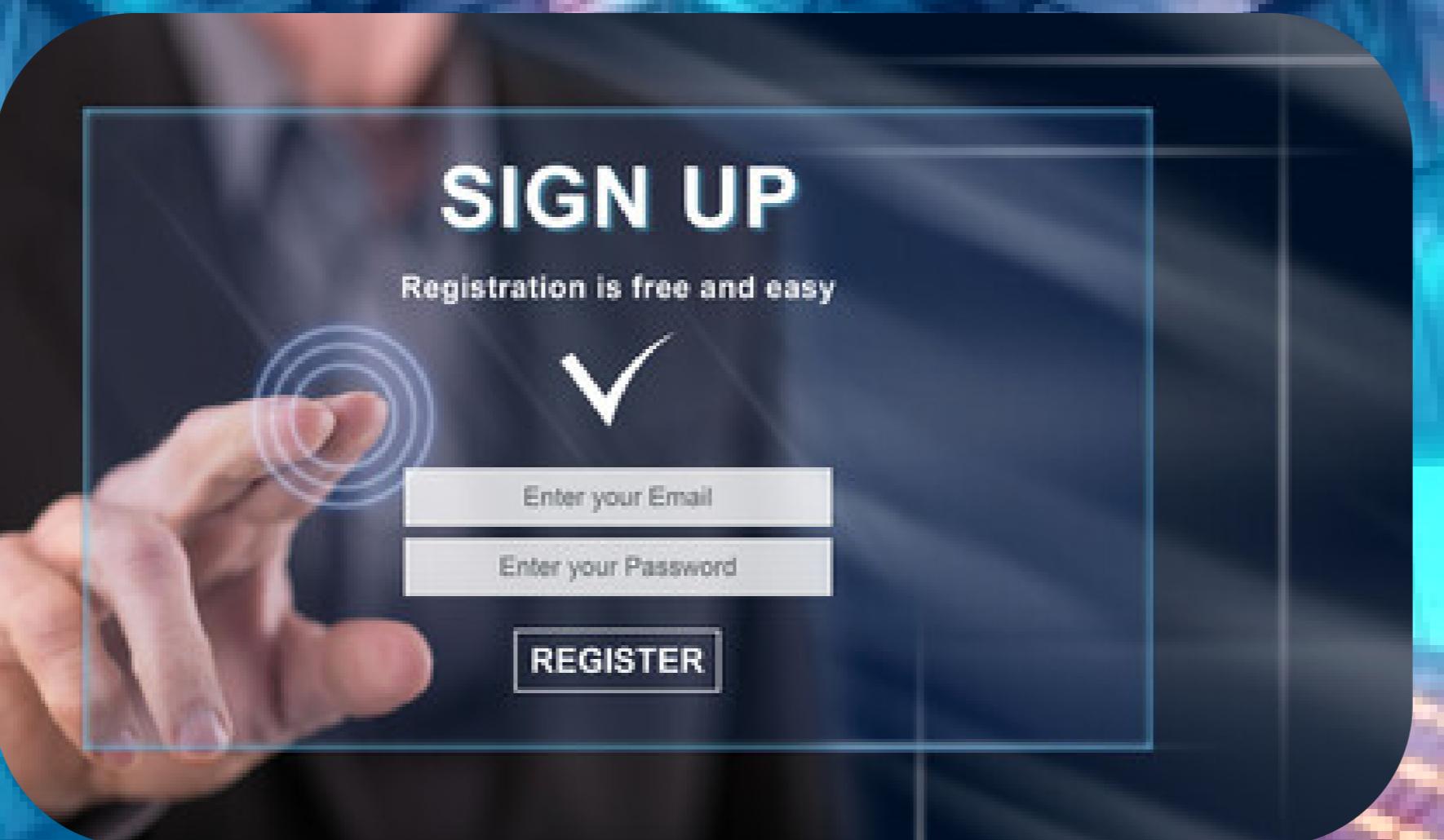
