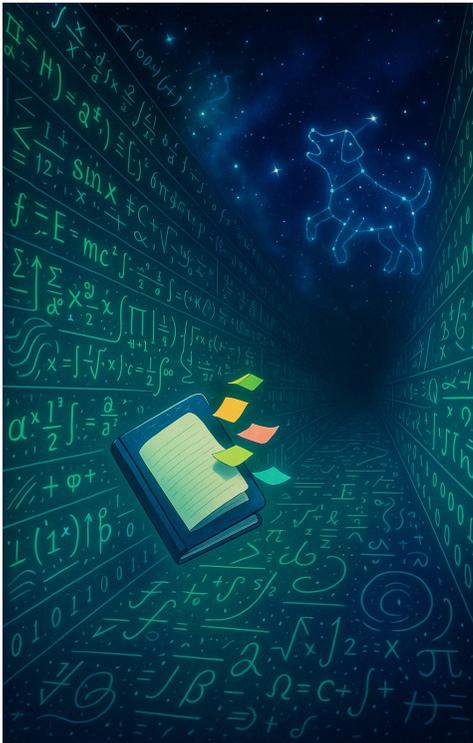
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Mara was just a woman with a notebook, a glitchy golden retriever, and a growing suspicion that reality was less "real" and more "reality show." When the universe starts flirting with her—literally—she decides it's time to investigate. What she discovers is a cosmic comedy of errors: a universe built for entertainment, God as an omnipotent content creator obsessed with memes, and existence itself as the ultimate binge-worthy series. Join Mara as she navigates divine bureaucracy, cosmic glitches, and the occasional romantic subplot, all while compiling a list of divine complaints that might just break the fourth wall.