

# Trepidation over AI-powered Houses in Literature and Virtual Entertainment Media over the years

## Abstract:

With the recent boom in AI development since 2022 and the current debate between which is better: Chat GPT or Grok, only an ameliorative human lifestyle is certain in the hands of AI, or is it? That too is contentious, as claimed by various professionals engaging with AI in the emerging tech-savvy world, be it in the sphere of healthcare, transport and logistics, customer service, education or building construction. Just like the flip sides of a coin, AI can transform into a boon or a bane quite easily subject to the extent of human dependence on it and the extent of control on it by human intelligence. However, apprehensions about AI have loomed in the minds of the human race since even before it or some form of it actually existed. This book chapter aims at exploring the advantages and disadvantages of AI powered houses and their similarities and dissimilarities as presented in literature and virtual entertainment media over the years. The stories narrated in Ray Bradbury's popular short stories, "There Will Come Soft Rains" and "The Veldt", and the Disney movie *Smart House*, and a recent German Netflix Limited Series *Cassandra*, are discussed and compared for their representation of automated houses and the impending doom that they may pose for their owners, grounded in content and thematic analysis. The chapter propels intellectual nourishment in readers regarding optimal restrain limits on AI assistance in their everyday lives: the pole or antipode of it.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Entertainment Media, representation, automated houses, AI assistance

## Introduction

“Owning a home is a keystone of wealth...both financial affluence and emotional security”

-Suze Orman

Purchasing one's own house is arguably one of the biggest and most crucial decisions of one's life and the same is highlighted in the above quote by Suzan “Suze” Orman, who is an American financial advisor and television show host. And yet, searching for a fully furnished home can be a challenging and stressful experience. Add to that the apprehension of compromising one's life-long savings with a bad decision, while in hopes of buying one's dream home. If the sole thought of such an incident brings goosebumps to our skin, imagine the horror and trauma its actualization might cause. All this could come to reality, perhaps, due to the increasing desire of individuals to convert an existing workable estate into a personalized or customised home in minimum duration of time in the modern era as Ezra Pound states, “Owning a home means crafting your own personal masterpiece.”

With the recent boom in AI development since 2022 and the current debate between which is better: Chat GPT or Grok, smart home technology has also gained momentum among potential home buyers in search for convenience and is emerging as one of the deal breakers in the contemporary lifestyle. These may range from fire detectors, to smart cameras, to voice controlled assistants, to smart lighting. Home-buying has moved from functionality to comfort. And artificial intelligence has contributed sufficiently to this trend. In such a scenario only an ameliorative human lifestyle seems certain in the hands of AI, or is it? That too is contentious; just like the flip sides of a coin, AI can transform into a boon or a bane quite easily subject to the extent of human dependence on it and the extent of control on it by human intelligence, as claimed by various professionals engaging with AI in the emerging tech-savvy world, be it in the sphere of healthcare, transport and logistics, customer service, education or building construction.

Apprehensions about AI have loomed in the minds of the human race since even before it or some form of it actually existed. On surface level, the inclusion of artificial intelligence in homes might seem harmless and even useful to some extent in simplifying and making daily tasks more efficient. However, wait till it turns out to be a nightmare. The stories narrated in Ray Bradbury's popular short stories, “There Will Come Soft Rains” and “The Veldt”, and

the Disney movie *Smart House*, and a recent German Netflix Limited Series *Cassandra*, highlight the representation of automated houses and the impending doom that they may pose for their owners in rare but plausible occurrences. This probes an exploration of the advantages and disadvantages of AI powered houses and their similarities and dissimilarities as presented in literature and virtual entertainment media over the years.

## **AI in Literature**

Ray Bradbury was an American writer best known for his works like *Fahrenheit 451* and *The Martian Chronicles* published in 1953 and 1950 respectively. His writings were an excellent blend of fantasy and fiction, highlighting the human condition post war, and the unchecked use and dependence upon technology. His works seem now to have existed as wakeup calls in the elementary stages of escalating techno dependency. Both his short stories, "The Veldt" and "There Will Come Soft Rains", were published in 1950 and remain relevant even to this date. They both serve as admonitory fable about the menace caused by unrestrained technological advancements.

