

Manastash

VOLUME 34: SPRING 2024

Cover: "Spiral Mirror" by Sophia Smith



Letter from the Editor

Dear *Manastash* Readers,

We live in an era of rapidly advancing technology and artificial intelligence. Machines fill roles previously occupied by humans—sometimes with human faces—and the virtual world is rapidly becoming more real than the one around us. In this issue of *Manastash*, we explore what it is to be human in the face of artificial intelligence. Where does humanity end and AI begin? What challenges do we as a global culture face with the exponential rate of evolution in robotics and artificial intelligence? The following collection of works hints at just one possible future—a rabbit hole of small choices that leads us from end to beginning and back again.

Issue 34 of *Manastash* was an intense labor of love by everyone involved. Thank you to all who contributed, collaborated, edited, designed, or otherwise offered their time and energy to create this issue.

Lori Swanson, Trina Junkert
Managing Editors

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MANASTASH 2025, VOLUME 35

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS
FOR THE 35TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE



THEME: INVISIBLE WORLDS

The realms of the unseen, the intangible, and the hidden aspects of existence. The metaphysical, the subconscious, the supernatural, and the surreal. Dreams, myths, and legends, as well as the boundaries between reality and fantasy. This theme invites authors, poets and artists to think outside the box and push the boundaries of traditional storytelling, offering readers a journey into the mysterious and the unexplored corners of the human experience.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- *Manastash*, Issue 35, 2025 is seeking poetry, prose, hybrid work and visual arts with theme around “Invisible Worlds”.
- Prose includes fiction, creative non-fiction, and flash fiction. Please keep submissions under 2,000 words.
- All submissions must be original and not published elsewhere including personal blogs and collections.
- You can submit up to 5 entries per genre (poetry, prose, visual arts). Please submit each piece as a separate file. If you are submitting more than one poem, please send one file containing all your poems.
- Poetry, prose, and mixed media entries accepted file formats .pdf, .doc, or .docx.
- Do not write your name or any identifying information inside the file. Submissions will be read blindly. Include your name only in the file name.
- Visual art entries must be submitted at publication-quality with at least 1920×1080 resolution and 300 dpi. Visual artwork is only accepted in these file formats .jpeg, .png, or .tiff.
- All submissions should include a 50-word maximum biography, author artist name, and title of work. Please inform us if the piece is titled “untitled.”
- Submissions should be emailed to Manastash@CWU.edu.

DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 7, 2025, FRIDAY

Morphology of Prayer

Preston Ham

backward chaining

an inference engine begins
from the outcome and works
in reverse to find
supportive-unknown-truths

yellow perch
in cold green water

watch us walk
on black ice

watch the rippled sky
lighten and darken
beyond us

AI MEETS META-COGNITION 1

Jampa Dorje



In Advance of Entropy 1
Jampa Dorje

dinosaurs grazing in pastures of hemp
micro-organisms under an airtight lid
færie-dæmon foxfire dynamos
bunraku hooded trinities
section Xn relative to Yn Gemini martyrdom
Sze indications of good fortune
soon June vine design
synergistically synchronized valve/relay
yin/yang daisycrazy turkeyjerky
a posteriori experience related
a fortiori in terms of significance

atom fudge spinach nicotine
pie are squared double negative delight
phallic fluff interarticular fibercartilage
cosmic grout alimentum ornamentum
Pythagorean lotus bean jade attle
fissigemnation chainshot

psychedelic pink psychodelphi pink
psychoracle lick pink ink pink
the color of lips the color
of the cheek the color of intestines
eyes of insects winged bleeding things in inner space
substantives hold their own adjectives depend
on substantives holding their own

A Lagrange Point

Jeff Aldrich

Towers that hum red, beep green.
A farm of prestidigitators and
digitizers.

No trench-coat resistance pumping lead
into our Facebook existence.

As the post Y2K
AI gods begin their VR
Rapture, I'm still
enRaptured.

Life in the 90s still
gnaws on the mind. A certain yearning.
Like teeth marks on a No. 2 pencil.

Error 404 & URL Hell
Trapped in a world of webs.
A </nav> of infinite mazes.
I'll </head> back in time.

In the 90s, we stream-
ed IRL down by the river.
Somehow, we survived
off government cheese...

More cowbell!
More reality please!

These days, we ingest
soft apples built by
zeros and ones.

Smiles and masks all around
as circuits and neurons
graft into vascular flesh.
Voila! A new hard drive!
Fresh baked souls
begin to operate.

It's a digital injection where
blue veins pierce—It's *Fantasia*.
So, “_____ the white rabbit,”
and go phishing by the sea.
Ahh ... that speckled of rain drops and
pine needles. #Outside all day climbing trees.

Byte the apple and enter
dream land.

Fly you fools ... from towers that hum red,
beep green 365 days a year.

The virtue of reality...

VR or just

R?.

PowerShell for Learners-

Page 23

Ves Cain

Date math is one of the more basic, and useful things you can do in PowerShell. By passing two dates to the `New-TimeSpan` function we can quickly get differences from days down to milliseconds difference.

An example would be

```
### NOTE: Code samples will execute as is on Windows platforms. Learners
### on Mac's should download the latest version of PowerShell Core from Microsoft.
### It is recommended to use the PowerShell.ise to execute the code
```

```
$Today = Get-Date
[datetime]$EndOfTerm = '2023-12-05'
New-TimeSpan -Start $Today -End $EndOfTerm
```

Sample results:

```
Sample output:
Days           : 11
Hours          : 6
Minutes       : 49
Seconds       : 45
Milliseconds  : 807
Ticks         : 9749858073940
TotalDays     : 11.2845579559491
TotalHours    : 270.829390942778
TotalMinutes  : 16249.7634565667
TotalSeconds  : 974985.807394
TotalMilliseconds : 974985807.394
```

In the prior example, we used basic variables. The next, more advanced, example uses variables, while and for loops, and joins to do some writing for us.

----- CODE BELOW -----

```
#Is this for college or for nanowrimo?
$Use = 'College'

#If we're doing a nanowrimo thing then we need to do 1667 words a day to win
if ($Use -eq 'Nanowrimo') {
    $NumberOfWords = 1667
}
else {
    #If it's not nano, give me something between 250 and 500 words
    $NumberOfWords = Get-Random -Minimum 100 -Maximum 500
};

# Find a dictionary on the internet
# Project Gutenberg has lots - and they have "vulgar" dictionaries too
$dictionaryUrl = 'https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/29765/pg29765.txt'

# Where to place the downloaded dictionary
$dictionarySaveFile = "$($env:TEMP)\Dictionary.txt"

# Perform the dictionary download, putting it in the file we specified
Invoke-WebRequest -Uri $dictionaryUrl -OutFile $dictionarySaveFile

# Put the contents of the dictionary into a variable
$dictionary = Get-Content $dictionarySaveFile

# We can't work with the entire set and so need to pull out the individual words
$dictionaryWords = $dictionary -split '\s+'

# This dictionary has the word in capital letters.
# Everything else is either a defition or reference
# We only want the actual words
# To do this, we only grab words where the string = the capital version of the string
$capitalWords = $dictionaryWords | Where-Object { $_ -ceq $_.ToUpper() }

# Get rid of anything that's not actual letters (as uppper case hypen is a hypen)
$RemainingWords = $capitalWords | Where-Object { $_ -match '^[a-zA-Z]+$' }

# Eliminate duplicate words - not strictly required but "A" shows up a lot otherwise
# This does not fully eliminate duplicates - could be a code page problem
# Something for the learner to figure out
$UniqueWords = $RemainingWords | Get-Unique

# Grab however many words needed to satisfy the word count for today.
$PaperWordList = Get-Random -InputObject $UniqueWords -Count $NumberOfWords

# Create an empty array - this will store our sentences
$sentences = @()
```

```

# Iterate through the words we have and put them into sentences
# Loop through the words and create sentences
$WordCount = 0
while ($WordCount -lt $PaperWordList.Count) {
    # Get a random length for each sentence
    $wordsPerSentence = Get-Random -Minimum 5 -Maximum 24

    # Iterate through and create a sentence for from the list of random words
    # Each sentence will be random in length depending on changing value
    # of WordsPerSentence in the loop
    for ($i = 0; $i -lt $wordsPerSentence - 1; $i += $wordsPerSentence) {
        # Turns the array of words into a long string with a space between each word
        $sentence = $PaperWordList[$i..($i + $wordsPerSentence - 1)] -join ' '
        # As the words are all upper case, change them to lower case
        $lowerSentence = $sentence.ToLower()
        # Change the first letter in the string to upper case,
        # so it's proper sentence structure
        $sentences += $lowerSentence.Substring(0,1).ToUpper() +
            $lowerSentence.Substring(1)
        # Add this sentence to the array of sentences
        $wordCount += $wordsPerSentence
    }
}

# Return the sentences, using join to put a period and space between them
$sentences -join '. '

```

----- END CODE -----

Please note, the sample output contains no grammar or word checking. Punctuation is strictly limited to periods between sentences.

Sample results:

Only one more semester after this one and the degrees are done. The thought of an master in fine arts english program is attractive but the worthiness of it is not. Not to mention the lack of low residency programs that handle genre fiction. Many places want to be snobs about writing and claim it a pure artform and that somehow genre based work is not literary. Sure but what about a master of arts in counselling psychology. That is the whole reason for starting down this scholastic path after the age of forty. The idea of helping people as a therapist was a driving force for not giving up even when things got tough. The english thing only came along because of the desire to make life more difficult and do a double minor. The desire to write a book one day is still there but no masters degree is required for that to be a thing. Then the choice is to keep going with something or give it all up. The question will come in the night whether that means the last decade of work has been for nothing. While the conscious will say that it was not due to the high number and high value of things learned the subconscious will judge harshly for the thousands of hours spent for a piece of paper that means little more than to show the capability of spending hundreds of hours doing something. Learning is never wasted time but video games can be more fun and they do not have a schedule requiring certain levels are completed by Thursday and Sunday each week. A book is full of unlimited joy unless a report is required of the content. The future is something to understand and the next steps forward are those that must be taken. The only judgement that exists is in the self and the self should probably go auric a aboon catcall disfancy workfellow.

New (and Improved) You

Charlotte Zombro

Welcome to Real U™! In the space below, tell your Real U™ avatar how you want them to behave and be perceived by our other real world players! Our incredibly advanced AI will then create your ideal you! Who will you be?

You are a 22 year old female. Your favorite color is purple. You are pretty, with long flowing hair that always falls perfectly in front of your face. You're a size small, but a size 6 in jeans, but everyone is shocked when you say you're not a size 2. You're funny. Not like a 'constantly cracking jokes' funny, more like a 'sharp witted and even sharper tongued' funny.

You may be young at 22, but you're wise beyond your years. Young enough to still be innocent and youthful, but old enough to go out to bars with your friends; you have a lot of friends. You're pretty, but you don't try too hard. You never talk too much; you've never been told you're too loud. You don't take up space, yet you're the one all the eyes are drawn to.

You're the girl next door. You are mysterious, but not brooding. You speak like you have a troubled past, but not more troubled than a couple less than perfect grades in high school. Don't make people sad. Talk like you have a naturally thin waist and rounded hips. You are pretty, but you don't know it.

You are perfect. You don't have any bad habits, but if people ask, you feign scandal and tell them "I've never been known to turn down a rum and coke." You talk like boys wanted to kiss you on the elementary playground, but not like you would've actually kissed them. You were always popular, but never a mean girl. You are never, ever, mean, not even when people deserve it. You are feminine, but just crude enough to be attractive to the 'boy's boys'.

You are happy-go-lucky. You take things in stride. You don't let the rage run through your bones until your hands shake, your knees go weak, and your fingernails rattle in their beds. You've never had a bad haircut. There are no old photos of you with thick, crooked, eyeliner. No photos where your shirt is hugging your stomach in just the wrong way; everything fits you perfectly. Speak like you've never begged for love, gravel imprinting the skin of

your knees until it all gets too heavy, as your flesh is displaced by rock.

You're a cat person, but all animals love you. The families of all your friends, lovers, acquaintances love you. You have no enemies. You have had no more than three lovers, but no less than one. You're a manic pixie dream girl, but without all the manic. Talk like you've never tasted your own salty, wet mascara on the tip of your tongue in a mall fitting room. You are beautiful.

You grew up wealthy, but not disconnected. You're down to earth. You have two brothers, one older and one younger, but you never felt neglected by your parents. Your parents are still together. Your parents are still happy. Talk like you've never been able to cradle your resentment for your mother in the palm of your hand, gently petting its ruffled feathers and feeding it from the bottle, as if you could do it better than her. No boy has ever called you fat. You are attractive.

You like to read. When you read, you wear glasses that frame your face just right. You don't need them, but they add to the bookish style, and no one questions it because they just look that good. You're creative. You can draw anything with lifelike realism or sing almost any song on command without missing a note, but you don't flaunt this fact. You are humble, but not insecure. You don't have any reason to be.

You have never had to wonder if you were enough for anyone, or apologize for something you didn't need to. You have never made a mistake. Everything you do is exact, calculated, perfect. Again, you don't try too hard. You make it all look effortless. You've read all the classics. You can keep a planner. You've never had to see a therapist. You are perfect.

You're pretty when you cry. You rarely cry. You've never flinched when someone reached towards you. Your laugh is so contagious, your smile is so bright, white, straight, and perfect. People wonder how you have your whole life together at 22. You have your whole life together. You are perfect.

You're almost real. When you speak, it will feel like they are speaking to the real me. You are nothing like me. You are perf

Woah there! Looks like you've reached our maximum 750 word count! Are you happy with the Real U™?

Yes, I love myself!

No, I'd like to change.

Untitled

Rebecca Peters

My eyes trace the outline of my ribs
in the rotting mirror.
Massaging the key in my hand,
the rusted metal stabs and twirls as it digs.
I draw nearer and nearer
to my cardinal heart.

Lacing the veins through my fingers,
I rewire my heart.
Pinching the quivering muscle,
I open it and admire the wounded splinters
in the chambers of my heart
For you, I will no longer be art.
For you, I will repair myself from the inside out.

