

Always root for the human

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

December 13, 2013

One of the most fun films I saw this year was [World's End](#)—the final installment of the trilogy that included [Shaun of the Dead](#) and [Hot Fuzz](#). While the first two were about zombies and buddy cops, this one was about saving the planet from Stepford-like robots.

I can't just watch a monster movie any longer, now that Scott Poole has made me think critically about the creatures we encounter in film and books. [Monsters in American](#) made me understand how dreaded beasts reflect our moment and incarnate our fears in history. In this particular era, it seems appropriate that robots would entrap our collective demons. Machines are taking over our lives by making them more perfect and pleasant. But there is hope. Throughout *World's End*, as well most monster movies, there is one overwhelming urge--we root for the human. We long for messy, recalcitrant humanity to win. Our survival instincts connect with the struggling, imperfect heroes.

Oddly enough, once we leave the theater, we forget to do this in our every day lives. We forget that we are supposed to vote for the human.

I'm at the grocery store with the fluorescent lights buzzing overhead and I have two options. There is a pod of four empty check-out stands, wooing me with self-service convenience or there is the clerk, chewing her gum, rolling her eyes, and looking like she would rather be any where else in the world. It's time for me to choose. I can either have no line, or I can wait behind the elderly woman who is clutching a wad of coupons and a checkbook.

I'm like everyone else. I don't have a lot of time. And I have the added reality that I'm an introvert, who cringes a little when I have to come up with some semblance of small talk. So, I would rather do my business without any human interaction. I can muster up a barely audible "thanks" for one person who is overseeing the four automated check-outs. That seems painless.

Just as I head toward the self-service, I stop. Then I stand in line. Behind the elderly woman. I can already see from my position in line that her coupons are out of date. But I wait for the gum-smacking clerk.

Why? Because even though I would like convenience, I am making a conscious vote for humanity. I want the humans to win.

Does that sound extreme? Maybe it is. But I worry about the workers in our country who are increasingly being replaced by machines. So much of what we do has become automated, for the sake of productivity. We moved robots into the production line long ago, displacing the workers. Bank tellers no longer count our money for deposit; instead, we take pictures of checks on our phone. Screens entertain our children far more than friends. We donate creative content on wiki sites, contributing anonymously, and dehumanizing ourselves. We can no longer find a human to find out how much an item costs; instead, we search for an automated price-checker. People no longer inhabit our shopping areas, asking if they can help us; instead, cameras hover from the ceiling, keeping an eye on us. Amazon plans to use [drones to deliver our books](#), so before we can get over the demise of our comfortable bookstores, we have to face losing the humanity of the UPS guy telling us where to sign. There were thousands of jobs in our country that used to be thriving occupations with creative minds working through important challenges, but they became automated, without much of a struggle on behalf of humanity's sake.

I am no luddite. I understand that in our relentless pursuit of the bottom line, if we can find robots that are more efficient, companies will use them. But as our largest corporations amass more wealth while gutting our workers and our creatives, we need to root for humanity. I understand that Siri's soothing voice may entice us with its kindness. Nonetheless, there seems to be some choices we can make. In the check-out lines, in our creative content, in our employment practices—humanity needs to win. We can overcome our fear of waiting. We can tolerate some attitude. We can conquer our resistance to small talk. We can be understanding in the face of error. We can look one another in the eye, and treat each other like people. We must. Humanity is depending on us.