

All the Thoughts Have Been Thought

What a Tragedy

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Holding back my tears, I stared at the blank document. Then I stared at it some more.

The empty page had the potential to become anything: magical red-brick houses, glowing status windows or main characters who solved every problem with a flashy sword.

Unfortunately, all of those ideas had already been written about more than a million times.

I snapped back to reality. The page was still blank.

I give up. Time to switch methods.

With a necessary melodramatic sigh, I slammed my laptop shut. I opened it again immediately to make sure the screen had not cracked, then leaned back in my chair.

These days, writers – not that there were many left – used all kinds of flamboyant AI gadgets to produce their stories. I, however, preferred the old-fashioned method of typing on a laptop. People had become far too unclassy to appreciate a good handwritten book in this failing society anyway. Tsk, tsk.

I picked up a pen and a sheet of paper, both of which had cost me an arm and a leg. Most of the remaining forests were protected, so paper had become a luxury rather than something people carelessly scribbled on.

Perhaps this even older-fashioned method would work better.

I hesitated to touch the page. It was almost too precious to write on. Instead, I tried to spin the pen around my fingers. It flew across my sad, dull room and struck the wall.

So, I could not even pretend to be a tortured, mysterious writer.

A wave of distress passed over me, and I clutched my head. Normally, I would have produced some kind of idea by now, no matter how ridiculous it was.

Perhaps I should abandon this originality nonsense and write something classic.

No. What was I thinking? Failing that pen trick really must have affected me.

Forgetting the paper, I opened my laptop again, newly determined to overcome this slump and write something original.

You might think that, with the world nearing its end, people would place fiction at the very bottom of their priorities. Coastlines had disappeared, summer heat warnings lasted for months and ration notices arrived more often than birthday cards. Instead of abandoning stories, however, people became even more desperate for them.

Virtual reality games became particularly popular. Advances in technology allowed players to remain inside fictional worlds for hours, and almost everyone used them to escape reality.

For the minority who still chose to read or write, an enormous online Archive was created to protect humanity's stories. Every book, poem and piece of fiction anyone could find was uploaded. It was meant to ensure that our imagination would survive, even if we did not.

Of course, the Archive made originality slightly difficult. Perhaps preserving every story ever written had not been such a brilliant idea for aspiring authors.

I glanced back at my glowing screen. Surely, I could not be the only person with this problem. Any idea that entered my mind had probably been used before. If a human had not already written it, one of the countless AI tools could generate it in seconds.

Wait.

I could write about that.

Finally! My genius brain had produced a genius idea. I knew it would happen eventually.

I opened the Archive, which had recently become my preferred method of avoiding everything happening outside my room. An AI assistant appeared and offered to create a completely unique story plot for me.

I closed it immediately.

Many writers had failed at this stage. They accepted the AI's offer, believing they had discovered their masterpiece, only to learn that the supposedly original story had been assembled from ideas already stored in the Archive.

That would not happen to me. I had created a brilliant, pure and completely original story to leave behind on this forsaken planet. Humanity might disappear, but at least nobody would forget me.

I clicked the search bar and eagerly entered a few keywords.

Original story struggles

No results.

My mouth fell open.

I had done it.

Just as I began celebrating my glorious victory, a second notification appeared, as notifications tend to do.

**Did you mean: writer characters struggling to create original stories?
Showing 1,455,140 results.**

I stared at the number.

The Archive began loading the results.

My once-genius head dropped onto the desk.

Ah, seriously. Just my luck.