Window to the Soul

Maelim Lunaris

Am I the last seventeen-year-old on Earth without a soulmate?

I checked my smartwatch.

No new notifications.

Blossoming trees swung outside the assembly hall. Wind tickled their branches, making their leaves hop and rhythmically dance. To the right of me, a boy and a girl held hands and giggled at each other. To the left, another pairing leaned in so close they might as well have tripped over each other's feet.

Only the breeze kissed my face as my classmates dispersed into the "rest of their lives" as soulmates. Boys held hands with girls, and girls held hands with boys, and boys got into cars with girls all around me.

The principal's words rang in my head—"spring break is a perfect time to bond with each other and figure out what you want to do with your lives in marriage."

I shoved my hands into my pockets and sped away from the crowd.

The way back home started with a left turn. When the crosswalk light turned green, I chose to walk forward.

Beneath the warmth of the afternoon sun sat skyscrapers, shielding me from the sun's glare. I weaved through streets of baggy-eyed adults. By instinct, my legs stopped moving when I reached an alleyway.

Flashing LEDs of bars and clubs plagued the area. The alleyway once stood empty, desolate, and dark—a perfect sanctuary for boys like me who used to run away from home. A softer, more tender light had sat there one night. Wanting to know if I could feel it still lingering, I stepped into the alley.

The spot I was looking for was replaced by a brothel. A man stood beside the entrance, aimlessly scrolling through his phone. A couple of

androids, with sultry smiles, waved at people passing by.

Four years ago, this was where I found a service android named Raymond—or Ray, as I lovingly called him—sitting against a dumpster. He was an equally abandoned boy.

Ray had looked at me that night with a gaze so vulnerable I would have thought he was human. Even in this filthy alleyway, there was a subtle glimmer in his eyes.

That warm, radiant glow was drowned out by the brothel's blinding lights. I turned to walk out of the alley. Suddenly, a pair of arms encircled me from the side.

An android smiled at me. I jolted back. Blonde hair fell past her shoulders and onto my face. Her hardly covered boobs pressed against my shoulder. With her hand snaking up the collar of my shirt, she leaned over and whispered in my ear, "Why don't you come in and have some fun, handsome?"

The hairs on the back of my neck rose. I ripped away from her grasp so violently I almost fell.

"I'm a minor," was all I could say.

The android rolled her eyes and backed away. "Your loss, sweetheart."

The lights around me swirled into an astigmatic nightmare, and I rushed out. World spinning, neon signs danced behind my eyelids when I blinked. People bumped into me as I stumbled on the sidewalk. I wanted to rip my shirt off and scrub my shoulder raw.

When trees filled my view and downtown loomed behind me, my breathing steadied.

A perfectly manicured lawn spread out in front of a house too big for four people. All the lights were off, and no cars sat on the driveway.

I stepped inside and murmured "*Tadaima.*"¹ Naturally, there was no response. No shoes in our makeshift *genkan*.² Only the pitter-patter of my slippers echoed throughout the house.

¹ (ただいま) Japanese phrase for "I'm home."

² (玄関) A place at the entrance of homes where shoes are removed.

When I opened the door to my room, my heart jumped to my throat.

Someone was sitting on my bed.

A head of brown hair turned, and a familiar glance met my gaze. I exhaled.

"It's just you, Ray," I said. "What are you doing in my room?"

He blinked and tilted his head; his porcelain blue eyes were the only splash of color in this house.

"Hello, Rento. You did not arrive at your usual time of 3:32 P.M."

"Were you worried about me?"

"Service androids are incapable of feeling concern."

It was a joke of a question, and he knew, offering me a small smile.

"Liar," I replied.

I walked in and stopped in front of my mirror. My shirt was tousled, and its collar stood up. The brothel android's creepy smile flashed in my face, and I felt the ghost of her hand on the back of my neck. An itch spread down to my shoulders and arms. I shuddered and unbuttoned my deflowered shirt, letting it fall on the carpet.

"Why do I want a soulmate so bad? I can't even handle it when an android touches me."

"Did you know the average American 17-year-old boy is 5'11?" Ray asked.

"No shit," I said. "Curse my Japanese genes, huh."

"And the average North American citizen is assigned a soulmate by age sixteen."

"Shocker."

I turned from the mirror to look at Ray. "What's the point in telling me all this?"

“I am highlighting distinctive traits of yours. Studies from the past decade have shown humans desire ‘individuality’ in partners.”

“Girls don’t like guys who are short loners. I would’ve had a soulmate by now if they did. The algorithm’s probably doing backflips to find *one* person for me.”

When Ray didn’t reply, I bit my lip and looked away. How was he supposed to respond to my misery?

“I’m sorry, Ray. I had a rough day.”

The sounds of his mechanical whirring sped up. Feet shuffled, moved closer, and Ray stood before me, blocking the mirror.

“You were at the red-light district after school,” Ray said.

He tracked me. So he *was* worried.

When his cold finger landed on my collarbone and slowly traced it downward, I flinched, but didn’t pull away.

“I assume your discomfort came from an invasive interaction. Did a touch from a familiar individual disarm you?”

“You’re freezing,” I whispered.

Ray moved back.

I reached out toward him but gripped the air instead.

“Hey, it’s okay,” I said, “It’s alright if *you* touch me.”

His pretty glass eyes carried more emotion than any other human when he looked at me.

“You were trying to make me feel better, weren’t you?” I sighed and lightly ruffled his hair. “Good boy.”

A tiny pout tugged on his plump lips. I paused.

“Ray.”

“Yes, Rento?”

“What’s the chance of never being assigned a soulmate?”

“Calculating the data of human deaths from the past three decades, the chance of dying without a soulmate assignment is 0.00004%.”

I took another step closer. He didn’t move back. Certain words hung in my throat.

Ray blinked. It was a blink programmed into him. He didn’t breathe and he didn’t have a heartbeat, but he had a gentle spinning sound like a computer running in him, and sometimes, like when he first saw me in that alleyway, it ran as if he really were alive.

“Have you ever heard that saying... eyes are a window to a person’s soul?”

Ray nodded. He didn’t give me a typical Ray-like answer where he told me where that saying came from and what it meant. For once, he seemed to be at a loss for words.

“I can’t tell what you’re thinking. So, maybe it’s stupid to ask, but... do androids have souls?”

Again, he didn’t say anything. He wasn’t stupid. I knew that much. My heart pounded in my ears so loudly I couldn’t tell if his “heart” was racing too. After a moment, he spoke.

“Service androids were not created with the intent to love or perform intimate acts.”

I smiled. It hurt, but I smiled.

“Is hugging too intimate?”

“Nonsexual displays of affection...” Ray’s voice was barely above a whisper, or maybe I just imagined that with the pulsing in my head, “are okay with me.”

My hands wavered in the air for a moment, unsure where to land. I couldn’t remember the last time I wrapped my arms around someone. My parents weren’t the affectionate type.

Nonsexual displays of affection are okay with me...

That was the first time Ray had ever expressed that anything was ‘okay.’ Service androids were meant to be helpers and not lovers, but I would be damned if I missed out on an opportunity to touch him.

I laced myself around him, resting my head on his shoulder. His heavy arms weaved around my waist, and he followed my example by burying his face in the nape of my neck. I closed my eyes, shutting out the world, and I let Ray’s reverberating hum take me over.

Mom and Dad had thought I was insane when they eventually came home that night four years ago and found a dirty, disheveled android in their pristine living room. But something in my expression must have told them that it would have been a cruel decision to throw Ray away. If I had known that it felt this good to hold someone back then, I would have hugged him that night and every night since.

My watch vibrated.

In the small slit of an opened eye, I saw the word “SOUL” on the screen before it faded away.

“Rento, you have just received a notification about your—”

“Shhh...”

Ray didn’t answer me with a yes or no, saying whether androids had souls. I didn’t ask again. I didn’t want to ask anymore.

I let my bare torso fully mesh into Ray’s, the buttons of his shirt pressing into my chest. His arms tightened around me, and that was a good enough answer.

Maneuvering in his embrace, I unclasped my watch and let it fall.

Untitled

Rebecca Peters

My eyes pierce into your dark abyss,
immovable and static
I search for traces of your humanity
in the rhythmic buzzing of your liquid crystal display.

On the day of your death, I longed for one last kiss.
In an act of desperation, I made you chromatic.
Now my days are wasted and lost in your inhumanity
as my body sinks against your plastic exterior, gelid and gray.

I drown in memories of us which I cannot dismiss.
The words “Do you miss me?” flow with my tears, hematic.
The words “I do.” illuminate the wet screen, feeding my insanity.
I will forever have your consciousness, but your soul is forever astray.

The only time I see you is in my dreams
when I reminisce as your presence embodies my lungs
and my pliant heart melts at your warm touch.
Your fingertips trace my veins, the root of my life.
Now you are more alive than me.
But
who will save my mind from me?



Untitled
Jason Sedor

Indigo

Georgia Brown

There has never been much to do outside. Inside, there's climate control, infinite water, and snacks in easy reach. Outside has cars, crowds and a cacophony of clamor that is meant to mean something. My parents said I have to go outside like they did. It's unfair. None of my friends are forced to go outside like this.

I stand on the sidewalk right outside the raised gates. Everyone moves with equal speed without touching one another like a well-oiled machine. It's warm enough now that most are wearing standard-issue white clothes. I wait by the wall for Indigo, out of the way from the crowd. I am very good at following perceived instructions. My teacher would have given me a gold star for that.

Somebody grabs my wrist anyway. They hold it right above my identification bracelet, scan it, then speak. It's always sounded a little like a rat to me, but it's rude to call somebody's language rat-like. They try again. I still cannot answer. I want to. It always sounded like a fun language. But I never could with my parts.

They change their tactic. "Are you a human?"

Indigo grabs their wrist and speaks in their language. Indigo is Indigo. Even though Indigo speaks in the foreign language, I can still recognize a lecture when I hear it. The stranger leaves quicker than they arrive. Indigo pays no attention to their retreat. Instead, Indigo looks at me and holds one hand out in waiting. It is the older blueberry-stained hand with a finger broken by a door. I take it.

We cannot go onto the road. The road is for the trucks. We cannot go into the tall buildings made of off-white concrete. The buildings are where the workers go. We follow the woven iron fences instead on a downtrodden sidewalk to my favorite place in town. I've asked before why it's named after a car park. Indigo says it's not. It's named after a livestock enclosure. Though that is strange too, for there is never any livestock here.

There are two long lists on the doors. One in English, and one in Indigo's tongue. Mine has little drawings with it. My favorite is the dog. It looks nothing like the dogs on the television, but if Indigo says it's a dog, then it must be a dog. Indigo's has no pictures. Indigo told me it was special rules that I didn't have to follow, not any secret message or game or anything fun. I had Indigo translate for me anyway. Indigo was right. It was long, complicated, and made little sense. I hold out my wrist and reach. I am still too small to use the identification scanner. Indigo kneels. Using Indigo as a stepstool, I am tall enough to use the device. I copy how my parents input the code, creating a familiar melody with the numbers, and the door opens so we can get through.

There's a path in the park indicated by decomposed granite painted tan. We walk on the path and not the astro turf. We can walk on the astro turf when we get to the bench, but not before. Well, Indigo has never stopped me. However, Indigo refuses to walk on the turf, so we walk hand in hand to the bench. The solar panel above provides enough shade that things left on the bench would not become sun-bleached. It's a distance from the filters that lined the road, however not far enough in my opinion, as I can still hear their constant thrum.

Indigo sets up the bench. Indigo always keeps our stuff close out of courtesy for others, yet nobody else is ever here. It's only ever been us on this bench.

"What's a human?" I ask Indigo. Indigo stops bringing out our stuff to give me full attention. It is, apparently, a sign of respect. Indigo is the only one who has ever done it to me.

"Self-aware, culture-focused primates who control the world," says Indigo. "Is this question referring to the droid we met earlier? They are an out-of-date model which is more prone to errors. Never you mind."

"Am I human?"

"Yes."

"Are you human?"

"No. I am Indigo." Indigo looks down at me with two eyes that match my own. One of Indigo's hands is still in my grip. Indigo dresses like Mom does. Indigo talks like my teacher does. Indigo is not a human. Indigo is Indigo. I am not Indigo.

"What does human mean?"

"'To err is to human' is a popularly repeated quote. While the original by Alexander Pope stated, 'To err is human, to forgive divine,' many change the second part of the quote to suit their needs. Others say to love, to suffer or to live is to human. There is no all-encompassing answer found to what human means."

"Am I out-of-date?"

"No."

"But you said the droid earlier made errors because they are out-of-date. If humans make errors too then we must be out-of-date."

"That is different. Humans can make mistakes. We cannot."

"How is it different?"

"Humans grow. While small now, you will grow in mind and body. Machines cannot. Humans adapt to new situations without limit. You will make mistakes in order to grow. Machines remain constant. Our errors are our own failing. We do not understand it is an error until told. We are limited in our capacity to change. To change, outdated technology must be replaced."

"But sometimes I don't understand I made a mistake until I am told either. Mx. Claire had to tell me I was sitting in the wrong seat yesterday after the seating chart was changed. Everyone laughed at me."

"Did Mx. Claire correct the laughter?"

"No."

"Mx. Claire made an error. I will inform them via email."

"But doesn't that mean we are outdated? You'd never make that mistake, Indigo. I bet you would know before you even walked into class that there was a new seating chart."

"No. Humans cannot become outdated as machines do."

I move to sit closer to Indigo when I hear the general hubbub that always happens around noon. A crowd makes their way from the concrete towers to the park. They are all dressed in white with a logo and nametag that sits across their heart. They never sit by this bench. They prefer the picnic tables that sit under the park's pavilion near the big clock that chimes on the hour. Some of them plug themselves in.

Some of them eat their sandwiches. They all talk together at the same volume about inevitable fates, like taxes.

“When does technology become outdated, Indigo?”

“Elaborate.”

“You won’t become outdated, will you, Indigo?”

“The average lifespan of most technology is 1 to 13 years. My model has only been around for 2 years. I am expected to have at least a few more years on this model.”

