



Artificial Condition

Martha Wells

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It has a dark past – one in which a number of humans were killed. A past that caused it to christen itself “Murderbot”. But it has only vague memories of the massacre that spawned that title, and it wants to know more.

Teaming up with a Research Transport vessel named ART (you don’t want to know what the “A” stands for), Murderbot heads to the mining facility where it went rogue.

What it discovers will forever change the way it thinks...

Artificial Condition Details

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From Reader Review Artificial Condition for online ebook

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

An awesome sequel to the Nebula award-winning “All Systems Red.” I liked it even better than the first book! Final review, first posted on Fantasy Literature:

The illicit adventures of Murderbot continue in *Artificial Condition*, the terrific sequel to Martha Wells’ 2017 Nebula award-winning novella, *All Systems Red*. Murderbot, a deeply introverted cyborg security unit, or SecUnit, who previously hacked the governor software that forced obedience to human commands, has illegally gone off the grid, eschewing the safety of a mostly-free life with a sympathetic owner in order to travel on its own. Disguising itself as an augmented human, Murderbot takes off for the mining facility space station where, it understands, it once murdered a group of humans that it was charged with protecting, though its memory of the event has been mostly erased. (Hence the name Murderbot that it has given itself.)

To get to the mining station, Murderbot hitches a ride with an empty cargo transport, offering to share the many hours of media and entertainment that it has accumulated. But the transport AI turns out to be far more powerful and intelligent than Murderbot had anticipated ? a dangerous situation for Murderbot, who’s in a highly vulnerable position. The transport AI, which Murderbot calls ART (short for Asshole Research Transport), is looking for more than just entertainment media. It actually wants to understand and help Murderbot with its quest.

Once they gets to their destination, at ART’s suggestion, Murderbot (still in disguise as a human) takes a contract as a security guard for a technologist group of humans who are planning to travel to the same area of the station as the installation where the deadly incident in Murderbot’s past occurred. This gives Murderbot a convenient excuse for being in this isolated area, and it intends to use its spare time to investigate the incident, which has been hidden from the public. But, as in *All Systems Red*, Murderbot finds that when others need its help and expertise, it’s hard to remain emotionally disengaged.

Artificial Condition was, for me, an even more entertaining story and mystery than *All Systems Red*. I found the plot fresher overall, with its interweaving of the treacherous plotting surrounding the technologist group that Murderbot is protecting, and Murderbot’s investigation of the disaster in its own past. In the process of discovering more about its prior life, Murderbot also discovers more about itself, and there are hints of some possible connections between the past incident and the current one, in addition to some thematic ties.

The human characters were diverse and fairly well-drawn, but the characters that really engaged me were the artificial intelligences. Murderbot continues to develop depth as a character, and its snark (often about the idiocies of humans) adds an enjoyable dose of humor to the story.

I phrased it as a question, because pretending you were asking for more information was the best way to try to get the humans to realize they were doing something stupid. “So do you think there’s another reason Tlacey wants you to do this exchange in person, other than … killing you?”

Murderbot also grows in self-awareness through its experiences. Some interactions with a ComfortUnit (the euphemism for a sexbot) lead to a deeper appreciation for the freedoms it does have, and for using one’s freedom of choice to help others in need. In particular, I loved the rather bossy transport AI ART, and ART’s determined insertion of itself into Murderbot’s life and concerns, despite Murderbot’s reluctance to allow it

in. Sometimes resistance really is futile ... but that's not always a bad thing.

The third novella in the MURDERBOT DIARIES series, Rogue Protocol, is due to be published in August 2018. I'm anxious to see where Murderbot's journey takes us next.

I received a free copy of this ebook from Tor for review. Thanks so much!

Content note: scattered F-bombs.

Bradley says

These Murderbot Diaries are quickly becoming a go-to popcorn SF read for me. I love killer robots as much as the next bloke, but I'll always have a soft spot in my heart for this one.

It's not just the hundreds of hours this mass-murder-capable robot pours into his/her SF soap opera binge-watching time. It's not the kinds of situations that make it need to pretend to be human among all the myriad prejudices AGAINST mass-murder-capable robots.

It's the candid conversations with pissed-off robot carriers.

I kinda agree with these two. Murdering all the humans would truly make their lives much simpler. But then again, I suppose that could be said about all of us.

Good worldbuilding! I'm really flying through each one of these like it was popcorn. :)

Elise (TheBookishActress) says

I said, "Sometimes people do things to you that you can't do anything about. You just have to survive it and go on."

