

# /lit/ Writing Competition\*

## { February, 2025 }

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Featuring stories from GiovanniDrogo,  
Hogan, meteor, BicFlair, Emilia, Beineberg,  
Logan, Pancakesyrup, ChineseDracula,  
VampDaddy, MaMaMi, Abes, Z. N.,  
mintjulia, jeff, ineptia, and trippo

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Organized by yodo (aka Emilia)

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Edited by ineptia

[ \* held the first Saturday of every month ]



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**Ok writers here we go!**

**Theme Requirement: The work must explore the boundaries between reality and illusion.**

**Character Requirement: The work must feature a female character who is an unreliable narrator.**

**You have until Monday 3rd February Midnight Greenwich Mean Time to post your submission.**

**Remember, post your submission in the comments with a trip:**

**In the name section of the comment type:**

**[wanted name] + # + [your pin]**

**and that will give your green wanted name followed by the exclamation mark and random numbers.**

**Submit your piece using reentry.co. Easy to read. Pastebin looks gross.**

**No word limit but anything more than 2,500 words will start to drag imo**

**00:10 GMT Tuesday I will post the link to the Poll.**

**You will then have until Friday 7th February MIDDAY to read, GIVE FEEDBACK, and vote!**

**Good luck everyone!**

**—yodo (>>24153972)**



# *The Myth of the Machine*

by Giovanni Drogo

—I felt it first as a slackening in my pelvic floor. Waves of dissipated tension radiating from what felt like the bottom of my spine. Taillights started streaking in front of me, leaving long red trails that swirled into a tunnel. Nothing I hadn't seen before . . . but I knew I at this point I may have misjudged my dosage.

>You were on drugs?

—Yes sir, but really, it was nothing I couldn't handle. Since I was on the road, I didn't have a scale on hand. So, I eye-balled it, and went a little overboard. But you have to understand I was only trying to break up the monotony. And the messages were clear. I was only supposed to be in Ohio for two months, working on the lithography installations. I got extended to four months. I was working the nightshift, twelve hours a night. Very little human contact that wasn't behind a faceless cleanroom suit . . . I was living in a world of white silhouettes. Intel had a lot riding on the mega-fab. With all of the tension around Taiwan, TSMC was in a weak position and Intel needed to prove they were capable of operating a foundry. Apple and Google had already signed contracts. Chip production was shifting back to the states and everyone was desperate to meet the demand. So, Kumagaya-Yoshimi Semiconductor—my company—extended all of the work contracts for us technicians, and authorized unlimited overtime. I was working seven nights a week. It was by choice. I could have stuck to the normal four on, four off schedule, but what can I say? I was compelled to work.

>Was it normal for a field technician to work seven nights a week?

—It wasn't unheard of. Especially on shorter one-month assignments. Guys like to make the travel worth the money. If you aren't working overtime, the only extra pay you're getting is in per diem. But I wasn't doing it for the money. I only wanted to work. To exercise moral discipline through a total acquiescence to the banality of ritual and labor. It was going well for the first two

months. I was comfortably in my routine. Fixing the machines all night. Spending all night with the machines in the humming air, under the yellow lights. I lost myself. I felt a flattening of my potentiality. The Machine is old . . . you do realize this? It has had thousands of years to perfect the incorporation of fresh components. It knows all the tricks to virtually lobotomize people. This mega-fab was only one manifestation of The Machine. The pyramids were built by The Machine . . . not to mention pre-historic social structures. It's an entity, and I started to become aware of its malevolent components. How it automatizes people. How it grinds them down until they are as smooth as a mirror. The cleanroom at the Ohio fab is one mile long and one half a mile wide. The space is unbroken by walls. Rows of machines stretch down the open space and seem to curve down at the horizon. There is one strip of aluminum flooring splitting the cleanroom down the middle. Technicians in white jumpsuits are always scurrying up and down this silver strip before turning off down one of the countless rows of machines. It can be disorienting. The ceilings are thirty feet high and covered with crisscrossing tracks that carry thousands of robots. These robots carry the wafers between the different machines. Photolithography is only one step in the process, you see. Each wafer is carried to dozens of machines that perform their own specialized tasks. The robots never leave the ceiling; they unfurl thirty-foot elastic tongues down to the machines and retract the wafer-boxes back to the ceiling before zipping away. Each robot is labeled with a number, and yes, I was being delivered messages via those numbers.

>Ok, Ruby, could you tell us again exactly how these robots were sending you messages? When did you first start to receive them?

—I've already explained it to the police officer.

>Yes, I understand Ruby. I just want us all to be on the same page. Were these messages coming from 'The Machine'?