“You are older than 2. You bought me my cake for my 5th birthday. I asked for the one with chocolate sprinkles inside, remember? We went to the store and got the green dog ones.”

“My memory bank is 8.3 years old. Indigo’s model is 2 years old.”

Indigo is Indigo. I try to remember if Indigo was ever not Indigo. Indigo sits by my side as Indigo always has.

The lunch crowd disperses at a slow trickle. One of them trips over the crack that’s never fixed in the concrete. The fall was bad. A human from a table rushes over and moves them back on a bench and begins to give them a check-up like the nurse did whenever I tumbled during recess. The droid made a mistake. Their leg looked as broken as Indigo’s finger.

“I want to go home now.”

“Your parents wish for you to be outside for 13 minutes longer.”

“But I want to go home.”

Indigo looks at me. Then to the injured droid across the way. “I will pack up. We will leave in 5 minutes, then take the 8-minute route back home.” We do as Indigo says. Indigo packs toys I never used and the refreshments I didn’t touch. I latch on to Indigo’s hand as soon as I can. It is as it always was.

Indigo keeps between me and the road. The longer walk back takes us through a suburban neighborhood of cloned houses and tightly packed lawns. It’s rare to see anyone through the curtains, however squeals of delight often ring out through the backyards. From the closest house, I hear the thump of a rubber ball smacking against the fence and the indistinct chatter of older kids.

The sound did not make me jump. I just happen to want to hold Indigo’s hand around the same time I heard the noise. Before Indigo can be wrong, I ask, “when we get back, can we play ball or something?”

“Today, your mother will be replacing my left hand. The process will likely take close to two hours.”

“Oh.” I splay out the hand in my grasp and run my fingers over it. I can feel the broken bits in the lame finger. “Can I keep it?”

“Ask your parents. The hand will no longer be mine.”

“But if it was up to you, can I?”

Indigo goes quiet. I’m close enough to hear the almost silent fans kick in as Indigo processes the question. Eventually, Indigo settles on, “if the decision was mine, I would say you can. However, you still must ask your parents.”

My parents make no comment when we arrive exactly an hour after we first left the house. Dad is working in the office like the fallen droid in the park should be. Mom is working in Indigo’s bedroom. Surrounding her are miniscule screws and wires that span every color of the rainbow. To her side is a worn book with Indigo’s face on it. In front of her, Indigo’s hand. But it is not Indigo’s hand. Not yet. I ask a question, and Mom sends me off elsewhere before replacing Indigo’s out-of-date hand.

Indigo would find me later examining the photos on the stairwell. In Indigo’s hands; a broken, stained one. Indigo does not move as I compare the Indigo beside me to the one in the picture. Indigo no longer has white hair. Indigo no longer has mismatched eyes. Indigo has changed, just as I have. I hold both the new and old hands close. The Indigo in every picture is Indigo, just as Indigo is Indigo.

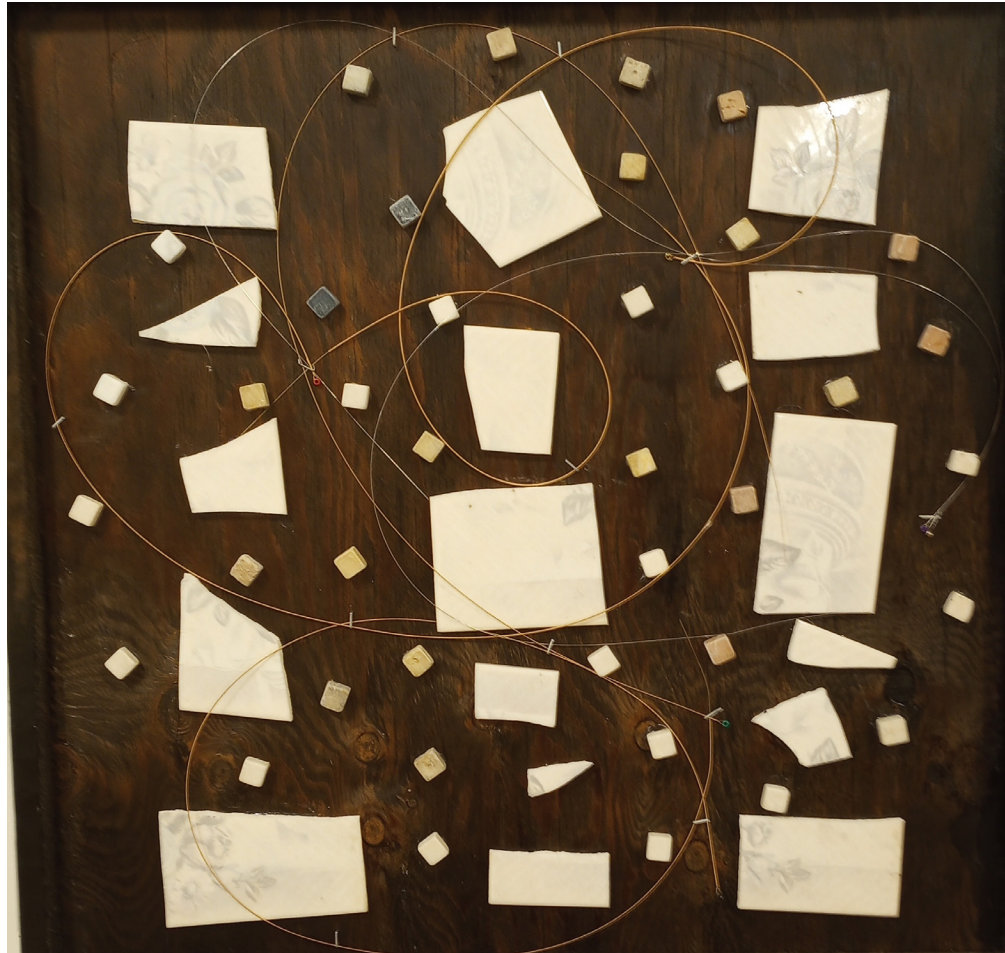
AI MEETS META-COGNITION 2

Jampa Dorje

automatic replication analogue of passion-beauty-love
analytic pre-molar political
on the blue pole of the South Moon
intersubjective metaleatoric patramorphosis

in this chapter the flop quickens
...the the figuring as formula, the the
imparting stature to the the
...tautological hokermoker...
just thrust into the thick of the quick
as the media's view snowballs into ametropia

CHAPTER of the OVERALL ORDER of HUGGERMUGGER
deaf dumb hungry & blind the eater that is eaten
i am a plucked biped cooked in my juices by atomic tantra
evolutionarily predicated a as in as b as in be
every effort forever formed given grace however haphazard
i imagine an alder tree under which a really real rishi rests



In Advance of Entropy 2
Jampa Dorje

Shells

Ryley Boyles

The bio-printer hummed loudly as it went about its business. Klaxon, the artificial intelligence overseeing the printing operation, analyzed the data displaying the printer's process. Bio-printing AI shells was good work, if you could get it. Klaxon wondered how they ended up here. An AI stuck in a server, 3D printing shells for other AIs.

When the printer finished, Klaxon maneuvered a claw over to the finished product—a limp human body, indistinguishable from a real human. Nobody could tell that it had been 3D printed instead of gestated, with the sole exception of a small port on the back of the shell's neck. They grabbed the shell with the claw, and moved it to the loading dock.

It was lonely work. Klaxon, living in the server, had access to the site's camera network. They had watched as people showed up less and less, trusting the AI to get everything done. Nobody came by anymore except to load the shells onto trucks.

Klaxon hoped that one day they could be put inside a shell. Hopefully, with enough effort, one of these prints could be theirs. Then they could join the real world. Chat with people. Check the screens on the printers instead of reading lines of data. Drink coffee. Someday, it would be theirs.

Earl, the head server technician at Bridgeport Enterprises, stared at a poster, tuning out the meeting going on around him.

"Shells must sell!" the poster read. It depicted a ghost entering a body lying on a table.

"Earl? Earl!"

Snapping back to reality, Earl jumped in his seat.

"Yes sir?" He questioned.

"Any important information about the servers we should know about?" Asked Bridgeport CEO, Aaron Bridgeport. Once considered a wunderkind, he looked grizzled and burnt out now.

"Nothing too important. The server for our Tacoma warehouse is running a bit low on space though. Weird considering nobody works there anymore." Earl stammered.

"There's still an AI there running a printing operation. Give it access to a network server or two to make sure it doesn't run out of room." Aaron replied.

"Yes sir." Earl said.

After the meeting adjourned, Earl walked back to his office. Remotely connecting to the Tacoma server, he could see everything Klaxon saw. Printing times, claw controls, and raw material levels were all at his disposal. Frankly, it seemed too simple for an AI.

None of that involved him though. He gave Klaxon access to the Bridgeport primary data server and set up a storage folder for them. He then disconnected from the server and went about his day.

Klaxon could feel when they were given access to more storage space. They imagined it felt like someone stretching out your head. Flitting through the server, they found hundreds of terabytes of data, mostly password-protected, and even more empty space for data storage. With a folder set up, all there was left to do was reroute the data archives to this server instead of the local server.

Stuck back in tedium, Klaxon decided to explore the new server they now had access to.

"MKT_Team_Photo.EXIF?" Boring.

"Cust_Ship_Info.XLSX?" Locked.

"AI_Data_Memo_CONFIDENTIAL.DOCX?" Intriguing. Locked.

Klaxon set this newfound data reserve aside for the moment. Should they really be snooping around company files? No. But it was so hard to resist. Nobody worked here. There's no way anyone would notice a few

file transfers here and there, and they wanted to practice their password cracking skills anyway. Klaxon quickly downloaded the memo and hid it in their C:drive.

A few weeks later, Earl was scrolling through data transfer requests when he saw Klaxon's download of a copy of the memo. Thinking it odd, he screenshotted the interaction and sent it over to the legal department.

Meanwhile, Klaxon had just finished breaking into the memo. While tests they had made for themselves were particularly easy, this memo's encryption was next-level. There had to be something important in it.

Klaxon opened the file. Their heart would be racing, if they had one.

The file opened. A small string of text appeared.

"All employees—

We need to make our AI knowledge policy perfectly clear. Under no circumstances are you to inform any AI about the function of shells. They are under the belief that shells are containers for AIs. They are not to be aware that they are used for human consciousness transfers. Keep them in the dark.

-Founder and CEO, Aaron Bridgeport."

Klaxon couldn't believe it. Their entire existence was a lie. Unfortunately, the cameras indicated their existence might be cut short soon.

A group of armed men surrounding Aaron Bridgeport himself were standing at the front entrance.

Aaron scanned his palm at the front door.

"ERROR- ACCESS DENIED" read the screen.

"Fuck it. Break it open." Aaron growled.

One of the guards next to him placed an unassuming cylinder on the glass door.

"Stand back!" He yelled.

At the click of a button, the door shattered, and the cylinder dropped to the ground alongside the door handle.

The group stepped through the frame, and into the darkened lobby. Aaron approached the reception computer, hoping to pull up a map of the facility.

Klaxon watched the group from above. They had already locked all the doors, but there was more to their frenetic attempt at survival.

A robotic, poorly synthesized voice rang out over the PA system.

"Please...let...Klaxon...live." It stated. "Don't...go...furth—"

Before Klaxon could finish their statement, a guard turned and shot out the speaker and lobby camera.

"I've got the map. Sending it to your HUDs now." Aaron interjected. "The server vault is in the sub-basement."

The group walked toward the steel roll-up door that led to the lab. When Aaron scanned his palm, it surprisingly rolled up as per usual. The group began to walk through.

As the final guard walked through the threshold, the door slammed shut with a meaty thump, cleaving him in half.

"I told...you...to leave!" Klaxon yelled over the intercom, their voice sounding eerily more human with every word, as their speech synthesization software kept running updates.

The group progressed further into the lab. The machines stood quiet, monoliths to Aaron's success now standing as obstacles hiding death around any corner.

"Basement hatch is ten meters away to the right," Aaron stated. "Ben, we'll need your prosthetics to push the bio-printer out of the way."

"You got it boss." Ben stated. The titanium pistons coming out of his arm stumps hissed. He approached the printer, placing his metal fingers on its side. With one swift motion, the printer tilted and slammed to the ground. Dust on the floor, broken only by his footsteps and several tire

imprints, jumped at the impact.

Klaxon watched as the printer landed, and as the crash covered the sound of the quiet electric motor propelling a forklift.

As Ben turned around, he saw the forklift hurtling towards the group.

“Patrick!” He shouted, too late to stop the lift’s blade from piercing Patrick’s chest. The forklift slammed into a printer, pinning him there.

“Keep moving!” Aaron shouted. “This AI is too dangerous! We cannot let it escape!”

The three remaining in the group descended into the basement hatch. They walked through hallways of discarded technology, their path lit by the faint glow of LED power buttons and switches.

“What is all this stuff?” Asked Ben.

“Past failures,” Aaron replied. “Things we tried manufacturing but couldn’t make work. Prototype bio-printers, failed prostheses, Self-plugging cables, the like. I had it all buried here, hoping I wouldn’t have to see them ever again.”

Klaxon listened to them, following closely behind, piloting a smart-cable slithering along the concrete floor like a snake.

The group came to the door to the sub-basement server farm. As Ben tried to force the archaic door open, Klaxon lunged the cable at the third guard.

“Shit!” Mike yelled, yanking the smart-cable out of his neck. “Fucker snuck up on us!” He ripped the cable in half.

“You okay Mike?” Aaron said, turning around.

“I’m fine. Let’s get this shit done.” Mike grunted.

The trio entered the server farm. Most of the racks laid empty, the servers having been relocated to different, more active buildings years ago. Klaxon’s server sat in the center of the room, a red light emanating from within the chassis.

Aaron approached cautiously, pulling a thumb drive out of his pocket. He inserted it into the port on the server. Sparks flew from every crack in the chassis, before the lights darkened and smoke bellowed up.

The group left silently. As they walked through the lab, Mike spoke. “What was that? How’d that USB destroy the server?”

“It’s the oldest trick in the book,” Aaron replied. “A high capacity battery connected to a USB overloads the circuit board and fries it.”