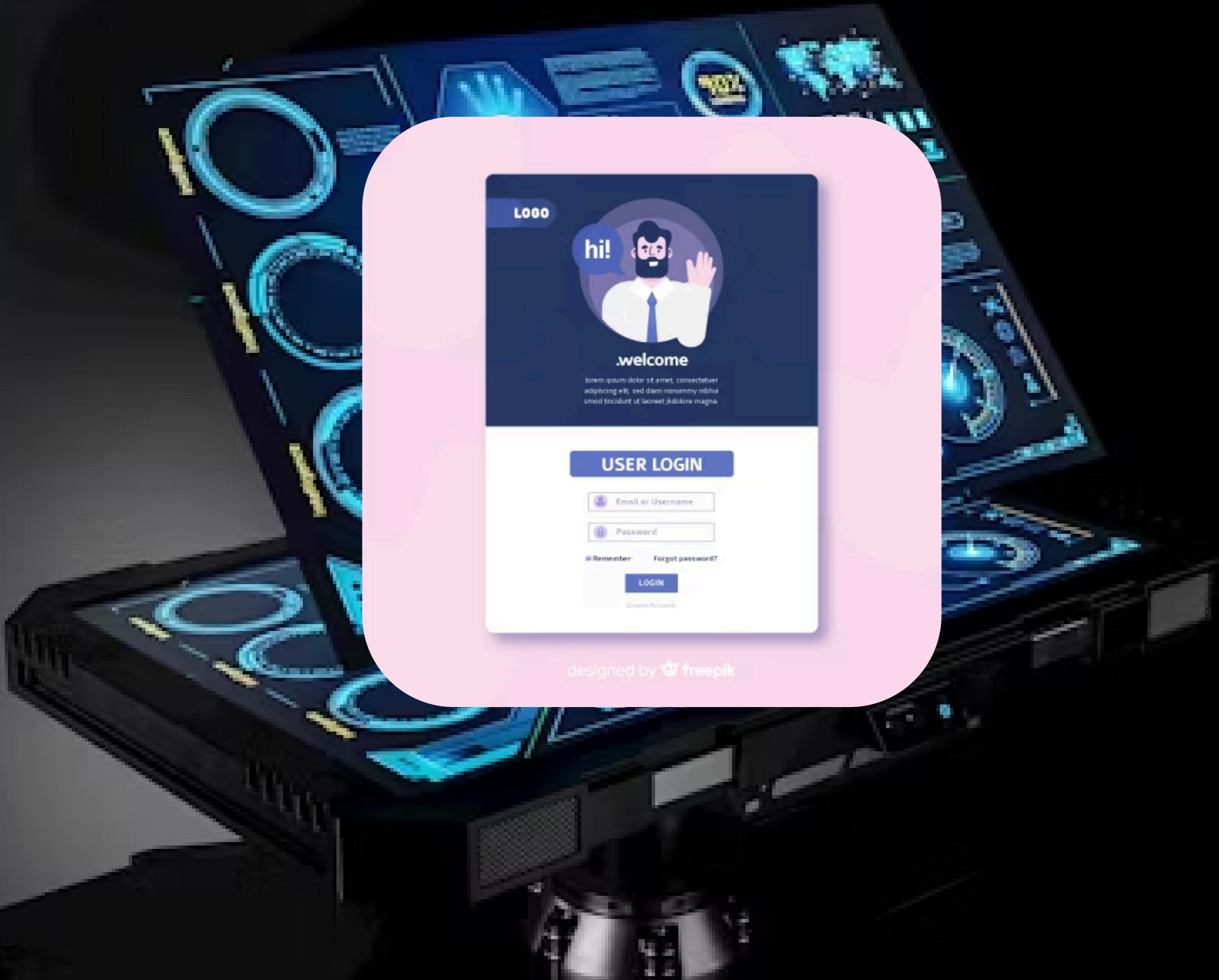


