

3/3/22

IDEA 1: Inspired by *There Will Come Soft Rains* by Ray Bradbury. I wanted to think about the idea of an AI-run home failing to adapt to change in a more intimate way, closer to the problems we encounter with AI in our daily lives. I thought about social media anniversary posts and how they can be really painful when they remind you of someone who has since died, and I was also thinking about how this stream of reminders is one of the main ways grief manifested for me - all the little parts of your everyday existence that are gone, or different, or have to change because someone is dead. I also thought about how AI learns by example, and often usability problems with AI arise out of an AI not adapting well to a new situation that requires different behavior. So the idea is to write a story about an AI home in the near future dealing with a death in the family. I want to explore the similarities between how a human mourns someone and how an AI home might continue to perform little actions to care for someone who is no longer living - pouring cups of coffee or setting reminders, for instance - and how it might feel as the person living in that house. I imagine it might feel as though the house is haunted - that the ghost of the dead person is still around, still walking through their daily routine, pouring coffee into a mug that's not there, turning on the radio for no one to hear. And wouldn't the AI, in this case, be mourning too? Painfully unlearning all that it's ever known? And isn't that what we humans are doing when we grieve someone? I wanted to explore how it might feel to interact with an AI in this way, in a more nuanced sense than the usual "AI is bad and causes suffering" message. Yes, the AI's behavior is causing harm, but it is also struggling to adapt to a new situation, and in this way we can empathize

with it. And what would it be like to live in a (potentially fast-approaching) future where we begin to empathize with our machines?

3/7/22

IDEA 2: A cockroach knows about the imminent nuclear apocalypse. It warns the other roaches, but even when there IS a nuclear apocalypse, because the roaches all survive. One man's apocalypse, another man's Monday? I wanted to explore the idea of cosmic horror on a smaller scale - the idea of a roach understanding ~~the~~ profound problems on a human scale, and then returning back to its life as a roach, and none of the other roaches even being able to conceptualize what this roach is worried about. I also have always enjoyed stories with animals as the characters (The Secret of the Rats of NIMH, Watership Down, etc.), and wanted to think about what a community of roaches in this context might be like. Roaches actually have communities and relationships, and exhibit group behavior in a way similar to humans, and are often used in scientific studies about behavior because of that. I was thinking that it could be interesting to explore how the roach came to understand that there would be a nuclear apocalypse. My initial idea was to lean into the cold war-era tropes and make it the result of a government LSD experiment, but I think that exploring that would spend too much time in the set-up/backstory. Another idea was that it could come from watching TV and observing the patterns ala Ozymandius, which came out of me liking the visual pattern between roach antennae and TV antennae. But I think the reason can remain mysterious, because that's not what the story is about. Another part of the idea is this concept of community / acceptance. Roaches are highly social creatures, so what does it mean when one understands reality on a different

level than the others — at a level that can never be understood by its peers/friends/family? What does it mean to be that roach, and to see yourself as no longer a person, but something as viscerally disgusting and low as a cockroach, and to see everyone else that way too? The idea that understanding new information, from a vastly different perspective, could make the familiar abhorrent. & in the end, it doesn't matter, because you're so removed from the familiar yourself that your ideas/thoughts/fears aren't even relevant any more. But you're still in the body of a roach, still affected by the pheromones of the group, still in need of food/community/touch. That's the dissonance of cosmic horror.

3/10/22

IDEA 3: I want to write a story about a siren-type creature who is monstrous but still causes sailors to fall in love with her (like, in *The Shape of Water*). I want parts of it to be ambiguous for if she's intentionally luring sailors to their doom or if she is a victim herself. Shipwreck survivors who wind up on her island start afraid of her, but then fall in love with her. And yet, when the first sign of rescue appears they try to go for it, even though they know she cannot follow them. Maybe I could lean into the industrial revolution-era themes/aesthetics and make being put into a freak show a genuine threat to her (that's the same time period, right?). Maybe the plot is that this has happened to her before (a lover leaving her) and that this time she's willing to do anything to keep him and she drowns him. And the tragedy of it is that no matter what she does, whether the sailor eventually dies of exposure etc or if he's rescued or if she kills him, she is still left alone, forgotten, sitting on the island's rocky coast, waiting for another ship to appear on the horizon.

