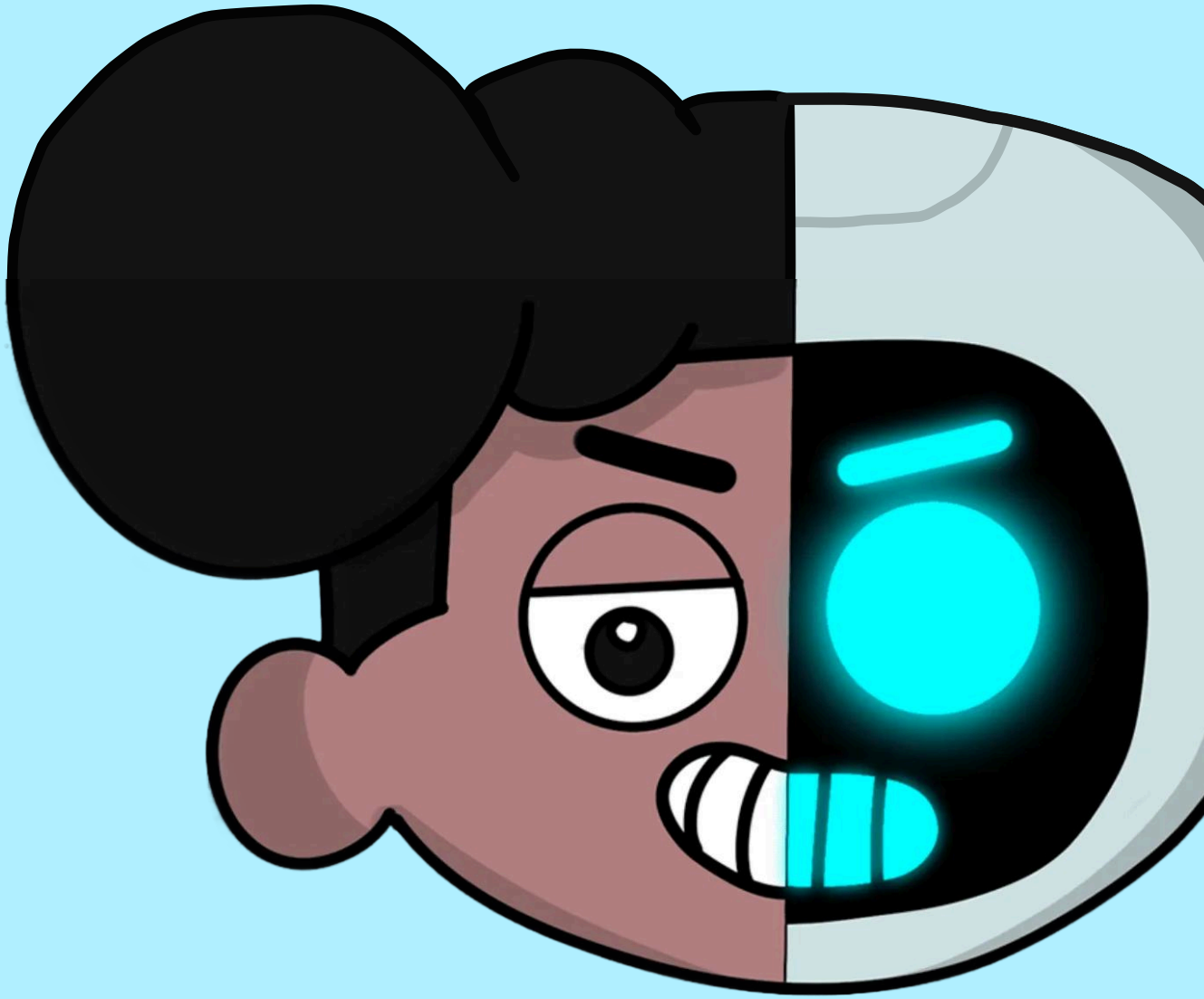
A REPORT

FROM THE DATA WORKERS' INQUIRY

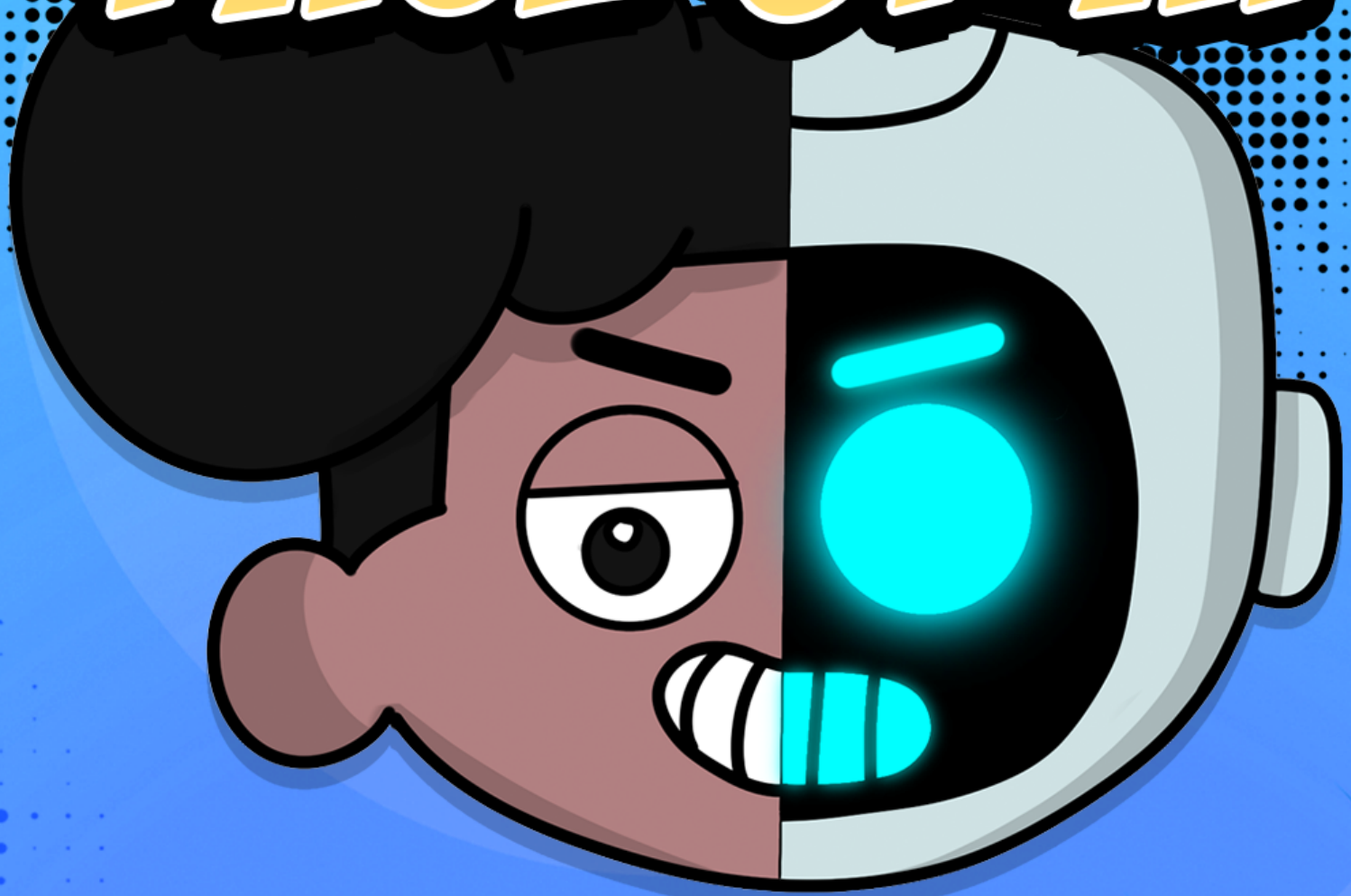
Behind the Face of AI



Anonymous Workers

Data Workers' Inquiry

BEHIND THE FACE OF AI



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Illustrations by: Kevin Makinya (Makish)

Suggested citation: Anonymous Workers. 2026, Behind the Face of AI. In: M. Miceli, A. Dinika, K. Kauffman, C. Salim Wagner, and L. Sachenbacher (eds.) Data Workers' Inquiry. Creative Commons BY 4.0. https://data-workers.org/france

BEYOND THE FACE OF AI

BY CLARA AND B

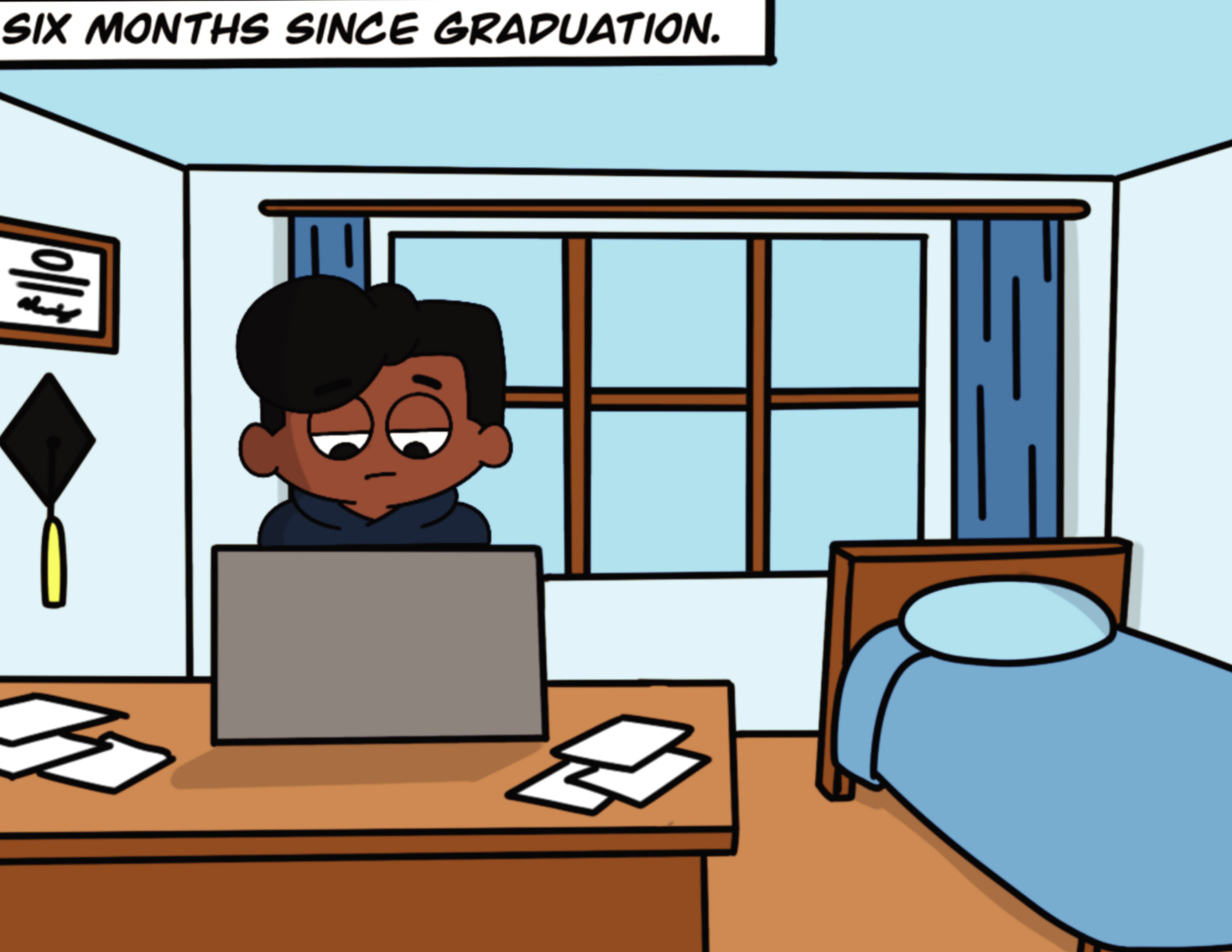
We are two anonymous AI trainers based in France. We are working for a large social media company through Outlier.ai, an outsourcing platform and Scale AI subsidiary. Our job is to impersonate an LLM. This means we receive real conversations between users and an LLM that happened on social media, so we can analyze them. Although anonymized, users do not know we have access to those conversations. We then have to respond to the user's latest entry as if we were the LLM. Concretely, these tasks demand a very high level of intellectual work and qualification, as they entail extensive research, critical thinking, creative writing, and proofreading and formatting skills. Once a task is submitted, the social media platform uses the response as an example of what a qualified human would have answered to that kind of prompt, so the LLM can be improved, especially in how it thinks and sounds like a human.

