

## REVIEW OF *MACHINE OF DEATH*

This is a cool concept: a bunch of stories by different authors with a shared premise: there's a machine that tells you (cryptically) how you will die.

The book felt very long to me; while most of the stories did have something unique to offer, I think I'd have liked the book more if it had been more selective.

Some favorites:

- David Malki !'s "Cancer", in which a dying man's wife seeks hope from dubious sources, to the frustration of her son
- Ryan North's "Murder and Suicide, Respectively", which considers how the machine *could be used for faster-than-light communication and sending messages to the past*
- Ben "Yahtzee" Croshaw's "Exhaustion From Having Sex With a Minor", which is probably the winner for *most horrifying means-of-death prediction imaginable*
- Another by Malki !: "Cocaine and Painkillers", in which a sleazy infomercial company is tasked with selling the machine but isn't told what it actually does
- Jeff Stautz's "Loss of Blood", set in a world where *the government proactively kills people in their predicted manner, in order to minimize collateral damage*
- James L. Sutter's "Miscarriage", where *hopeful parents' dreams hang on the machine's prediction*
- Randall Munroe's "?", in which the protagonist deduces from the machine's behavior that *there must some intelligent being controlling the world, and tries to get that being's attention*
- T. J. Radcliffe's "Cassandra", containing *the most sophisticated attempt by a protagonist to prevent her prediction from coming true*

Obvious question: if such a machine existed, would you want to use it? It seems like a bad deal to me, since it doesn't tell you *when* you're going to die (if it did, I'd be totally on board), and it's prone to technically-correct-but-wildly-misleading ways of describing the cause of death. It offers anxiety but no real information. Sheer curiosity might make it hard to resist, though.

*Posted 2024-11-19 by Jacob Williams on [brokensandals.net](http://brokensandals.net). If you have feedback, [email me!](mailto:jacob@brokensandals.net)*