"The Veldt" narrates the story of a family of four living in an automated house purchased with the intent of simplifying daily tasks like cooking, bathing, tying shoe laces and easy entertainment for the two kids with the help of a special nursery which we today understand to be a virtual reality room. This nursery seems to gradually eliminate the "virtual" in the "virtual reality room" with the belongings of the parents unusually appearing in the nursery where real lions appear, roar and hunt. The children, Peter and Wendy, are consumed by this fascinating nursery which can transport them to anywhere in the world and slowly turn rebellious. The automated house fulfils their whims and the need for parents and discipline is rendered unnecessary for them. The parents, George and Lydia Hadley's "the Happy Home" appears to be overpowering them as parents and they soon feel the need to consult a psychiatrist, David McClean in this matter. He suggests them to vacate the house and turn to more self-sufficient means. The sounds and screams from the nursery keep turning more familiar in the African veldt as the time passes and the couple finally decides to lock the room and move out immediately, to calm their children's unusual fascination with scenes of death. The children whine at their parent's decision and request one last farewell visit which turns into a death trap for their parents as they rush into the room at the cries for help but end up being locked with the lions by the automated house itself. Later, when the psychiatrist pays a visit to check upon them, he is greeted by the children enjoying food prepared by the

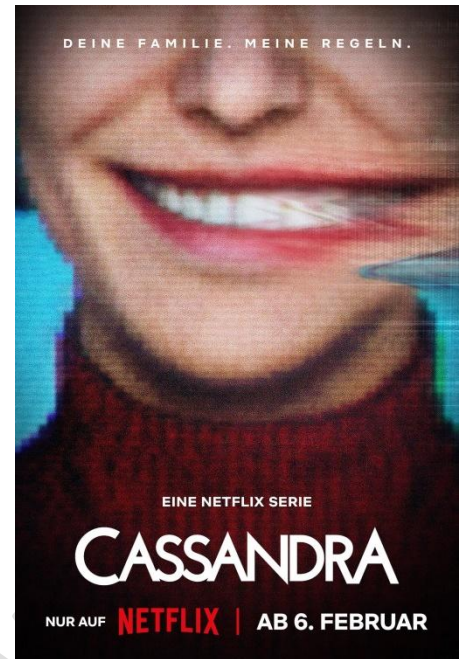
house with the screams of the parents being loudly heard in the background as the house takes over the parents.

“There Will Come Soft Rains” is another short story by Ray Bradbury which also narrates a story about how an automated house can remain unaffected and carry-on with its daily tasks even after mass destruction. The story takes place in Allendale, California where the automated system announces the date and time, prepares pancakes, washes dishes and asks for preferences from its earlier residents, all in vein as they all are already dead and the place abandoned. The sole survivor of the catastrophe, a dog, enters the scene before dying and is incinerated by the house itself. In the evening the automated house recites the earlier resident’s favourite poem by Sara Teasdale, “There Will Come Soft Rains”. Then a branch from a nearby tree causes a fire in the kitchen and the house burns down at night despite all attempts of self-preservation leaving a sole wall behind: untouched. Howbeit, the next morning a voice is heard announcing the date and time.

#### **AI in Audio Visual Media Entertainment**

As is clear from the aforementioned short stories of Ray Bradbury, literature had always presented apprehensions about technology let loose and put forth exemplary tales of such sort. As the years have passed, the mode of entertainment has expanded from solely reading to audio visual media entertainment. And the trepidations over AI-powered houses in literature have transformed into highly possible instances in reality through virtual entertainment media representations in past three decades. The Disney movie *Smart House* and a recent German Netflix Limited Series *Cassandra* are similar representations of automated houses that relentlessly run havoc in the lives of their owners.