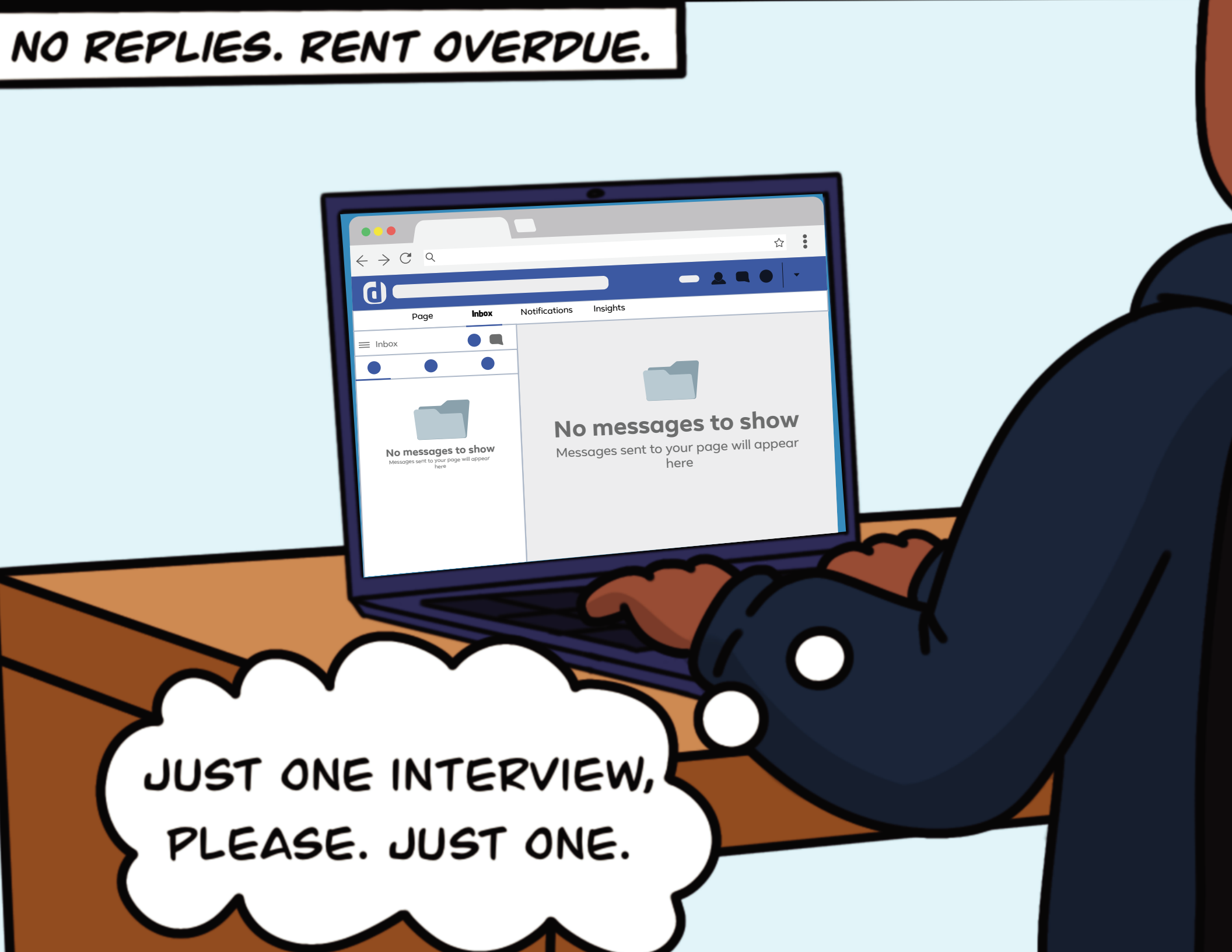
In ad campaigns, Outlier presents the jobs as a great way to earn money while working remotely from the comfort of your own home, but more importantly, as the perfect opportunity for qualified bilingual individuals to finally see their skills valued. What they fail to advertise, however, is the level of alienation and pressure that comes with that beguiling 25-dollar-an-hour fare. Workers impersonating AIs have to work at impossible paces and follow ever-changing rules and restrictions that censor and standardize the personal and human style they were precisely hired for. And when they somehow manage to meet the required standards, there is always the risk of writing "too well for a human being" and being accused of cheating for using AI to draft responses. The promised recognition, for its part, will have to wait. The intense intellectual effort they put into their work leaves no visible trace. Instead, it gets instantly absorbed into a system that automates it. We leave our blood, sweat,tears, and mental health in the process,but we will never get to see the finished product, let alone get recognition, which is actually fitting for a company that makes us work like robots: how could it value our skills as qualified, human workers?

We have created this inquiry with several goals in mind.
Firstly, we would like it to serve as a cautionary tale for candidates who might be tempted to apply, as well as for future AI users, who need to realize the cost at which these new technologies are being developed. Even though the story ends on a very dramatic note, the character's mental and emotional distress is dangerously close to what AI trainers actually experience while working.
Secondly, we want this piece to reach people who do the same job as we do. We want them to know that they are not alone, thatwhat they are feeling is valid, and that they deserve better. That if we unite, we might be stronger and come up with solutions to improve our situation (mental health check-ins and a slower pace at the very least).
Finally, our purpose is to get the attention and support of public institutions. While our goal is to unite and denounce our working conditions, many of us are afraid to speak up too openly because of the consequences. On the one hand, the platform's terms and conditions clearly state that we risk legal repercussions if we do so. On the other hand, we are well aware that if we refuse to abide by these working conditions, the platform could easily replace us in an instant, as it preys on the unending amount of young, qualified candidates who converge at these positions because they cannot find jobs elsewhere. We feel that the only way some significant changes can be made is if public institutions actively address these issues.