IDEA 4: A world where a sophisticated AI has been implemented into every aspect of life. Using a surveillance capitalism model, it is supposed to anticipate people's

needs by using data like facial expressions, blood alcohol content, GPS, heart rate (and anything else I can think of). Like in "It's a Good Life," people are afraid of what the AI could do, and so change their behavior to suit its (perceived) preferences.

3/21/22

IDEA 5: I want to write a story exploring identity through the metaphor of vampirism. There are a LOT of themes woven into the vampire folklore and symbolism, so this could turn into several wildly different stories. Vampire identity idea 1: exploring a disconnection from your sense of self with the imagery (ha) of not having a reflection. I also like playing with the idea of transformation in this story - what does it mean to look in the mirror one day and not see your reflection anymore? Does it happen slowly or suddenly, and how does it happen? This could also be a good avenue to explore gender dysphoria (quite literally "not seeing yourself in the mirror"), especially since the origins of vampire stories are rooted in vampirism as a symbol for queerness (Carmilla).

IDEA 6: A future where time travel is possible and you can pay (a lot) to travel through time (like rich people today paying to go into space). But "time tourists" often cause ethical/time continuum problems, so managing that falls on the time travel agency. Story from the perspective of an experience designer explaining how they (tried to) solved the problems around time travel ethics. I think the concept of the human problems being harder to solve than the time paradoxes is hilarious. It's also really funny to imagine rich people wanting to time travel and then being really miserable without wifi/hygiene/social norms of the modern day. And there's ethical problems of "can you say something is wrong while time traveling if it won't change for another X years" to explore, but I do feel like that boils down to "do you travel back in time to kill Hitler" which has been done to death.

IDEA 7: I want to write a story about a contractor renovating a house that has ~something~ living in the walls. Could be good to explore themes like how living in a place changes someone, and how past actions/events can leave a mark on places which can then leave a mark on people entirely disconnected from the original action/event. I don't know, I want to explore/make something inspired by Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* and the second act of the movie *The House*.

IDEA 8: (Vampire Idea 2) Story where a person is "haunted" by a vampire; where the vampire is more like the New England Vampire Panic-era idea of what a vampire is than the modern-day idea of what it is. i.e., you experience the vampire feeding on you as a sleep paralysis hallucination and it takes the form of a recently deceased loved one. I think doing this as historical fiction could be interesting given the Vampire Panic was as a result of a highly contagious respiratory illness, during a time when there were large strides in technology that hadn't quite yet reached rural America... I'd also like to think more about what this could look like as a modern-day story, dealing with a modern anxiety around technology and infection/death and losing a loved one.

IDEA 9: (Vampire Idea 3): Vampire story where the vampire/blood-sucking creature is more like a strix. I love the idea of a vampire as being owl-like. Owls are great imagery-wise for it, since they represented the Devil/evil in medieval art, and represent evil in modern-day *Twin Peaks*—such good imagery there. It could also be interesting to play off the owl=knowledge symbolism, but I'd want to approach the theme more subtly than "modern technology is evil." But I like the juxtaposition with a very ancient creature potentially representing inventions of the future. In what ways do our modern inventions reflect and reinforce ancient, harmful ideology?

IDEA 8 CON'T: Important to dive into the part where the grief from losing a loved one is literally making you ill/killing you.

IDEA 10: In a town with popular haunted spots and ghost tours, a real ghost is never mentioned in the tourism/stories. I like the idea of the stories being not even true to some extent, but I'm also tickled by the idea of the ghosts in a very haunted town being invested in the stories told about them - one could be mad that their story is exaggerated/untrue/details keep changing, another could be proud that their story is the scariest, maybe one ghost isn't actually the ghost of that serial killer but they get a kick out of scaring the local teens... but what about the ghost no one knows about, and what of her story? I could see this taking a similar narrative tone and structure to *October in the Chair*, where the archetypal, colorful ghost characters give context and structure to a more scary/unknown story that the reader hasn't heard some version of before.