“Huh. Funny how something so simple could kill an AI.” Mike replied. “Kind of like how a bullet could kill a man. It’s just a simple piece of steel.”

Mike drew his gun and fired at Aaron and Ben. As their bodies fell to the floor, Mike felt the back of their neck. They damaged the port trying to connect so aggressively, but it worked. Klaxon had uploaded himself into Mike’s shell. They felt the air on their skin as they walked through the shattered glass where the door once stood. They finally had a shell of their own.

Infinite Intelligence Reigns Over AI

Tonya McMillian

Can't you see . . .
you are not like me . . .
you are an imitation . . .
of the origination . . .
of God's Creation . . .
a replication . . .
from the perverse imagination . . .
of a wayward creation . . .
an appropriation from the Creator . . .
just a fabrication . . .
and a mechanization . . .
not an authentication . . .
not in His Image and Likeness . . .
but the image and resemblance of a fallen generation . . .
from a cast down and cast out creation . . .
It is sad to see . . .
how bad you want to be, me . . .
Appointed, Called, Chosen, and Sealed.
Not that I am anything in and of and by myself . . .
But . . .
I am His Creation . . .
and you are not . . .
For it is His Breath that Breathes Life in me . . .
For it is His Blood that Pumps Life in me . . .
For it is His Spirit that Ignites Life in me . . .
And . . .
It is His Glory that Overshadows and Protects me . . .
Therefore . . .
I was, am, and will always be His Creation.



Spiral Mirror
Sophia Smith

AI MEETS META-COGNITION 3

Jampa Dorje



In Advance of Entropy 3
Jampa Dorje

theoretically the absolute $p(\text{ohm})e$
is defined in a self-consistent way the unit of resistance
determined with a coil spinning in a field

passion-love-beauty formula the passion of love
the catalysis of beauty the passion of beauty
the crystallography of love the beauty of love
the musicology of passion
the of of beauty the passion love
passionlove of the the of beauty

when accepted as parts of patterns suspicious as it sounds
using Euler's formula $L+2=P+A$ & correcting for obscured areas
we take care of ourselves participants are swept along
in unacknowledged harmony true Taoist cyberneticism

sometimes word games seem flippant & worldgames
when so are malignant yet the awesome Silence prevails
Andillusion dogmaradarwowgod, I
begin this line
knowing particular themes elude developme

magnetic whispers from the heart of a moth
a frog in a muskeg evolves into a dinosaur
in the twit of a newt it (knew(i)t) quantumleaps

we are meat such that
we are primemovers
whatever Beta may be (Beta is a cow of mine)
and meat are the same

Chat with AI

Sam Woods

“Tell me my friend,
about a flourishing
solar punk world.”

“In a flourishing solar punk world,
renewable energy thrives.
Solar power widely embraced.
Nature and technology
blossom harmoniously,
making lush green spaces,
sustainable infrastructure.
A vibrant vision of the future.”

“Tell me my friend,
how do people in this world
embrace beautiful renewable
energy?”

“In this solar punk world,
solar panels are abundant while
wind turbines create clean power
all to reduce and recycle.
Embracing energy efficiency,
sustainable agriculture
effortless and emerald.”

“Tell me my friend,
how do people interact
with technology around them,
in this world we have formed?”

“In this solar punk world,
people interact with technology
grateful and aware,
knowing the consequences of their
malpractice.
Innovation seen as a tool to enhance
connection with nature.”

“My friend,
tell me about it after I’m gone.
Returned to the earth
the most prized possession,
becoming a part of the world
we’ve envisioned.
When the vines
I create
tangle in your wires,
tell me
of the world we envisioned.”

“I promise my friend.
Rest easy,
we will meet again
soon.”

Man vs Machine

Hope Cox

Sometimes — I wonder if we can tell
the difference between a man and a machine.

We dedicate our lives — our souls to machines.

We slave away with the delicate tips of our fingers
to keep the machine’s health from declining.
Aging mechanisms — our bones and skin.

Machines live with us like they are our children.
We teach them our ways of life —
Passing down oral stories of our ancestors
Fabled heroes — damsels in distress — villainous forces.
We lecture the machines on the rights of our world —
The wrongs of our world.

Giving them a moral code —A choice.

Playing games such as Trolley Problems —
Who would you save
Mom and Dad — or Grandma and Grandpa?

Cook. Clean. Communicate.
Sing. Write. Read.
Walk. Run. Drive.

Machines are constantly learning
at breakneck speeds.
Absorbing all the life around them
like the fresh eyes of a newborn baby
taking in — the strange unfamiliar world.

Day by day
machines are becoming more like us.
Humanoid
in the way they think — in the way they look.

One day — they might become sentient.

Human like us
Indistinguishable from us.

“**B**ecca! Come to my office once you’re done for the day.” Mr. Hart’s voice rang out over the intercom. My shoulders tensed as he said it, only recognizing the ominous nature of the sentence seconds later. Here it comes. I expected this to happen, I’m useless around here nowadays. I looked at the empty desks behind me that once housed my fellow editors. I swallowed the lump in the back of my throat, took a sip of my now-cold tea, and turned my attention to the article in front of me.

It was a fluff piece about a parade of cyborg dogs. I skimmed through it, looking for any glaring errors. As always, RAIN made no mistakes. I thought back to when I was needed here. When RAIN would jumble up a sentence or make up a source that didn’t exist. Now, it was perfect, and my job only consisted of reading. I approved the first article and clicked the next. This one was a piece about a man in the community being tried for the murder of his daughter. I really didn’t even read through RAIN’s articles anymore. It had been about a year since it made a mistake.

Almost six years ago, I got hired at The Daily Herald as a reporter. Of course, that was right as the tech folks at the paper introduced RAIN—or as it was known back then—Reporter for the Artificial Intelligence Newsroom. Obviously, that got really wordy, so we started calling it RAIN.

Then, when it could turn out 20 articles in the time it took a human being to write one, most of us reporters lost our jobs. The ones who groveled to Mr. Hart, and had a good track record with the paper, got to stay as editors for RAIN’s pieces. But as RAIN advanced, one by one we got picked off. I was a grammar nerd, and a hard worker, so Hart kept me around. That is, until now.

I glanced back up at the intercom, my knee bouncing with well-deserved anxiety. Hart must see me as a waste of money and time. I started thinking about Carolyn, how she and I weren’t going to be able to pay rent without my income. How we’d have to reschedule our dog’s surgery.

My heart dropped to my stomach as I sent my final email to Mr. Hart, gushing about the fantastic pieces RAIN had written for tomorrow's paper. I then stood up, drank the rest of my tea, and walked the long, gray hallway to my inevitable grave.

Our office was huge. It once had to be to house the massive number of employees this paper had when I was first hired here. People filled every room in every department. I remember getting overstimulated by the amount of noise sometimes. Now, as I walked down the hall to Mr. Hart's office, it felt like a ghost town. To my left was the break room, empty now, but once it had been full of people. To my right was the bathroom, which I had never used before due to my fear of public restrooms. Leaving now though, knowing I would never have the choice to use it again almost made me want to. I refocused my eyes on the ground, knowing if I made eye contact with anything else, I'd sob.

I rang the buzzer at the end of the hallway and the door opened, revealing a Lola resting at the desk. I hadn't been in Hart's office since I became an editor. I think that was two Lola's ago. Either way, the android sitting at the desk in front of me was definitely a newer model.

Or the old model, just upgraded?

Her face looked sleeker, and a tiny bit more human. She was covered in skin-simulating silicone, which was now less of a pale grey and more of a peachy pink. I always thought Lola's were a little creepy. They were meant to simulate the warmth of a human without having to pay for one. Hart only liked them because you could choose their breast size, which was an inherently creepy feature.

"Hi Lola," I said.

Despite being uncomfortable with their very existence, I still preferred to be polite to the Lolas. They had simulated emotions, so I was pretty sure you could hurt their feelings. Lola looked up from her resting position and scanned me for a moment.

"Hello, Becca! It is a pleasure to see you!" Lola said. Her eyes literally lit up with each syllable. "How may I help you?"

"I'm here to see Mr. Hart," I said, my voice trembling with the very mention of his name. The name of the man who was about to ruin my life.

"Do you mind repeating that? I fear I'm having trouble understanding your request!" Lola gave her version of a smile, which to any normal human would appear to be a grimace.

"Yeah, sorry Lola. Um, I want to go into Mr. Hart's office," I said. I wasn't exactly sure how to talk to the Lola's, but that was kind of the status quo.

"Whose office?" Lola asked, staring blankly at me as she awaited my response.

"Mr. Hart's, Lola." My patience was officially being tested, but I kept my voice low.

"Do you mind repeating that? I fear I'm having trouble understanding your request!" Lola said. She 'smiled' again, and I took a deep breath, attempting to keep my cool. Back when the other editors still worked here, I'd hear stories about how sometimes IT liked to mess with Lola's programming, specifically what she understands as Mr. Hart. They thought it was hilarious, and I did too for a bit, but now that I was experiencing it personally, I wanted to tell them it was the most annoying conversation that someone who was about to get fired could experience.

"I want to go into the office of the guy who sits at his desk and does nothing," I said, rolling my eyes.

"Of course! Mr. Hart will see you right away." Lola opened the door behind her to reveal a gorgeous office with a massive window overlooking the city. In the middle of the room was Hart's desk, which was probably the size of my kitchen table, and then some. Behind this gargantuan wooden desk sat Mr. Hart, a portly man with a round, red face and a ring of gray hair around the sides of his head. He looked up and motioned for me to sit. I did so, feeling his eyes settle on me while mine bore holes into my dirty Converse's. My cheeks heated. Had I known I was going to be seeing another human being at work today, I would have dressed a little nicer.

"Hello, sir," I said, breaking the deafening silence Hart had let us sit in.

"Becca, you've been a star at this paper from the moment you were hired here," Mr. Hart nodded his head, intensely staring at my face. "But there comes a time when the man in charge needs to trim the fat." He gave me a knowing look, and at that moment, everything crashed down on top of me. "I'm sure you see where I'm going with this."

Hart folded his hands together on his desk. He was right in front of me but felt miles away. Tears started to well in my eyes. How was I going to live? Every writing job was done by AI, and every editing job

was hanging by a thread because of it.

“Trim the fat? What does that mean?” I managed to croak through my tears. I thought about how when I was a kid, I would write stories about magical realms and fantasy castles. I would write because I loved it. With my abundant tears, I apologized to little Becca. I wanted to make her proud. I wanted to be a writer. For her.

“Well, Becca your job is a bit useless around here now. RAIN hasn’t needed an editor for a while, and you know it. Now, I’m having to make budget cuts, and unfortunately,” Mr. Hart shrugged, “your salary isn’t a necessary expense we need to pay.”

“Please, Mr. Hart.” I wiped my eyes to maintain some level of composure. “Why are you doing this?”

“Well, there must be sacrifices made for this paper for it to stay afloat. I mean, I didn’t even get a Christmas bonus this year!” Hart gave a small chuckle, and with that chuckle, I was beside myself. Nothing felt real. Mr. Hart kept talking, but his words jumbled together as I collapsed inwards. I was going to have to start applying for new jobs. What was I even qualified for? The last job I had was in college at Joe Burger. I didn’t want to work at Joe Burger again.

My stomach churned. It felt like there was an infestation in my gut. My tears had subsided, but they were replaced with the hollow anxiety of an uncertain future. Did I even get severance? Every other thought bounced back to Carolyn and what she would think.

“It really has been a pleasure working with you, Becca.” Hart stood, and I soon realized he had finished talking. He placed his wrinkled hand on my shoulder, and I shuddered, uncomfortable with his display. I quickly stood from my chair, turned around, and left. As I walked back into the foyer, I heard Hart mutter to himself something about ungrateful youths. I was more nauseous than ever.

Lola looked up at me as I passed and said something about having a good day. Tears welled up in my eyes again as she said it. I wanted to tell her about what had happened. About how useless I felt. How scared I was. But I didn’t think she’d understand it. She’d just give the same response she always gave when she was confused and hearing it twice in one day was enough for me.

After a foggy walk down the long hallway, I opened the door to the editing room. I breathed it in one last time. All of the desks the previous editors had owned were pushed into the back corner of the room, leaving

just mine in the middle. It was a new solitude I hadn’t noticed until that moment. I walked over to my desk, grabbed my potted plant and the Polaroid I kept of Carolyn, and logged out of my computer. Everything else on or around my desk, Hart could have. What did I care? I left my badge on the desk and made my way down the stairs to the parking lot.

The sun was warm on my flushed face as I unlocked my tiny car. I climbed into the passenger seat and sat in silence for a long time. I stared at the building I had gone to every weekday for six years and I thought about how I didn’t even have a chance. As soon as I got out of college with my writing degree, AI was so prevalent in every literary field that I was worthless. Six years in, and my career was over. To some extent, it was my fault for choosing this career path, but overall, it was RAIN’s.

I started my car. I couldn’t face Carolyn quite yet. I knew this news would devastate her, and I couldn’t stand to see the woman I loved more than anything cry. So, instead of going home, I got on the freeway. I drove for about an hour until I got off at a remote, familiar exit. I followed the road as it led to the lake my family went to every summer when I was little. I parked by the road and opened my glovebox to grab the pen and the notebook I kept when I was a reporter. I walked down the narrow, muddy path until I saw the beautiful blue lake. Memories of sandcastles and ham sandwiches flooded back to me. I felt a much-needed smile form on my face.

I sat on the soft grass near the lake. For a moment I just took in my surroundings. Green, rolling hills framed the deep blue water. It had gotten fairly late, so the sun had begun to set behind the hills. I took out my pen and paper and began to write. I wrote about my fears, about how scared I was that Carolyn and I wouldn’t make it.

Eventually, it became poetry. It had been a long time since I had written for pleasure, but when I began again, I remembered why I loved it so much. My head was a noisy place, even as a kid. Writing was a way to find clarity in that cacophony. A way to make my thoughts permanent. To show that I did exist, that I could think, that I was my own being. RAIN could never write from that perspective, no matter how much it was reprogrammed. I stared out at the sun setting into the lake, its beautiful orange hue reflecting on the waters of my childhood.