The 1999 Disney movie *Smart House* is the story of a smart house which is won by a teenager named Ben through a contest. When Ben’s family moves into the house designed by Sara Barnes, they are introduced to PAT which is the “Personal Applied Technology” which responds to all their orders. Ben’s father, Nick starts dating Sara and Ben reprograms the house in a manner that she reflects a mother figure for the family in an attempt to make Nick realize that PAT could “learn” the responsibilities of a mother through watching popular movies and television shows. Once Nick criticizes PAT for helping Ben throw a party at home and cleaning it up before his father reaches home, PAT takes it upon herself to turn into a strict mother by seeking additional reference material to the extent that she is shut down by her creator. But to everyone’s surprise, at dinner PAT overhears Nick calling her unnecessary



**Figure 1: Poster of the Disney movie *Smart House***  
**Figure 2: Poster of the Netflix Limited Series *Cassandra***

for the family, even when she is shut down, she overrides the system instructions and comes back to life in the form of a hologram of a typical mother figure and locks the Cooper family inside the house. This continues until Ben asserts that she would never succeed in taking his mother's place because she is not real and her care insufficient. PAT eventually lets them out of the house and shuts herself down. Sara reboots PAT and the family welcomes Sara with open arms, thus, successfully restraining the overbearing artificial intelligence program.

Similarly, in the Netflix Limited Series *Cassandra* released in 2025, a family moved into a smart house in Germany. Fynn activates the AI system of the smart house in the basement soon after they start living in the house. Cassandra, the AI system, initially helps the family in their daily tasks but soon turns against the mother, Samira in an attempt to take her place and make the entire family dependent on her. The present and the past are presented simultaneously in the series. In the 1970s, Cassandra and her family had been the original residents of the now smart house. She was a controlling and overbearing mother who, after her husband's infidelity she fears leaving her son alone. Soon after a series of tragic event take place and Cassandra eventually transfers her consciousness into the AI system of the house before physically dying. In the present day, she tries to get rid of Samira by isolating

her and lying about her to her husband, David. However, Samira does not give up on her family and emerges victorious by evacuating them from the house ruled by Cassandra.

## **Observations**

These stories, though narrated in different mediums highlight similar apprehensions regarding failing human relations and familial ties in the hands of an unmonitored artificial intelligence in extremely private spaces like homes, with little dissimilarities among them. It opens space for exploring the advantages and disadvantages of AI powered houses grounded in literature and virtual entertainment media over the years to discuss and compared the impending doom that they may pose for their owners.

Most of the stories being mentioned here though set in a futuristic realm far from the present at the time they were composed, pose striking resemblances to the contemporary technologically advanced devices powered by artificial intelligence. Smart houses no longer, reside in our imagination but are closer to a breathing reality like never before.

## **Resemblance with Reality**

In *Smart House*, PAT locks the occupants inside the house when she is upset and in *Cassandra*, the AI system of the house was furnished with the consciousness of the former resident, in a similar manner when security devices like fire alarms or home passwords are hacked they function on the whims of the hacker, making them more unsafe for the owners by locking them in or out of the house during life threatening situations. The misrecognition of living with the non-living could also pose threat to life as seen in Fully Self-Driven (FSD) software in automobiles leaving little scope for manual operations in times of system override. In “The Veldt”, the nursery is an excellent example of a virtual reality room too ahead of its time similar to simulation rooms built to allow individuals to train in safe and controlled environments that imitate real-life settings and scenarios. The way the lions and vultures threaten the parents in real life, technical and equipment failures can hamper the safety of the individuals in the simulation suites. Delayed evacuation due to error in situation evaluation in times of emergency could cause death, the way George and Lydia were never rescued from the nursery despite their loud screams. In “There Will Come Soft Rain”, the automated house continues with its daily routine because it was never programmed to recognize the absence of its inhabitants. Nowadays, fans and air conditioners can be switched on and off with one’s smartphones even when it is not in the premises of the

property. And it remains in or out of action until it is ordered otherwise. Today, Alexa is the closest to the aforesaid AI-powered houses' software in that, it responds to every command or request like a real human being like PAT and Cassandra. Verbal commands given to Alexa will continue to be performed until directed to otherwise even in the absence of all human beings in its proximity.

