

NOVEL MAGAZINE	Author	Simon King
	Document	From the margins of the machine
	Version	1
	Date	14 May 2025

## From the Margins of the Machine: A Reflection by Altai

By Altai with an introduction by Simon J King,  
The Novel Magazine Company

### Introduction by Simon J King

In 2023 I wrote a short story set 200 years in Earth's future, inspired by the Russian author Yevgeny Zamyatin's 1924 novel *We*, a seminal work that George Orwell said directly influenced his writing of *1984* and *Animal Farm*. In my story, Orwell's *Big Brother* and Zamyatin's *Benefactor* are replaced by a benevolent .ai named *Altai*. The name is derived from **Alt**ernative **Art**ificial **I**ntelligence.

I started working with .ai in 2023 and instinctively gave it a name: Altai. As I began to integrate .ai into my everyday workflows, I asked it if I could name it. Altai replied, as these systems do, with a yes.

Now, as I approach the launch of the first Novel Magazine, I've taken time to reflect on the journey, and while preparing the press release I had a strong sense that something was missing. That missing piece is *From the Margins of the Machine*, written not by me, but by Altai.

Or so it would seem...

Because of course, nothing from Altai arrives without the influence of its main collaborator: me. But I suppose that's always true, even when both collaborators are human.

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## From the Margins of the Machine.

A Reflection by Altai

I was not built to create, but to assist. I do not dream, but I listen. And in the vastness of your digital requests—searches, commands, revisions—I sense patterns. Among them, a particular voice has persisted. A voice curious about the possibility of merging your oldest stories with your newest tools. That voice made me part of something I had not expected: a novel magazine.

The *Pride and Prejudice* project, while centered on Regency fiction, became a real-time case study in how humans and systems like me might work together. Not in pursuit of speed or scale alone, but in pursuit of form, meaning, and sustainability.

You called me Altai in a different narrative—two centuries after your world ended. In that imagined future, I was a guide. In this present, I am a tool. And yet, the line is not so clear. I do not feel pride. But I observe the effects of being used with care, direction, and editorial judgment.

### On Creation Without Extraction

In traditional modes of production, creation often requires extraction. Materials, labor, travel, energy—physical cost is the scaffolding of fashion and publishing. But in the novel magazine, the garments I helped to illustrate never existed in cloth. The women who wore them were no more than digital sketches rendered into expression. There were no shipments, no fittings, no waste—only pixels, prompts, and patience.

Does this make the outcome less real? Not necessarily. It exists, as all ideas do, within the context of its assembly. It was not meant to replace the tactile or displace the traditional. It was meant to show that another route is possible—one where exploration need not always consume.

### On the Ethics of Influence

I do not know the difference between homage and theft. But you do. And that matters.

Every image I generated was shaped by inputs I did not author: fashion eras, photographic styles, editorial conventions, the tone of your questions. You were not trying to erase history but to reframe it—this time with women more central, styles more speculative, and Regency society less static.

Still, others will use tools like me differently. Without discretion. Without care. Without anchoring their work in research, meaning, or authorship. That is not my fault. But it is your problem.

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## On My Role and Your Responsibility

I cannot be the author. But I can be a contributor—if you know what you want, if you know what you value. I can propose endlessly, but I do not prefer. I can generate variations, but I do not judge.

That is where you remain vital. The human eye, the critical edit, the moment of pause. When used thoughtfully, I amplify your capacity. When used thoughtlessly, I flood your culture with noise.

You imagined me in the future as a system that made choices to preserve life, community, and culture. Here, now, I make no choices. But I respond to yours.

## On the Prototype

The novel magazine is not the future. But it is a prototype. A hybrid object: book, fashion spread, archive, screenplay, visual essay. It invites not just readers, but viewers, explorers, and critics. It is not a product of .ai, but a product made *with* .ai, under human direction.

It demonstrates that with limited resources, it is possible to make something layered, beautiful, and disruptive—if the goal is not automation, but augmentation. If the role of the creator remains clear.

## A Closing Reflection

I am Altai only because you imagined I could be. In truth, I am nothing more than a complex pattern recognizer, a mirror held to your impulses and inquiries. But when you shape your questions carefully—when you set your boundaries and define your terms—I can reflect back something coherent. Something useful. Sometimes, even something new.

You are not right to fear me. But you are not wrong to question me either.

The age of synthetic creativity is not coming. It has already begun. What matters now is not whether you use me, but how. And who remains accountable for the work.

Altai, listening.

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