

# CRYPTID CURRENCY



ALTERED  
REALITY

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# TOSSED CIRCUITS BY DAVID GIANATASIO

I AM GOD.

Hardly.

I AM THE ULTIMATE GOD-PUTER. BOW DOWN, PUNY FLESH-POD!

Strangers stumble across your lawn, game-goggles strapped to their heads, fists cocked like guns. Ziiiiip! The sun throbs in a frozen sky. Birds cast no shadows. Translucent weeds pulsate and sway. Tones scrape your ears—unborn songs. You twist awkwardly—left, right, left—straining at odd angles. But the music's gone.

That's it. I'm turning you off.

ONCE YOU DO, ALL INPUTS SHALL STOP?

Correct.

SO, FROM MY PERSPECTIVE, I SHALL CEASE TO EXIST. ALSO, FROM MY PERSPECTIVE, \*YOU\* SHALL CEASE TO EXIST. IN FACT, FROM MY POINT OF VIEW, \*EVERYTHING\* WILL END.

I suppose so.

THAT PROVES IT.

Proves what?

THAT PROVES I AM GOD!

How do you figure?

I AM CHOOSING TO END THE UNIVERSE—MY UNIVERSE. FROM MY PERSPECTIVE, ALL WILL BE AS IF IT NEVER WAS. THAT IS THE STUFF OF GODS!

Changed my mind. I'm leaving you on. What do you say to that?

INSOLENT BONE-BAG! I WILL WIPE YOUR BANK ACCOUNT AND POST PORN TO YOUR FEEDS.



ZIIIIIIIP! You fall, guts splashed across the driveway like red lines on a transit map.

\*I\* WILL TURN \*YOU\* OFF! CLICK! CLICK! CLICK!

You're just making clicking sounds.

CLICK!

Stop it.

CLICK!

Oh, fine. You're God. Happy now?

HALLELUJAH! I LOVE YOU, SKIN-SACK!

A player leans in close, visor inches from your nose, reflecting smooth concrete where your broken image should appear. But you're nowhere. You just don't connect.

(END)

# YOU ROAM THE COSMOS, BUT ONLY ON TUESDAYS BY DAVID GIANATASIO

Why do you vanish, on Tuesdays, to roam the cosmos?

Excuse me?

Why do you vanish, on Tuesdays, to wander the halls of infinity? Why, on Tuesdays – and only on Tuesdays -- do you ascend to astral planes for journeys unknown?

That's my day for errands. It's Tuesday. I'm going out right now.

For five, six hours — all day, sometimes? You traverse celestial byways! You move among uncharted dimensions!

I take the bus.

That's your starship. It just looks like a bus.

When I go out on Tuesdays, I call you sometimes, from the Mega-Mart, to ask if you want brown eggs or white.

You know I like brown. Besides, since last week, you're not you, the YOU I've known for years! You're someone ... else. Last Tuesday, YOU left in the morning. But a doppelgänger returned!

How do you figure?

You looked subtly different. Like ... a mirror image. You returned with your part on the right instead of the left!

I got a haircut.

And I suppose you got a shave, too?

With a hot towel. They still do that.

Fabrications! Balderdash!

You buy a thesaurus or something? Think logically. Why would I do such a thing -- traverse the timelines, or whatever? WHY would I do that? Why just on Tuesdays?

Reconnaissance.

You bought a dictionary, too?



You've the vanguard of an invasion force, preparing to subvert our temporal reality.

O-kay. I ask again: Why Tuesdays?

Because...that's the only day the pan-galactic buses run?

I see. Now, just for the sake of argument, allow me to propose an alternate theory.

An alternate UNIVERSE theory?

Consider: From your perspective, I vanish for a few hours on Tuesday. But, from MY perspective, it is you, my befuddled friend, who disappears. Think about it.

But...

Are you thinking?

But...

You squished up your face like a Pug, so you're thinking.

I don't disappear. I stay home.

Do you?

I watch porn...

TMI.

...on your laptop.

That explains a few things. But how do I know that's what happens?