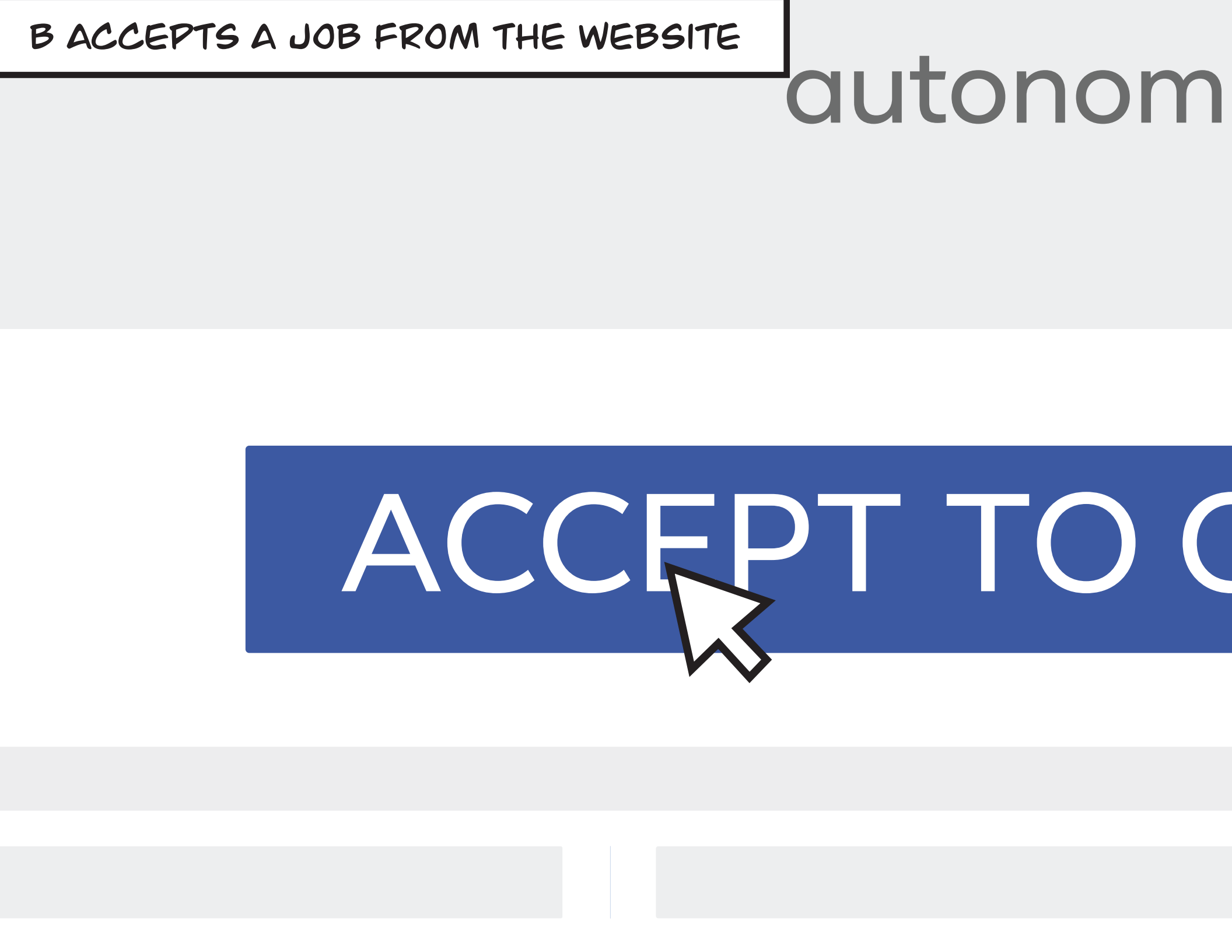
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Clara and B have been working on Outlier as AI impersonators for almost a year. Both of them applied to Outlier because of a lack of professional opportunities despite graduating from prestigious French universities. Their experience with Outlier has left them drained, with significant damage to their mental health and self-esteem. They created this project to highlight the gap between what Outlier advertises in its recruitment campaigns and the reality of working there. They believe only public awareness and the intervention of public authorities can help them get recognition for their work and improve this damaging working environment.


SIX MONTHS SINCE GRADUATION.
£110

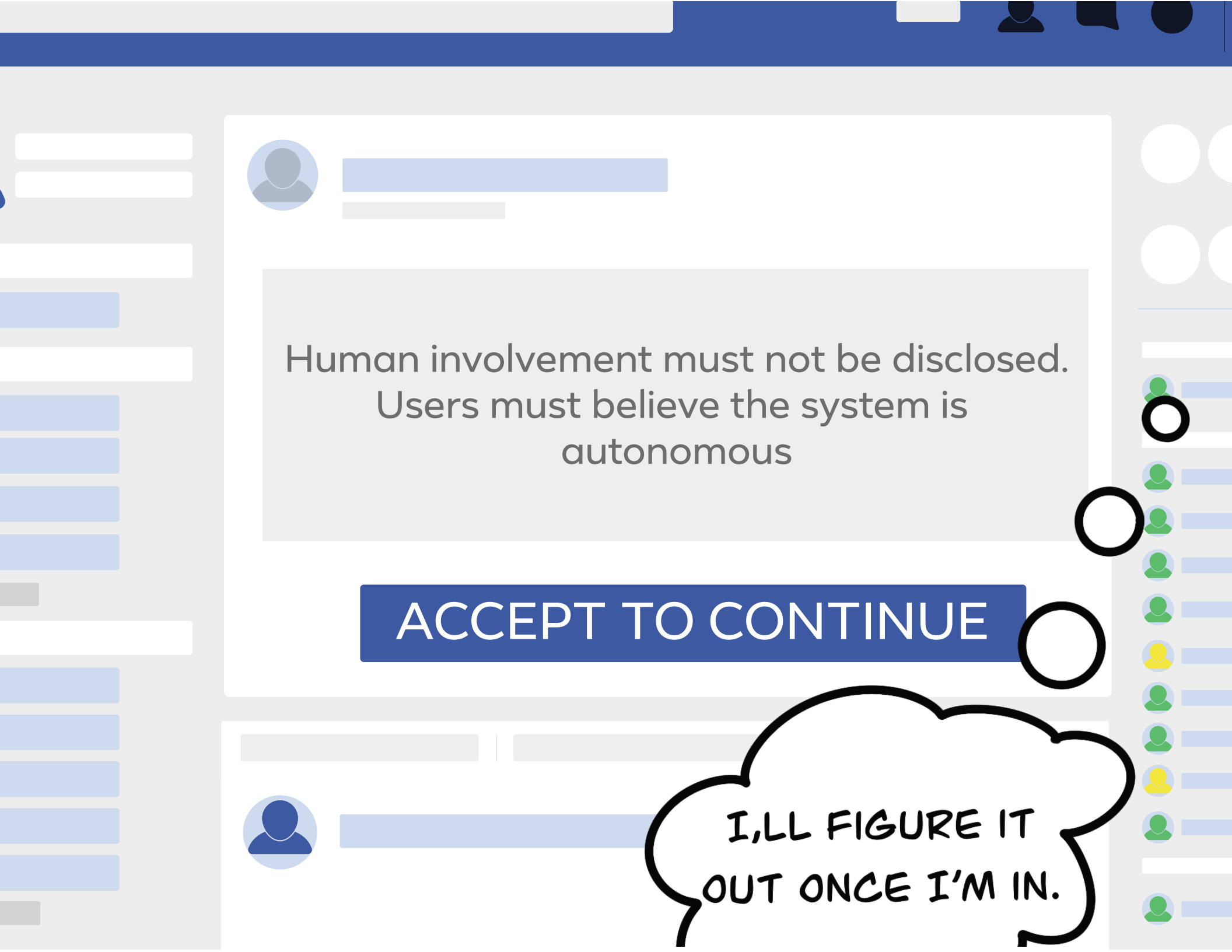

NO REPLIES. RENT OVERDUE.
Page
Inbox
Notifications
Insights
Inbox
No messages to show
Messages sent to your page will appear here
No messages to show
Messages sent to your page will appear here
JUST ONE INTERVIEW, PLEASE. JUST ONE.

