ON WRITING

Boredom Is the Engine

By Austen Tucker · 2026

Imagine the most scratched-up, blurry, oil-smeared glasses you can. Put them on. Now go through the world. At first it's kind of interesting — you lean on your other senses, you pay attention in ways you never had to. But after a while, I guarantee you, you will get bored.

Now imagine you can't take them off.

Boredom is the engine. AI is the turbocharger.

I couldn't picture imaginary friends. Other kids conjured them out of nothing — I had nothing to conjure with. What I could do was copy. Cartoons. Pixelated video games. The chunky images on a computer screen. Things big and bright and simple enough that I could still see them. So I copied them.

Then the copies got boring. So I gave the sprites personalities, to make it interesting.

Here's the thing about my brain: once I'd done a thing, it wasn't fun the second time. So it had to get more complex. The creatures got complicated backstories. The backstories got boring. So I stopped borrowing and started making up my own.

I learned to tell stories at a deep level because I was an audience of one. There was no one to impress and no one to bore but me — and I bore easy. I always found a way to make it more interesting. I had to.

The other thing I did was imagine myself as the cartoons. Not watching them — being them. Other kids projected their imaginary worlds out into the room around them. I couldn't. The room was the problem. But the body? I had full access to the body.

So I embodied. It was fun to think about what bunny ears would feel like — how they'd work differently from the ears I had, what it would feel like to twitch one. It was fun to think about tails, and how they would fit. It was the nineties; everything was anthro animals. Yes, I'm a basic bitch furry. Deal with it.

Here's the part that matters: imagining myself as a hero wasn't fun. Imagining different embodiments of myself was. Seeing a new world meant nothing — I could barely see this one. Feeling a new body meant everything.

There's a whole essay in that paragraph. I'll write it. For now, just hold onto the shape of it: a kid who couldn't see the world, learning to imagine her way into bodies that could.

Somewhere in middle school, someone told me I had a talent. I wrote a bad poem and sat on it for a few years. Then high school came around, and the boredom got boring again. I thought: what if I could share these stories I've been making in my head? I picked up a pencil and started writing.

A bad poem, a long wait, and a kid who ran out of ways to entertain herself. That's the whole origin story.

I am always bored. Any time something is primarily visual, I will make my own fun. I cannot help it. I never could.

I am proud of my craft. I built it over forty years, one bored afternoon at a time, and I take real offense when someone glances at my work, sees that an AI touched it, and files it under slop.

They have the timeline backwards. The boredom came first. The stories came second. The pencil came third. AI showed up forty years later, bolted onto an engine that had been running my whole life. You don't get to call the engine slop because you only just noticed the turbocharger.

I started with sprites big enough to see. I'm still finding out what else I can make.