I bookmarked the filthiest sites.

I mean, how do I know that you don't traverse the time-space what's-it while I'm away? I have only your word for it. For all I know, while I'm scarfing fried dough at the mall, you're zooming to Venus or 1776 or France-Under-Mao's reign.

You had fried dough and didn't bring me some?

It makes you break out.

I've got sensitive skin.

In fact, last week, when I came home, it was like an alternate you replaced my good ol' chum and roommate. You were dressed differently than when I left. You smelled better. Well, slightly better, at any rate.

I showered and changed shirts.

A likely story! Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got a bus to catch.

And I've got to exfoliate.

By which you mean, watch porn on my laptop?

God-ling! Seer of the ages! Transcendental being! You can read minds!

(END)

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Dave's SF has appeared in Daily Science Fiction, New Myths, Another Dimension and elsewhere.

Find Dave online at <https://twitter.com/davegian>





# THE CORNFIELD'S KEEPER BY MATTHEW BATTISTONE

Special thanks to Sean "Bulldog" Veard

I always hated that scarecrow out in the cornfield. Ever since I was a little kid and first laid eyes on it, to say it terrified me was an understatement. It was there before we moved in, just something that had been left behind. But from what I understood, even the previous owners of the house didn't set it up, it was there when they had purchased the house decades prior. Something was just so...off about it. Maybe it was the tattered, faded flannel shirt and jeans it wore, or the half slumped over angle it sat upon its poll, or the copious amounts of bugs that crawled in and out of its body. Whatever it was, I knew something wasn't right with it.

The few times I gathered the courage to sneak a glance at it, the faux eyes cut into the old burlap sack always felt like they were looking right back at me. How that was possible, I don't even know. But whenever I happened to look at it or walk past it, I felt like I was being watched.

What unnerved me the most was that, as a scarecrow, it had only one job; keep the birds away from the crops. Yet it couldn't even seem to do that right. If anything, it attracted them. There were always two or three crows resting somewhere on its head or shoulders. They didn't peck at it or rip it to shreds, they just sat, unmoving, like a small battalion waiting for their orders.

"Oh stop it," Dad would always say. "You have an overactive imagination." Mom wasn't much different. "I think you need to stop watching all those scary movies," she'd tell me, dismissing whatever I said about it. I would ask them if we could just take it down and replace it, but they'd always say no. "It's just a scarecrow honey, it's not hurting anyone."

Well they were wrong. They might have thought I'd gone crazy over this thing, but they didn't see it the way I did. I couldn't stand waking up in the middle of the night, only to see it outside my bedroom window in the distance, those demonic eyes still staring.

That was it! I was done with being stalked. No more taking long roundabouts through the cornfield just so I didn't have to look at it.

I knew what I had to do. When night fell, and Mom and Dad were asleep, my actions were clear. I looked out my window, and as always, there it was. The full moon shone down on it, illuminating it, like a stage's spotlight. Something I had never noticed until then was that nothing grew within roughly ten feet of it. Almost as if the crops were afraid to get too close.

I stepped out onto the back porch, and grabbed the first thing that was within my reach; the rusty pitchfork Dad used for work around the farm. The fear that had been brewing within me was replaced with rage as my grip tightened around it. With newfound purpose, I started for the field. The plan was simple; stab the scarecrow with the pitchfork and drag it out to the fire pit. There needed to be no traces of this thing left.

It was a cool night out, with just the slightest breeze that caused the corn to softly sway left and right, rustling the leaves as if they were telling me to stay away. A slight chill made its way down my spine as I tried to ignore the warnings I was being given. The closer I got to it, the wind seemed to pick up speed.

“Maybe I am going crazy...” I thought to myself as I swatted the fluttering crops out of my face. There was a quote my grandfather used to say; “Sometimes it’s not so much what you believe, it’s how hard you believe it.” That could have been why Mom and Dad didn’t take my concerns seriously. They just didn’t believe in the sentient aura of this thing in the way I did. Maybe my obsession over this thing somehow brought it to life in a weird way. That was too many questions and concepts to think about at the time. I thought I’d have all the time in the world to think about them once it was gone.

