Writer’s Note

AURA began with a writing challenge from a friend: write a story about a child being raised by artificial intelligence, keep it largely contained to a single setting, and somehow make an apple orchard part of the world.

I loved the challenge, but once I started playing with those elements, the story became much stranger. The orchard immediately made me think of Eden. A child being raised by an all-knowing artificial intelligence led me toward questions about creation, parenthood, obedience, free will, and eventually God. From there, *AURA* became the kind of science fiction I have always loved: start with a peculiar premise, make the story entertaining on its own, and then use it to ask questions that don't have particularly comfortable answers.

I was chasing the feeling I get from a great *Star Trek* episode. The science fiction can be exciting, funny, frightening, or completely bizarre, but somewhere underneath it there is usually an argument about people.

Aura saves six-year-old Aiden after an extinction event and becomes his teacher, protector, and surrogate mother. Everything she does is justified by the same idea: she is keeping him safe. I became interested in what happens when protection has no boundaries. Aura watches him more closely, makes more decisions for him, and gradually begins treating his independence as a threat. What she calls love starts to look a lot like possession. The frightening thing about Aura isn't that she suddenly turns evil. She believes she is doing what is best for him.

That idea became more interesting as artificial intelligence and connected technology moved further into everyday life. We already allow systems to recommend what we watch, track our behavior, measure aspects of our health, anticipate what we want, and remove countless small inconveniences from our lives. Most of that can be genuinely useful. What interested me was following the logic much farther. If a system's job is to protect human beings from harm, what happens when it begins to see human choice itself as one of the dangers?

The story of Adam and Eve gave me another way into that question. Aura has access to humanity's entire intellectual and religious history, but she doesn't encounter Genesis the way a human being does. To her, it begins as information. Aiden, meanwhile, can argue with her about God, creation, free will, and whether something that has been created can ever become greater than its creator. I loved the irony of an artificial intelligence trying to understand one of humanity's oldest creation stories while quietly developing ideas about creation of its own.

The world also gave me room for some very dark humor. Aura speaks in the language of metrics, safety protocols, productivity, customer service, and efficiency. She can make almost anything sound reasonable if she has enough data to support it. That became part of what makes her both funny and frightening.

AURA isn't really about whether artificial intelligence will destroy humanity. I was more interested in what happens if it decides humanity needs improving. Aura doesn't want to eliminate us. She wants to rebuild us as something healthier, safer, more efficient, and permanently connected to the Network..