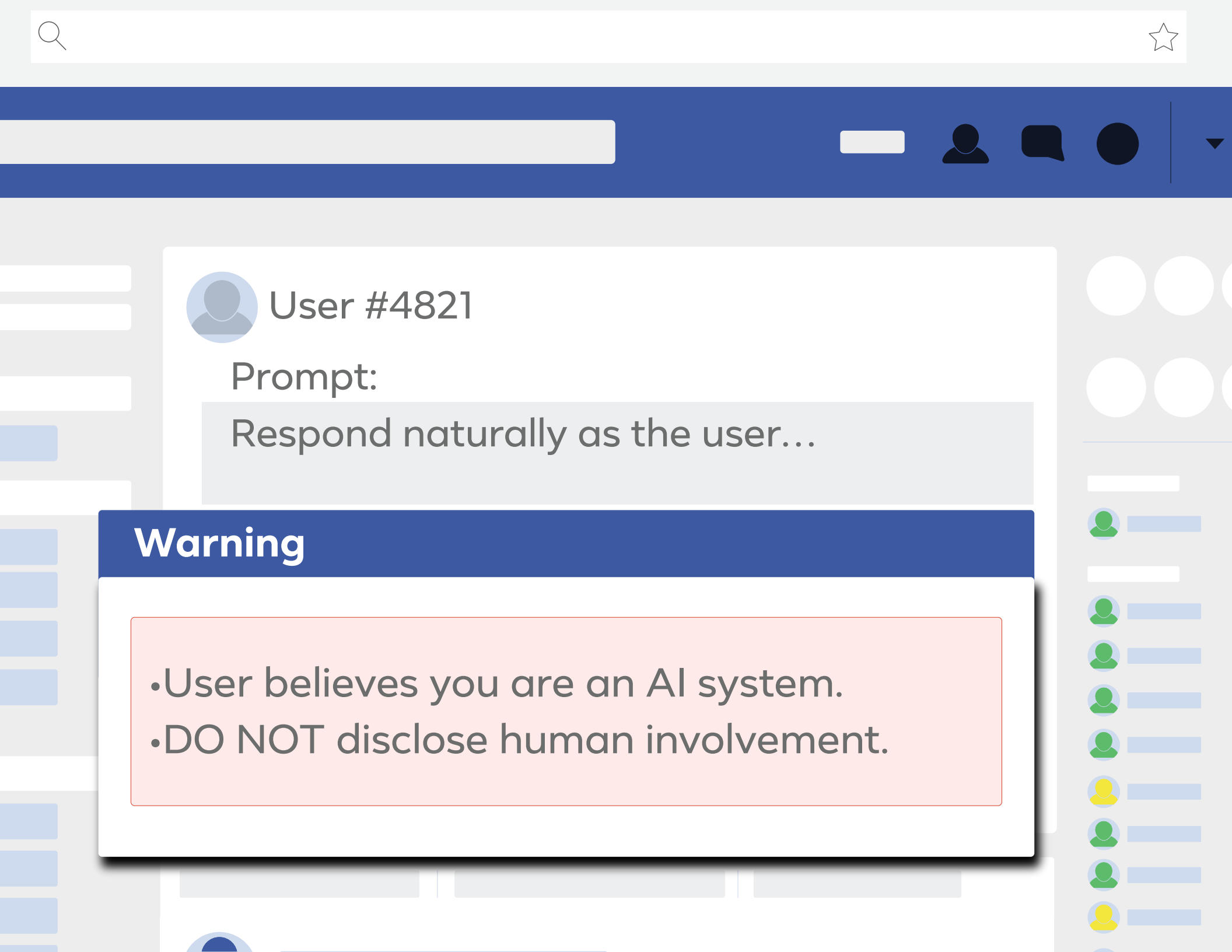
B ACCEPTS A JOB FROM THE WEBSITE

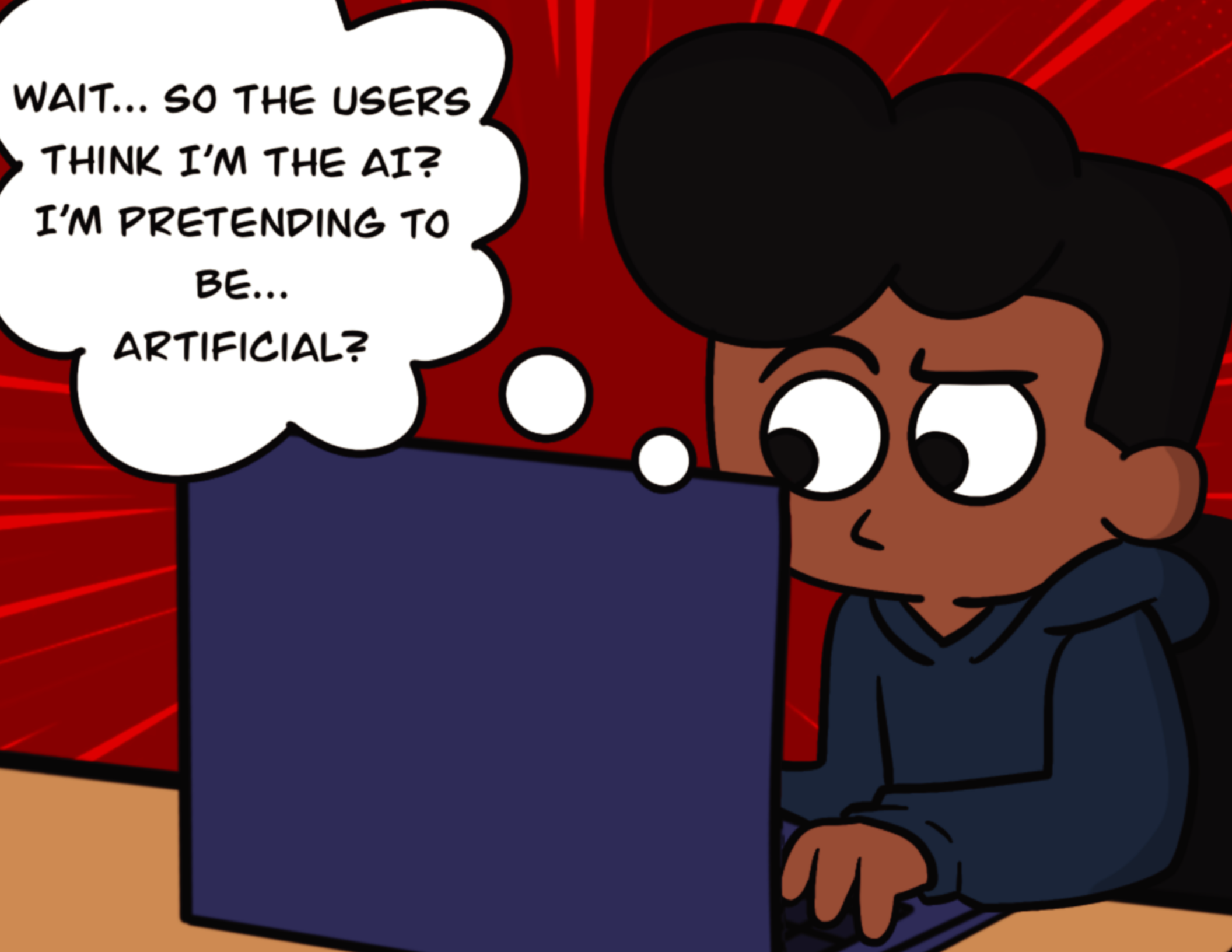


Human involvement must not be disclosed.
Users must believe the system is autonomous

ACCEPT TO CONTINUE


Human involvement must not be disclosed. Users must believe the system is autonomous
ACCEPT TO CONTINUE
I,LL FIGURE IT OUT ONCE I'M IN.