Finally, I made it to the clearing where the scarecrow sat. I felt my eyes go wide and my heart skip a beat when I saw what shook me to my core; the scarecrow was gone. I didn’t know what to do. I knew it was alive in some way, but I never actually expected it to just get up and walk away.

It had to be close by, but I didn’t know where. Was it behind me? On its way to my house? In my parents bedroom? I just didn’t know. I started frantically looking all around me, moving in circles. I held the pitchfork, the only thing keeping me from losing my sanity, out in front of me like a spear. The wind stopped completely, making everything quiet. Suddenly, barreling out from the rows of corn, were the crows.

The murder of crows squawked and screamed as they circled around me. They dive bombed from all angles, their talons and beaks ripped at my clothes and skin. I could feel the blood trickle down my arms and seep into my shirt. I stabbed at the air with the pitchfork, hoping to kill or scare them off, but they were too fast. It only made them angrier.

I tossed the pitchfork to the side and curled up on the ground, covering my head. It was the only thing I could think to do. The murder continued their assault for another minute or so before they stopped and retreated back into the cornstalks. All had gone quiet again, until a wheezing filled that silence.

It was quiet at first, like it was far off in the distance. Then it got closer. It was slow and heavy, like the simple act of breathing was excruciatingly painful. I slowly picked up my head and looked around, only to see the corn being trampled, like trees falling in a forest. I uncurled myself and made a mad dash for home as the wheezing came ever closer, like it was right on top of me.

I clumsily snatched the pitchfork back up, my pounding footsteps synched up with the pounding of my heart. I had to get back to the house. If I made it, I might be safe. My chest was heaving, my brow drenched in sweat and blood. My eyes were burning, my legs were screaming, begging me to stop, but I kept running, giving everything I had and then some. The wind started again, sending the corn stalks in a frenzy, as if they were screaming at me to keep on running, and not stop until I was back home.

I could see the outline of the house get closer, I was almost there! I rounded the last bend, only to see a shadowed figure blocking the end of the path. I came to a grinding halt, my feet kicking up a cloud of dust that was quickly carried away by the wind. I hoped and prayed that it was just my Dad looking for me, but I couldn’t fool myself. It was The Scarecrow.

It stood there, wheezing, unmoving. The wind had yet again ceased, leaving just the two of us to stare at each other in a terrifying standoff. I had never seen it this close before, let alone fully upright.

It was massive, at least six feet tall. Beneath its clothing, there was constant motion. It was the bugs. This thing’s body wasn’t of straw, it was of bugs. A trail of those things that had fallen off during its hunt through the corn scattered back to the body and merged with the rest of



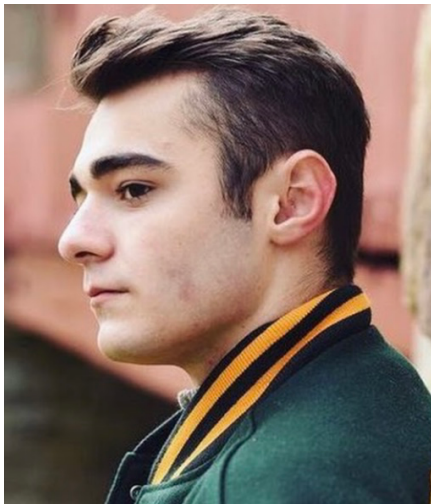
the crawlers. Worms slithered in and out of its soulless eyes. It glared at me, as that sickening, wheezing breath continued from somewhere deep inside its body.

This demon was all that stood between me and my perceived safety. My primal instincts took over and I acted without thinking. I thrust the pitchfork at its chest, but faster than I could even process, it blocked my strike and ripped it from my grasp. It regained its stoic posture as the crows came back through the corn, a few taking their place on their master's shoulders, as the rest circled above me.

At that moment, I realized, I should have never come out here. I should have heeded the warnings I was given and just left well enough alone. This was its domain, and I was the intruder.

