

Hi everyone. I'm repeatedly asked about the looming, dooming threat of AI on professional writers, both established and aspiring. And I haven't written about it. At least not *lately*. In part, it's difficult to say anything true. Years ago, I documented my thoughts on a related topic ("[Paging Dr. Mario](#)"); since then, machine learning has made enormous leaps that I failed to anticipate. What *didn't* change between then and now is my philosophy. That remains the same. And I already wrote about that. And I have no interest in repeating myself. And less than no interest in reporting on current events. Especially those about which I have no expertise. So, I've been avoiding this topic. But it's gotten *really* loud, huh? Established writers have been quieter, but among the aspirants, "AI will prevent me from achieving my life goal!!!" Upon hearing that, I realize there *is* something I can comment on. Perhaps a whole *series* of journals, oscillating between nonchalance and dread. Nonchalance first:

My wife and I rent a house in Stockton, California. Once or twice a week, a bicycle gang rides by. Thirty, maybe forty cyclists on average. They're young and rowdy looking, but they seem harmless. I watch them. Attentively. Experimentally. And sometimes conspicuously (that's the experiment). Half the time, I spy from my living room window. Like a creepy voyeur. The other half, I go outside and make my spectatorship visible. What I'm testing is the Hawthorne effect: when these youthful ruffians realize they're being observed, does their behavior change? Yes. It does. And it's hilarious. 100% of the time, if there's no observer, there's no wheelie. But if an audience member is present, the wheelies are spectacular. But only a quarter of them do it. Give or take. It's the same quarter every time though. And this makes me wonder: if a member of the Hawthorne wheelie group were to survive an apocalypse, becoming the last remaining human on the planet, what would his daily routine look like? What percentage of his behaviors would change? No more wheelies, I know that. But what else? Is every decision contingent on witnesses? Half of them? Or are wheelies the only thing he would change? Then I wonder if this percentage could function as a mental health index. Perhaps a score under 10% indicates emotional maturity and a stable sense of self, while counseling is advised in those with a score over 50%. That's what I think about as I watch the cyclists ride by. Once they're gone, I wonder what *my* post-apocalyptic life would be like. I know it would involve more gardening, and I'd have a lot to learn about water purification and storage. But other than that, I don't think it would change. I'd still read. Still exercise. Go on walks. And I'd still write my book. Even though I would be the only creature to ever read it. There are plenty of activities I've given up over the years. Like trying to learn other languages, which I spent a lot of my youth doing. Because I thought it was cool when William Wallace, said, "Or in French if you prefer?" in French. I wanted to be the kind of person who could do that. Until my late twenties, when I finally realized the pursuit was foolish. I had no interest in the languages themselves; I only cared about the wheelie. For me, a profitable line of self-examination has been, "What is my motivation?" With writing, I pass the test: I take pleasure in the activity itself. So I keep doing it. If I were in it strictly for the celebration, I'd give it up. Just like I did French, Japanese, and Polish. I don't mean to imply that success violates passion. There's a huge crowd watching Brandon Sanderson's wheelies, but I get the impression he performs them for his own satisfaction. And he would go on performing them well after the AI bots murder everyone but him and leave him to confront Armageddon alone. That said, if fame really is important, fear not: it won't be long before you can populate your living room with clapping robots.

