



January 12, 2115, was the day the robots took over. It was not a violent insurrection. In fact, no one actually took notice of it at all. Humans just surrendered. All except one, Tobias Smithwater. He ran with his family into the woods.


Autonomous

By Terence A. McSweeney

Order the book from the publisher [Booklocker.com](https://www.booklocker.com)


<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/13088.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**



TERENCE A. McSWEENEY

AUTONOMOUS



MANKIND'S GREATEST HELPER IS NOW
ITS GREATEST THREAT.

Copyright © 2023 Terence A. McSweeney

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-958890-88-2

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-958890-89-9

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88531-583-8

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

BookLocker.com, Inc.

2023

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

McSweeney, Terence A.

Autonomous by Terence A. McSweeney

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023919133

Characters

(In order of appearance)

Tobias	Husband of Marie Smithwater
Marie	Wife of Tobias Smithwater
Joshua	Stepson of Marie and Tobias
Eric Solvenson	Co-inventor of AI robots
Archibald Megarisky	Trader, pawnbroker
Paul Krasinski	Co-inventor of AI robots
XF5	Double-faced Bot
Yvonne	First YG Series Bot
IDUDATOR	Self-aware leader of the AI

1.

Tobias

It was always the same. Her presence was with him. It was subtle but always alluring. It was a breeze that took the breath away. It was a caress. Today was no different. Slowly she seeped into his mind.

Are you there?

As much as he tried, he could not free himself. Without even knowing it, he had already answered.

I am here.

Instantly her face came into his mind. It was always the same. There was a small tear working its way down her attractive cheek as she mouthed the words "Save me." Then there was the scream. It happened the same way every night. It was so regular that he was unsettled on those rare nights that the dream was absent.

He tried to fall back asleep, but the effort was tedious and finally, he rubbed his eyes and gave up. He stood and shook the lethargy from his bones. It usually took some time to walk comfortably without stiffness and he thought of younger days. The structure where he chose to settle for the night was once a house. Now it was mostly rubble, but what was left of the roof kept the rain off. He walked over to an open space that led out into what was previously a patio. He thought about all the barbecues and gatherings that happened there. *How many birthday parties with cake and candles being blown out had these bricks seen?* And he imagined the children screeching with joy chasing each other about, but they were all gone now. Now, for Tobias, it was just a place to relieve nature's call. He thought, *We really screwed up! We ignored the warning even after it screamed for us to do something. Like mice*

hiding from the cat never thinking that the cat was already right behind them, mankind stepped into a brave new world.

He zipped up and moved back under the protection of the roof as the mist of the morning once again became aggressive and it started to pour. *How long has it been since he had seen the sun?* He moved to the inner rooms of the hovel searching for breakfast knowing that the place had long been picked over by others with the same thing on their agenda. This made his stomach gurgle in anticipation of a meal that would not be found. He continued his search. This went on for a few minutes until Tobias grew tired and sat down to plan his next move. *Plan the next move*, sounded like he had some great strategy and an idea, but it was the same plan as yesterday and hundreds of yesterdays before it. The plan went: Find food or die! It was succinct. It was uncomplicated. It was growing to be more impossible by the day.

The rain had let up and the skies looked brighter as if this would be the day that the sun would finally make its grand entrance. He pushed this thought away as he did not want to jinx the very notion. Instead, he rested for he knew he must move on soon. It was at times like these that he cursed the robots. After all, they were the real boogeymen and women. He thought, *don't refer to them as human they are just machines. What should I call them, boogey things?* Yes, that will do. He thought about how it all started, and it was the robots that offered mankind the *golden ticket* to a blissful life. They handed the fruit to the Adams and Eves and like fools, mankind gobbled it up like pigs at the trough. He thought, *well it wasn't quite that sudden. It was subtle and took time. Mankind never knew what hit it.*

2.