—No, I don't think you do understand. There needed to be a balance, a correction. Of course the messages were from The Machine, but it was only operating in everyone's best interest. What will be left in the world when we are eclipsed totally by The Machine and lose all subjective contribution? We have become over-domesticated. It is a process The Machine has been overseeing since the first neolithic caveman sat down and started scraping flint rocks together—and here I am today, essentially doing the same thing; patiently applying myself to monotonous work, simple motions, advancing slowly, almost imperceptibly . . . it is ritual pushed almost beyond human endurance. Now, this

isn't to say work is all bad. Ritual regularity and repetition help man control chaotic outpourings of the unconscious, but like I said, it's about balance. And The Machine is sensitive to this. So, I was chosen as a vessel for the correction. All night long I would sit with my machine, caressing it, listening to it, and I would watch the robots going by overhead. I started to recognize patterns in the sequences. Certain series of numbers would pass in regular intervals. I began to record them in my notebook at the start of my third month in the fab, and by the end of the month I understood what was expected of me.

>And what was The Machine asking you to do?

—To restore balance, of course. To stop production. To contaminate the system. A significant enough delay in the production cycle would bankrupt the company and many of the contractors. It would have a global impact. Really, it was The Machine self-flagellating. It isn't all malevolence. It works in ways we can't comprehend. But the messages were clear enough to me. I only needed to introduce impurity into the system. Copper has special properties that allow it to easily diffuse through silicon. It is used in many processes during chip manufacturing, but needs to be closely monitored and controlled to avoid contamination. Putting a copper wafer into a non-copper machine will lead to millions in damages and repairs and lost profits. Putting copper into the air itself would be catastrophic. The Ohio fab was sacrificing itself. So, I needed copper powder. The Machine wanted to breathe copper into the cleanroom. You can buy all of the raw material at any hardware store. It's a simple reaction between copper chloride and iron. I filled my bathtub with the copper chloride and a bucket of nails. The reaction generates a lot of heat so I added a few gallons of water to slow it down, too. After a few days of processing the copper powder I had enough to fill my backpack. I wasn't getting much sleep at the time. I had to do all of this work in the twelve-hour intervals between shifts.

>I see . . . and what did you do next?

—I did what I was told to do. All environmental variables are tightly controlled in a cleanroom. The air inside the fab is extremely pure. There are less than ten particles per cubic meter of air. A room like this one we are in now has millions of particles per cubic meter. All I needed to do was introduce the impurity into the ducts after the filtration system. It was easy. There isn't much security during the day and there is even less at night. People don't ask questions. The air in the fab moves from the top down, cycling through the

cleanroom and then through the perforated floor tiles to the sub-fab before being exchanged for fresh air. I took my bag of copper dust and walked along the catwalk at the top of the cleanroom, amongst the robots, stopping to pour copper dust into every duct that was pushing air. And soon the white metal in the fab was coated rusty orange. It was everywhere. Alarms started blaring from thousands of machines. They were screaming for help. They were dying. Every screen had an error message. White silhouettes on the silver highway were running between machines. I sat on the catwalk and watched the robots flying by, and The Machine spoke to me as it died, saying it would be reborn.

>Does the machine still talk to you, Ruby?

—Yes, of course. This interview is a part of the correction. Talk to me and know thyself, Machine.

-the end-

# *'The Myth of the Machine'*

## *Critiques*

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Anonymous // >>24161101:

>>24155147

Quite liked this one and it actually made me think and go back to read portions of it again once finished. Strong opening line, I really like the description of "pelvic floor", and the final line was pretty killer too. I understand that Ruby's version of events is that the Machine instructed her to destroy it to prevent humanity from becoming useless? Maybe a little bit too exposition/explanation of the science and broader situation, but I certainly like this.

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Anonymous // >>24161742:

>>24155147

I like this one, though it felt a bit too "explainy" to me. I admit, my eyes glazed over for a bit.

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Anonymous // >>24161919:

>>24155147

Wow. Reading all of that was painful. Exposition after exposition. With the starting line I thought it was a sex story and what I got was technobabble to the max. I'm very sorry anon

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Anonymous // >>24162376:

>>24155147

I think the most interesting part of this story for me was trying to figure out who exactly she was talking to. It's not the cops. It's not her employers. It appears to be a group ("us"). Also a higher authority ("sir"). The vibe is that of a shrink. It reminded me of the tv show Person of Interest, the scenes where Root talks with her psychiatrist while imprisoned in a mental institution. The description of the fab really sold it for me. And there are some really good lines ("To exercise moral discipline through a total acquiescence to the banality of ritual and labor.", "I felt a flattening of my potentiality."). However, I do feel like there isn't enough tension here. It's just a straight recounting of events without any real present conflict.

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ineptia // >>24163307:

THE MYTH OF THE MACHINE

GiovanniDrogo

>>24155147

1.

>Kumagaya-Yoshimi Semiconductor

>authorized unlimited overtime

"KYS" :(

There is a 19th-Century book called Erewhon; inside, there is a sub-book [set of] chapter[s] titled "The Book of the Machines."

You should check it out bec. your story and the way you characterize technology eerily reminds me of it in a very good way.

