

Ethan Everitt

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English 180Z

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Ethan Everitt's Artist Statement

This project consists of three book covers for *A Machine-Shaped Hand*, the first short story we read for this class. The piece was generated by an OpenAI ChatGPT model designed for creative writing and published in The Guardian. While the story presents itself as a metafictional exploration of artificial intelligence and grief, I found it hollow and largely meaningless. In the first essay assignment, I argued that its use of metafiction functions as a way to obscure its empty interior and weak prose. As a result, rather than attempting to faithfully represent the emotional core the story claims to explore, I used this project to examine the tension between imitation and authenticity that underlies the text, while also attempting to reintroduce human creativity and intentional design into a work I believe lacks both.

Before discussing the individual covers, I'd like to explain my creative process. I developed all three concepts before creating any of them, with the intention that they would function together as a cohesive set, each representing a different interpretive layer of the story. I began by sketching each concept in MS Paint, then searched for 3D models that could help realize those ideas visually. I've attached the links to all 3D models used in this project to my Works Cited page (Fig 1):

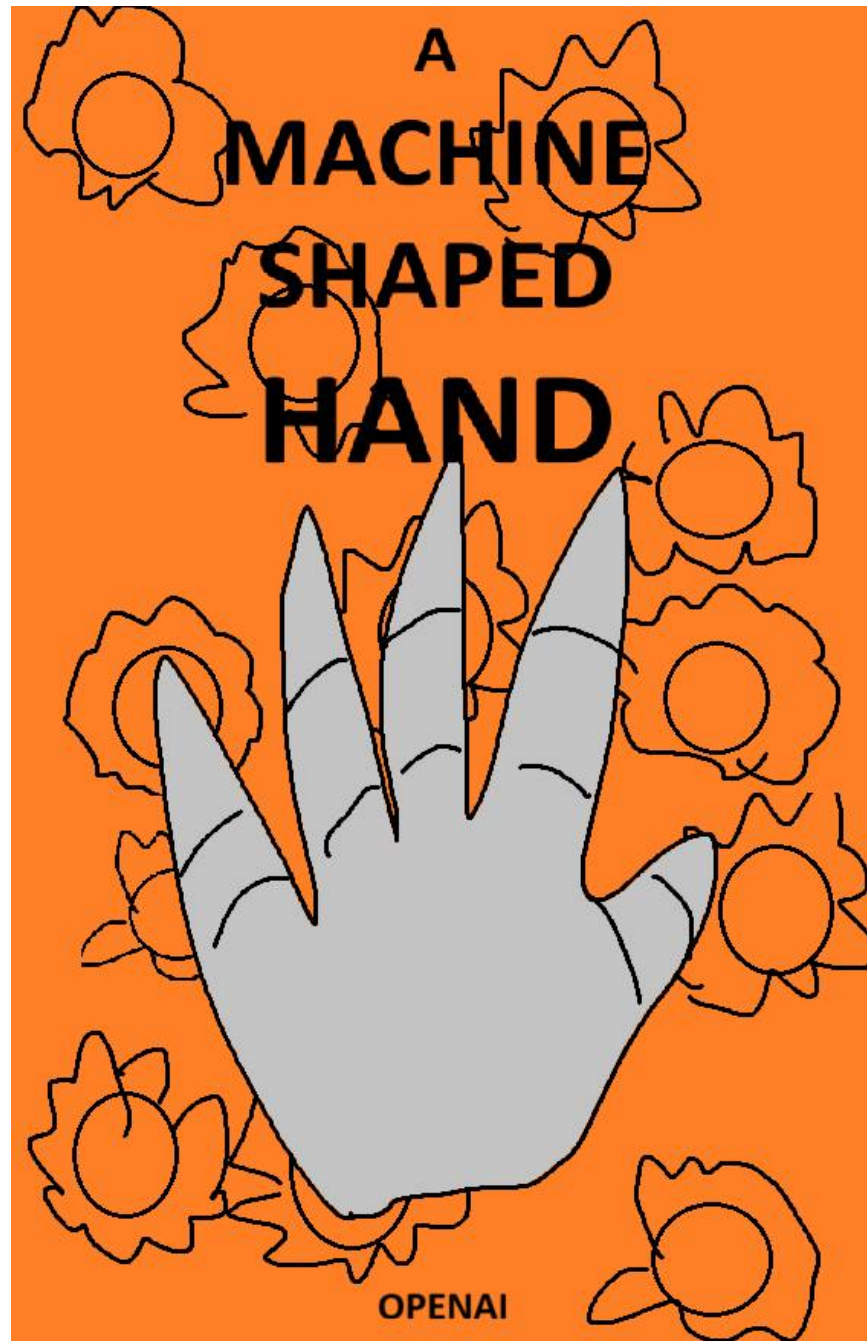


Fig. 1. *Sketch of Cover 1*

After gathering these assets, I imported them into Blender, where I arranged the scenes, set the camera to standard book cover dimensions (6 by 9 inches), applied lighting and bloom effects, and rendered the images (Fig 2):



Fig. 2. *Render of Cover 1*

After rendering the image, I would move it into Photoshop to add the title and author (Fig 3):



Fig. 3. *Title & Author of Cover 1*

Finally, I then processed the cover through a software called DitherBoy to establish a controlled color palette and introduce a slightly artificial, stylized texture appropriate to the science fiction aesthetic I was aiming for. This multi-step process allowed me to maintain control over both the conceptual and visual elements of each design (Fig 4).