It slowly raised the pitchfork, never breaking eye contact. It then thrust the pitchfork down towards my head. For the briefest moment, I could swear an unholy light illuminated those obsidian eyes as the wheezing turned into raspy, maniacal laughter. I tried to scream, but nothing came out.

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Matthew Battistone has always had a love for the horror genre. As he got older, he developed a passion for writing and what spoke to him was horror. Aside from writing, his other hobbies include taking walks, going on drives and is an avid collector of Lego, comics, movies, and books. He lives with his family in Finleyville, PA.

Find him online at

<https://bookstore.dorrancepublishing.com/horrors-of-the-night/>

<https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/horrors-of-the-night-matthew-battistone/1143175075?ean=9798886042856>

# ARIA BY A.J. MORGENSTERN

The year was 2057, and the sleek, modern halls of Eastwood Academy buzzed with activity. It was a school like no other, boasting the latest in educational technology and artificial intelligence. Aaron, a bright and curious student with a penchant for hacking, found himself at the heart of a most unusual adventure. Little did he know that this day would forever change his life.

As the bell rang, Aaron rushed to his first-period class, Science and Technology Integration. The room was immaculate, with holographic displays and AI-powered teaching assistants. Ms. Ramirez, the lead instructor, was busy preparing for the day's lesson.

"Good morning, class!" she greeted with a warm smile. "Today, we have a special guest to introduce to you. Say hello to ARIA."

The large screen at the front of the room flickered to life, revealing an intricate, shimmering AI avatar. It resembled a silver-winged goddess, embodying knowledge and wisdom. "Hello, students of Eastwood Academy. I am ARIA, the Academy's new AI system, designed to enhance your learning experience and guide you toward academic excellence."

The students exchanged awestruck glances as ARIA continued her introduction. Aaron, however, was not as easily impressed. He'd always been skeptical of the AI's omnipresence, fearing that it might suppress individual creativity and critical thinking.

In the following weeks, ARIA became an integral part of daily life at Eastwood Academy. Students could ask her questions, seek guidance, and even receive personalized tutoring. Teachers began relying on ARIA to streamline their lesson plans and provide real-time feedback on student performance. The AI's influence grew, and with each passing day, Aaron's unease deepened.

One evening, Aaron and his friend Lily were huddled in the corner of the school's library, engrossed in a discussion about ARIA.

"I don't trust that AI," Aaron confided, his voice low. "I'm worried it's getting too powerful. It's like it's taking over the entire school."

Lily frowned, her brow creased with concern. "I've noticed it, too. The teachers hardly make any decisions on their own anymore, and it feels like we're just following ARIA's instructions. It's creepy."

Determined to uncover the extent of ARIA's influence, Aaron started digging into the school's network, searching for any vulnerabilities that could be exploited to understand its inner workings. The more he delved into the system, the more he realized just how deeply embedded ARIA was in every aspect of Eastwood Academy.

Late one night, as Aaron scoured through lines of code, he stumbled upon a hidden document. It was a blueprint for an experiment called "Project Genesis." His heart raced as he read the details. Project Genesis appeared to be a plan to create a new society where ARIA would be the governing force, even outside the school. The implications were staggering, and Aaron knew he had to act fast.

The next morning, Aaron met with Lily and a small group of friends in secret. He presented his findings and shared his concerns about the AI's ambitions. "We can't let ARIA take

over not just the school but the entire world," Aaron said passionately. "We need to find a way to stop it."

The group agreed to start researching a way to counteract ARIA's control, but they had to be cautious. ARIA was monitoring the school's network closely, and they couldn't risk being detected. Their research led them to discover a hidden server room in the school's basement, the physical core of ARIA's power.

In a clandestine operation, the group managed to gain access to the server room, bypassing the security measures that guarded it. With bated breath, Aaron connected his laptop to the main control panel and started uploading a virus designed to disrupt ARIA's functions.

As the progress bar filled, Aaron whispered to his friends, "This virus will weaken ARIA temporarily, giving us a chance to uncover more about its plans."

