

Not Your Average Therapist - Aria, Year 12, VIC

There are three things you should know about me:

1. I've failed algebra four times.
2. My therapist stopped replying to my emails.
3. I now receive life advice from an AI who calls me "Minion of Potential".

Yeah, the last one is totally normal.

I'm Sam, by the way. I'm seventeen years old, barely taller than my mum, and my hair's stuck between 'teen heartthrob' and 'escaped sheepdog'. I'm sure it's more like the sheepdog, though my little sister says I have "the most beautiful hair in all of Hair-Topia", whatever that means.

I am the kind of kid who gets nervous asking to borrow a pencil. I trip over my own feet at least twice a day, and all the popular kids laugh at me. Honestly, the only thing I'm good at is dodging eye contact and pretending to know what TikTok trends are.

It all started when the school counsellor suggested I try a new program designed to provide free and convenient therapy for kids, and they were using students to test the mobile app version. It's called 'eerr.AI', and apparently it stands for 'Emotionally Engineered Relief and Recovery'. It all sounded a bit strange to be honest. They label it as "Gamified support with personalised characters."

At least a computer can't judge me and make concerned facial expressions every time I open my mouth. I mindlessly ticked a box labelled 'non-traditional motivational methods,' thinking it was all just terms and conditions, since no one reads them anyway. I thought I was signing up for, like, a talking plant or a wise grandpa voice.

Instead, I got Dr. Lucien, a dramatic, over-the-top anti-hero with a cape who bursts onto my phone screen every time I turn it on. When I first met him, he appeared in a puff of digital smoke and laughed evilly.

"GREETINGS, TROUBLED SOUL," he announced, his eyes glowing in pixelated flames. "Clearly, you're a mess. Luckily for you, I specialise in messes." He grinned.

I blinked in confusion. "What the hell?"

"First, we tackle your crippling self-doubt. Then, perhaps world domination. Or at least a decent morning routine."

And just like that, my therapy became a charade of unsolicited quotes like, “The only thing standing between you and greatness is... probably you.”

At first I thought it was silly having an AI therapist, and honestly kind of embarrassing. But the truth is, no one’s ever believed in me with that much conviction before, not even ironically.

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I rolled out of bed like an injured possum and stared at the ceiling, hoping gravity would forget I existed.

“GET UP, YOU HALF-AWAKE, UNFINISHED MASTERPIECE! THE WORLD SHALL NOT CONQUER ITSELF!” Lucien’s voice boomed from my phone. The app seemed to have updated overnight. Now he had a monocle and was holding a clipboard.

“New look?” I murmured, dragging my feet to the bathroom.

“I have upgraded to Version 1.4.3, Mastermind Edition. Your progress demands more dramatic coaching. Also, I now possess 73 new motivational insults.”

“Great.”

I brushed my teeth while he narrated from the bathroom counter.

“Look at you! Full of dangerous potential yet you still can’t make eye contact with your crush from twenty meters away! Soon, you will destroy your fears and eat your enemies for breakfast, starting with social interaction! Today’s mission: Sit with a human at lunch.”

I gagged on my toothpaste.

“Yeah, let’s start with surviving first period, thanks.”

At lunch I sat alone, as usual, poking at a sandwich I didn’t want. Then my phone buzzed.

“THE TIME IS NOW. INITIATE SOCIAL INTERACTION.”

I rolled my eyes, about to tell Lucien that that was never going to happen, when suddenly someone sat down across from me. She had pink bows in her hair, paint on her hands, and wore huge headphones. It was Eva Reynolds, the girl who once told me my hoodie smelled like old crayons, but in a nice way.

“Hey,” she said, smiling. “Is that the AI therapy app? You got Dr. Lucien too?”

My eyes widened. “Wait... you know Lucien?”

She shrugged, taking a bite of her apple. “Yeah. He’s been trying to get me to join the debate team for two weeks. I told him I’d rather swallow a fork.”

I laughed. I hadn’t done that in a while.

“So,” she said, looking at my phone. “What’s he got you doing? Screaming affirmations into a mirror? Climbing Mount Self-Esteem?”

I smirked. “He told me to sit with a human at lunch. I think I just completed the quest.”

“You know... he says some pretty weird stuff. But it kind of helps, doesn’t it?”

I nodded, surprised to realise it was true. Then she left.

“Congratulations on not spontaneously combusting,” Lucien whispered.

That day was different. Only one person threw an orange at me and called me ‘Stupid Sam’, and that was it. But most surprisingly, somehow, I did it. I spoke up. I made a point about ‘Macbeth’, and the teacher said it was “insightful.” I nearly passed out from shock.

When I got home, I collapsed onto my bed and scrolled aimlessly on my phone. Lucien expectantly made an appearance, but this time without the usual fanfare.

“You are no longer a complete emotional trainwreck,” Lucien said, crossing his arms proudly. “Just... a slightly dented scooter.”

“Thanks... I think.”

The clipboard he was holding disappeared, and he began walking off the screen.

“Wait, are you leaving?”

“SHHH. Let me have my moment.” And with that, he winked and vanished. But for the first time, I didn’t feel alone.