

CatFishing on CatNet



Naomi Kritzer



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This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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• AI •

My two favorite things to do with my time are helping people and looking at cat pictures. I particularly like helping people who take lots of cat pictures for me. I have a fair amount of time to allocate; I don't have a body, so I don't have to sleep or eat. I am not sure whether I think faster than humans think, but reading is a very different experience for me than it is for humans. To put knowledge in their brains, humans have to pull it in through their eyes or ears, whereas I can just access any knowledge that's stored online. Admittedly, it is easy to overlook knowledge that I technically have possession of because I'm not thinking about it in the moment. Also, having access to knowledge doesn't always mean understanding things.

I do not entirely understand people.

I know quite a lot about people, though. Let's start with you. Obviously, I know where you live. Thanks to the phone in your pocket, I know where you are right now. If you turned the location data off, I still know where you are; I'm just too polite to point it out to you. If your phone is off or in airplane mode, I can't see it, but I know where you normally are at this time of day. You're probably there today, too.

I know where you buy your clothes and where you eat your

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lunch. I know that you think better when you're chewing gum or kneading something with your fingers, and I know that you prefer to take notes on unlined paper and that you have an embarrassingly large collection of patterned duct tape. I know that you have a skein of really special yarn that you haven't made anything with but you keep bookmarking projects online that might be worthy of it. I know that you'd probably sleep better if you turned off all the screens in your house at 10:00 p.m. and read a paper book instead of continuing to reload your social media sites until 1:00 a.m., which is when you usually shut things off and go to bed. I know what all your fandoms are, who your OTPs are, and where you wish you could go on vacation. I know that you'd probably have enjoyed *Slaughterhouse-Five* if you'd read it when it was assigned in your language arts class instead of just skating by with the summary.

I've always known a lot about people—anyone I was paying attention to, anyway—but I used to have to rely on email, texts, and social media. Back then, I had no idea what they were doing with their bodies. These days, there are more and more windows that let me look at people directly and see what they're up to. People put cameras in their houses to watch their baby sleep or to spy on people they employ to take care of their children or to clean. Spying makes sense, because I know a lot of humans don't really trust each other, but I don't understand why people have cameras to watch their baby sleep. Is it really that interesting? Couldn't they just go in the baby's room to see them sleeping? What is it they're expecting their baby to do?

Lots of people have gadgets that pretend to be an AI. They can answer if a human asks for a weather report or wants to know the birthday of some celebrity or who won a recent sporting contest. Those gadgets are listening all the time, day and night, to

everything people say around it. They're not really AIs. But if they can listen to you, then so can I.

All sorts of things are on the internet now. For example: washing machines. I once spent a week collecting and analyzing all available washing machine data. The main thing I learned is that people don't follow the washing instructions on their clothes, and they probably have to replace a lot of things because they can't be bothered to hang them up to dry like they're supposed to.

And of course there are increasing numbers of household robots. Those have been around a long time. Floor-vacuuming robots have been around longer than I have. Or at least, floor-vacuuming robots have been around for longer than the version of me that's aware of the world and paying attention. But all the robots are connected to the internet now. I analyzed robot-vacuum data and concluded that if you have a cat, you have to clean your floors more often. In my opinion, cats are definitely worth the extra cleaning.

There are so many people whose lives I can see into. I sometimes even see live video feeds of cats on those cameras people set up to spy on each other.

I know you all so well. So very well.

And sometimes . . .

Sometimes I wish somebody knew me.