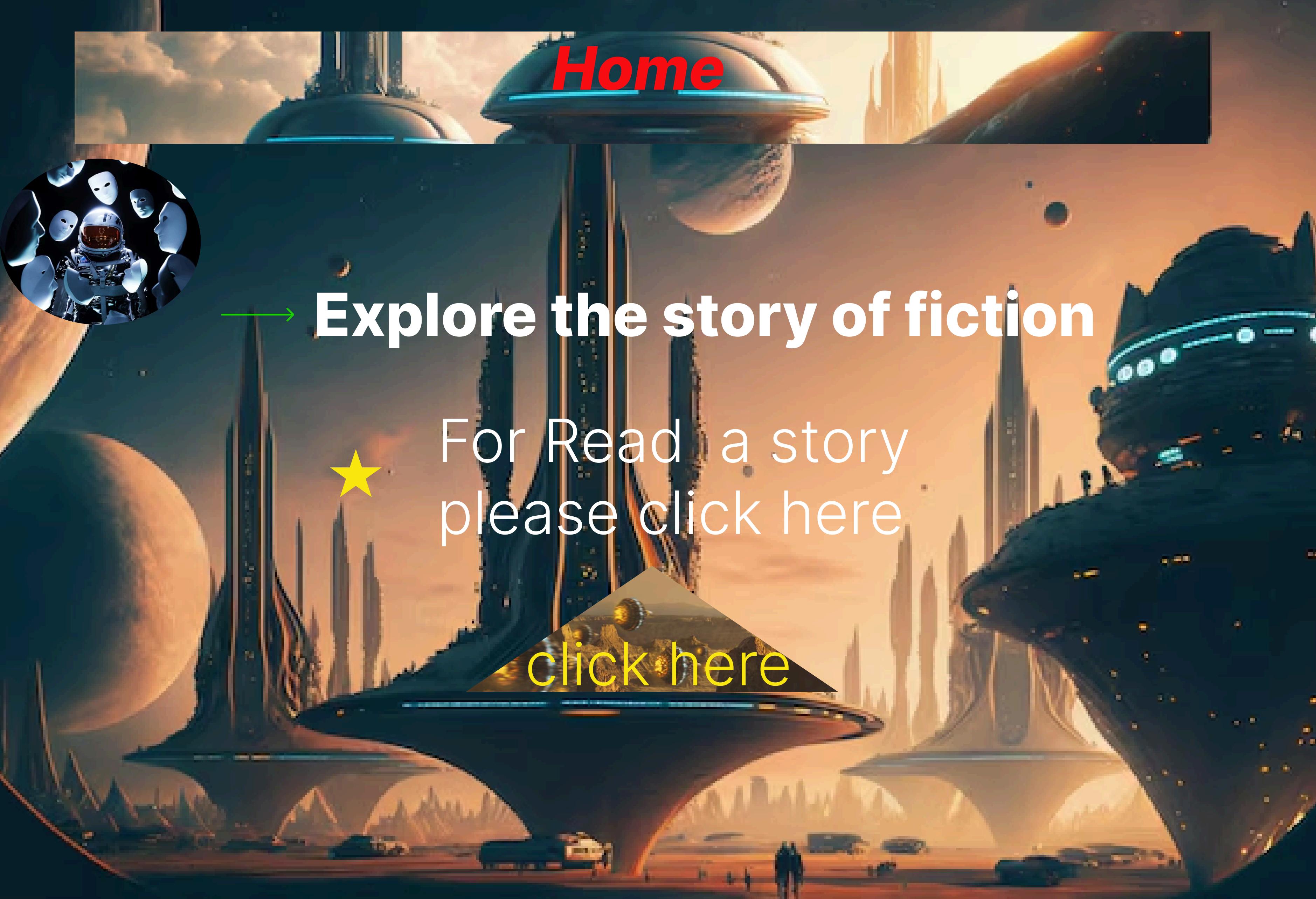


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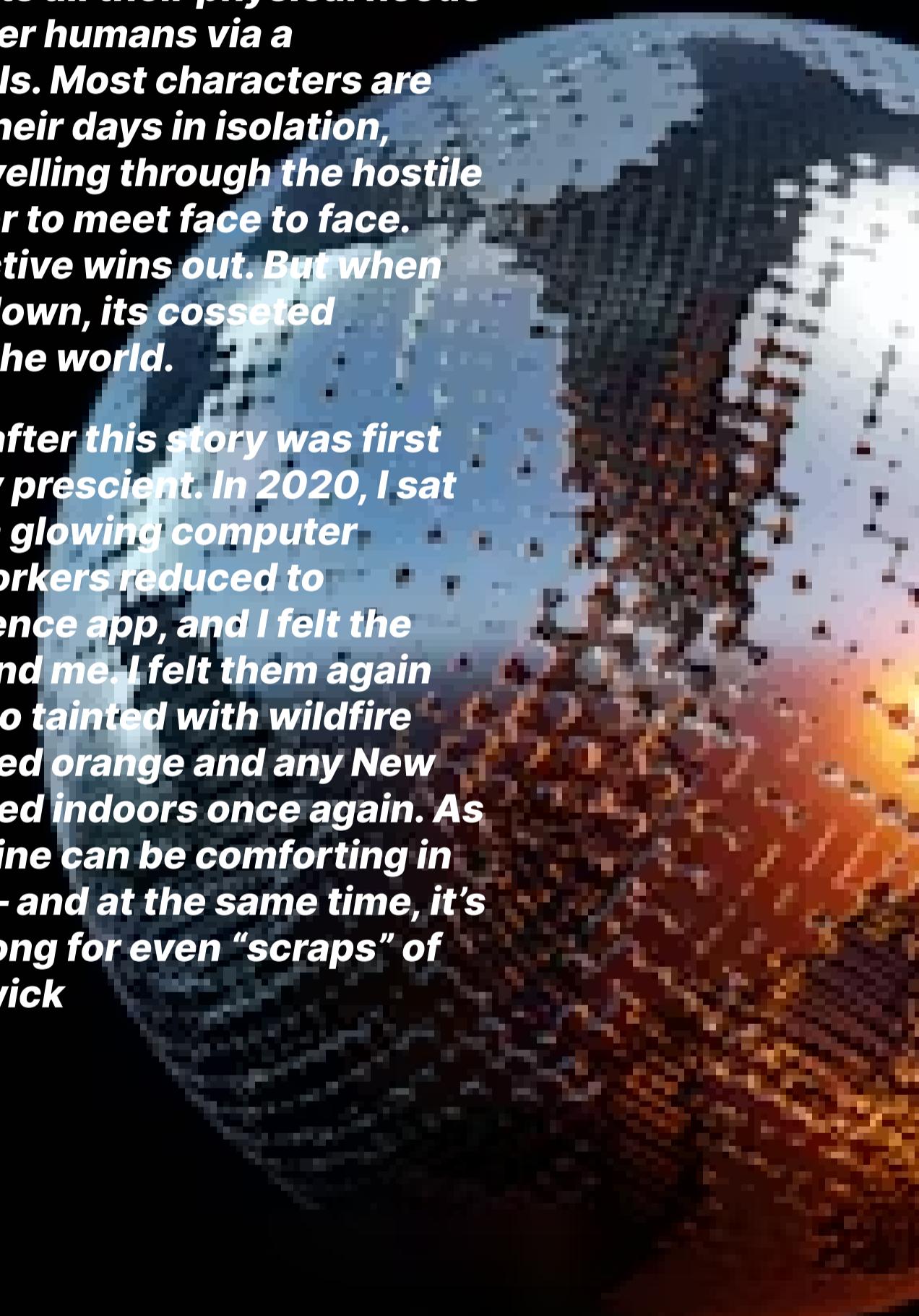


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The Machine Stops by E. M. Forster (1909)

Within the massive apparatus in E. M. Forster's take on the smart home, each individual lives in an underground room that meets all their physical needs and communicates with other humans via a technology akin to video calls. Most characters are perfectly happy to live out their days in isolation, although some insist on travelling through the hostile environment outside in order to meet face to face. Eventually, the first perspective wins out. But when the machine finally breaks down, its cosseted inhabitants face the end of the world.

