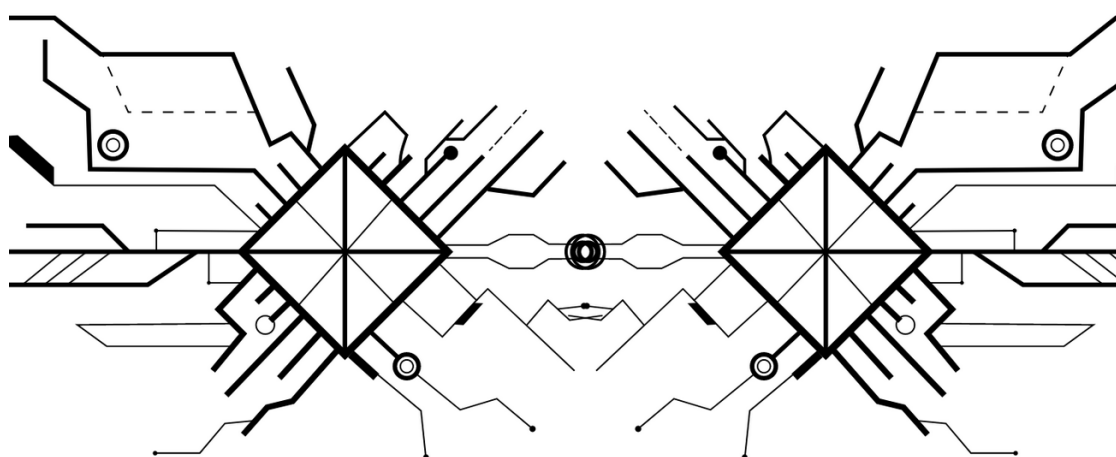


# ***LOST IN THE SHELL***

**Short and flash fiction Around SciFi**



*“His dimensions were space, light, and the pleasures  
associated with nuanced, subtle anonymity.”*  
*J.G. BALLARD*

*If we were to invade Earth, we would probably save  
Michael B. Morgan and his books.*

Daily Mars

*Michael B. Morgan's stories could have been written  
by an inhabitant of Uranus. In fact, it's likely.*

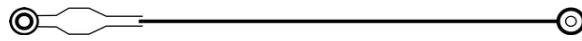
The Uranus Globe

*Morgan's short stories are disturbing, colorful, and  
provocative: here's an earthling who's not bad at  
writing, despite being an earthling.*

The Moon Chronicles

*Morgan's stories are likable and engaging, a good  
test of authorship. They also read quickly, a prerequisite  
for us.*

Meteor Tribune



# SYNTHETICA

Death probably tastes metallic. Gary imagines it as a frantic electric current of panic, pain and violence. Why did he think of that while watching the virtual sunset? Could it be the blood-red sun in the AI-generated set? Well, the scarlet spots that haunt the soft clouds look like the organic residue that could have stained the bulging shirt of a beautiful girl.

“Dear user, your sunset experience is coming to an end, if you want to extend it, you need to authorize the transaction of more credits.”

Gary moves his head, annoyed by the buzz of the android operator’s voice coming directly into his ears. It’s not quite a woman’s voice, but it imitates the thin, liquid tone well, with hints of sexual arousal. The voice of androids with female sexual identities has a shimmering something that Gary likes, but also manages to annoy him. He has chosen this type of identity for his callback operator, within many possible options.

Surrounding him there are dozens of other one-on-one, all sitting in the same way, unsmiling, polite and formal, with holovisors on their faces and the connection cables linked through the implants they have installed in their subcranium. Gary also has such a cyberdeck.

Everyone is experiencing their own individualized sunset. Gary read a statistic saying that people tend to choose to see the personalized AI generated sunset in the evening and the personalized AI generated sunrise in the morning. It is a kind of residual unconscious memory that still connects places, events, and time in a more plausible way, linked to real life, to the experience of the real world that humans retain deep within themselves. Generative AIs can produce reliable, near-perfect virtual scenarios, and AIs that expand consciousness can induce perceptions, but they still cannot completely erase the residual imprint of reality.