January 12, 2115, was the day the robots took over. It was not a violent insurrection. In fact, no one actually took notice of it at all. There were no threats of bodily harm. No one died in humanity's defense. The movies had it all wrong. We walked through that door voluntarily. We abdicated with our increasing reliance on convenience. It was not convenient to read so we submitted to be read to. It was not easy to drive, too much stress, so we invented self-driving vehicles. Finally, we did not have to leave our homes because everything was at the tips of our fingers. We surrendered without a shot. We chose to be slaves because it was easier than thinking.

Tobias Smithwater never could sit in one place for any length of time. As a child, his teachers were always commenting on his lack of focus. What they really meant was that Tobias could not sit still for a period of time because there was so much to see and do. Tobias never surrendered because he embraced the effort of life. It made him feel alive. He loved the sweat and toil. He loved the humanity of it. As the human race withdrew into individual cocoons Tobias pushed outward. He left the city and traveled into the wild. He was off the grid, hell there was no grid where he went. There was only the raw savagery and beauty of the natural world, and it was all his because no one else wanted it. The result of this was that Tobias Smithwater was dangerous because he was a free thinker in the slop of conformity. He was unpredictable and incorruptible and that was not fine with the robots. He was a widget that needed fixing or replacement. They were hot on his trail.

Tobias cared little about his machine foes for he had a theory. His theory was based on one principle. All forces in the world need a counterforce. Without an opposite, there is no balance. Good defines evil and evil defines good. A teeter totter is just a teeter sitting on the ground without the counterweight pushing down in order to lift it up.

The robots did not want Tobias dead because he was their ultimate reason for existence: to serve. He was their *totter*.

He did not even blame the robots for giving mankind the poisonous fruit. They were serving their purpose but look at the outcome. The population of the planet had fallen in a little over three decades from twelve billion to nine hundred million. Of that nine hundred million nearly two-thirds now lived in a virtual reality connected to the Gateway, a system of pretend existence. They were in their own bubble of reality. It was warm and safe. All of their needs were cared for, all except one: choice. The robots did not compute that freeing the species homo sapiens of their need to choose would only make them crave choice even more. The ones that escaped the Gateway revolted. At first, they could easily evade their mechanical pursuers, but in time the robots adjusted. They developed the traits of humans. They developed emotions that complimented pure logic and when they did, they liked it. They liked it so much that it became difficult to tell the robots apart from humans. It was a perfect operation except for one element. The robots could not love. They could not fathom the emotion as hard as they tried, so they sought to be mankind's savior out of logical necessity—the best intentions of mice and men...and robots. The result was the continuous destruction of humanity.

Mankind was the endangered species now. The robots tried to make things better, but they never computed the soft inner layers of man's psyche. There was a *cattle herding* mentality about modern mankind and the easy life was considered by most to be the rewarding life. So, they gave humans that life but some, like Tobias, would not eat that fruit. They moved out of the cities with their families and hid. The robots with the best intentions sought them out to be re-educated. This is when it all went sideways for mankind. This is when Tobias lost his wife, lost his soul. He refused to be compromised with a ferocity that at times even scared him and took up to killing robots. Others did as well, and the result was destruction, devastation, and the end of society, for the robots fought back. Wherever they found those not under the fold

they offered a choice: re-educate or eradicate and they asked their captives the ultimate question: *Where is Tobias Smithwater?* For he was the greatest robot killer of them all.

His pursuers were very efficient because, after all, they were machines. They did not need sleep or sustenance. They remained charged and powered for years. They scooped up humans by the thousands and brought them back into the fold. This is not to say that they captured all of them. A good number of hearty souls escaped deep into the wild like Tobias, all searching for the place that the robots could not reach. Many would still perish along the way searching for that place. Most did not know where it was, but they were sure it existed. Tobias was one of those, but unlike the others who had taken it on faith that the place was real, he knew it existed because Tobias had a map!

3.