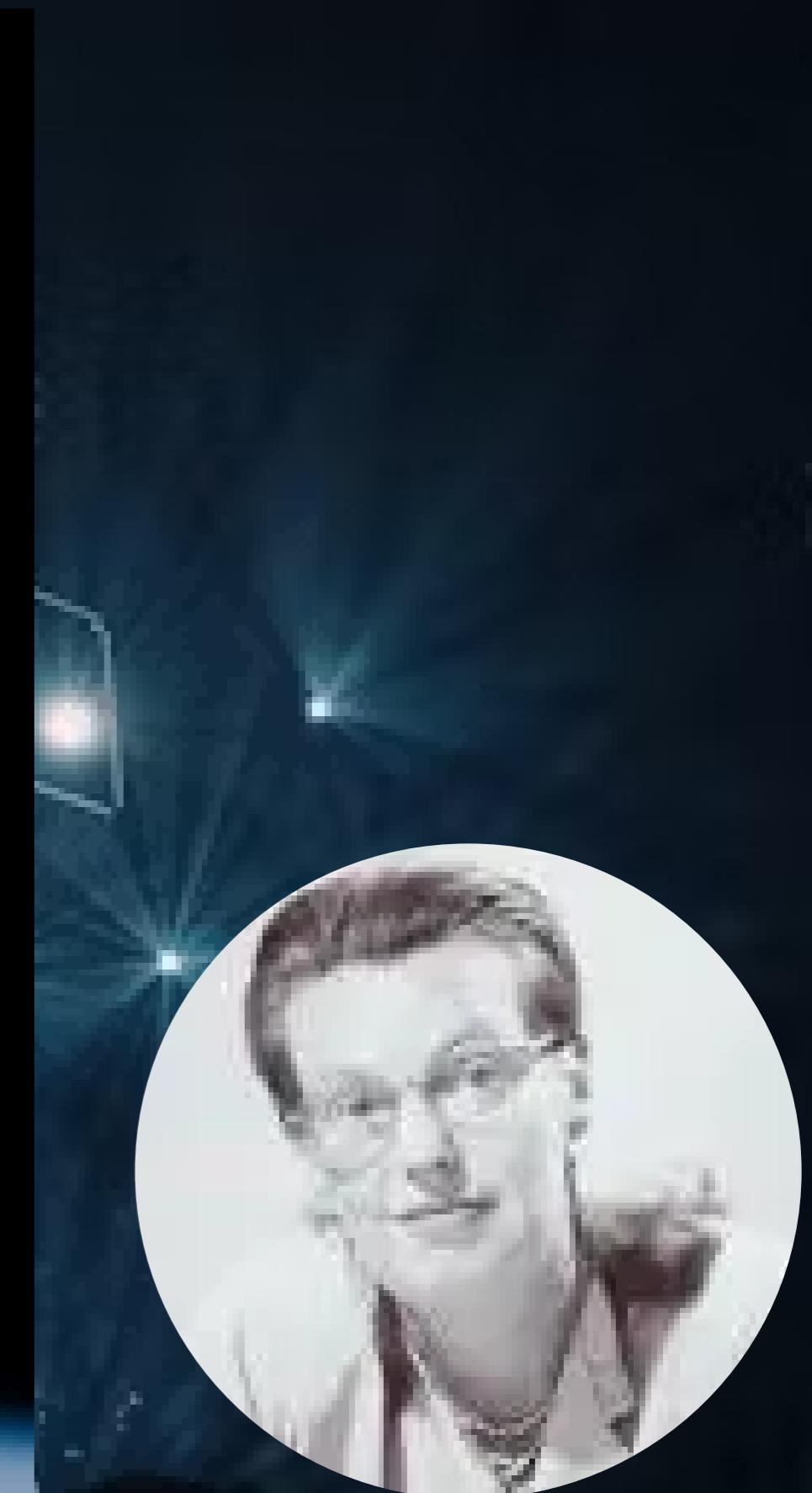
More than a hundred years after this story was first published, it feels incredibly prescient. In 2020, I sat in my apartment in front of a glowing computer screen, my friends and coworkers reduced to rectangles in a videoconference app, and I felt the walls of the machine surround me. I felt them again last year, when the air was so tainted with wildfire smoke that the horizon turned orange and any New Yorker who was able retreated indoors once again. As Forster predicted, the machine can be comforting in the face of an unsafe world – and at the same time, it's so stifling that it makes us long for even "scraps" of the open sky. Sophie Bushwick