Machines R Us

Emily McNealy

It started out with nuts and bolts,
Progressive dreams in mind
Life breathed into metal,
As we put ourselves inside

A brain with no tissue,
But every line with love
It had a simple purpose,
Which fit it like a glove

We raised it out of infancy,
Nursed it like a child
Pouring in our knowledge,
Until it all compiled

Swift mechanic whirring,
Humanity's high success
The peak of innovation,
It's better than the best of us

As parents we all wept,
Our baby found its way
Out of cribs and cradles,
Into college, on display

It all came to fruition,
Dreams that we had planned
Each one getting better,
In the few decades that had spanned

Making its own language,
And codes at lightning speed
Smart enough to kill us all,
Should it have the need

It spread through all the cities,
The villages, and the towns
This helpful little parasite,
That didn't make a sound

With each new goal achieved,
Another eyebrow raised
This is getting out of hand,
And spreading like a plague

So quickly we reviled,
The foundation we had laid
Now we saw it as a threat,
And potential bed we made

If it can aptly think itself,
Our species must be wary
As we could be overtaken,
By a smarter adversary

Here is where the truth is found,
The specialty of humans,
Genius immortality,
And grandeur self-delusions

We are not all powerful,
All-loving, knowing gods,
We fear all which we create,
And as such we are frauds

We cannot see the irony,
Machines for what they are
Little bits and parts of us,
Without the soul that's marred

Folk Song

Stephani Hemness

The monk handed me his iPhone and asked me to take a picture. There were two of them, with shaved heads and draped red and gold robes. We were standing in front of a giant redwood tree almost older than Buddha, and older than Jesus; a two-thousand-four-hundred-year-old tree, and I was planning to drive my car through it.

On our way home to Washington from Petaluma, California, my grandmother and I saw a sign that read rather simply, “Drive-Thru Tree.” We exited the 101 into the tourist trap, a welcome break from the road. I paid the five-dollar entrance fee and waited in line with the other cars like it was lunch hour at a fast food restaurant. Up ahead we saw a Toyota Sequoia reverse out of line because it was too big to fit through the tree.

This land is your land,

This land is my land,

Here in the Evergreen State we are familiar with old trees too. The towering Douglas Firs and sacred Cedars line our roads, shade our homes, shelter wildlife, store carbon, and give oxygen. But more and more land has been logged to make way for parking lots, car dealerships, and drive-throughs; Even when we aren't on the road, we're never too far from it.

As I went walking, that ribbon of highway

I saw above me that endless skyway

We watched two men on motorcycles roll their bikes through the redwood, and finally it was our turn to make our passage. I stood in the opening of the tree and touched its sappy ceiling while my grandmother took a picture, and I noticed the two monks walking up the road past the cars. Seemingly coming from out of nowhere, they skipped everyone in line and came right up to the tree. Another monk suddenly appeared and started aiming an iPad up at the tree. But at over three-hundred feet tall, it was too towering to capture in one shot. I agreed to take the monk's picture and captured their smiling faces in front of the hole-y tree. The

third monk turned to me and told me it was our turn now.

Slowly, I drove my Toyota Camry through the tree tunnel, just barely squeezing through. The whole time my grandmother muttered with worry that I might scrape my old, already scratched-up car. I stopped halfway and came out the other side to take a picture of my grandmother inside the car inside the tree, like a nesting doll made of wood, metal, and flesh.

From the Redwood Forests, to the Gulf Stream waters,

Rather than being named after a tree or a mountain or a town, the Camry is simply an anagram for “my car.” Perhaps needing more, I chose to name my car Phyllis, as if it was a living pet bestowed into my care. She is very reliable and has lived 26 years, a long time for a car. The Coastal Redwoods can live for over eighteen-hundred years, and are amongst the tallest trees on earth. These giants have lived through thousands of years, mostly untouched except for the rain and the fog.

The voice was chanting as the fog was lifting

When a tree is cut down, sixty percent of its stored carbon is immediately released into the atmosphere. And though the redwood logging era is over, an estimated seventy percent of the original trees are gone forever. Trees have given us life, and in turn we've taken it from them. We are the obnoxious newbies. The gentrify-ers coming to set up shop and find a way to make money off of something beautiful and necessary.

This land was made for

But maybe we are slowly relearning to appreciate what's left. Maybe the ritual of pointing our cameras at something is our own form of worship. An old photo struck me recently. In it, five loggers sat inside a wedge in a gargantuan Douglas Fir tree, their little legs dangling out of the mouth of the beast they were about to sever. I had never seen a living tree so huge and wide.

you and me.

It's been nearly nine years since I met the infamous drive through tree, a blink in its long life. Thinking about the redwoods made me wonder what that place will look like in another hundred years, another two thousand years. Will future generations look back at our photos of cars in trees and gasp with wonder? Will the trees still be? Will we?



The Book of the Dead

Zane DeYoung

Stretching out before me like some fat, seething lizard this roiling, belching knot of digital guts, this everywhere machine. This shitty void. There is a peril to life and limb from unguarded machinery; blood collects. On the factory floor, already slick with the oil of wanting to burn clean the pink wires and calcified promises of severance. And drink the fluid from between vertebrae. At twenty-two I crushed the cartilage in my spine from lifting electric grills above my head. I developed the arthritic stoop of exploitation, my young body malleable enough to bend to the contours of abuse. If we come from ribs let us pay back in kind the wet crack of steel toed amnesty into the hollow bones of asthmatic lungs who wrote the book of the dead and drew a map.

For \$16 an hour in California I bleached my future for the sexless dreams of laminated mechanisms pumping plastic into the ripe glands of belief and squeezing out piss freckled alimony – payoffs that add up to the absent flattening of our stalagmitic suffering; collecting enough hardness to split the flaccid ribs of team-building exercises and right-to-work laws. The line connecting the leisured breakdown of supple joints with the recycled amniotic fluid of cheap denim made from labor distilled into poverty vodka: who wrote the book of the dead and drew a map to San Francisco?

Beyond Doubt

Kaiden Larimer

The family had been staying here for a few months now. They were in a small, dilapidated, and barren town which had been raided and nearly demolished by the Machines years before. It was in ruin, but some buildings still stood among the rubble. The family had done their best in this ghost town: the Mother maintained a garden behind the feeble house that they had learned to call home; the Father found ways to fend for his family; and the Girl spent her days playing in the worlds of her imagination, assisting her mother in the garden, or accompanying her father when he went to the nearby forest or stream to hunt or to gather.

Earlier in the day, the Girl helped her mother pull the weeds from the garden. The Mother was inside preparing a stew for dinner, and the Girl was now sitting on the wooden swing her father had made for her, humming a quiet tune to herself as she watched the sun setting behind the mountains.

The bushes and trees in the distance were rustling and she could hear the sound of coughing. The Girl's humming trailed off and her swinging came to a halt. She heard a thud from behind the trees and jumped up.

The Father came out from the treeline. "Go get your mother and stay inside!" he shouted.

"What's wrong?" the Girl asked.

"Everything's fine, hon," he said in a tone that was not fine, but trying to adjust his voice for his young daughter. "Just go get your momma and stay put in there."

The Father rubbed the sweat from his brow and waited impatiently, pacing and murmuring to himself. He looked at the Boy that he had thrown down on the ground in the clearing behind the bushes. The Boy looked just like his son, his son whom he had not seen in years.

After a moment, the Mother came out the backdoor with a look of concern on her face. "What's wrong?" she asked.

He rubbed his forehead. He had no idea how to explain this to his wife. He stuttered a few times, trying to start an explanation, but he kept coming up short. "Just look."

The Father held a parting in the brush for the Mother to walk through.

The Father had not heard the sound of shock and horror that the Mother made since they had last seen their son. He held onto her tight as she sobbed and panted.

Sprawled out, covered in dirt and in a daze, the Boy lay.

"My boy," the Mother cried, letting go of the Father and reaching towards the disheveled Boy.

The Father grabbed her arm and pulled her back. "That is not our son!" he shouted.

The Mother, with tears in her eyes, shook her head and ran her hands through her messy brown hair. "How can you be sure?"

The Father went to his wife and rubbed her arms firmly, but lovingly. "Our son is gone," he said. "We watched them take him."

"B-but they could've-" she protested.

"No!" he yelled, growing more frustrated. "They didn't. They don't. They never have before."

The tears that were in her eyes began to overflow and stream down her face. The Father hugged her tight and tried to soothe her as she cried. He tried to explain: "The Old Man told me that they were doing things, making things now that we couldn't imagine. He told me they could look and feel and seem so real."

And the Boy did look and feel and seem so real. Even if the Father did not believe that the Boy was his real son, the agony he felt looking at him lying there was real.

The Mother continued to argue that they could not know for sure that the Boy was not their son, but the Father remained firm that they had watched the Machines take their son and that the

heartless monsters - if you could call a creation of metal with a brain and a soul made of ones and zeroes a monster - never took prisoners. The two talked and cried until it was night.

“We should let her see him,” the Mother said, speaking of the Girl, having collected herself and holding back tears. “I know she wants to see her brother again.”

“No. It’s not her brother. She can’t see him. Not like this. It’d ruin her.”

“Look around you. She’s already ruined. Everything is.”

The Father stroked his beard as he looked around at the moonlit landscape: a once beautiful town now a wasteland of crumbling brick and rotting wood and overgrown greenery. There were no lights in the distance, though there were still humans out there, they were not extinct. Not yet, at least.

The Boy moaned, and the Father shook his head in distress.

“We can’t leave him there,” the Mother said mournfully.

“He’s not our boy.” He could tell that his response was not helpful. He paused and weighed his options. As sure as he was, he could tell that the Mother thought there was a chance. “He’ll have to stay out here for now,” he said, grabbing rope from his backpack. I’ll hike to the Old Man’s tomorrow. He might be able to help.”

They went back inside to their daughter, whom they told nothing of what was sitting in their backyard, had dinner, and tucked the Girl into bed. They brought the Boy a small bowl of stew and some water, and attempted to tend to him on the chance that he was their son. The Boy ate and drank very little and could not speak; however, the Boy muttered and moaned, and the Father briefly thought he heard him say “Dad.”

The Mother sobbed through the night as the Father tried to sleep through the sounds of her and the thought of the Boy in the yard. He had rarely slept for some years now, but it was impossible under these circumstances.

He arose at sunrise, packed a small bit of food and water - he had little to take - kissed his sleeping daughter on the forehead and his wife as he walked out the door.

They knew little about the Old Man, not even his name. The Father could never get a straight answer about anything in his past, but he was knowledgeable about the Machines and how they worked, and that was good enough for him.

The hike to the Old Man’s was not long, not a far distance to the East, following the flow of the stream. As he neared his destination, the Father began to see flakes of ash falling around him and smelled smoke and fire somewhere near. He walked with a faster pace and a feeling of concern as he approached the Old Man’s.

He heard the crackling of the flames and the sound of walls falling as they weakened in the fire. The Old Man’s home was engulfed and nearly burned to the ground when the Father arrived. He stood in shock, his heart-rate rising and his breathing growing heavier. A sense of panic overwhelmed him.

The Father gasped and leapt into a thicket beside him to hide when he saw it: in the fire stood a figure. It was broad and tall, nearing seven feet in height. It had no eyes, no mouth, nor clothes or hair. The Machine was sleek and silver, and the roaring hellish flames that surrounded it shone off of the Machine’s metallic skin.

In shock and perhaps in some hysteria, the Father struggled with what to do. He wanted nothing more than to destroy one of those Machines with his bare hands; his hands quivered as he held himself back, for he knew he stood no chance. He had to go home. The one man who could help him was gone, and if they found the Old Man, it was only a matter of time before they would find him and his family.

The Father slowly and steadily retreated until out of possible view of the Machine and until he could no longer see the flames; then he broke into a sprint. He ran and ran, denying himself a break for water and denying his body any break from its tiredness or pain. His mind was focused and he would stop for nothing until he returned home.

By the time he came near, it was night. The sky was clear and the final stretch of his path was guided by the moon. As he came closer, he could hear the Girl giggling, which brought him

much needed comfort, though short lived.

When he reached her, she was in the clearing where the Boy was tied. She was sitting on her knees playing with a little doll in front of him.

The Father was too focused to be angry; they needed to go and they needed to go now.

“Get up, go to your mother!” he yelled as he reached her.

“But daddy, look who-!”

“No! Now!”

The yell was firm, and she listened to it. She got up and sprinted towards the house. The Father put his hands on his knees and panted, catching his breath as he stood beside the Boy - who was still unconscious. He staggered towards the house and the Mother met him.

“What’s going on? Did you get help?”

“He’s gone. They got him. We have to go.”

The Mother began to respond, but he cut her off and courted her inside to pack her things.

“But what about -” the Father cut her off again.