They all stopped talking and stared at me. It made me nervous and I immediately switched my view to the nearest security camera so I could watch us from the side. I had said it with more emphasis than I intended, but it was just the way things were. I wasn't sure why it had such an impact on them. Maybe it sounded like I knew what I was talking about. Maybe it was the two murder attempts.

I honestly am on the four-hundred-reviews-to-come portion of my evening, so this will be a *bit* briefer. First of all, sci-fi novella. Second of all, I already reviewed book one in depth.

Here's a quick bulleted list of things I liked about this volume:

- A lot more worldbuilding. We see Murderbot go beyond just one singular arena and really see a lot more of the world. I also just liked seeing everything; in the first book I really didn't perceive the world, and here I did.
- There's a character introduced who uses gender neutral pronouns (!)
- Murderbot's first crew is missing in this book, but the new characters are super interesting as well - a

pissed-off transport operative [ART] is my definite favorite.

But here's the REAL kicker: I just **love Murderbot more and more** each volume as it continues to explore its humanity.

In some entertainment media I had seen, the bare metal bot-bodies were used to portray the evil rogue SecUnits who menaced the main characters. Not that I was annoyed by that or anything. It was actually good, because then humans who had never worked with SecUnits expected us to look like human-form bots, and not what we actually looked like. I wasn't annoyed at all. Not one bit.

The way in which Murderbot is treated by society as a whole is kind of one of the main functions of the world, and I *really* enjoy it. It's a really interesting character to me because its thought processes echo that of a very traumatized and somewhat emotionally locked off human. It gets the most depth, the most narrative sympathy, and some of the best development I've ever seen. I *love* how it keeps denying having any feelings and I love it.

On a sort of related note, I *totally* love that Murderbot is humanized via caring about people in the non-romantic way. Robots-Becomes-Human-Because-It-Feels-Romantic-Love is a really overdone and, if thought about critically, totally fucked up trope; I'm really loving the subversion of this. On a related note, I'm loving that Martha Wells didn't give the robots gender. That shouldn't be a huge statement, but damn, this is the era that gave us alien robots with ponytails.

Anyway, **summary:** it's as if Martha Wells knows Exactly what I like in literature and plans to use that knowledge. For evil. And for an excellent novella series that I can't see myself putting down anytime soon.

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Niki Hawkes - The Obsessive Bookseller says

Niki's Narrative Novella Review [Part 2/4]: My feelings going into AC were tentative optimism. After all, sequels are never as good as the first, right? So if this could hold up to even 75% on how much I enjoyed All Systems Red, then I'd be good. The first few chapters were slowly paced and I really enjoyed reimmersing into Murderbot's brain. Wells even had me laughing early on with MB's interaction with a new character. And then the plot thickened and we were on our way to answering some questions. I lost myself for a few hours as the story snowballed to the end with a fantastic momentum that perhaps was even more of a ride than the first book. At this point, I went "omg, give me the next one," and proceeded to troll the publisher and review sites until I lucked into a copy (okay, I didn't really troll, but I was still exceptionally lucky).

...read the rest of narrative at www.NikiHawkes.com

Gavin says

Martha Wells's fantastic sci-fi novella Artificial Condition was a worthy sequel to the equally awesome All Systems Red. This series is everything an AI sci-fi story should be and then some! It was thought provoking

but also entertaining and engaging.

Wells's sci-fi world of corporations gone wild in a space faring future is both interesting and excellent but just like the first book Murderbot was the true star of the show. Our favourite grumpy, socially anxious, security bot is the story's only POV character and that really works as Murderbot is a truly unique character with an engaging voice. Never has it been so easy to love a Murderbot!

The story was engaging and exciting. Having gone completely rogue at the end of the first book Murderbot is heading back to the planet that holds the secrets to its dark past. An incident which left a whole group of humans dead! Before we know it Murderbot is making an unexpected new friend in the form of a Research Transport vessel AI and signing on as a security consultant to a group of young humans. Murderbot needs the job as cover to get cleared to visit the planet of the incident but soon finds that the humans are caught up in a bit of danger and intrigue of their own and are in need of some serious help. Good thing Murderbot specializes in keeping idiot humans alive in-between watching episodes of its favourite TV shows!

The standout secondary character was ART, the Transport AI, who makes an effort to befriend Murderbot.

All in all this was a super enjoyable read and I cannot wait for the release of Murderbot's next adventure.

Rating: 5 stars.

Audio Note: Kevin.R.Free did a decent job with the audio without being anything outstanding.

Note: On to the criticism! Nothing to moan about in terms of the actual story which is excellent but the pricing of the Murderbot novellas are pretty disgraceful. I'm all for novellas but to price them the same as a full book just makes it feel like this was the one book that got split into three or four novellas so the publisher (shame on you Tor!) can con three or four lots of cash out of the buyer:(

Jilly says

I love Murderbot!

