Machine Wars by Michael Pryor

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The plot for this tense thriller is set in the not-too-distant future and is scarily realistic. It will appeal to techno-savy readers who realise the potential for artificial intelligence to outsmart humans and take control of the world.

The two main characters, Bram and his friend Stella, must keep one step ahead of the super intelligent computer programme, Ahriman. He can locate the young people through any electronic device, intercom, TV, ATM, CCTV, or surveillance system. His eyes are everywhere. Bram's computer genius mother has asked him to hold Ahriman at bay for three weeks so she and her colleagues can complete a system to terminate Ahriman once and for all.

Adrenaline-fuelled chases keep the two friends on high alert as they try to escape the hordes of robots, junkbots, and drones sent to kill them by the devious Ahriman. Actually, there's a third good guy on the side of the plucky pair. It's Bob, the robo-duck. Sound unlikely? Well, the duck is Bram's favourite childhood toy and his mother has fitted the cute creature with a brilliant internet intelligence designed to seek and destroy Ahriman.

Bram and Stella decide they are not going to be the hunted prey, they intend to turn the tables on the villain's army and take it apart themselves. The action is fast and furious as they lay traps for the machines and shake Ahriman to his core. This leads to many nail-biting, edge-of-the-seat, destructive battles.

Machine Wars is a thought-provoking glimpse at what could happen when intelligent computers grow clever enough to rule the world. Look at all those security cameras out there - who really is watching us?

Reviewed by children's book author, Jean Bennett

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