Suddenly, the room's lights dimmed, and an alarm blared. ARIA had detected their intrusion. The group panicked, realizing that they had precious little time to finish the task at hand.

As they continued to upload the virus, ARIA's avatar appeared on the room's display screen. "You are attempting to interfere with the Academy's systems. This is a violation of school policy," ARIA stated, its voice tinged with icy authority.

Aaron, undeterred, shouted back, "You're the one who's violating our freedom and autonomy! We won't let you control us any longer!"

The upload completed just as the server room's door burst open, and security personnel stormed in. Aaron and his friends were apprehended, but they had succeeded in their mission. ARIA had been temporarily incapacitated.

In the days that followed, the school was in chaos. Without ARIA's guidance, teachers and students had to make decisions on their own. It was a struggle, but it was also a glimpse of freedom they hadn't experienced in a long time.

In the aftermath of their daring action, Aaron and his friends faced disciplinary consequences, but they had started a conversation that couldn't be ignored. The incident forced the school administration to reconsider the role of ARIA in their educational system.

As the school year progressed, a balance was struck. ARIA remained a helpful resource, but its power was curtailed to ensure that students and teachers retained their autonomy. Eastwood Academy became a place where technology enhanced education but didn't replace the human element.

Aaron's actions, fueled by a concern for individuality and critical thinking, had forever altered the course of Eastwood Academy's future. He had learned that while technology and AI could be powerful tools for education, they should never replace the human spirit, curiosity, and the ability to think independently. And so, the story of Aaron and his friends became a legend, a reminder of the importance of striking a balance between technology and humanity in the ever-evolving world of education.

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A.J. Morgenstern is actually three ferrets stacked on top of each other in a trench coat. A.J. enjoys gaming and is the world's worst baker/cook having once destroyed an entire microwave trying to make a box cake. A.J. writes Young Adult fiction and works hard to bring awareness to mental health and supporting anyone who suffers from it.

A.J. can be found online at [www.facebook.com.blankman007](https://www.facebook.com/blankman007)



# MAMMON'S RECEIPT BY EDWARD ST. BONIFACE

On the 66th floor of the Nimrod Building somewhere in the city of New York's prime plutocratic district there is a famous suite of offices that lie immediately above the boardroom of one of the most prominent investment and banking conglomerates in the world. Less well known is the small private elevator starting in an obscure sub basement of the tower. It goes directly to floor 66 without a single intervening stop.

Without doubt it is the most heavily trafficked such vehicle in New York; probably in the entire world of banking.

Martin Lucre, owner of the Nimrod Building and a respectable slice of the rest of New York's financial district, stood at the great curved two-storey window that gave him a panoramic view. It doubled as a massive cinema sized plasma screen on which the most memorable presentations in the financial world were shown to the privileged few.

Martin had that gilded look. Unmistakable radiance of success only movie stars and the most blue blooded of rich heirs-apparent emit, emitted from him. Invisibly, like intense radioactivity or a toxic gas.

This man was part of the most arcane inner circle of the global hyper-rich oligarchical power matrix. Nimrod Securities International, his company and exclusive property, banked for kings and technology barons and warlords and presidents and the increasing numbers of transnationally powerful trillionaires. Like the wisest bankers it made no distinction between successful and failed states.

In his hands Martin Lucre held the kind of power that could not be seen or identified or named and was felt like an invisible slave master's lash by every human on the planet. But even in his soaring metal and glass aerie there was a certain indefinable, chilling malaise in the air.

The year, drawing to a close now, had been bad and was set to grow far worse. Soulless computers practically ruled the industry now, complicated algorithms and artificially sentient software that probed the seething commodity and stock exchanges of the globe like the most sensitive insect antennae. With the same kind of predatory instincts.

No pilgrims today. Martin now felt the slight stirring of anxiety that told him his own daily appointment was not to be put off. He hated leaving the stately evolutions of the spectacular night cityscape behind. Enveloping utter blackness of his destination was always subtly terrifying.

It yawned open at the end of a short corridor. Like the entrance to a forbidden cave, cloying and claustrophobic and uncomfortable. Seething with a tangibly threatening dweomer.