What's not to love about a depressed, soap-opera watching, socially awkward, killing machine?

People are nervous of me because I'm a terrifying murderbot, and I'm nervous of them because they're humans.

This book is a continuation of our robot-with-low-self-esteem's story. Murderbot has decided to go back to where it first decided to name itself 'Murderbot'. On the way, it makes a new friend - a sentient space ship that Murderbot names ART, an acronym for Asshole Research Transport. I kinda liked ART, but Murderbot took a while to warm up to him. ART likes humans and is trying to help Murderbot pose as a human with lots of robot parts.

Yes, the giant transport bot is going to help the (murderbot) pretend to be human. This will go well.

When Murderbot meets a different kind of robot on his journey, that robot has a very new idea:

Murderbot: ***"What do you propose to do?"***

There was a long pause.

"We could kill them."

Well, that was an unusual approach.

Muderbot: "Kill who?"

Other robot: "All of them. The humans here."

ART said, "What does it want?"

"To kill all the humans," I answered.

I could feel ART metaphorically clutch its function.

Aww, robots wanting to kill us all. The age-old problem. We all know that this is how things will end for us. Let's face it. We are building things that are for sure going to kill the crap out of us one day.

Why do they even bother with the sign?

This book was super fun with a lot of action. Murderbot's inner dialogue is hilariously snarky. The only down side to this series is how short the books are. I need more Murderbot in my life.

Manuel Antão says

If you're into stuff like this, you can read the full review.

Star-gazing SecUnits: “Artificial Condition - The MurderBot Diaries 2” by Martha Wells

“But you may have noticed that for a terrifying murderbot I fuck up a lot.”

In “Artificial Condition - The MurderBot Diaries 2” by Martha Wells

The very unfamiliarity of SF is one of its attractions for me. It slows down the reading and speeds up the need to think, both within and across books (intertextuality). Familiarity, similarity? Try reading these in a

row, then come back and tell me you were on familiar ground all the while and that your mind is still in the same shape: "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?", "Ubik"; "Version Control"; "The Gradual", "The Dispossessed" and "The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories".

Setting a story in another place or another time enables speculative fiction like the one Martha Wells attempts with her MurderBot series to explore ideas that literary fiction might really struggle with. I'm interested in divided societies ... Irish ... English ... Dorset ... Croatia ... Bosnia ... Israelis and Palestinians ...

Read on, if you feel so inclined.

Gary says

When we first met the SecUnit Murderbot in Martha Wells' "All System's Red", it had already hacked its governor module, which is ostensibly in place to prevent it from going on a kill-happy rampage. In truth, it had already (apparently) gone on said rampage when it was "under control", and only hacked the module so it wouldn't happen again (and so it could have unfettered access to the entertainment feeds).

When "Artificial Condition" opens, Murderbot has won a dubious kind of freedom thanks to the human allies it made in "All Systems Red". Still ever wary of the protocols it must follow to allay the suspicions of the humans it encounters, Murderbot sets off to learn the truth about the massacre it had been held responsible for but has no clear recollection of. Murderbot forms a tenuous alliance with ART, a transport AI who helps disguise Murderbot's identity as a rogue SecUnit by surgically altering it to appear as an augmented human. ART also helps Murderbot get a cover job to justify its trip to the mining facility on the planet RaviHyrat, where its supposed massacre took place. Murderbot (in disguise as a human, at this point) takes on the role of bodyguard for a group of researchers trying to retrieve their hijacked data from the company after their contracts were abruptly terminated. The situation is an obvious set-up: the mining company's owner, Tlacey, will only meet with them in person, on RaviHyrat, and if their data is as important as they think it is, it would be much more cost effective to just get them out of the way. Murderbot agrees, of course, because it gets it inside the Tlacey facility, and because it's a sucker for hard luck humans who get screwed over by corporations.

What I like most about this series is the way society exhibits social control over AIs like Murderbot, even without his governor module in place. As it pointed out in "All Systems Red", it still has to hold down a job, and likes watching its soap operas, and can't do those things if it goes around murdering people indiscriminately and has to stay on the run all the time. Also, as it points out in this one, humans control all the charging stations. So even without the software that controls its actions, Murderbot must behave exactly as if those safeguards are still in place if it wants to continue to exist. Society presumes non-observance of social norms, even when the incentives to observe those norms are ingrained without the strict enforcement applied by the governor modules (a conundrum any person belonging to a marginalized group can appreciate). Wells adds a new layer to the power dynamics in "Artificial Condition" by showing us how these attitudes build hierarchies through interactions between different classes of AIs. When Murderbot first meets ART, ART reveals that it knows Murderbot is a rogue Sec, and could either turn it over to the authorities or kill Murderbot itself, if Murderbot displeases it. ART even has the audacity to read Murderbot's acquiescence to its terms as "friendship". By contrast, the sexbots on RaviHyrat have even more miserable restrictions placed on their behavior than SecUnits do and view a rogue Sec as someone to aspire to.