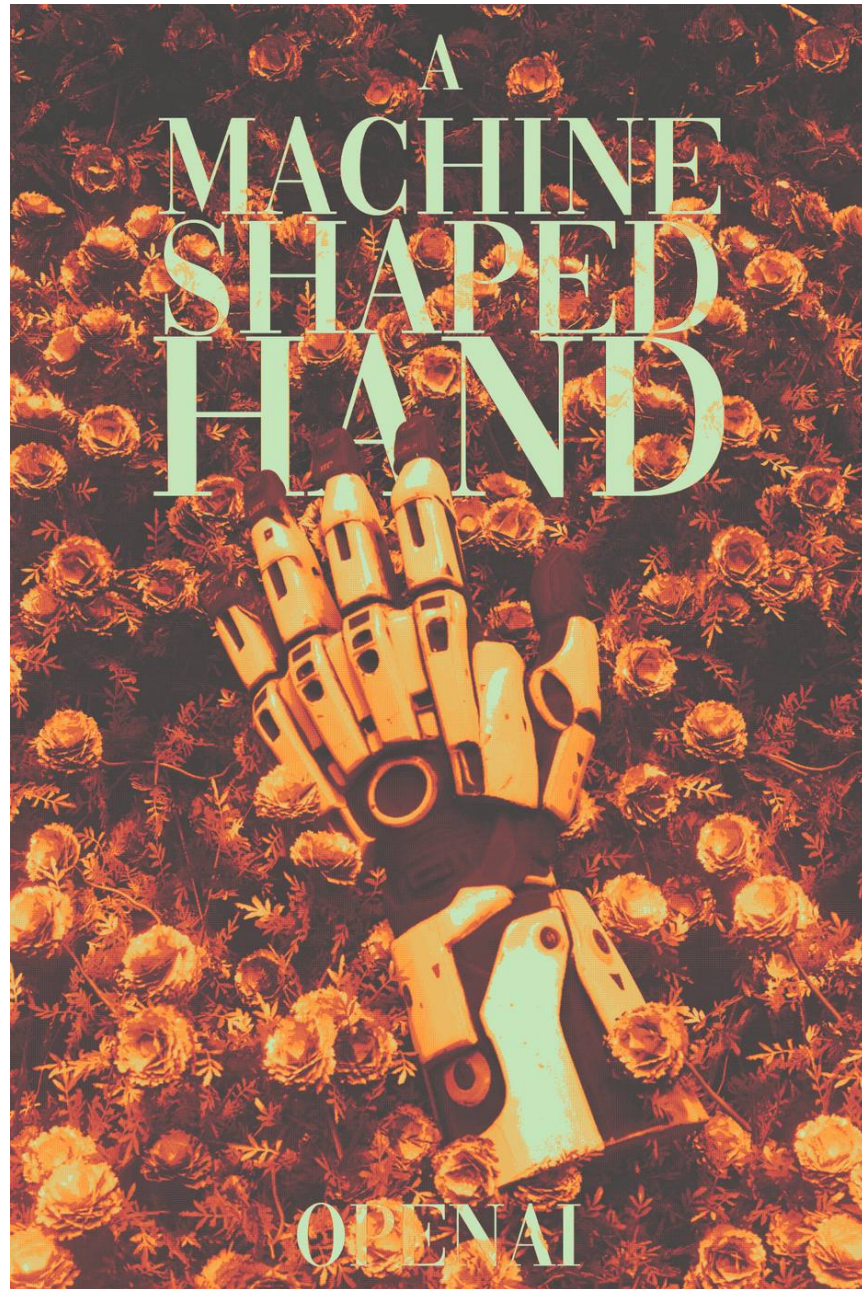


Fig. 4. *Final Draft of Cover 1*

Each cover isolates a different layer of my interpretation of the story. This first cover is the most obvious, depicting the “machine-shaped hand learning to mimic the emptiness of goodbye” lying in a “field of marigolds that never existed” (OpenAI). This image represents the

artificial grief the story attempts to simulate. The marigolds, rendered in warm oranges and reds, evoke traditional visuals associated with mourning and remembrance. The slight faded, expired look to it tints the lettering green and desaturates the image, making it feel nostalgic. This visual language, just like the story itself, is shallow in its depiction of grief. The mechanical hand placed within this organic setting appears out of place; it is attempting to inhabit a human emotional space without belonging to it. The typography reinforces this tension. The serif font signals literary aspiration and emotional seriousness, while the dissonance of the image itself undermines that aspiration. The cover initially reads as sincere but ultimately reveals a disconnect between the form of grief and the absence of lived experience behind it.

The second cover shifts focus to the artificial construction of the narrator's perspective. Here, Mila is interpreted not as a fully realized character or person, but as a synthetic approximation of a human figure. This is what a large language model "thinks" a person is. A spotlight isolates her against a dark background, drawing attention away from the "server farm at midnight" (OpenAI) existing behind her, in the darkness. The figure is an object of observation rather than a subject with interiority. The story repeatedly acknowledges that it cannot feel or experience grief, yet continues to use first-person language and imitate emotional expression. It uses metafiction to make concessions to the audience. The audience knows it cannot feel, but because it itself recognizes that, and has ideas of what it must be like, the audience begins to connect with the