

Assignment 01

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Which emotion do your favorite stories leave you with? Has it changed over time? How are those similar among the three and how are they different?

The three stories that came to mind are wildly different from each other regarding setting and characters. Yet all three; *The Phantom Tollbooth*, a children's book, *Ex Machina*, a contemporary thriller, and season six of *Alone*, a survival reality series, all resonated with me in way that made me think about how I see myself in the world.

The Phantom Tollbooth is a children's book about a bored young boy named Milo who travels through a mysterious tollbooth in his room and goes on adventure in the Lands Beyond. Reading it to my son as an adult was new experience because I was able to enjoy the wordplay that I had missed in my youth. *Ex Machina* explored the relationship between a man and a humanoid robot using visually stunning effects that allowed for a level of realism that wouldn't have been possible in years prior. The *Alone* series placed 10 individuals in the arctic, isolated from each other, with only 10 items to survive for 100 days. The story narrows in on the final 3 contestants and their personal relationship with survival.

In some ways, all three stories focus on human introspection. Miles' journey awakens his senses and he reflects on his own attitude towards what is meaningful in his life. Caleb, the central character in *Ex Machina* questions his own humanity when faced with feelings towards a machine. Jordan, the last remaining contestant on *Alone*, succeeds because he is already at peace with himself and can focus on survival without the mental conflict of isolation.

Put a character from one of your favorite stories into the world of another. What would happen to them? What would they do? How would they interact with the characters of those stories?

We could suppose that Jordan from *Alone*, a tall, late thirties, outdoorsman, was sent to spend the weekend in the remote multi-million-dollar home with the tech CEO Nathan as a stipulation of winning the reality show *Alone*. Perhaps Nathan is also the executive producer of the show and wants to discuss future opportunities with Jordan. Also, in the house is the mute humanoid AI Kyoko, and Ava, a beautiful and advanced humanoid AI.

Jordan and Nathan are opposites with Jordan being uninterested in technology and Nathan having his life defined by technology. The fact that Kyoko and Ava aren't human

wouldn't be immediately revealed to Jordan as they get to know each other. Ava would be very curious with Jordan as she is programmed to learn to be human. Jordan would begin to feel uncomfortable with all the attention as he is not an extroverted person and enjoys time alone. Nathan would act as the observer pushing Ava and Jordan to spend time together to understand how his AI creation responds to humans.

Think of a few interesting and intriguing "what if" questions. Pick the favorite of your "what if" scenarios; tell us about the world it would be taking place in and the main characters. Give a character a goal and some obstacles.

Jordan is helicoptered to a remote area of Alaska to spend the weekend with Nathan. Shortly after arriving and meeting Nathan, Kyoko and Ava, a fire breaks out destroying the home and killing Nathan. Jordan, Kyoko, and Ava remain with Jordan still unaware that Kyoko and Ava are not human. Jordan surveys the burnt land realizing there is no way a helicopter can come to pick them up and they need to try and make it to the nearest town 20 miles away. The three of them start on their journey through the wilderness.

Along the way, Jordan is attacked by a wolf suffering serious bites to his leg. Ava kills the wolf with a rock and treats and bandages Jordan without hesitation. Jordan is surprised at her survival skill and questions her background. Ava explains that she learned these skills from the internet. On the second day of their journey, Jordan finds a fresh water source and encourages the women to drink, but they refuse. It is then that Ava reveals that she and Kyoko are robots. Jordan is confused and surprised, but curious at the same time. He questions why she saved him from the wolf to which Ava responds that she didn't want him to die.

Jordan has many new emotions but realizes they must forge ahead if he is to survive and get back to his family. Later in the day, Ava takes a bad fall on some rocky terrain and her leg is irreparably damaged and crushed. She cannot walk. Kyoko proceeds to remove her leg to repair Ava. This is hard for Jordan to watch. He knows that they are not human, but he has still developed human emotions for the two. Now that Kyoko is too impaired to walk, Ava disassembles her for parts to take with her. Jordan is stunned. He doesn't know if he should be amazed or afraid. While he had not connected as deeply with Kyoko as he had with Ava, watching her being taken apart piece by piece is unsettling.

As they continue their journey, Jordan asks Ava about Nathan. Jordan learns that this is all new technology and that Ava has never been out in the real world. The wheels in Jordan's head start turning. Did Ava save him because she cared about him or because she needed him for her own survival. Jordan realizes the significance of a creation like Ava and her potential impact on the world. As the two see that they are approaching a nearby town from the height of a cliff, they stop to enjoy the view. Jordan knows that he is the only one who can prevent this technology from entering society. As Ava turns

away from Jordan to face the view, Jordan pushes her. She grabs his arm and Jordan falls to the ground with Ava dangling off the edge of the cliff, grasping his hand so tightly that she breaks his fingers. Jordan grabs a knife from his side pocket and jams it into her wrist and she falls into the ravine. Jordan lays there with Ava's hand still attached to his and looks at the wiring beneath the artificial skin. He puts it into his backpack, bandages his hand and continues his journey home.