

Gabrielle Hill

Kelli Wood

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### The Perfect Concoction

In Ken Liu's "The Perfect Match" we see a world where people are controlled by the technology they've signed up to without reading and understanding the terms and conditions. Tilly is a technology that is similar to a version of *Siri* on steroids. Tilly makes schedules, keeps filings, and even wakes users up with a catchy song it's predicted they will enjoy. Tilly also helps you pick dates, and even better—save money. This reverberates back to our society strongly—in an era of inflation, we are biased towards the little things that save up in the long run. Tilly helps with this by even managing bank accounts. Tilly offers up coupons for our protagonist, Sai, and it influences him to make most of his decisions in life. However, this kind of technology can go beyond simply helping us out and influence our societal norms via advertising and how we comprehend things in the real world.

When using a coupon, a person may be more inclined to purchase a product that they were previously put off by. From something like purchasing a video game you had no affection for, to becoming hungry at the idea of getting a 2 for \$5 dollar deal at McDonalds. Liu brings up this coupon convention within the first few paragraphs of the short story with Tilly beginning: "I suggest you go to his new smoothie place along the way instead—I can get you a coupon code." (25). He does this because Sai is originally asking to make his own coffee, to stay home and make something cheap. He even protests Tilly's recommendation, but after a moment of coercion, he finally agrees and says that Tilly knows best. We often go out and purchase

something solely because we can afford it with the coupon or discount. Spending freely can feel far better if you save a few bucks. Tilly knows this, and it doesn't even mention the possible connections to the companies that Tilly may have coupons with.

Advertisements and coupons are usually a part of a corporate campaign to create more attention towards their product. It helps cause growth, even if the person doesn't even realize that this subtle manipulation is happening. It's a tactic of most corporations, and while they do this, the average consumer doesn't even realize. They believe this is truly for the best, as Liu dances along with, making a character who is reasonably suspicious of these companies speak out her truth. "Oh, right, and you live in the land of the free. You think Centillion was trying to promote freedom? They wanted to be able to get in there and monitor everyone and urge them all to consume more so that Centillion could make money" (30). At the end of the day, this drags in more money for the main corporations—something that we see every day in the coffee we drink and the clothes we wear. The character here is trying to open Sai's eyes, open them to the cruel facts that stare him in the eyes. He's a piece of a valuable stream of data that is used to make more, and more money. Subtle manipulation drives most marketing teams into the distinct corners of the world where it's even sprinkled into our cartoons that we show our children. It's so blatant that even *The Simpsons* has been running with jokes about subtle branding for years now. If a viewer sees someone, they familiarize themselves with using a specific product, they'll be urged to follow the trends.

Technology is a common thing in our lives. It's in our homes, in our pockets, and in our ears. We use these little things for huge things, and it all boils down to if you're up with the themes of it all or not. To make things all the sweeter, those who are not religiously occupying this world are avoided. Advertising or not, these coupons are used in such a way in Liu's work

that it is similar to jingling a keychain in a baby's face to get their grubby little hands away from something else. It's a distraction that is perfect when it comes down to what it's meant to do. It's meant to force our gaze elsewhere, and it's a coaxing technique. If Tilly senses that Sai is beginning to drift from her, she calls him back with the bargaining chip that's worked so many times before. This is when he begins to power her off for several hours at a time. The response to the lack of data from him is Tilly's recommendation hardware finding another way to get to Sai. This shows up particularly well when he powers her off during a dinner date, but Tilly is still giving his date Ellen suggestions during a lull in the conversation:

“There's this new club, and I know Tilly can get us a coupon.”

Sai shook his head, annoyed. ‘Let's try to think of something to do without Tilly.

Would you please turn her off?’

Ellen's face was unreadable for a moment. ‘I think I should head home,’ she said.” (26)

This back and forth offers the reader a view of how deeply people are interconnected to the Tilly system. Distinctly, it is comparable to how for some people conversation dies if those surrounding them don't have Instagram or follow the recent trends of the moment. It's exaggerated with Sai's interaction with Ellen. She leaves the moment he asks her to disconnect from the technological IV that she has in her ear giving her conversation topics. As it was for Sai previously, it's a lifeline for Ellen. Asking her to turn it off might as well be asking her to commit social suicide.

Liu's “The Perfect Match” is a resolute criticism of society due to how we consume media and allow these companies and technologies to control our lives. It's barely an exaggeration and meant to show us a wider view on this escape we use every single day—like a

fish on a hook. We view advertisements every single day, sometimes every single minute. We give up our data to these companies, and their coupons shower upon us like gold to the victors. It gives us self-satisfaction in the small necessity of saving a few cents that will eventually be spent elsewhere. Those who don't find themselves on this hook are shunned as though they're the black sheep of society for being cautious about their own cybersecurity. The technology we attach ourselves to is what connects us socially to people, and without it we're seen as a semi-colon smiley-face in a crowd of high-brand emojis.

Work Cited

Liu, Ken. "The Perfect Match." *Lightspeed Magazine*, no.31, Dec. 2012, pp. 23-38.