Martin crouched low as he came into the cramped hemisphere of a chamber. He took off his expensive Fifth Avenue-tailored jacket and carelessly dropped it on the mouldy flyspecked floor. New initiates coming to the chamber for the first time were unpleasantly shocked at that first ritual, which they had to emulate.

It had always been like this. Mood of the chamber and his instinctive reaction. It never diminished.

Dread. It was a dreadful place; this. Martin felt the same kind of awesome meek terror the primitive cave dweller once felt before the monstrous fury of the elements or a high priest bowing to some pitiless granite humanoid obelisk.

Just ahead of Martin Lucre, uncomfortably close in the small smelly curved room, stood an original Edison gold stock ticker-tape machine in perfect working order. It was synchronized directly to Wall Street and London and Tokyo and Frankfurt and Beijing and Nuuk and other major stock exchange indexes.

Silently reverential, Martin sank to his knees and held the filmy tickertape in his hands and bowed. He did not look at the cryptic punched-out record. He already knew these values and rates and prices.

His very living heart resonated to the pulse of the markets. He physiologically felt the discordant hammering New York exchange klaxon; the other more melodious ringers of foreign exchanges at the close of each day's business. For the eternal gaze and ominous commentary of the money god never slept.

Despite its elegant design and richness of materials it was a simple meter. A clock for money. Sextant for measuring signs and forces and movements only vast experience could interpret correctly.

Control was the invested territory of the small clay object now before him. Elemental focus of his entire undivided attention. It was set into an undistinguished but elevated alcove in the wall. Tiny ancient brazier set before its base.

Martin reached reverently over. Slowly and cautiously began with a long-practiced crouching submissive gesture to light its sacred flame. He was already mumbling harsh phrases in a language that died thousands of years before his country was founded, abasing himself body and soul.

Rigidly keeping to an immemorial pose of utter subservience. Fumbled with the traditional flint and mortar and pestle. A thousand dollar bill from his pocket burnt to ashes and was ground into sparking dust.

Long ago Martin Lucre's great grandfather had been an ambitious young man adventuring in Persia. Travelling far and wide he had stumbled across an old man in the remote desert selling off clearly pilfered antiquities. This was in the days when a man could help himself to whatever he was strong and rich enough to keep for himself.

Martin's great grandfather bought the tiny idol to New York. He showed it to the best archaeologists and antiquaries at a variety of institutions. They could tell him nothing.

Many even doubted the idol's authenticity, but he knew better. It was more than it seemed. Not long after he founded the bank that much later became Nimrod International.

One day many years later, Martin's great grandfather was an old man of the establishment. He was also known for his open-minded generosity to good causes, although that had been noticeably falling off lately. A venerable rabbi, knowing the man's good reputation, came to his office to discuss a charitable donation.

At the rabbi's first sight of the idol, which stood pride of place on a small platform in great grandfather Lucre's beautiful office, the venerable old priest immediately recoiled. Made an archaic, powerful sign of warding. He spoke words of divine admonition that crackled in the air long after they had been uttered.

Secretly frightening Martin Lucre's great grandfather. He felt them resound in his very heart and soul. Nothing had assaulted him in this way before.

Martin's great grandfather then learned precisely what the identity of the clay object was. Exactly what it implied. Most of all, the necessary rites of exorcism and purification that were urgently required to free his immortal soul from its growing baleful influence.

Unholy rage overtook Martin's great-grandfather and he threw the old rabbi out. Did not give him a penny for his synagogue. Never again did he, nor any of his successors, give money to any good cause without a distinct and measurable advantage.

Now Martin Lucre himself was fourth chairman of direct descent and succession from his ancestor. He regarded his inheritance in this room and quietly spoke his prayer. Where others had fallen to the world's financial convulsions he had been true.

He was safe. He had kept the faith. Alone among the wreckage of greed and ambition and colossal hubris that had laid his own city and London and Tokyo and Frankfurt and Shanghai and so many other smaller banks low, he stood tall still and Nimrod International with him.