The Lottery by:-Shirley Jackson(1948)

*Shirley Jackson is author of one of the scariest novels in the world (*The Haunting of Hill House*) and one of the most brilliantly unsettling (*We Have Always Lived in the Castle*). So it is only to be expected that she would also be the author of one of the most quietly disturbing speculative short stories ever written, *The Lottery*. It takes place in a nondescript rural village, where the locals are gathering for the lottery. It sounds like it's going to be fun. Kids are collecting stones. Everyone knows what is going to happen; they don't think much of neighbouring villages who have got rid of their lotteries ("Listening to the young folks, nothing's good enough for them. Next thing you know, they'll be wanting to go back to living in caves"). But a trickle of unease begins to spread, as the lottery "draw" looms nearer. If you don't know what the twist is, I won't spoil it, but I just read this again and I still feel a little shaky. Jackson is a stone-cold genius.*

Alison Flood



The pedestrian :-by Ray Bradbury(1951)

If a dystopian story where cars dominate cities, people spend sedentary evenings gazing at screens and AI-powered police robots fail to grasp human motivations was published today it may come across as over-egged. But Bradbury's *The Pedestrian* is 73 years old.

Its protagonist, Leonard Mead, is hauled away to an institution by a driverless police car that can't fathom why he'd be strolling at night with no purpose. The incident is mentioned in Bradbury's later novel *Fahrenheit 451*, suggesting that they inhabit the same world, and the idea reportedly came to him when he was interrogated by police for walking in Los Angeles in 1949.

Things don't get much more dystopian than reframing a post-dinner stroll as a rebellious act, but the story has valuable messages about the society we have since constructed that is increasingly difficult to navigate without technology and how we maintain humanity in the face of progress. And the unflinching AI that refuses to accept Mead's explanation should give us all pause for thought as we entrench large language models into every aspect of our lives. Matthew Sparkes