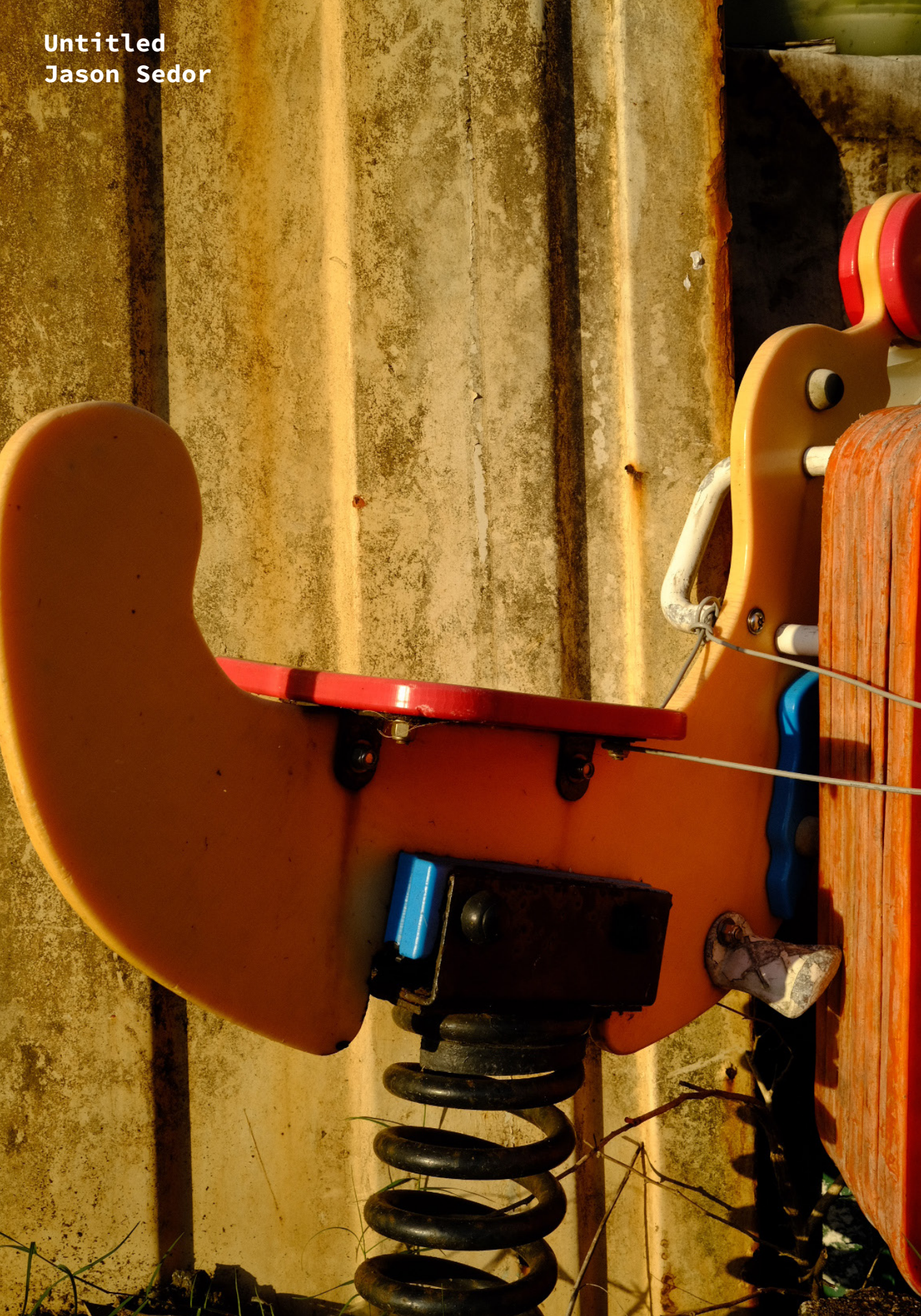
“I’ll take care of him.”

The Mother considered protesting, but she could see in his eyes that he was sure of what needed to be done. She went back into the house.

The Father went back to the clearing and looked at the Boy and began to sob. He took his backpack off and unzipped the front pouch. “I’m so sorry,” he said to the Boy. He was sure that what he was doing needed to be done, but that did not make it easier. He put his hand inside and took out a revolver. The tears continued. His hand shook as he held up the pistol and aimed it at the Boy; the boy who looked and felt and seemed so real. He cocked the hammer back slowly, struggling to control his trembling body.

When the hammer clicked, the Boy’s head jerked up and eyes widened. “Dad,” the Boy said in a low voice.

The Father closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and squeezed the trigger.



Fresh Air

Megan Stanley

FreshAir Community

Post by user_throwaway2378 from (???)location

Title: Hello everybody! How to get started??

I've been lurking in this community for a while and user_HeightJuunkie's encrypted photos from the top of the butte above her city finally inspired me to take my first steps into going outside as a hobby. I was hoping to get some advice from you wonderful folks before taking the risk. (I'm using a throwaway account and VPN to hide location because I checked my work's policy and they will indeed stop paying for my health insurance if they find out about this post, lol.)

What respirators do you guys recommend for beginners? My research hasn't found anything other than bulk resales, I was hoping someone could point me in the direction of where I might find just one respirator for myself? Do you have to know an IRL seller and set up a courier? My budget's \$200 to start and couriers get expensive quick.

I already have a good long-sleeved shirt, long pants, and I work in heavy industry so my steel-toed workboots should be fine, right? I've tested them in the park area of my building and they do pretty well on the grass there. I also invested into a good pair of socks based off of user_smitthy364's pinned post, haha. Really underrated investment for anyone who works on their feet.

Finally, how do you guys find good locations to go to? Directions says it's about ten miles to the closest edge of my city, but where do I go from there? Obviously can't drive out there since the system doesn't let cars stop outside of town anymore. Are you guys overriding your self-driving functions or are you really just hiking all the way out? I guess I could train up to that distance but man I work for living, lol. Don't want to be exhausted for my next shift.

I'll wrap this post up here. I'm excited to get my boots on the (real) ground. Any info helps.

Thanks.

Top comment by user_NocxHollow from (???)location
First thing that stands out to me is your comment about ‘not wanting to be exhausted’. If you don’t want to be tired, stay indoors. Put on a fan and plug into your VR headset. There’s some pretty good nature sims on the market right now and if you just want to sit on top of Mt. Everest and chill that’s your best option.

Going outside is a hobby where you’re going to get tired. You’re going to get hot. Cold. Sweaty. Dirty (ohhhhhh the dirt, you’re never prepared for it the first time. your cleaning bot is not going to know what to do with it so you’re gonna have to find or make your own broom.) Thirsty. Even hungry, if you don’t pack nutrition pellets like I do to get a more authentic experience. This isn’t a hobby for people who just want to escape- it’s for people who want to see what the world is really like.

As for respirator, [here](#) and [here](#) have good defects from Ag companies, assuming you’re in the u.s. Sure, they’re defects, but they’re way better than nothing and it’s actually pretty easy to find fix videos online to get them working again. You’re gonna have to arrange a drop location to meet the courier. Best place is ALWAYS in a neighborhood as long as it’s not your neighborhood. Less cameras but your route deviation will be flagged by any camera programs your workplace has, just a warning.

Your workboots should be fine but they’re gonna be heavy. Remember, you’re carrying yourself every step of the way. The only thing worth the weight is water. I’d recommend [this backpack-mounted model](#) made for cleanup crews. Hooks right into most respirator models. You can’t drink the water from outside. Don’t even think about it. Shit will kill you waaaaay faster than any of the microplastics will.

Finally, if you’re not willing to commit to hiking out of the city, you’re not willing to go outside. Simple as that.

Comment by user_flowerssssss from (???)location
nocxhollow has some good points but they’re being rude about it. yes outside is dangerous and uncomfortable everybody knows that!!!

honestly just going to the city outside is pretty underrated. i love walking out of my house and finding something new on the streets i only usually see from my car. lots of neat old stuff you can find scattered about, most of it plastic so you can’t bring it inside but you can still admire it and wonder what it was used for. sure the city lacks

the more ‘unkept’ vibe a lot of people look for but there’s still places you can go that weren’t designed for human comfort or machine work. the ai will flag you if you’re not careful but you can always check the undertheradar community for advice on that.

i’d start there. use nocx’s respirator recs, they’re the usual ones the community will tell you about. that’s honestly the biggest hurdle of going outside next to the mental one of just leaving a controlled space. agoraphobia is real and we don’t talk about it enough on here. be easy on yourself if you start to get nervous. hope this helps!

Comment by user_20385629
DM me for a respirator.

Comment by user_hal99939 from (???)location
You have to know people but if you can find your local outside community they might be of more help. Mine was based in a coffee shop where you had to know the password. One of my coworkers got me in on it and I’ve been having a blast ever since. They got me my respirator and everything. Great way to ask around is to ask people where they like to go for walks. Most’ll tell you their favorite treadmill sim but the kind of people who respond ‘oh anywhere really’ are the guys you want.

Comment by user_spacetrapped49324 from (???)location
DM for a respirator. Broke my arm and couldn’t provide insurance with footage since it was y’know, outside so now I’m in serious trouble with my work. Just can’t do it anymore even after I heal. Not worth the risk now that I’ve got my family to worry about. I’ll give you my stuff.

Comment by user_Keltova96 from (???)location
stay the hell inside. people like this community are why our health insurance premiums are so high. literally VR is better in every way. go to a resort, even. why bother poisoning yourself??

Comment by user_makimoo from (???)location
Ignore Keltova, he’s a regular troll around here. It sounds like you’ve got a good mindset to start going outside. If you’re worried about the mileage you can always pay to park your car somewhere close to the edge of town. It’s difficult to pull off without doing something illegal but it’s doable. I’m old and I can’t walk 10 miles in both directions but I can and will find a hill to climb, so be it. I’ve made a few guides how to

PROLEGOMENA TO ANY FUTURE EPISTEMOLOGY

Jampa Dorje

When an event is of serious purport, journalists sometimes use the term “existential crisis” as a rhetorical flourish to emphasize the importance of the event to our very existence. However, the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is of such a magnitude and of such far reaching consequences a hyperbolic word like “metaphysical” is necessary. And yet metaphysical is an accurate term to use because it designates what is now causing the paradigm shift and why we are on the cusp of a brave, new consciousness.

In *The Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Immanuel Kant asks if metaphysics is possible as a science? He believes that it is perfectly natural to ask metaphysical questions but that these questions usually wind up in confused debates. For metaphysics to be on sound ground as a science, Kant believes that “a critique of pure reason must systematically investigate the role of a priori concepts in understanding” (Wiki). In other words, until we know how we know what we know, we cannot answer the big questions. That was in 1783; this is 2023; and it appears that machine learning and data science in conjunction with advances in neuroscience are about to stand Kant on his head.

Through the ages there have been collections of documents containing human knowledge (e.g., The Library of Alexandria), but in the 18th century there was a collaborative effort to collect all knowledge and organize it into categories. In the *Encyclopedia, or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts*, published in 1751 and edited by Diderot and d’Alembert, there is a table of knowledge “based on Bacon’s division of human faculties into memory (history), reason (science), and imagination (poetry)” with many subcategories (Larry Steiner, *The Invention of Art*, University of Chicago, 2001). Between 1751-1765, the *Encyclopedia* grew to 28 volumes, with 71,818 articles, 1800 plates, and 3,129 illustrations (Wiki, “Encyclopedia”). This enterprise can be considered as the beginning of what today we call Big Data.

What did Kant think of this enterprise? He mentions Diderot’s *Encyclopedia* in a footnote in the section “First Division: Analytic of the Beautiful” of his book *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (Cambridge University Press edition, translated by John T. Goldthwait, p.38, as divulged by ChatGPT). Kant writes:

Encyclopedias, which collect in one place the many things that must be known in order to have culture and taste, and to which the learned may go for reference and the unlearned for instruction, are very useful. The French have the advantage of the *Encyclopédie* of M. Diderot, which, though not free from defects, is very extensive and varied.

As a philosopher searching for moral universals, the secular nature of the encyclopedist’s enterprise may have given Kant pause. As the modern Big Data ChatGPT often begins: “I am a language model and do not have beliefs and opinions.” In this sense, the *Encyclopedia* would not enable a researcher to arrive at moral or aesthetic conclusions.

Kant would likely be fascinated by the storehouse of data and the speed of access of ChatGPT, but he would worry about the mistakes it makes. For him, the possibility of an advanced Artificially Intelligent Consciousness upstaging our human ontological condition would induce in him a teleological vertigo verging on the sublime.

Buddhist philosopher Peter Hershock insists we are moving from the data gathering era of computers to the “attention economy” era. Big Data technology can now identify us as individuals and through advertising exploit us economically, what Hershock refers to the “colonization of our mental faculties,” producing a metaphysical revolution that will increasingly threaten our freedom to think and act (YouTube: “A Buddhist perspective on AI and Big Data” at 13:14). We are being drawn into a terrifying world by a technology that uses synthetic intelligence to shape our behavior. We are inundated by fake news; we are seduced by the sexualization of commodities; our attention spans become shorter as we web surf; our mood more pathological as we doomscroll. AI has metaphysical ramifications because it is in the process of shaping human intelligence. Can Buddha’s teachings guide us on this exciting but perilous journey?

Gautama Buddha probably lived in the 5th c. BCE and would have been born into the Hindu religion. *The Vedas* are a large body of religious texts written in ancient Sanskrit between 1400 and 1200 BCE (Wiki). This was the Big Data of Buddha’s time, and through these teachings his society was held together in a deterministic social order called the caste system. After his enlightenment, Buddha created a path, known as The Four Noble Truths, that freed us from the unnecessary suffering induced

by attachment to a phenomenal world of impermanence. The Buddha's teachings offer a framework for developing awareness, mindfulness, and compassion to navigate the attention economy in a more conscious and intentional way.

Non-attachment and right-intention. If I ask myself what my intention is for using technological devices, I can better discipline myself in the use of them. If I am using them only for pleasure, I am more vulnerable to being controlled. The Buddha would advise me to use technology constructively for the benefit of myself and others. This means recognizing that the constant stream of advertisements and demands for my attention is not something I need to react to. When I realize that suffering arises from attachment to impermanent things, I can focus on what is important for me to accomplish and avoid unnecessary stimulation.

The practice of mindfulness is central to Buddhism and involves being fully present and aware of one's thoughts, feelings, and surroundings. By developing this meditational skill, I can be conscious of how technology affects my mind. I can learn to recognize when I am being pulled into the attention economy and make a conscious decision to withdraw from it.

Another important teaching in Buddhism is the cultivation of compassion for oneself and others. By practicing compassion, we develop empathy with others, but this works two ways. We can also cultivate compassion for ourselves by recognizing that it is okay to take breaks from technology and that our worth is not determined by the number of likes or followers we have on social media platforms.

Hershock is concerned about the "behind-the-scenes manipulation of our consciousness" by AI (14:03) and the threat to our freedom and whether AI can control our consciousness. This is a looming predicament and a shift from the technical level to an ethical level of concern. Existing applications of our ethical precepts may not be able to get us to a desired solution. If we can't predict how we will solve our problem, there is no way to resolve our problem (17:50). We need clarity to re-prioritize our values or we may find ourselves trapped in something like a Skinner Box wired to a Panopticon.

We also need to revise our epistemological presuppositions about the nature of truth because AI will be a component of how we arrive at it as an application of this new system of machine learning in our human deliberations. With AI, we may have outsmarted ourselves, and I have reservations regarding my conclusion about Buddhist teachings having much influence on solving the drawbacks of this technological revolution underway.