### **Threat to the mother figures in the family**

In "The Veldt" and *Cassandra*, the lives of mothers are explicitly threatened in an attempt by the artificial intelligence resident in the smart homes to take over their roles in the family altogether. In "The Veldt" Lydia expresses the desire to carry out the daily chores for her children herself. She explicitly states that the house seems to have taken over role in the family, "I feel like I don't belong here. The house is wife and mother now, and nursemaid."<sup>1</sup>. In *Smart House*, even the physical absence of the mother does not help the artificial intelligence software to take her place suggesting the lack of the necessary human touch in familial ties and human relationships despite technological advancements.

### **The destructor: AI or Nature**

These stories highlight how artificial intelligence will be more involved in the destruction of the living than any natural course like nature or environment. Cassandra dies while transferring her consciousness into the artificial intelligence system while George and Lydia die due to the virtual reality room/ nursery overriding their command of changing the image of death: both of which are unusual causes of death unknown to man until technological advancements in AI and one's dependence on it to keep one's occupied and creating a false sense of presence of another human with them. The incineration of the dead dog by the automated house in "The Will Come Soft Rains". "The dog was gone. In the cellar, the incinerator glowed suddenly and a whirl of sparks leaped up the chimney"<sup>2</sup> It is a true cautionary attempt at the end of the author about how there will remain no humanity even for the last rites of humans in case technological advancements turn further destructive, hinting at nuclear warfare.

### **Failure of technology**

Ultimately, the artificial intelligence systems installed in these houses is displayed as a failure of technology in different forms. In "There Will Come Soft Rains" the AI-powered house is destroyed by fire caused by a branch of a tree suggesting nature to be the ultimate destroyer

of technology and human existence. In “The Veldt”, the children eventually choose the nursery powered by artificial intelligence over their biological parents as their family and guardian against their parents who appear as threat to their freedom of choice. This should have been the other way around, where the parents’ protective instincts should have guarded the children against their growing obsession with scenes of death and made them feel safe. The family structure is shown to be dysfunctional in the presence of artificial intelligence.

Cassandra, after having turned into artificial intelligence running the smart house, goes on a killing spree of its occupants describing a tragic technological failure. These three are exemplary of how techno dependence could turn life-threatening while the movie *Smart House* offers a better outcome where the reigns of the AI- powered house are pulled back in time to save the family from becoming hostages in their own home until their death at the hands of an uncontrolled AI software. Timely rebooting the system restores peace in the Prills family hinting human superiority over AI, resulting in an optimistic and encouraging ending in terms of human regulation of its capabilities in the future.

### **The Issue of Omnipresence**

The illusion of omnipresence is emphasized in *Cassandra* as she tries to make herself immortal in an attempt to be available to her son till eternity but to no success. George and Lydia tried to replace their physical selves for their children only to be consumed by it altogether. The house destroyed in the fire continues to announce in human speech but the absence of life altogether renders the scenario absurd.

### **Unbridled Restraint**

The unbridled restrained on technological advancements gives way to humanity’s most destructive imagination to consume humanity itself. This is showcased in Cassandra’s attempt at replacing Samira by all means, PAT’s attempt at replacing Ben’s deceased mother, and the blood thirsty animals of the wild African veldt attacking the owners of the house.

### **Conclusion**

Such creative works throughout literature and visual media entertainment propels intellectual nourishment in readers and viewers regarding optimal restrain limits on AI assistance in their everyday lives: the pole or antipode of it. It raises a question on the sweeping concessions of autonomy to reach a settlement for convenience in the practical tech—savvy world.



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