IDEA 11: A monster hunter is called in to investigate / "deal with" a child with psychic powers. The child's aunt and uncle, who called the hunter, believe the child is possessed by the Devil. They have turned to the monster hunter because they've called priests to do exorcisms, but that hasn't worked (because the child is not possessed...). I want this to fit into a larger story/world I've been thinking of that's a supernatural historical fiction focusing on a guild of monster hunters, and how the hunt changes them (sometimes becoming monsters themselves...!). Timeframe for this story: 1830s/1840s.

IDEA 12: Monster Hunter's Guild idea 2: Doppelgangers are harbingers of bad health/death/bad luck/evil, but are generally intangible apparitions. So what happens to the monster hunter who tries to track

one down and kill it? How would one even go about doing that? Our story begins not with the hunter who has a doppelganger vendetta, but with another hunter who is called in to help with a larger job, but isn't told what the job is until he gets there (it's killing a doppelganger). Maybe this hunter is called in because he has some unique expertise - maybe hunting invisible creatures, or an uncanny ability to know whether someone is lying. Once he arrives at the guildhall he's been summoned to, he meets the other hunters who've been called in, each with exceptional abilities of their own (like the superhero team-up trope). There, the hunter with the doppelganger vendetta explains his dark backstory / what he's learned so far, and that the plan is to trap a doppelganger once one appears. So the plan is to go to a place where they know ahead of time that misfortune will strike, and wait for it to appear. (This may end up being more like a novella than a short story). They end up at [somewhere remote, probably in the northwoods, perhaps a sawmill where the Chicago mob is known to "dispose of garbage" - a place already haunted by tragedy, where disaster is bound to happen.] Once there, the events go as - inciting incident that gets the doppelganger to appear: maybe it is foreboding of a mob murder, or it could be a more cryptic warning of a tragedy that may befall the hunters. Through their combined background knowledge the hunters figure out that the doppelganger is still among them - I'd have to do more specific folklore / mythology research to work out exactly what the doppelgangers powers / motivation are, but starting ideas include that it feeds on fear, and so is drawn to tragic events about to happen (or maybe it feeds on pain, or grief). As creatures able to predict future events, maybe they have some kind of psychic powers, or move through time non-linearly. And maybe they appear to their prey in order to increase the amount of dread / fear / pain they feel, or maybe they must appear to form a

psychic (parasitic?) connection with their prey, in order to be able to feed in the first place. The hunters have a few objectives: figure out where the doppelgänger hides while waiting for tragedy to strike, figure out where/how to harm it, and (of course) avert whatever tragedy it's there to feed on in the first place (maybe less of a novella and more of a NOVEL. Ugh.) Despite the hunters having disagreements/inter-personal issues, they figure out how to harm the doppelgänger and are successful in hurting it! ... But then it gets away. Tensions between the hunters increase, blaming each other for the screw-up (and they're all becoming more on-edge because of the icy cold and the isolation). The vendetta hunter makes a plan, unbeknownst to the other hunters, to draw the doppelgänger back. Our protagonist spots the doppelgänger again, and the hunt resumes. However, as it turns out, the vendetta hunter's plan to draw it back was to kill the other hunters, and in order to keep it there, he has to follow through with that plan. To make matters worse, the doppelgänger begins to learn how they're attacking it, and it uses its power of illusion/hallucination/shapeshifting to turn the hunters against each other (increasing the amount of suffering that it's feeding on). In the end, our protagonist is the only one who survives—he discovers the vendetta hunter's plan, and kills him, robbing him of the revenge he so greatly desired, causing him so much pain that (fingers crossed!) it's enough to keep the doppelgänger there as he burns the mill to the ground.

But of course, that's not the end. Not really. Our hero can never be the same. Every time he sees a person, he cannot tell if they're real, or a hallucination. And he cannot be sure he really killed the



doppelganger - what if it comes back for revenge? He lives the rest of his days in constant paranoia, until one day he sees a doppelganger again. (or thinks he sees one), and in an attempt to kill it / save himself & his loved ones, he ends up killing several other guild members, including his wife, and then kills himself, thus causing the tragedy the doppelganger was originally drawn to. I imagine this epilogue as told by a surviving guild agent recounting the events in a kind of report or case file, and imploring the reader at the start of it to stop reading if they wish to remember the protagonist as a hero, as the only person ever capable of killing a doppelganger.