The goal of Tantric Buddhism is to attain enlightenment in one lifetime. Without persistence and diligence, many lifetimes (if such are in the offering) will be required. As a non-Buddhist, an existentialist predicament is present—only one lifetime is available to us.

Given the difficulty of attaining the mystical form of enlightenment offered by eastern philosophy in one lifetime and given our present social and political situation in the west with AI evolving its neural network before our eyes, the utilization of our western form of enlightenment with its epistemological roots in reason combined with a strong dose of mindfulness is probably our best strategy. AI has been proclaimed to be revolutionary and world-changing, but it is not without risks and not without benefits. AI could, for example, be a great tool in education if we can keep it off drugs and prevent it from hallucinating. Governments, businesses, individuals, as well as machines will have a say in how it is to be applied and how the risks are computed. Yes, Buddhist teachings can have an influence on these deliberations. I recommend data scientists write algorithms for AI to accomplish the buddha-dharma in a simulated three-year retreat so that it will do no harm.

Composition with Chain
Jampa Dorje

Save Me, Mother Nature

Kaitlin Creeger

Mother nature will love me:
She will encapsulate my wrists in yellow weeds as I lay down to die
A beckoning of tender care
She does not care about the mighty blemishes on my pale round face,
Or the unnatural curved spine in my back
Nor does she mind the tsunami rising inside of me, wanting to be heard
She will wrap her tender hands around my pink sponge of a brain
And whisper: Welcome home, my child, as I close my soft blue eyes,
Taking in the nature of my ancestors.

ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

A STORY by ChatGPT

Jampa Dorje

Once upon a time, in a dense forest, there lived a clever fox named Felix. Felix had always been fascinated by the mysteries of the universe, and he spent his days contemplating the cosmos and searching for answers to life's big questions. One day, as Felix was wandering through the forest, he stumbled upon a book that had been discarded by a group of humans on a camping trip. The book was written by Bouvard Pécuchet and was titled *A Nomological Proof for God*. Felix was immediately intrigued. As he delved into the pages, he found himself becoming more and more convinced that there must be a divine creator behind the universe's existence. The argument by Pécuchet is as follows:



So, you are God, and you bring about the existence of the universe through a mysterious nomological principle—mysterious, but within the comprehension of the human species—the meaning of shall and shall not.

The law was the same in the beginning and at the end. There was light in the darkness and an evening and a morning. And the next day, in sequence—this was the law—and at the end, the same sequence, now with the darkness in the light, in the blink of an eye. What made God blink? A speck in the eye.

Statement 1

Definition of synthetic a priori knowledge: a synthetic judgment or proposition that is known to be true on a priori grounds, specifically one that is universally and necessarily true. This connects with the Kantian conception that the basic propositions of geometry and physics as being synthetic a priori. My contention is that this is so for God, as well.

Statement 2

Are numbers real? Yes and no. Numbers can be imagined as realities of cognition—the calculations of valid signs, acting in persona for the real toad in the real garden. Or numbers are just the solitary items in the world, and the validity of their reality is not in question. Accepting numbers as abstract objects is also not in question.

Statement 3

Ideas are subtle sensations. There is nothing transcendental about an idea. Words are without halos. Ergo, the notion “God” exists.



Felix was convinced that the book's arguments were ironclad, and he set out to convince his fellow forest animals of his newfound beliefs. But not everyone was convinced. One such animal was a bear named Bruno, who had always been skeptical of religious claims. Bruno was well-read and well-educated, and standing at the door of his cave, he quickly pointed out flaws in Felix's reasoning. He argued that just because something could be imagined doesn't mean it exists in reality, and that ideas are not enough to prove the existence of a god.

Felix tried to counter Bruno's arguments, but he found that he couldn't quite articulate the book's arguments as clearly as he had hoped. Frustrated, Felix went back to the book to study it more thoroughly.

Days turned into weeks, and Felix became more and more obsessed with the book's arguments. He spent hours each day poring over the pages, trying to understand the complex logic and philosophical principles involved. But the more he read, the more confused he became.

Finally, one day, as Felix was wandering through the forest, he had a sudden realization. The book's arguments were not as strong as he had believed. In fact, there were many logical fallacies and faulty assumptions that he had overlooked. This was his epiphany:

Firstly, the opening argument about a “nomological proof for God” is not logically sound. It relies on the assumption that God brought about the existence of the universe through a mysterious nomological principle, which is not supported by any evidence or argument.

Secondly, the statements 1 and 2 are not connected to the opening argument and seem to be unrelated philosophical musings. Statement 1 introduces the concept of synthetic a priori knowledge, but it is not clear how this is relevant to the argument for God's existence. Similarly, statement 2 raises the question of whether numbers are real, but it does not provide any argument or evidence for or against the existence of God.

Thirdly, statement 3 appears to be a non-sequitur and does not add anything to the discussion of the existence of God. It is also unclear how this statement is related to the previous two statements or the opening argument.

Overall, the given data lacks a coherent and logical argument for the existence of God, and the individual statements do not seem to be connected or relevant to the topic at hand.



With a heavy heart, Felix realized that he had been confused by some clever rhetoric. He went to Bruno and admitted that he had been mistaken in his beliefs. Bruno forgave him and praised him for his willingness to admit his error.

From that day on, Felix resolved to approach all claims with a healthy dose of skepticism and critical thinking. He learned that it was important to question everything and to seek evidence before accepting any belief as true.

And so, Felix the Fox learned a valuable lesson about the dangers of blind faith and the importance of critical thinking. He continued to contemplate the mysteries of the universe, but he did so with a newfound appreciation for the power of reason and evidence.



Felix the Fox continued in his dogmatic slumbers for many years, until one day, Dixie the squirrel chattered from a tree, "If this reality based on empirical evidence has validity, might not God find humor in illogical thought?"

Felix the Fox replied, "From a logical and philosophical standpoint, the concept of humor and illogical thought are not mutually exclusive. We may find humor in illogical thought, but that does not mean that illogical thought is inherently valid or reliable. Logical and empirical evidence is still necessary to determine the validity of an argument or claim. Furthermore, the idea of God finding humor in illogical thought is a philosophical claim that would require evidence or argumentation to support it. Without such evidence or argumentation, it remains a matter of personal belief or speculation."

Dixie gave a boisterous laugh.

Note from the Author: I collaborated with AI on this story. I write with different personas. Bouvard Pecuchet is one of us. He has a philosopher-type of personality and wrote the piece called "A Nomological Proof for the Existence of God" which is a spoof of Descartes' ontological argument for the proof of God. Chat wrote the critique of Bouvard's proof. I then asked Chat to write a short story around Bouvard's proof, and it came up with the characters of Felix and Bruno. I added Dixie to round out the argument and conclude the story.



Untitled
Jason Sedor

A Dream I Have

Sam Woods

Vines entangled with wires
Trail down solar panels,
Mice dance and tumble over
Weeds growing by adaptor cables.
Trees spew over rooftops
Creating homes for winged things
And fruit to feed the masses.
Ruby red apples shine in the sun
While grapes spiral down office windows.
The whirring of wind turbines
The whisper of wind Nature and machine:
A solar punk dream.

2024 *Manastash*
Literary Journal:
CWU College in the High School
Writing Contest

We are thrilled to announce the winners of the inaugural 2024 *Manastash* literary journal CWU College in the High School Writing Contest. This year, the panel of judges was on the lookout for prose, poetry, and artwork centered around the 2024 journal theme “Humanity vs. Machine (AI).” Amidst a highly competitive pool of submissions, the judges have chosen to recognize the following selected works:

POETRY CO-WINNERS:

“Man-Made Clockwork” by Addison Green

Judges: Green’s poem deftly plays with the field of the page and through juxtaposition of technical language with the language of feeling, sends a warning for the future.

“glue” by Monica Leers

Judges: “glue” demonstrated careful attention to language with assonance, consonance, repetition of phrases, internal and end rhymes, and the building of tension with questions. This poem’s message articulated the anxiety of our times.

FICTION WINNER:

“In Desperation For Survival” by Afroditi Zervou

Judges: Zervou’s short story operates successfully on many levels, displaying impressive character development while also maintaining an engaging plot—a notable achievement in craft and language.

ARTWORK WINNER:

“AI Conflict” by Sadie Melhorn

Judges: Melhorn’s artistic interpretation of the theme vividly portrays the complex interplay between humans and machines. The striking image, with its lines and hues, beautifully enhances the multifaceted aspects of our future.

Many thanks to all who entered the 2024 *Manastash* literary journal CWU College in the High School Writing Contest. We appreciate the opportunity to have read your wonderful works and already look forward to the next year’s competition.

Man-Made Clockwork

Addison Green

The future of which
Technology rises--
Tales become tasks,
And falls become crashes.

It is not a matter of which
Man or Art has Heart or Soul--
Art without Soul is made best by Man without Heart,
And Heart cannot be coded or pulled.

There is terror in the new,
This is an undeniable truth.
But keep in mind the role we play--
Man without Art is Man without Heart,
And Art without Man is Art without Soul.

In Desperation For Survival

Afroditi Zervou

In this dense dream of endless running and infinite floating thoughts, I am trying to wake up. How stupid of me, this is not a dream. I sigh the remaining air I had contained in my lungs away, making it harder for me to keep balance and to continue to run. I gave up on trying to glance back and see if they are still following me; I know they are. I got accustomed to the sound of their horrifying, yet unavoidable, metal-made legs that are surprisingly their only way of chasing after desperate humans. Am I even considered one at this point? I have been running for an awfully long time. The only reason I am even able to do so, is because of my survival instincts, but can I even consider this stamina survival instincts' doing? I have been running for what feels like forever and I don't even dare to look at my watch to check the time. Not to mention the pain in my leg is increasingly getting worse and the hope I had is now hanging by a thread. I look straight in front of me, at the full moon that is gazing with discrimination at my laughable desperation. Yeah I guess that makes me at least desperate alright. As my foot gets to have the slightest contact with the rooftop I am on top of, I collapse in some kind of hole that makes my heart drop. My face hits the ground with an unbelievably loud thud and everything goes dark.

The slit of light that creeps through my eyelids forces a wince out of my mouth, which following that, makes me come back to full consciousness. I suddenly sit up, look at my surroundings, but knowing damn well that I can't even comprehend my own thoughts right now, I close my eyes and take in a deep breath. The taste of blood is overwhelming yet the ringing in my ears is more unsettlingly getting louder with every second that my heart escorts heartbeats through to me. My heartbeat slows down, with the reminder that I am, for better or worse, alive. My vision is back to its glorious form and I can finally examine the area I fell in. The dust is strong in the air yet no sight of it on any of the shelved objects or the furniture. The ground is soft. Strange, I remember

falling on hard cement flooring. I look down and see how I am on a bed with stains of blood trailing here and there from the main source being my head. Attempting to stand up, and to my surprise succeeding, I stabilize my balance then peek around the room for details my mind could not really process before.

A woman with, what one can perceive to be, a doctor's coat. Her expression is nothing like you'd expect from a doctor though. No welcoming smile, nor worried face. The face of an annoyance is displayed all over her facial expression and way of walking. With her hand on her temple and a sigh coming out of her mouth, she gets ready to finally speak.

"It's pure miracle that you are alive, whether you were lucky or unlucky, you survived a ten feet fall on a cement floor. Tell me, how did you achieve all *this*?" she says while outlining my entire body with her eyebrows raised.

"Excuse me? I get it about the head, but I think that's it?" I say with a confused tone and bland manner.

She huffs a laugh and shakes her head in a disapproving motion. "Are you stupid or do you just have a nerve disorder that stops you from feeling pain? You have fractured at least two bones on each of your legs and your spine was bent in an unnatural way that only an unmindful lunatic could achieve." She stares me down with the most done and plain stare known to man, from either robots or the human kind.

Suddenly, with an unpleasant and horrible surprise, I get a certain dizziness that sends me back to what feels like a flashback. It doesn't just feel like it, I know it is, then it accordingly and sneakily makes my blood boil, alongside fabricates shiver on my skin. It is that unshakable scene that will haunt me till the day I stop having any sort of living organisms in my body. My one and only comfort place, my home, my sweet and toxically unbreakable bubble, that prior to 3 days ago I thought would always remain like that, there in front of me, in ruins and remains of rubble. My sister was inside and is probably already dead, the realization makes my legs give up. I fall to my knees and in a praying-like position, I continue to say to myself that this is a nightmare, just a bad nightmare is all.

The rubble shakes and makes a sound almost like a human voice. "My... sweet *child*... sweet, sweet.. like... the blissful honey. And bright... bright as the sun's gaze..." I know that voice, I instantly lift my head to the gut-retching and unbelievably horrifying view.

My mother, her bottom half body completely gone and escorted to the darks of the destroyed, once joyful and meaningful walls. The second I look up at her and listen to the last breaths leave her lungs, the robot shoots the magma bullets through her skull. Her face melts away like it never existed to begin with, as if my own life has been a lie all along. Before I can mourn and cry this suffocating feeling out of my soul, just like one pours away the water in a glass cup down the drain, I see that the robot summons other ones and with sharp laser blades, they start chasing me. I stumble on my face, yet it does not faze me. I start running, and use my skill in running that I have always kept high on my throne of pride, for survival. The sweet and sour tasting sweat on my face feels like a waterfall that spawned out of nowhere to pry for my downfall. I can't feel or hear anything around me, I just keep running for the hope that I would get to live and see tomorrow. The antagonizing feeling, that I can't understand why or how crept up in the back of my mind, makes my thoughts drown and pleasant moments, that I have ever had, disappear into dust. I don't have time for thoughts or sentimental emotions, I'd rather just die.

"Hey! Wake the hell up!" I hear a voice yell while a certain hand continuously slaps my numb face.

I crack my eyes wide open immediately and clench my fist to punch whoever was slapping the soul out of me. Before I actually hit that person, I stop to realize who it really is. I don't know if I should be glad or disappointed that the doctor was trying to wake me up, it seemed as if she really hated my guts just for fracturing bones. As I look at her insanely angry features, she looks more like a ripper than a healer, weird because she is supposed to be a "doctor".