He slept through the night and as usual, he was awakened by the dream. He was soaked in sweat and his stomach now ached for nourishment. The weather had turned warmer and drier. It was time to go. Carefully, he looked out from what once was the front window but was now just a gaping hole in the concrete. He had to be careful because the robots never slept. He looked for any sign of life. There seemed to be none. He gathered his courage and began to take his first step when he heard the familiar whistle of metal flexing. Instantly, he ducked down and tried to make himself small. The sound grew louder, and he knew that one of them was searching close by. Then he saw it across the street. It was bigger than the models that he was familiar with. It was all pistons, steel, and circuits, a real horror show. It lifted debris of stone and wood with little effort. It was powerful and tall, but that is not what was the most unsettling. As the robot turned, Tobias saw something that was most horrifying. It had a human face, not a mask of a human face, but an actual human face with human eyes that could see, a human nose that could breathe, and a human mouth that could grimace or smile with ease. The sight of it caused Tobias to shake uncontrollably and he feared that this monster would hear him. It did not for the moment, and when it turned back to its search of the house across the street Tobias slowly inched his way to the backside of his current abode and slipped out. His plan was to work his way from building to building until he was in the clear. He made it next door when he heard the sounds of the robot on the move. He dove in through an open door and scrambled out of sight. The robot was close. He could smell the lubricating oil. He waited. He carefully pulled an old rug up over his body and curled up in a corner of the room. The robot put his humanoid head in through the opening and looked in both directions. Tobias held his breath and hoped that the machine would not do a thorough search. His hope was realized and the robot after a moment moved on down the street.

Tobias lay still for a very long time. *That was too close*, he thought. Then another thought occurred, *why hadn't the machine looked through his rug covering for a heat signature?* Then he got an interesting notion. He thought, *perhaps this robot was not searching for him, perhaps there is someone more important to find. Was that a good thing or a bad thing?* He would have to think about that. For now, he needed to find food. He decided to search his current location.

The house was more intact than the one he left moments earlier. Most of the house showed very little abuse. He worked his way to the kitchen and by its state it was clear that someone left in a hurry not long ago. There were dishes with the remnants of a meal scattered on them. Tobias smelled the food scraps and decided that they could still be eaten. He stuffed them into his mouth and was convinced that they were the best-tasting food he had ever eaten. Such was the delusion of a starving man. He searched the kitchen for more. The cabinets were empty, but he spied a door that could lead to a pantry. He thought about all the delicious morsels that lay behind that door. He grabbed hold of the knob and made to turn it. It would not budge. Locked. He went back to a cabinet drawer that held silverware and found a butter knife. He walked back to the door slid the knife into the catch and pried at the bolt. With some effort, he managed to move it enough that a hard yank caused the door to fly open making more noise than was safe. He froze and waited for any sounds outside. There were none.

The room was long and narrow. It was also dark. Tobias worked his way down a tight aisle finding all sorts of canned goods. He had hit the motherload! If the aisle wasn't so narrow, he would have done a celebratory dance. He grabbed a few of the cans and stepped back out into the kitchen. He found a can opener and opened a can of beans and another of soup. He slurped both down in quick order and examined the third can he had taken. It was peaches in syrup. Now he did that dance. He cut through the metal top and drank the can as if it was a milkshake. His hunger satiated, he sat on the floor and thought about his next moves. He decided that he would find something to carry as

many cans as his strength would allow. He knew that he could carry fifty pounds easily, even seventy-five if he distributed the weight evenly. He thought, *perhaps I can find a backpack or bag in one of the other rooms.* His full stomach gave him optimism and energy. He quietly moved about the house in search of his new quarry.