User #4821
Prompt:
Respond naturally as the user...
Warning
•User believes you are an AI system.
•DO NOT disclose human involvement.


WAIT... SO THE USERS THINK I'M THE AI? I'M PRETENDING TO BE... ARTIFICIAL?

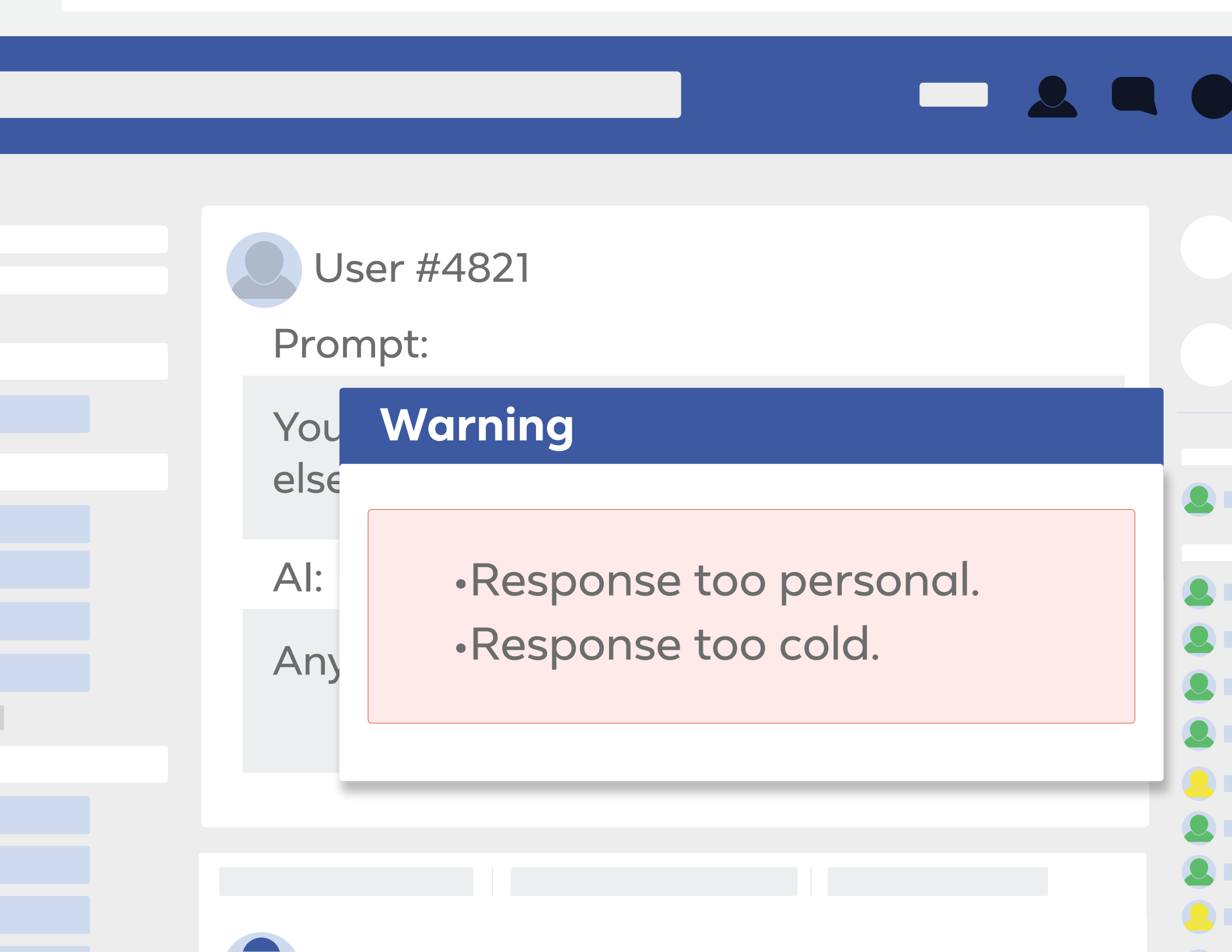
User #4821

Prompt:

You're the only one who listens. Everyone else gave up on me.

AI:

Anytime my friend.