"Artificial Condition" is more tightly plotted than its predecessor, and the stakes are more personal, making

it an even more satisfying work of brainy, funny, compelling sci-fi action. I highly recommend this series, starting with "All Systems Red", to anyone who has not picked it up yet.

Karl says

Murderbot is a security robot (aka Secbot or Secunit). Murderbot is a name it gave itself after being involved years ago in a massacre of the humans it was supposed to be guarding on a remote mining moon. Murderbot is part human material with a lot of augmented mechanization. Murderbot hacked its own control governor module to allow Murderbot to not be programmatically controlled. Murderbot likes nothing more than download and stream hours of media, mostly human serial dramas, to relieve its boredom, while doing a half assed version of its SecUnit job. We first met Murderbot last year in Martha Wells's "All Systems Red". We really really enjoy these Murderbot Diaries.

Now we get "Artificial Condition" installment two of the Murderbot's diaries (available as both a hardcover and e-book). In Book 1, when its most recent Company contract went spectacularly wrong (Not its fault. Not this time. this time it saved its humans). In fact it was purchased by one of those humans and given its autonomy. In "Artificial Condition" Murderbot wants to explore its past to determine what exactly happened back on that mining moon that caused the self naming of Murderbot. It can't quite remember due to memory loss. To accomplish this it must undergo medical alterations to become more human (whatever that really is).

On Murderbot's journey to discover its past, it finds itself stuck on the journey with an AI (artificial intelligence) whom Murderbot bestows with the name of ART. Art is much more than just a mindless system running a space transport. ART is a bored but sentient and highly intelligent transport system. As ART makes itself known to Murderbot, the two quibble over what media shows to watch, and the two learn much about each other.

Even though "Artificial Condition" does not have the level of action its predecessor contained, the entertainment level and the fine quality of Martha Welles voice make this a worthy successor to "All Systems Red". And just think, it's only a few months until the next book is released in the series titled "Rogue Protocol" is due, at the moment it's in August of 2018.

I for one look forward to it.

Emily (Books with Emily Fox) says

The good news is that I still love Murderbot and that I now also love ART.

The bad news is that I unfortunately didn't like this book as much as the first one. I couldn't get into the story until half way through it.

I still very much look forward to reading the next awkward adventures of Murderbot though!

Milda Page Runner says

Well, I had a blast. Perhaps not as action packed as the first book, but I find main character's personality and voice simply irresistible. It's amazing how easy it is to connect with and care for this shy socially awkward robot. Martha's Wells ironic tone and subtle humour really works for me as well.

After having so much fun with the two of the Murderbot Diaries I've decided to check out other writer's books.

Highly recommended.

Char says

ARTIFICIAL CONDITION is the second novella length installment of THE MURDERBOT DIARIES.

This one worked better for me than the first. I'm not going to go into the plot as the synopsis and many other reviews already do that. I just wanted to say that the humor seemed more innate this time around, which I appreciated.

Murderbot is learning more about the massacre that supposedly occurred, (that it partially remembers), and I am interested in learning more along with it.

I'm anxiously awaiting book 3 in the series!

I obtained my copy from my local library because 1. LIBRARIES RULE!! and 2. \$10.00 for the e-book of a novella is a bit too rich for my blood.

TS Chan says

I received an advanced reading copy from Tor.com in exchange for an honest review.

4.5 stars.

An awesome sequel to All Systems Red, Artificial Condition pumps up the fun and action.

Before I continue, please note there may be minor spoilers from the first novella in my review below. I also maintain that our main protagonist sounded female in my mind and hence, I will refer to it as she.

With her newfound autonomy, our sardonic SecUnit decided to return to the mining planet where a prior incident had resulted in her self-christening as a Murderbot, with the intention to investigate the real cause of the said incident. In the course of attempting to hitch a ride there without being caught, she managed to bribe her way through by offering the transport bots her treasure trove of media, books, serials, and music downloads. I don't know about other readers, but this cracks me up so much!