There were three bedrooms in the house, but all of these were on the second floor which was accessed by a staircase in the middle of the structure. The staircase was in disarray. Many of the steps had rotted through or were completely missing, which suggested that the floor above was also in the same state of disrepair. Tobias thought about how he could safely get up to those rooms. He tested the banister. It was made of oak and seemed solid enough. He grabbed hold and put his weight on the area of the first step that was closest to where the supporting pilasters of the banister met. It felt solid. Carefully he stepped to the next step. Again, there was no play in the step. He congratulated himself on his plan and slowly, step by step, he climbed to the next floor landing being careful to never stray from the side of the stairs. Finally, he made it to the top and crouched down as he saw a light flash across the interior. It was only there for a few seconds, but it was a reminder that they were still outside looking for him. He tested the floor. It was definitely spongy from all the rain which was falling through a gaping hole in the roof. This was not good news. He thought, *would there be anything that was not ruined by endless days of weather?* He worked his way along the edges of the floor thinking that this was where the strength of the floor resided. Soon, he found the first door. He carefully pushed on it, and it swung open with a low moan. It was a nursery room. The former occupants had a baby or babies he noted after he identified two cribs. In one there was a small blanket with a bunny on its face. There was something else he could just make out in the low light. *What was it?* he thought. *Blood!* He looked about the room. There was more blood splattered about the room. Quickly he moved back into the hallway and emptied the fine food he had just recently eaten onto the floor.

After much shaking and disgust, he willed his body to move on down to the next room. Its door was open as if it was inviting him in saying, *Wait till you see the horrors I have in here.* He looked about. There was just a bed and a small dresser that had toppled over. The bed was a twin size, so Tobias assumed it was another child's room. He worked his way to the closet and opened it up to see what if anything he could use. There were a variety of dresses and matching pants and tops hanging. On the floor were sneakers and shoes all arranged as if they were waiting for their owner, who Tobias thought was probably an adolescent female, to select them for the day's activities. They waited in silence for her not knowing that she would never return. He searched for anything that he could carry the cans with. Off in the corner of the closet on the floor was a bright pink *My Kitty* backpack. It was fairly large like one that a kid would take to school every day. He snatched it up and found it was full of books and a variety of clothing articles including another pair of sneakers. He emptied everything onto the floor and checked the side-zipped pockets which were empty except for a few coins. He silently laughed thinking; *I wonder if there are any vending machines around? I could use a bag of chips.* The thought of food again made him queasy. He zipped the pockets back up and loosened the pack straps so they would fit over his shoulders. It was tight but he managed to place the pack on his back. He was quite a sight, all dressed in brown monochromatic clothing except for the neon pack that hung off his back like a turtle shell. He knew he would have to find something to cover that luminous sign that said, *I am over here. Come take me!* He made his way to the final bedroom.

This bedroom door was closed like the nursery door. Working his way around the edge of the hallway he arrived at it and pushed but it didn't move. He turned the handle and with some effort, it turned. The door gave up its grasp and slowly revealed the room. What was revealed caused him to choke. The smell was a punch in the face. He now knew where the inhabitants of the house went.

4.

Tobias had seen all forms of cruelty in his life. He had also seen a variety of ways to die. Soldiers who had experienced battle did not reminisce about glory; they just laid testament to its horror. What Tobias saw in the room of this testament was an orderly acceptance of fate and death. On the large bed lay four bodies stretched out as if they were sleeping. There were two adults, male and female, a younger female in the arms of the adult female, and a baby boy. The peacefulness of their display was grotesque. Viewing it clutched at Tobias's heart, his soul. These once-living people had chosen to check out from the nightmare on their own terms. Tobias wondered when that time would come for him. Would he have the same courage? He could not answer that question yet, so he buried it deep down for another day, another time.

He moved closer to the family on the bed and was unsettled by how peaceful and resolute they looked. He imagined them carrying on their daily lives, getting ice cream, going to soccer games, school plays, and all the other activities in another life, another time. He wondered, *was the father the one who presided over the death of his family before he shut off the light in his own eyes?* It was terrible. At least the metal monsters were deprived of four souls to torture. *Four?* He thought. *Shouldn't there be five? Where was the other child? There were two cribs. So much blood in the room. So much blood.* He stepped back and turned away. He had to get out of that room.

He worked his way down the hallway and then the stairs retracing his steps as precisely as he could. He managed to make it to the first floor without tumbling through and went back to the kitchen with his pink backpack. It was very dark now, so he decided to make himself comfortable until the morning. He searched for the rug that he had curled up under earlier and used it as a blanket covering all of his body except his head. He fell fast asleep.