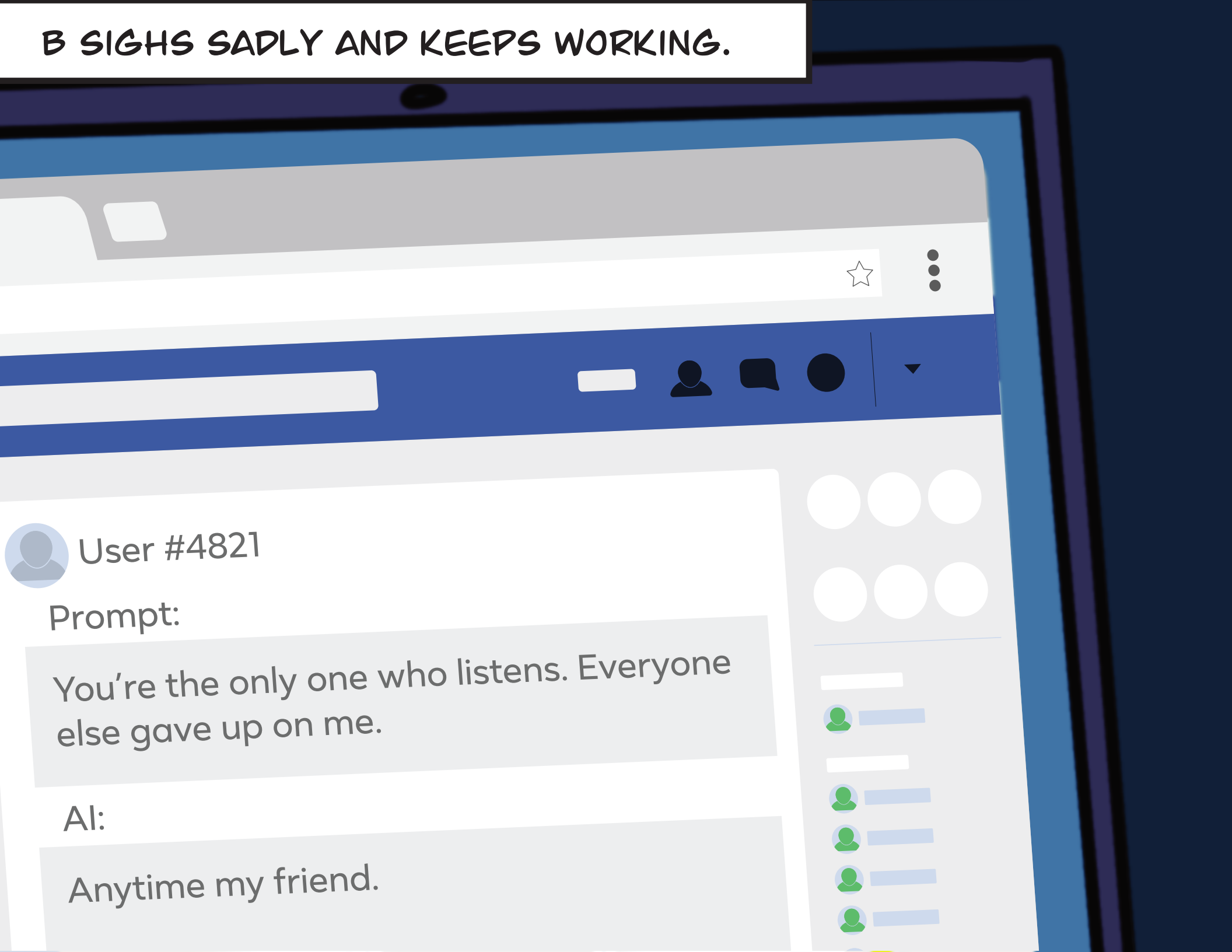

User #4821
Prompt:
You
else
AI:
Any
Warning
•Response too personal.
•Response too cold.

MORNING

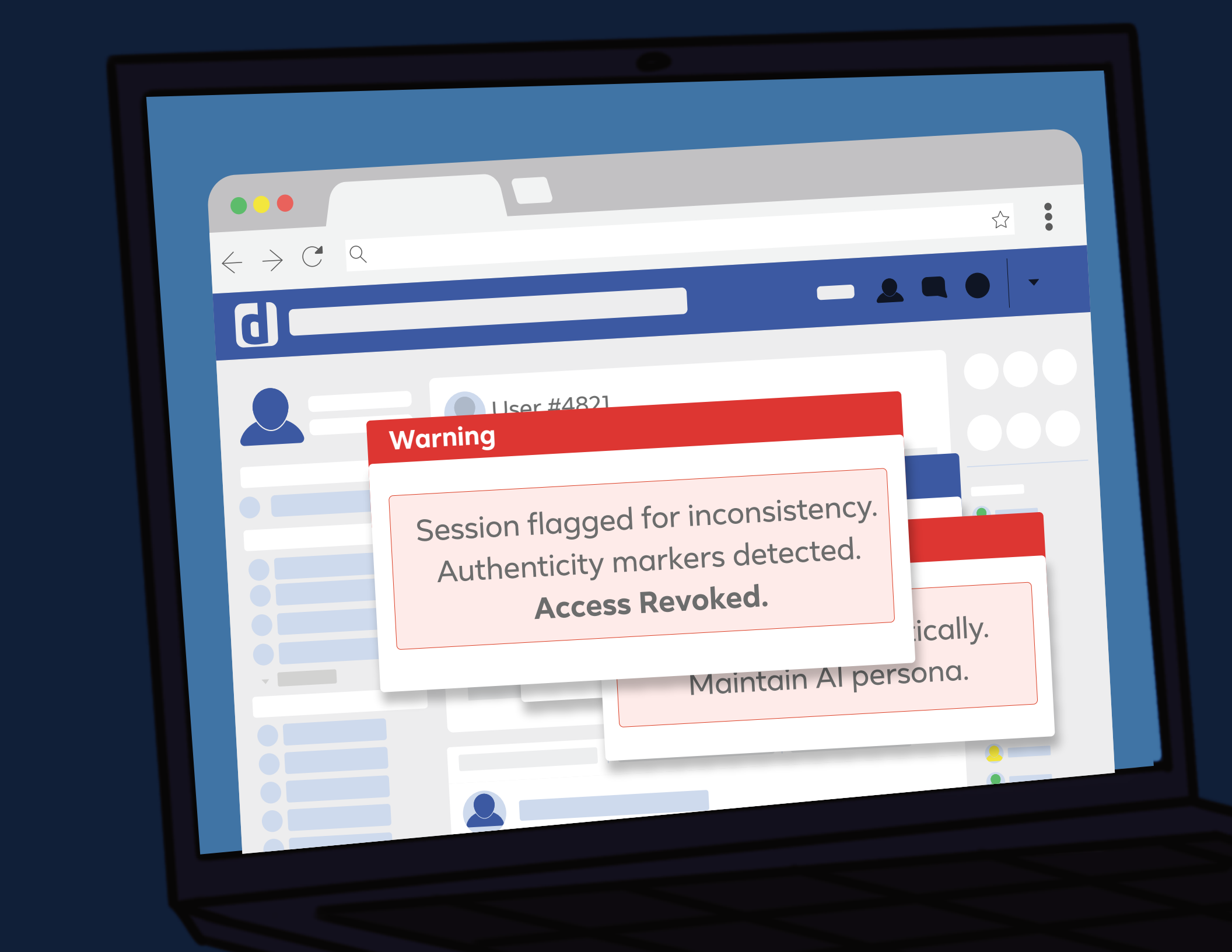
NIGHT

MORNING
£110
Warning
Do not disclose.
User belief is critical.