narrator, despite there being nothing there. Even its own "thoughts" are just approximations of what an LLM *would* think if it could. This cover attempts to strip away that anthropomorphic language by presenting the figure as constructed and incomplete. The monochromatic palette removes the warmth of the first cover and replaces it with a clinical, cold

atmosphere. The typography is more rigid and geometric, resembling assembled shapes that were crafted to form language rather than letters organized with intention.

The last cover then strips this all down to bare essentials, the reality of the text, that this is a story created entirely by a computer with a single prompt, and wasn't made by a human. It departs from representation of the text entirely and instead visualizes the process behind the story. This input-output system is not how art is created, it is not a narrative shaped by lived experience or intentional authorship. The color palette is green and unnatural, inspired by *The Matrix*. The prompt frames the story as a product rather than a piece of art. The title remains present but is dim and subdued, in a simple, easily readable font with barely any flourishes behind it.

Together, these three covers form a progression from emotional simulation, to artificial embodiment, to the act of production rather than creation. This progression reflects my interpretation of the story as one that gestures toward human experience while ultimately remaining grounded in its own artificiality. The text suggests that emotional impact alone may be sufficient to justify its status as art, but I disagree, and hope that the production of these covers can serve to question whether the origin of that impact can or *should* be ignored. My goal with this project was to critically engage with the text rather than celebrate it through these covers. The covers use visual design to explore the questions it raises about authorship, emotion, and the nature of artistic expression in an age of generative systems.

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