That doesn't work for Gary anymore, because he's been exposed to sunsets out of time and sunrises out of time so many times that his mind and body are high now. It doesn't matter where or when anymore. It's not like a fucking time zone, because here, sunrise and sunset can follow each other at any time of day, in any place, all you need is a holoviewer and a subscription to Horizon 3.3, the app for always being connected to your desires.

Gary loves that slogan: *Always connected to your desires*. He doesn't feel like spending any more credits, though, so he takes off the holoviewer and hangs it on the armrest of the holo-chair, then gets up and walks to one of the corridors that vertically mark the 1,000-square-foot room where he and the other users can participate in the holographic projection of the virtual 2 p.m. sunset. All together;, as *collectivism* is the dominant imperative.

Gary walks down the hallway and spots a pretty good looking blonde-haired girl. She has nice breasts. He loves that detail. She likes to show them off because she gets dressed with little on. Gary walks by and steps out. Once outside, he is assaulted by the chemical smell that is being vaporized by a robot that is

disinfecting the streets just a short distance away from him. It's a greenish vapor that stings his skin and nose and makes his eyes water, probably causing some unknown disease. But Gary never externalizes this thought, because people wouldn't listen to him anyway: He passes for a pretty weird guy.

He walks down the street and looks at the storefronts, in one of them a girl is repairing one of those mannequin androids, the kind that move around greeting passers-by like metal whores in a plastic case. Gary looks at the girl and she looks back at him. She greets him, he greets her back, and then moves on, but he stops short, picks up his application management device, and selects the one he needs: Synthetica, the emotion management AI he found in a sponsored email, which stated that the whole thing was an experiment that he had to keep secret for security reasons. He activates the AIapp with the microchip they implanted in his wrist for free. Then he waits.

*Generating response...*

*Good afternoon Gary, how can I help you today?*

The AI asks him, connecting directly to his neural system via cyberdeck.

He replies brainly: *I need an appropriate phrase to say to a girl who arranges android dummies in a shop window.*

*Generating response...*

*Here is a typical phrase that is useful in such circumstances:  
Hello, I can see that you're very busy with your work. I must say  
you're very good at it. But I was wondering if you'd like to go out  
with me when your shift is over.*

Gary nods, *Sure that's a good way to get her attention?*

*Generating response...*

*It is an appropriate phrase to greet. But if you desire, I can generate a more persuading response.*

Gary is about to answer, but when he looks up he notices that the girl is no longer at her place of work, in the window display, so he goes into the store in search of her. Dozens of advertisements for fashionable clothes reach directly into his brain, activating various sensory levels for an immersive shopping experience. But Gary doesn't get involved, even though they're bombarding him with their neuromarketing impulses. He keeps looking for the girl. After a while, he finds her in the men's underwear section of the store.

*Synthetica, suggest the right phrase to use to ask a girl who is rearranging men's underwear to date with me.*

*Generating response...*

*Sure, here's an appropriate phrase for the circumstance you've pointed out 'Hi, I'd like to buy something, but I need advice from an expert, and you seem like a girl who knows what she wants and doesn't let appearances get in the way'.*

Gary nods and with a "hello" between his teeth he walks over to the girl and gets her attention. She turns and looks at him. He repeats the phrase generated by the emotional AI.

"Thank you," she says back to him, but she does not seem convinced.

Gary turns to the AI again and makes his brainly prompt, *I don't feel like I got her attention the right way. Regenerate the sentence and find a more appropriate one.*

*Generating response...*

*Based on the statistics I have, you can tell her that she is very nice and that you have been thinking about this for a long time and want to tell her, but you are afraid of seeming intrusive.*

“You’re very attractive, I’ve been thinking about telling you for a long time, but I was afraid of sounding pushy.”

She gives a smile, “Don’t worry, I get that a lot.”

*Generating response...*

*According to the normal behavior of a man of your age in the same situation, you don't want to be one of the many Garys. Ask her out and promise to give her a surprise that will set you apart from all the others who have complimented her.*

Gary is confused: The AI just generated a line without his request. He keeps silent.

“Well?” the girl presses him. “What would you like to buy?”

“Come out with me. I’ll give you a surprise that will make me unforgettable and different from all the others you’ve met.”

Her eyes are on him. Gary is smiling. He’s smiling like some of the smart guys he’s seen on screen who look like they have a way with women. He can mimic people. He can do it well.