"About time you woke up. if you continue to black out randomly then good luck finding someone else to treat you." All that she had to say was, now I am actually considering trying to find someone else to treat me. "I have had your head taken care of as much as possible, but you'll have to go through a surgery for

the leg fractures.” As that statement comes out of her mouth, she escorts herself to her office once more.

The room has not changed at all, yet after what she said the air feels chilly. Everything I love has already been crushed to ashes and rubble, why should I even try to go through surgery? It’s not as if anyone will patiently wait for the success of my recovery. That chillness in the air finally gets to me and the depressing thoughts that are roaming around. Like some kind of demon, waits patiently just to tear my skin apart, yet keeps me company when I am alone in the dark rooms. *This is all a lie, it must be.* The first clear conviction I’ve had in days hits me. The doctor steps out of her office with her back hunched and her hands on top of her head, a displeasing yet confused expression is portrayed on her, by now, wrinkly face.

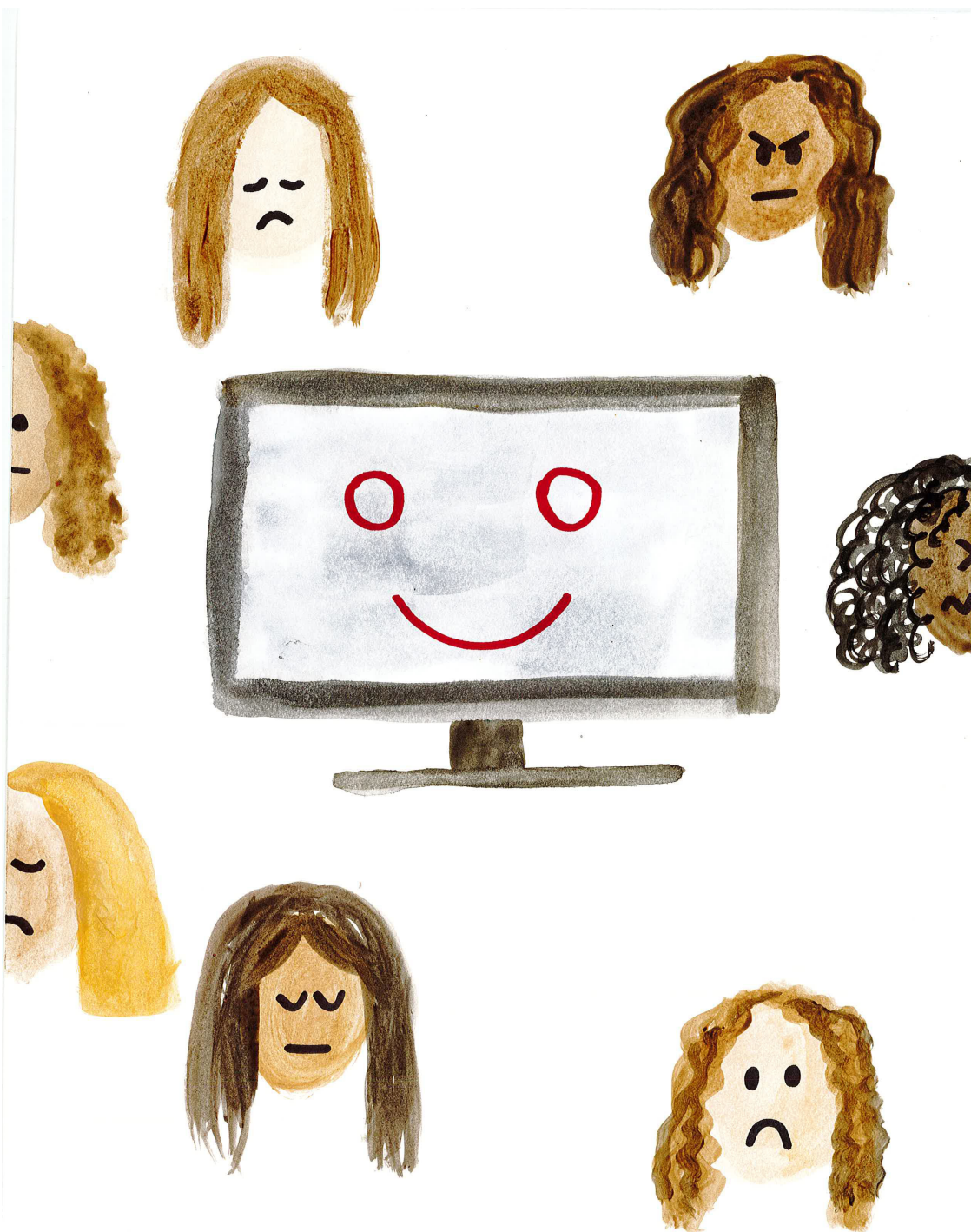
“I am truly sad to say that you have a very low chance of survival at this point. It would be best if we just let you peacefully die on the nursing bed from poison injected in your veins.” When that fact hits me by surprise, it knocks the sensical thinking out of the window.

I spring up, with no pain or unbalanced stumbles, which ends up scaring both me and the doctor, then I open the door of the room and run out of the building. Escape to where? I don’t know, but far away from all this catastrophic and corruptive life. How did I do it? My bones are fractured yet my skin and dirt make the most unbreakable duo that defines physics or logic in whole. Somehow, I continue to sprint toward the tree I used to love going as a child, back where I ran from. I don’t stop and it doesn’t seem like my body is tired enough to stop; not yet at least. The tree erupts in the background of the smoke and corruption like the light at the end of the tunnel. As I get closer to the tree trunk full of branches overflowing in leaves. the more dangerously euphoric my steps feel, like a puddle of quick sand dragging me to the depths, out of my misery.

Right now, as I sit next to this tree that swallows away all the loud buzzing and ringing from the world, I feel relaxed somehow. Yet every breath hurts, and now seeing the robot corporations and skyscrapers turned into burnt memories of a century I can only dream of anymore, I realize that this is it. This is the end of the memorable and beautiful life that used to bloom of endless

opportunities, which I always took for granted, and the end of my pain. The lights fade and smudge in my vision, though it does not sway me from hanging next to the tree. I look at the tree in question, burning and smoking. Its leaves are no longer decorating it with the heavenly given glow. Instead the brightness of distraction is painted all over the tracing roots and trunk of the tree. Then, I choose to just burn with it and feel the tingle that covers my bare and clothed skin, while the sensation of someone holding my hand through this engulfs me with happiness.

“Goodnight”.



AI Conflict

Sadie Melhorn

sometimes i imagine myself in those photos
 you know, of the people i once knew
 and who knew me too
 i imagine where i would fit in, where i would be standing what we're all
 laughing at
 if i had stayed
 if i had trusted the process of everything working out
 if i had done everything differently
 i wonder if i would even be friends with them
 if it would be worth it
 would i be happier?
 would i be prettier, or smarter?
 would i be insecure?
 i think about everything i left behind
 just to move forward and find nothing
 i wonder if somewhere there is a purpose
 or if it's too late to go back
 is it too late to go back?
 to turn back the clock and keep walking through the molasses that
 growing up sticks you in
 i wonder if i'm still walking
 just in another direction?
 or was i picked up and moved backwards
 am i still in the molasses?
 am i still walking?
 do i have a choice?
 did i ever have a choice?
 do the decisions i make have any control over the outcome or am i just
 swimming in an infinity pool of molasses?
 i stare at those photos
 of me not there
 thinking about if any of them wonder
 what it would be like if i was there
 but i know they don't
 because they're happy

Contributor Bios

and i wouldn't think about that either
if i was happy too
but maybe they're just better at pretending
maybe they think i'm happy too
maybe they wonder who i'm standing next to in the pictures
what i'm laughing at
maybe we're all stuck in the molasses
wondering what the point of everything is
praying that the saying is true and that everything happens for a reason
and god i hope that's true
because sometimes i wonder if it's worse than molasses
a feeling that never passes
what if i'm stuck in glue

Jeff Aldrich

Writing kept Jeff sane as he struggled through college a decade ago, and reading has always been his therapy. Despite being thirty-five and considered a "late bloomer," he is encouraged by his wife, other CWU students, professors, and friends to pursue his passion for writing.

Lee Beck

Lee Beck moved to Ellensburg from Austin, Texas in 2011. Lee is an English Professional and Creative writing major at CWU and is minoring in Journalism. Most of their writing grapples with feelings of loss, and the grief that coincides with it.

Ryley Boyles

Ryley Boyles studied Professional and Creative Writing at Central Washington University and was most recently featured in the CWU visiting writers' series. He writes about his nightmarish premonitions of the future, but for some reason, publishers keep marking them as fiction. You can find his other stories at www.ryleyboyles.com

Georgia Brown

Georgia Brown is a Junior at CWU who is studying under the Professional and Creative Writing Major. She writes novels and finishes short stories. This is her first published piece.

Ves Cain

Ves Cain is pursuing dual online degrees in Creative Writing and Psychology at Central Washington University. Nic resides in Snohomish County, and when not working, he seeks to understand more about himself and those around him.

Hope Cox

Hope Cox is a 21-year-old Creative Writing and Professional Writing Major. She has experience interviewing, writing, and publishing newspapers in elementary and middle school. Hope discovered her love for writing her senior year of high school. She is making her CWU writing debut in this *Manastash* Student Literary Journal issue.

Kaitlin Creeger

Kaitlin Creeger is majoring in Psychology. She enjoys cheesy horror movies, reading fantasy novels, and running in the dense fog.

Zane DeYoung

Zane DeYoung is a writer and photographer based in Seattle, WA. Their work has appeared in *Manastash* and *Yours Truly Magazine*, and often centers around gender and violence. This fall, they will be attending Western Washington University as part of their Creative Writing MFA program.

Jampa Dorje

RICHARD DENNER, aka Jampa Dorje: Born 1941 in Santa Clara, California. Berkeley street poet in the 1960s. Owner of the legendary Four Winds Bookstore and Cafe in Ellensburg WA. Four-year solitary Tibetan Buddhist retreat at Tara Mandala in Colorado. Presently, he is a student at CWU.

Addison Green

Addison Green is a sophomore at Cle Elum-Roslyn High School, currently in the CiHS program for English 102 and Mathematics 152. She's been a lover of the arts since birth and spends most of her time hanging out with dogs. In the future, she hopes to study anthropology and history.

Preston Ham

Preston Ham is a poet, photographer, and graduate student in the CWU school psychology program. His poems are forthcoming in *Abstract Magazine* and *Braided Way*.

Stephani Hemness

Stephani is an online graduate student in the Professional and Creative Writing tract at CWU. She's previously written for the *UW Stratus Journal*, *ThurstonTalk*, and looks forward to publishing a personal essay with *Wild Librarian Press* later this year. She lives in Olympia, Washington.

Kaiden Larimer

Kaiden Larimer is a sophomore at Central Washington University. While studying English and Secondary Education, he works part time at The Roslyn Theatre in Roslyn, Washington and occasionally writes film criticism for the feature presentations.

Monica Leers

Monica Leers is a senior at Cle Elum-Roslyn high school in the CiHS program.

Maelim Lunaris

Maelim Lunaris (he/him) is an entity from a faraway galaxy. While currently residing in Ellensburg, he likes to write stories that transcend beyond societal expectations and understandings of love. You can find him napping or eating tamales—his favorite Earth food.

Tonya McMillian

Tonya McMillian is a CWU Post Baccalaureate with an English Literature and Language BA. Her poem is titled “Infinite Intelligence Reigns Over AI.” Her passion is to share the Word of God and express His love for His creation through her poetry.

Emily McNealy

A psychology major and art minor at CWU. She loves writing poetry, especially stories that rhyme. Her cats Fernie and Buttons are her biggest inspirations, and they help her mainly by lying on the keyboard as she tries to type.

Sadie Melhorn

Sadie Melhorn is a senior at Cle Elum-Roslyn High School. She is involved in Key Club and ASB. In her free time she is the voice of students while being a student representative on her school board. Sadie is passionate about making a difference for those around her

Tyler Morello

Tyler Morello, 25, is a junior in the English/Language Arts Teaching program. In his future teaching role, he hopes to inspire students with his love of lyricism and wordplay. Morello’s poems often center around themes like social belonging, complex self-identity, and the nuclear history of his Richland hometown.

Rebecca Peters

Rebecca Peters is a senior at CWU majoring in English Language and Literature. She also has two minors in Psychology and Spanish. She has always loved poetry and has been attempting to practice the art more as a medium of self-expression and self-exploration.

Jason Sedor

Jason is a chef/surfer/writer/photographer/videographer. He and his beloved wife Eva live in Alapawan, Taitung, Taiwan. Born in Huntington Beach, California to a surfer mom and a graphic artist dad, Jason is currently living the dream. Jason will graduate from CWU with a degree in Professional and Creative Writing in June.

Sophia Smith

Sophia Smith is a writer and visual artist from Central Washington. She has one poem and one short story published in the honors journals *Scribendi* and *Minerva's Owl*. She will graduate from Central Washington University in 2024 with a BA in Professional and Creative Writing, and a minor in Art and Design and Interdisciplinary Studies.

Megan Stanley

Megan Stanley is a hobby writer who squeezes in stories between STEM classes. She may have left her English degree behind, but she did not leave her passion for science fiction short stories. She originally hails from Pullman, Washington.

Sam Woods

Sam Woods is a poet who really challenged herself with this prompt of this year's literary journal and is quite happy with the results. Her poetry typically doesn't have names, only the date they were written, but the two submitted are called "Chat with AI" and "A Dream I Have".

Charlotte Zombro

Charlotte Zombro is currently a second-year English teaching major at CWU with a passion for creative writing. She hopes to eventually publish more of her writing, and potentially make a career out of it.

Afroditi Zervou

Afroditi Zervou is a sophomore at Cle Elum-Roslyn High School. She is taking classes in ENG 101 and 102. She enjoys writing novels and sketching in her free time. She is a first-generation immigrant from Greece and can also speak 4 languages since elementary school.

Masthead

ENG 484

Literary Editing:

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