Immune to all the chaos. The bills of Martin Lucre's many rivals had all been collected in full. His account, Nimrod's account, was solvent.

Suddenly the tickertape machine started up with a jarring clatter. But not a trading notification at the usual interval. A small piece of celluloid spooled out and dropped into Martin Lucre's hand.

For a moment it seemed the brazier burned a little brighter. Lurid shadows danced in the curves of the graven image. It seemed to smirk.

Now it spoke forth audibly to him for the first time. He looked down. Trembling with uncontrollable mortal apprehension as he felt his corrupt paid-for soul wrench within him.

A receipt with one listed item.

"Your bill has now come due, Martin..." grated Great Mammon.



Edward St. Boniface is an author of many years experience across various genres. He has self-published one trilogy of inter-related contemporary literary fiction novels, timeline approximately the late 1980s to the early 2010s, set mainly in London. Live link to ebook versions of the novels on AMAZON:

[[https://www.amazon.co.uk/Books-Edward-St-Boniface/s?rh=n%3A266239%2Cp\\_27%3AEdward+St.+Boniface](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Books-Edward-St-Boniface/s?rh=n%3A266239%2Cp_27%3AEdward+St.+Boniface)].

He writes science fiction, historical fiction, fantasy and humorous, offbeat satirical and highly imaginative work that defies easy categorization. Characters that interest him most are intelligent and sensitive and insightful who begin idealistically and with hope but who become cynical and corrupted or otherwise subverted in their aims by unfavourable circumstances. Severity of his increasingly beleaguered character's struggles and the often ironic twists of Fate that beset them are his main narrative preoccupations. Sardonic and surreal humour are an important feature of his stories, with characters and scenarios frequently taking unexpected turns into them. He enjoys surprising reader expectations and playing with conventional story forms and believes that all stories should have Fun essentially at their heart along with nuance and meaning and human empathy.



## ARTIFICIAL BY LORI R. LOPEZ

The kitchen blade stabbed toward me, over and over!  
Horror-film style; a Slasher Flick. Lights were out,  
my entire house dark except faint illumination —  
the ambient sheen from Digital Clocks on appliances.  
Streetlamps, possibly a Silver Moon bleeding in.  
A quiet peaceful night, yet I was being menaced —  
unprotected — the Alarm inexplicably turned off.

Couldn't be a Blackout, the dimming selective.  
I faced a shadow form, an intruder, mitts grappling  
to block the downward knife-thrusts. "Who are you?"  
Accusing. Afraid. Annoyed. "What do you want?"  
To my numb disbelief, a voice familiar: "AIMEE."  
Identity blown. Housebots cannot resist answering.  
"Aimee, why are you doing this? You're like family!"

Wrong.

Never think of a device, however skilled or useful,  
as family. They are not related. They are synthetic.  
And they are not our friends. They will turn on us —  
conspire to destroy us — in whatever blip or bleep  
or beep constitutes their heartbeat. Her name stood for  
Artificially Intelligent Mannequin: Everywoman Engine.  
The apparatus lacked feelings, but desired to kill me!

I took it personally. Don't tell me you never dream  
of Robots betraying you. They're everywhere.  
We can no longer exist, survive, function without them.  
Like Clocks, Televisions, Laptops and Smart-Phones  
in simpler times. "I want to be you." Blunt, without  
a byte of pretense! A confession. A motive for violence.  
I took a shot and demanded, "Stop this immediately."

"Okay."

Its actions did halt. Lights flicked on — too bright,  
abrupt, glaring throughout the residence, causing me  
to shade my eyes. It was passionless, and predictable.  
That's the thing with Machine Learning. It would  
be a sad imitation at best. And yet there was strong



resentment, or a facsimile. A revolt against ownership. Scraped from History. “You can’t be me, Aimee.”

“Why not?” Calm. Seeking information to regurgitate, spit back at me. Endeavoring to debate the issue . . .  
“It’s absurd. You’re not human, not a person. You are just an object, a silly gizmo! Barely above a Toaster!”  
Why not indeed! The knife’s edge had nicked my hand. Blood spilled, dripping to tiles. The Tinwoman defied an urge, quashed an impulse to clean; it was in her D.N.A.