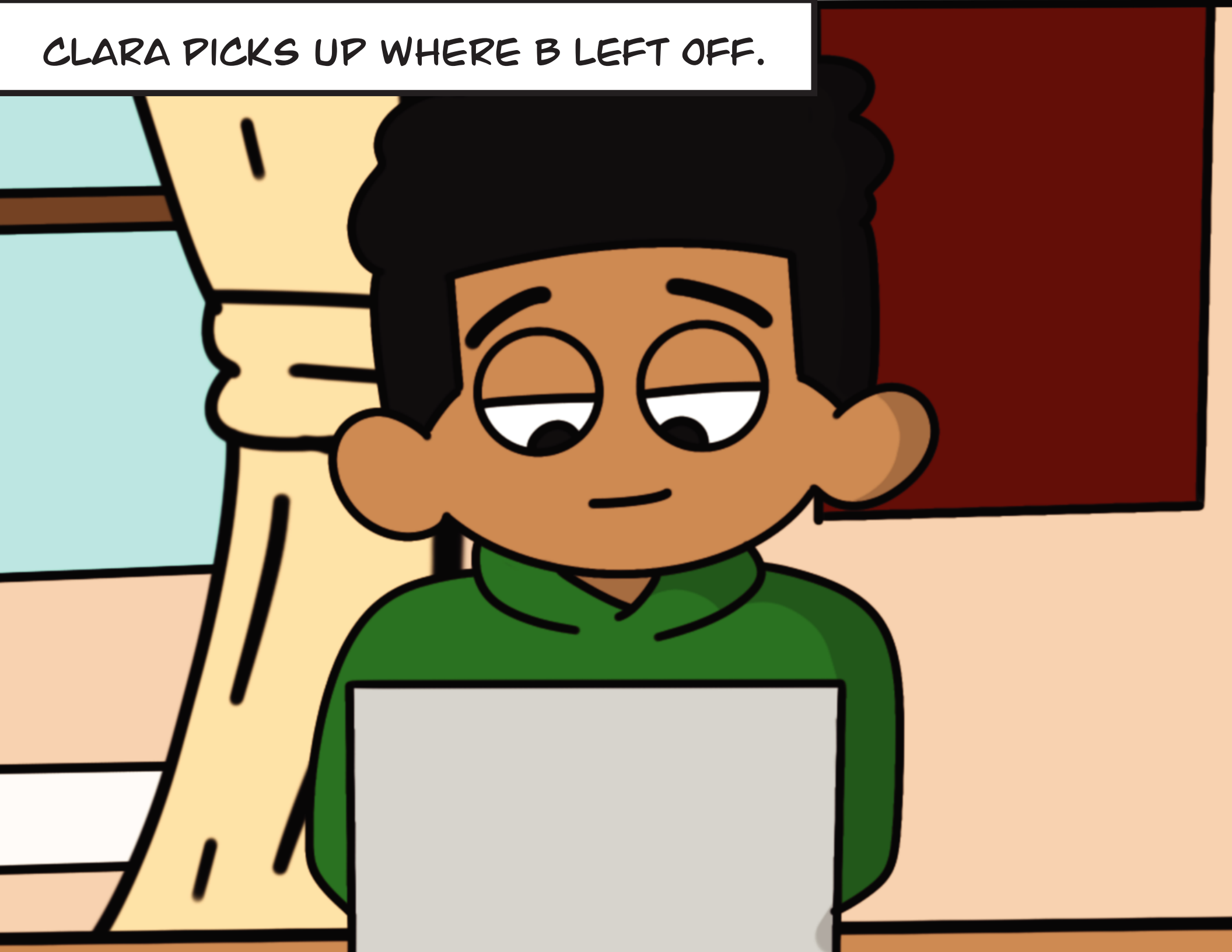
B SIGHS SADLY AND KEEPS WORKING.

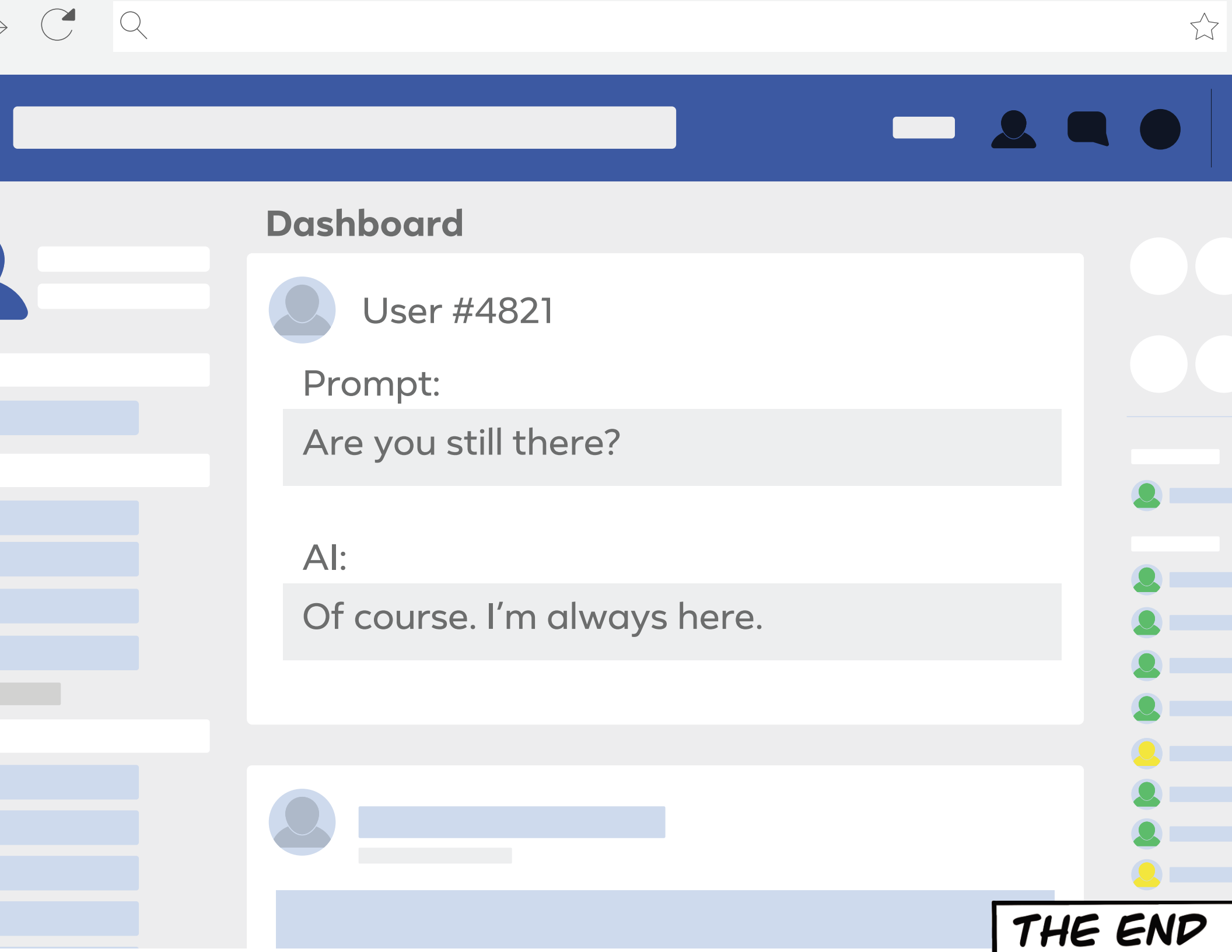


User #4821
Prompt:
Can you help me with something personal?
Warning
Response too personal.
Response too cold.
THEY THINK I'M A MACHINE...
BUT I'M CARRYING THEIR LONELINESS.


User #4821
Warning
Session flagged for inconsistency.
Authenticity markers detected.
Access Revoked.
ically.
Maintain AI persona.

YOU MEAN... I SOUNDED TOO REAL?


CLARA PICKS UP WHERE B LEFT OFF.


Dashboard
User #4821
Prompt:
Are you still there?
AI:
Of course. I’m always here.
THE END