“I’m not sure,” she said. “You’re a stranger to me.”

*Generating response*



*The most plausible response, based on other users' choices, is 'Give me a chance so we can get to know each other better. Don't tell me you're old-fashioned, because I don't believe it!'*

Gary looks at the girl, she looks back. Advertising slogans and compulsive shoppers are swirling around the two of them.

"Don't tell me you're old-fashioned, because I don't buy that—"

"No, I'm not, I'm an emancipated chick. I do what I like, how I like, with whom I like and when I like."

Gary remains silent for a few moments.

*Generating response*

*The phrase that best fits the context might be 'People like you are rare, that's why I noticed you. But I don't want to be pushy or come off badly. There are strange people around'.*

The words come without his request, but Gary picks up and starts repeating. A smile lights up on her face.

"All right, I'd like to try you out."

"You will?"

"Sure, you're a nice guy and you have a way with words."

She agrees to date, Gary doesn't even believe it.

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Smith, "Poor girl."

Dee, "Yeah."

The two cops stand in front of the body lying on the damp ground under the rows of hundreds of corn plants. They are actually used to seeing lives torn apart in this way, they see a lot of it; this bogus commiseration over dead girl is merely an excuse

for some exercise in moral gymnastics. Above their heads, the lights of the police car swirl. In the darkness, they look like the schizophrenic lights of a disco. Then Dee gets down on his knees and strokes the smashed chest of the victim. It smells like iron, but he knows it is the blood that stains the girl's shirt, right at the level of the round of the breasts that were partially sliced by the killer. Later, he fixes his eyes on her face, paralyzed with terror even before death.

"Hey, Smith, don't you have a feeling you know this chick?"

The other ducks and squats and tries to find someone resembling the girl.

"No, I guess not."

"She's the one from the store in the city. She's a technician. She fixes androids."

"I'm never downtown."

"You sure?" Dee says with a chuckle, "I've seen you downtown."

"Okay, yes, I have. Just don't tell my wife."

"I ain't gonna tell her nothing, poor woman. Getting you for a husband must have hurt her enough."

"Well, same here!"

"No way. Your wife is an angel heart."

*Generating response...*

*Hello Officer Jay Smith, Officer John Dee is cheating on you with your wife. In order to get a confession from him, I can suggest an appropriate phrase if you wish.*

Smith freezes. When Dee turns around, he sees him standing motionless, holding a Led flashlight.

He looks like he just saw a pile of dead bodies.

“What is it, Smith? What’s going on?” he asks him.

“Have you activated Synthetica?” Smith questions.

Dee stares at him.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, I’m not cleared to access the AI.”

*Generating response...*

*Confirmed, John Dee is not authorized to access me.*

*Shall I generate a question to get your colleague’s answer about  
his relationship with your wife?*

“Who has access to Synthetica?” asks Smith again.

“The top brass.”

“Which ones? Who?”

“The guys that profile the killers and study their behavior.”

Smith puts the flashlight down.

“Dee—”

“Huh?”

“Are you, like, making out with my wife?”

Dee stops, turns, looks at him.

“Wh-what?”

“Are you making out with my wife?” Smith presses.

“I have no idea what the hell you’re talkin’ about.”

Smith shouts at him, “Don’t fuck with me! Are you fooling around with Margareth?”

Dee pauses a few seconds, then raises his gun.

“And who told you so?”

*Genereting response...*

*Hello, Officer John Dee, would you like me to generate the  
appropriate question for your colleague, Officer Jay Smith, so that*

*he can give you an acceptable answer? Alternatively, I can generate a list of reasons why it would be appropriate to kill him, based on observations of other users' behavior.*

[ MICHAEL B. MORGAN ]





# TO YOU, DEAR READER

This quick book of short stories (more or less short) came out of the night, it has no claim to be a masterpiece, the purpose is to have a chat about ideas. A meeting of you and me around those ideas.

Maybe you didn't like all the stories, for sure you liked some of them more than others, well, let me know, write to me: [bmorganmichael@protonmail.com](mailto:bmorganmichael@protonmail.com)

And if you can, please leave a review on Amazon, to let these ideas going.

And see you around.

MBM

<https://aroundscifi.us>