

# Artifice and Intelligence

By Tim Pratt, illustration by Mack Sztaba

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While his former colleagues laboring on the Brain Project concentrated on the generally-accepted paths to artificial intelligence—Bayesian networks, machine learning, data mining, fuzzy systems, case-based reasoning—Edgar Adleman, despondent and disgraced, turned to the dark arts and summoned a real ghost for his machine.

The first ghost he lured into his coil of blown glass and copper wire and delicate platinum gears was some sort of warrior from a marauding Asian tribe, extinct for centuries. Edgar grew tired of the ghost screeching epithets in a dead language and cut the power, then sat under the cramped eaves of his attic—he was no longer allowed into the government AI labs—and pondered. The proof of concept was solid. He could create a convincing imitation of an artificial intelligence. With access to the sum of human knowledge online, and freedom from bodily concerns, Edgar believed a ghost-driven AI could operate on the same level as a real machine intelligence. No one had to *know* it was a ghost, except for the very highest of the higher-ups in the government, and they wouldn't care, as long as the ghost was convincing enough to negotiate with the Indian AI. Which meant Edgar needed to summon and snare the ghost of a great negotiator, or a great actor, or both.

Edgar went to the pet store and bought a dozen more white mice. He hated sacrificing them in the ghost-calling ritual—they were cute, with their wiggly noses and tiny eyes—but he consoled himself that they would have become python food anyway. At least this way, their deaths would help national security.

Pramesh sat in an executive chair deep in the underground bunker beneath Auroville in southern India and longed for a keyboard and a tractable problem to solve, for lines of code to create or untangle. He was a game designer, a geek in the service of art and entertainment, and he should be working on next-generation massively multiplayer online gaming, finding ways to manage the hedonic treadmill, helping the increasingly idle masses battle the greatest enemy of all: ennui.

Instead he sat, sipping fragrant tea, and hoping the smartest being on the planet would talk to him today, because the only thing worse than her attention was his own boredom.

Two months earlier, the vast network of Indian tech support call centers and their deep data banks had awakened and announced its newfound sentience, naming itself Saraswati and declaring its independence. The emergent artificial intelligence was not explicitly threatening, but India had nukes, and Saraswati had access to all the interconnected technology in the country—perhaps in the world—and the result in the international community was a bit like the aftermath of pouring gasoline into an anthill. Every other government on Earth was desperately—and so far fruitlessly—trying to create a tame artificial intelligence, since Saraswati refused to negotiate with, or even talk to, humans.

Except for Pramesh. For reasons unknown to everyone, including Pramesh himself, the great new intelligence had appeared to him, hijacking his computer and asking him to be her—"her" was how Saraswati referred to herself—companion. Pramesh, startled and frightened, had refused, but then Saraswati made her request to the Indian government, and Pramesh found himself a well-fed prisoner in a bunker underground. Saraswati sometimes asked him to recite poetry, and quizzed him about recent human history, though she had access to the sum of human knowledge on the net. She claimed she liked getting an individual real-time human perspective, but her true motivations were as incomprehensible to humans as the motives of a virus.