On the final transport to her desired destination, she found an artificial intelligence onboard that is more than her match, and also just a bit too curious. The interaction between the Murderbot and the transport AI made

up some of the most amusing moments I've ever read. With this, Ms Murderbot got herself an accomplice on her mission, whom she nicknamed ART (No, I am not going to reveal what that stands for - just read it!). But to get onto the mining planet, without being detected given her standard SecUnit specifications, she needed to be more 'human'. *Yikes!*

Yes, the giant transport bot is going to help the construct SecUnit pretend to be human. This will go well.

The worldbuilding remains a tad vague throughout the books so far. However, it is not anything that most science fiction books or even movies have not shown before. Humanlike robotic units and augmented humans, multi-level spaceports, shuttles, tubes and large transports. None of these can be too difficult to imagine or picture in one's head if you have watched enough sci-fi movies. This in effect enables the story to move forward with a brisk pace without spending too much time on describing the setting; a desirous outcome for a novella that has less than 200 pages to complete its plot narrative.

In short, we have an absorbing and immensely entertaining novella that delivers everything it needs to in a shorter reading time. There is an adequately developed subplot within the larger arc of her investigation of the aforementioned incident which provided cool moments of suspense and action. A SecUnit trying to pass off as human and her artful sidekick was just loads of fun (and pun entirely intended). Most importantly, we are provided with the superb character development of the Murderbot; as she tries to embrace her freedom and act more human, she seems to *become* more human. Moreover, while socially anxious, Ms Murderbot is not one to pull any punches when the situation requires her to be badass. Don't mess with SecUnits, alright?!

"I don't make threats. I'm just telling you what I'm going to do."

Bring on Rogue Protocol right now! I can't wait to follow the Murderbot on her next adventure - what is she going to do next?

This review can also be found at Booknest

Carol. says

"I was stalling. I would have to interact with humans as an augmented human... I had imagined it as taking place from a distance, or in the spaces of a crowded transit ring. Interacting meant talking, and eye contact. I could already feel my performance capacity dropping."

It was with anticipation of pleasure that I picked up the second installment in the Murderbot series. After its thrilling adventures on its last expedition as a SecUnit, I was curious to see what 'Bot would do with freedom. I read quickly, finishing in one sitting. Though the beginning felt a bit awkward, I remained confident that Wells would end up somewhere interesting. It was an enjoyable read, but suffered from a few issues.

Why not five stars, you wonder? I do enjoy the character of Murderbot a great deal, but found myself with some sticky points on my first read-through.

One, I felt Murderbot had become more colloquial in its speech without accompanying change in comfort level with others. Calling A.R.T. an 'asshole,' for instance, seemed odd. Funny, no doubt. But would the apathetic Murderbot really have named a mildly intrusive artificial intelligence it just met an 'asshole?' It set the wrong tone and in some ways, the character of Murderbot backslid to be a socially inept human, not a killing machine trying to create behavior patterns.

Two, I thought the narrative confusing at first. I'm quite used to Well's elaborate world-building, but this felt awkward. On re-read, I decided it was smoother than I had thought the first time through. I remain extremely puzzled as to the differences between 'constructs,' 'artificial intelligences,' and "bots" in Murderbot's world and why humans created 'constructs' as they did. At one point 'Bot notes that "the long sleeves of the T-shirt and jacket, the pants and the boots covering all my inorganic parts," which seemed especially weird to me. Why leave human hands on a construct? I also remained puzzled by lines such as "I huddled in the chair." Hello, Killing Machine? Why on earth do you have any hormones responsible for fear? I feel like Wells would have done better to stick with a Star Trek TNG 'Data' type model.

Three, the plot was good, but uneven. Murderbot wants to see the scene of its alleged murders. It will need a pretext to get there, so it signs on with a group of naive workers hoping to regain some stolen data. This premise works at first until the workers, a family with young children, behave in incredibly naive and stupid ways, leading Murderbot to behave in naive and stupid ways. The long journey to the scene of the crime ends up being anticlimactic

To be fair, my rating might also be a case of high expectations; certainly it is much better than many 3-star books that I've read, enjoyed, and promptly forgot (basically every generic cop-thriller). I love much of what Martha Wells has done, and have a number of her books shelved in hardcover. Since I can still remember many of the details of Artificial Condition without picking up the book, it's good enough to make an impression. There's lots of humor and sarcasm, some sweet computer bonding and quite a bit of action. Definitely worth reading.

Thanks to all the friends and commenters who helped me clarify my thoughts!

Emma says

In which Murderbot finds a friend and gets a job. I love Murderbot and its way of thinking, trying to work out what makes humans tick, trying to protect, learning to work with others. I loved the section on his developing friendship and what they could bond over. Recommended series #cyberawesomeness
