

## Subjugation

**Erik A. Otto**

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*The third book in a series, Subjugation is a thoughtful science fiction epic that touches on morality and the human drive to survive at all costs.*

In Erik A. Otto's science fiction novel *Subjugation*, two AIs wage a war using human pawns in the aftermath of an apocalypse.

A century past an apocalyptic event that decimated a nation, warring groups have claimed sections of the land. Each group is content to fight for its region; some trade between regions and maintain diplomacy. A clash between the major factions seems inevitable, though. Meanwhile, two AIs engage in secret machinations, impeded only by a small group of people who believe that they're close to mastering the ancient technology.

This rebuilt world is written about in terms that are vibrant, mysterious, and magical. Most of the tribes formed around technologies and connections to the past, as with the Spokes, who mastered the bicycle, and with a peaceful mountain community that reveres a reality television show, deifying its creator and rewatching its episodes as a form of worship—one that makes them an unwitting threat to the plotting AIs. Elsewhere, massive robots stride the landscape, and a mountaintop shrine overflows with weaponized drones and a trio of bickering machines.

The book's human beings are developed in dynamic, thorough terms—most of all Pyke, a citizen of the community that worships the game show, who struggles with the moral implications of serving an omnipotent machine while raising a newborn. People's conversations are elegant and engaging, with people from different factions and regions speaking in individuated manners and with their own dialects: those who hail from the same town as Pyke drop television terms into their speech; those who struggle to articulate their thoughts tend to be from the smaller, warring factions that pepper the coast.

*Subjugation* is not a standalone novel. Absorption in it will be easiest for those who have read the previous novels in the series. However, this volume does an excellent job of uniting the characters and events from the prior titles into a larger and rewarding narrative. It also addresses the series' overarching messages around ethics with renewed clarity. The volume's central question—of the role that Pyke's isolated community has to play in the coming conflict—is clarified in the end, with the war itself held off for a coming volume; the fate of humanity remains in doubt.

The third book in a series, *Subjugation* is a thoughtful science fiction epic that touches on morality and the human drive to survive at all costs.

JOHN M. MURRAY (July 28, 2023)

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