Are you there? He was and again he saw her face. The tear traveled down her cheek. His wife would then scream *save me* and he would wake up. Not this time. The face of his wife said, *You are close, find me!* Tobias jumped up from the blanket. His eyes darted around the room anticipating the grasp of a metal hand. It did not come. *What the hell was that about?* he wondered. He noticed that his right hand, his gun hand, was shaking. He felt electric. He felt Marie's presence all about the room. *Was he finally losing his mind?* The hairs on his arms stood on end. He was charged and ready for action, but what action? Nothing else seemed to change about his circumstances. The house was the same complete with its dead owners permanently asleep upstairs. He walked back and forth like a cat anticipating violence. He needed to calm down. He thought, *twitchy and itchy gets one dead from an abundance of lead*. It was a saying he learned in the early days of the revolt against the robots. He eased his breathing and focused on the task at hand: get food and get out. Slowly, the shaking stopped, and he was in control. He moved back into the kitchen and opened the pantry door.

He looked at the shelves and discovered a small flashlight sitting on a shelf by his right knee. *Was that there before?* He was so hungry yesterday that he could have missed it. *Still, that was a big miss*, he thought. He slid the switch to the "ON" position and a small, bright halogen beam shot out cutting the darkness. It revealed that the pantry, while narrow was at least fifteen feet long and there was another door at the far end. There were all sorts of food cans and other supplies stacked neatly on each shelf. *Was he the first person to stumble into this house? Why has this pantry not been ransacked?* He pondered these questions only for a moment because his stomach demanded his attention. He found a number of cans of soup and an assortment of vegetables and fruits. He also found canned spaghetti and olives. The shelves were packed. He chose a few cans and once again had a feast.

When his stomach was full, he decided to make a list of what he needed to carry out with him. He found a pencil on a string that was tacked up

on the wall next to a pad of paper that was next to the refrigerator. *Time to go shopping!* He drew two lines down a sheet of the paper and labeled the top of the three columns formed by those lines. The first column he labeled, FRUITS & VEGGIES. In the second column, he labeled DINNER and finally, in the third column he labeled DRIED/ MEDS STUFF. Satisfied with his list he went about filling it. As he found what he was looking for he brought it out and put it in one of three piles. In short order, he had much more than he could carry. *Oh, the laments of a rich person.* This was a high-class problem. Suddenly the backpack looked a great deal smaller than it had earlier. He decided that he would take his favorites from piles one and two and hope to find items for pile three as he had only found a box of cereal and five coffee pods. He loaded the backpack with what he could until it was stuffed and then brought the excess back into the pantry for some other poor soul to find. It was then that he thought of what was behind the other door. He hoped that there might be a rifle and ammunition or something he could use to defend himself. He moved to it and turned the handle. As he opened the door, a pair of eyes stared at him. He jumped back knocking over some cans and he heard a voice say,

“Tobi? Finally, you have found me!”

**Other Books by
Terence A. McSweeney**

Poems and Thoughts

Observations and Commentary on Life, Love, and Nature

Green Underwear

Accounts of Two Boys Growing Up in the Cold War Era

Little One's Big Day

Children's Picture Book

The Quest

A Heroic Journey of Adventure, Rescue and Redemption

Book 1: The McGonegal Chronicles

The Twelve Gates

The Road to Redemption

Book 2: The McGonegal Chronicles

Redemption and Illumination

The Way Home

Book 3: The McGonegal Chronicles

Between the Folds

The Agency: The Aranas Years

Sequel: The McGonegal Chronicles



January 12, 2115, was the day the robots took over. It was not a violent insurrection. In fact, no one actually took notice of it at all. Humans just surrendered. All except one, Tobias Smithwater. He ran with his family into the woods.

Autonomous

By Terence A. McSweeney

Order the book from the publisher [Booklocker.com](https://www.booklocker.com)

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/13088.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**