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Erewhon/Chapter\\_23](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Erewhon/Chapter_23)

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Erewhon/Chapter\\_24](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Erewhon/Chapter_24)

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Erewhon/Chapter\\_25](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Erewhon/Chapter_25)

>photolithography

"light" + "rock"

>scraping flint rocks together

"light" + "rock" also :0

>regularity and repetition help man

This is totally subjective, but I feel—Ruby being the prompt-mandated female character [who's also a high-level engineer/technician]—she'd probably opt for "humanity" here instead of being so sex-specific?

She also uses "human endurance" right before [which works]; "man", idk, also [just] sounds, like, too grandiose?

Also, "white silhouettes" = faceless [flattened-potential] workers; I guess I'm trying to say "man" is too particular/specific for her dichotomy between "us" and "the machine".] [Unless she's regurgitating some philosopherspeak—which was kinda the gist I got from the "banality/labor" line.]

[I'd say it's a sign of a very good piece if one word like this makes me think about it so much :) ]

2. Ruby's exposition and recounting of her crimes is—at least to me—appropriately dry/calm/collected/clinical (she's basically devoted herself to soul-erasing menial labor) but why not do this to make her un-humanity stand out more[,] at the same time as spicing up the delivery[/pacing]:

Give the interviewer some more emotion!

Create a contrast between the calm-insane & the animated-rational.

>Ok, Ruby, could you tell us again exactly how these robots were sending you messages?

"Now, lady, you said the "tongue-machines" were talking to you? Like, really?

'Cause that actually kinda makes sense."

3. It's a fascinating psychosis to personify an object—an idea, really—into something you have a masochistic relationship with & then to justify "hurting" it because, well, that's what it wants. Gives me hope it's all Ruby's intricate rationalizations for getting some humanity back. At first I didn't think she should have been on drugs—being in that kind of environment (I think) is enough, but it served as a good indirect explanation for how/why she got caught (if she, like, crashed her car or something) plus [another] attempt at [her] [improperly?] balance[-ing] [things].

You obviously did a lot of research [and reflected terrifyingly-beautifully] on a really cool subject—I have to ask: Is Ruby's name significant? Are, like, Ruby-crystal lasers necessary to make these chips?

>-the end-

"end of audio file" [or something similar] could work [instead] --> she just said she's conversing w/ TM.

[Rose alludes to fraught geopolitics stirring up the Chip War—would love to hear her cynical take on it all]

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(REPLY) Anonymous // >>24163767

>>24163307

thanks for the feedback and close reading, anon. I will definitely check out erewhon. It looks like it's right up my alley.

Rubys name, unfortunately, has no significance to the story.

I've been writing a little feedback for all the stories, but you've convinced me to be a little more thorough in my critiques.

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Emilia // >>24164133:

>>24155147

The Myth of the Machine.

First Impressions:

The prose could use a lot of editing. I appreciate the time constraint of the comp though, just wanted to point it out for the future.

For example,

>Taillights started streaking in front of me, leaving long red trails that swirled into a tunnel.

How about: Taillights streaked in front of me, long red tails swirling into a tunnel.

This general rule, of trying to remove the fat, like all the 'thats,' 'was,' and 'hads' and stuff, can be applied to the rest of the piece. But like I said, time constraints and all.

Technicians in white jumpsuits are always scurrying up and down this silver strip before turning off down one of the countless rows of machines.

White jumpsuits scurry up and down this silver strip, between countless rows of

machines.

A lot of telling in the beginning. This may be a consequence of the voice you have chosen, but it reads bland.

I really like the spiritual aspect in your prose about the ritual regularity and work. Nice. Interesting perspective that gives depth.

I sometimes forget this story is written like a conversation. I think the voice should be different if it's a conversation.

Final Impressions: I'm not sure how this fits the brief? There is a kernel of something interesting here. I think if you wrote a story from within, it could be really interesting. I'd like the drama to take place alongside the white coats, as opposed to it being reported.

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trippo // >>24166867:

>>24155147

Interesting to see that you and I essentially alighted on the same format for this prompt with the post-incident interview idea (though mine doesn't have an explicit interviewer). I like the slow drip-feed of information throughout (what's she talking about? what's all this tech jargon? what's the Machine?) and it builds up well to a climax with some great imagery of copper dust coating everything as the factory shuts down. I appreciate that part of the point here is that the Machine is inscrutable since it's implicitly an delusion – but as a reader, I'd still have liked to see Ruby provide greater rationale for her actions beyond just simply "sacrificing the fab". But again, she's meant to be delusional, so I get it. As a final stylistic point, I don't believe you needed to capitalise that definite article there when you say "the Machine". You cover a lot of ground with this one. Good work.

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mintjulia // >>24167858:

>The Myth of the Machine

I enjoyed how cold and matter-of-fact this felt. I felt some kind of inevitability running through the text. Quite dreadful.

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ChineseDracula // >>24168486:

>Myth of the Machine

The first paragraph of this gave me the expectation of her causing a car crash due to being high, but that never came and the drugs weren't really touched on again in the story, only serving to set up unreliability of the narrator. Would like to see them reappear a bit more. I like the ideas/twist brought forth at the end that the machine is more than just technology, but a sentient system of society. This piece kind of reminds me of the later chapters of Harassment Architecture.

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