The man who i know by:-Jacqueline Carey

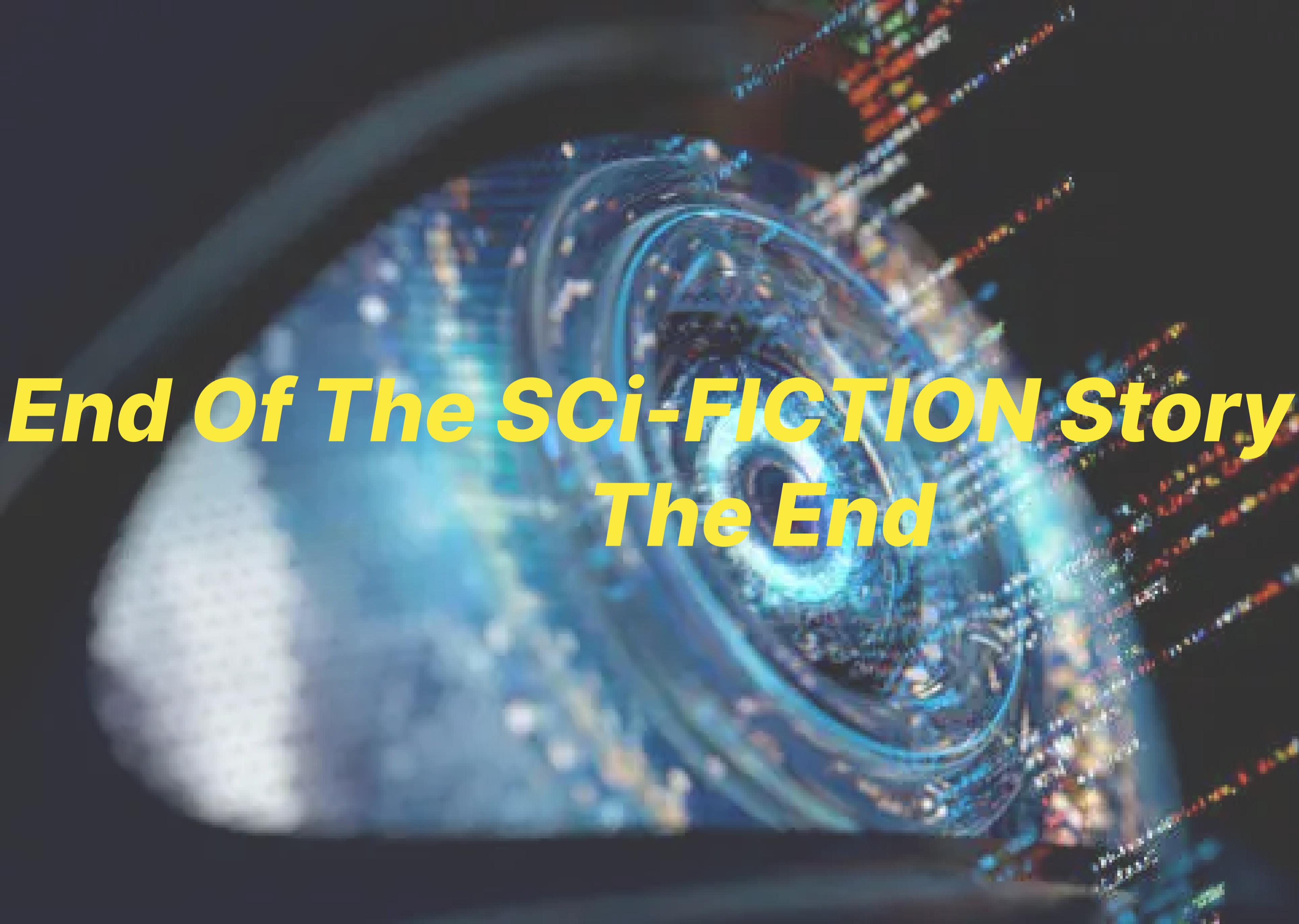
The enigmatic dystopian novella I Who Have Never Known Men by Jacqueline Harpman has haunted me since I finished it. It opens with 39 women and one girl who have been locked in a cage underground for an unknown number of years, closely watched by three guards at all times. None know how they got there. Then, one day, as the guards are delivering food, an alarm goes off and the guards run off in a panic, leaving a hatch unlocked. The women make their escape into... well, I won't spoil it for you. The stark prose and use of repetition in the wrong hands would be dull, but Harpman uses them to great effect in this unsettling meditation on the meaning of life and community, hope and hopelessness and the effects of captivity. But be warned: if you like your fiction to be tied up in a neat bow, then this isn't one for you. Eleanor Parsons



All You Zombies:- by Robert Heinlein (1958)

Before stories such as Dark, Looper, Back to the Future and Doctor Who, Robert Heinlein delivered one of the most memorable time travel paradoxes ever conceived in his 1958 short story All You Zombies. But don't be fooled by the title – there are no shambling hordes of the walking dead to be found. Instead, the story begins with a bartender serving up shots to a customer while coaxing the latter into sharing their personal circumstances and incredible life story. It is a standard storytelling scene with a twist that is telegraphed in the opening paragraph, because the bartender is actually a temporal agent recruiting the customer to join a shadowy organisation that manipulates the timeline through time travel. Before long, the conversation takes some unexpected but increasingly personal turns for both people. Heinlein supposedly wrote All You Zombies in a single day and you can read it within half an hour – but don't be surprised if the story slithers into your subconscious and nests in its coils there for years to come. Jeremy Hsu





End Of The sci-FICTION Story
The End