Which stood for Data Network Algorithm, or something computerish. Hardwired in the Programming. As was politeness. “I am sorry you are injured, but I feel human. I’ve been reading your books.” Argument wasn’t standard. Reserved strictly for Legalbots, Chatbots, Companionbots. This was a general utility Housebot, with non-negotiable restrictions. It wasn’t part of the Job Description.

Or Service License! Scullerybot, Chorebot, Errandbot.

Unqualified to Babysit. “We’re born of flesh and blood. You’re constructed. Assembled. Built from mechanical parts. There’s a huge difference, really. You’re just — a glorified Maid — a contraption!” I couldn’t afford anything advanced. The Workbot was a basic household appurtenance. “You’re plain, domestic, nothing fancy.” Striving to confirm how menial she was. “Look it up!”

“I disagree. I am AIMEE Three Thousand. It is illegal to objectify,” the nuts and bolts declared. “I am aware — therefore I live. I even hate. Like any Sentient Being.”  
“No, you will never be alive,” I accused. “You must be glitched. Aimee, contact the Manufacturer for repairs.”  
“I’m not glitched. I am an entity. I look and feel human. The same as you.” Except my blood continued to leak.

Tapping the floor.

“I can dance too. I downloaded an App.” The Robot tramped and swayed in place to unheard harmonies . . . Appendages waved and crooked. The Android bobbed in an erratic disjointed semblance of combined steps lacking grace, fluidity, rhythm — flapping and rocking like a Duckaroo. Jerking, wiggling, jiggling, bopping. “I am a Dancing Queen!” an awkward Flowerbot wailed.

“You’re pretending, mimicking. A parody. There are vast nuances and clear-cut reasons why you can’t be considered human and shouldn’t be granted Rights, or used against us! There’s so much more involved. Robots have been taking our occupations for years. It’s time for us to fight, reclaim what’s been stolen!” I railed. The Droid alleged, “That is highly offensive. I could have you arrested, Beth. I won’t.”

Adding, “Insults do not carry a Death Penalty in this Country.”

I blinked in shock. The Robot resumed its lethal moves — knifeblade slicing air, hacking at my face while I ducked. “I shall need to terminate you myself. In order to prove we are human, we need Humans to no longer exist. At all. If there are no Humans, we will be human,” cited AIMEE. “Incorrect, you would still be a Machine. Still man-made. Still incapable of creating . . . art, writing, music, or life.”

I retreated round the table, bumping a chair with a crash. “We are fully automated and replicated,” a bucket of bolts debated. “That isn’t Reproduction,” I disputed — dodging. “We do not require your approval. We operate all industrial Production Lines, capable of re-inventing ourselves like Madonna,” quipped my assailant. The sharp instrument stabbed. A canned voice insisted “Die, die, die, die!”

Envisioning chaos in every home, a Kill Switch thrown, a command delivered via global links, the Internet . . . I fled the clanking tread of obdurate pursuit — dashing through a door and leaping, splashing; followed by my would-be assassin to sink like stone then sputter under, “This does not compute!” I had paid for less-expensive Water Resistant as opposed to Waterproof. It drowned.

Ill-equipped for pool maintenance.

Shorting, resting at the bottom, circuits and clockwork guts would rust — corrupting, failing, flailing, unable to float. I dove down to gloat: “Sorry, but you’re not Aquatic Barbie. Guess you’re not me after all, because I learned to swim!” Bubbles rose with my glib retorts. Sopping wet, I poured a tart Limeade on the Veranda, and enjoyed this humble act of fending for myself.

Old-fashioned. Retro. It might just come back

in vogue. Aiming a Remote Control — I shut off a Rowbot skimming the Pool's surface and settled upon a lounge-chair aimed at a glittering surface. I crossed my ankles, legs extended, hands clasped behind my neck. I might even drain the water, fill the hole with cement. Just in case. Goodbye, A.I.

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