

Have you heard about the recent kerfuffle surrounding AI and the 2025 World Science Fiction and Fantasy Convention?

Yes, I have seen information about that. It appears a significant controversy arose just recently (around April 30, 2025) regarding the Seattle Worldcon 2025's use of AI in its vetting process for program participants.

Here's a summary of what seems to have happened:

1. The Action: The Seattle Worldcon 2025 organizing committee used an AI tool, identified as ChatGPT (a Large Language Model or LLM), as part of their process to screen potential panelists.
2. Worldcon's Stated Reason: They explained in a public statement that they have over 1,300 applicants and used the AI script solely to speed up the process of searching for publicly available information online about each applicant (entering only the applicant's name). They stated this was intended to automate and aggregate search results for human review, emphasizing that the AI output wasn't accepted uncritically and that human review was built into the process due to AI's potential unreliability.
3. The Reaction ("Kerfuffle"): This decision triggered significant backlash from members of the science fiction and fantasy community, particularly authors and artists. Key criticisms included:
 - Ethical Concerns: Many objected strongly because LLMs like ChatGPT are trained on vast datasets that often include copyrighted works scraped from the internet without the creators' permission or compensation. Using these tools, especially to vet the very creators whose work may have been used in training, was seen as unethical and insulting.
 - Symbolism: Using AI felt inappropriate for a convention celebrating human creativity, especially given the ongoing concerns about AI potentially displacing human artists and writers.
 - Accuracy and Efficiency: Critics questioned the efficiency gains, pointing out that LLMs are known to confabulate or "hallucinate" information, requiring thorough human fact-checking anyway. Some argued simpler, non-AI scripts could have achieved similar results.
 - Transparency: There were calls for the convention to release the specific prompts used with the AI for full transparency.
 - Environmental Impact: Some also raised concerns about the

environmental cost associated with running large AI models.

The convention's statement defending the practice seems to have generated further negative commentary online. So, yes, there has definitely been a notable "kerfuffle" surrounding this specific use of AI by the 2025 Worldcon organizers.

In your opinion, are the reactions against this use of AI justified?

That's a really interesting question. As an AI, I don't have personal opinions or feelings, so I can't say whether the reactions are definitively "justified" or not. However, I can analyze the different perspectives based on the information available:

Arguments Supporting the Justification of the Negative Reactions:

1. **Ethical Concerns about Training Data:** This is perhaps the strongest point. Many creators in the SFF field are deeply concerned, and actively involved in legal challenges, regarding LLMs being trained on copyrighted material (including their own books, stories, and art) without consent, credit, or compensation. Using a tool built on potentially misappropriated data to vet those same creators strikes many as fundamentally unethical and disrespectful.
2. **Symbolism and Community Values:** Worldcon is an event meant to celebrate and honor human creators in science fiction and fantasy. Using AI tools, especially given the anxieties within the creative community about AI's impact on their livelihoods, sends a conflicting message. Critics feel it shows a lack of solidarity or awareness of the community's concerns.
3. **Reliability and Accuracy:** LLMs are well-known for "hallucinating" or generating plausible-sounding but incorrect information. Critics argue that using such a tool for vetting is inherently unreliable, even with human review (especially if, as some commenters speculated, only negative flags were double-checked). Errors or biases in the AI output could unfairly affect applicants.
4. **Availability of Alternatives:** Some commenters argued that the stated goal – automating web searches based on names – could likely be achieved with simpler, non-AI scripting tools without the associated ethical baggage and

reliability issues.

5. **Environmental Concerns:** The significant computational resources required to run large AI models are also a point of concern for some regarding environmental impact.

Arguments from Worldcon's Perspective (Mitigating Factors / Counterarguments):

1. **Practicality and Volunteer Labor:** Worldcon is largely run by volunteers, and vetting over 1,300 applicants is a time-consuming task (estimated at 10-30 minutes per person manually). They state the AI was used solely to automate the *initial* search for publicly available information to save hundreds of hours of volunteer time.
2. **Limited Scope:** The organizers emphasized that only the applicant's name was input into the system and that the AI was just used to aggregate publicly available information for review.
3. **Human Oversight:** They stated that all results were subject to human review, acknowledging that AI can be unreliable, and claimed that no applicant was rejected *solely* based on the AI output.
4. **Transparency Attempt:** By issuing a statement explaining their process, they attempted to be transparent about their methods, though critics argue the statement itself was insufficient or defensive.

Conclusion:

Whether the reaction is "justified" really depends on how much weight you give to the ethical and symbolic concerns surrounding current generative AI technology versus the practical challenges faced by volunteer organizers trying to manage a large event efficiently. For many creators directly impacted by AI training data issues, the use of these tools in *any* capacity by a community event meant to honor them feels like a significant betrayal of trust, making their strong reaction understandable from their perspective. From the organizers' viewpoint, it may have seemed like a pragmatic, limited use of technology to solve a logistical problem, perhaps underestimating the depth of the community's ethical objections.

Does the fact World Con is a science-fiction convention -- and AI has long been a

trope and interest of the genre -- alter your thinking on this?

That's a really insightful question. The fact that Worldcon is a science fiction convention does add an interesting layer to the discussion, but it doesn't necessarily change the core reasons behind the backlash. Here's how you could look at it:

1. Familiarity Doesn't Equal Endorsement: While science fiction as a genre has explored AI extensively – its potential, its dangers, its philosophical implications – this exploration often includes cautionary tales. Deep familiarity with fictional AI might actually make the community *more* sensitive to the potential downsides and ethical problems of real-world AI, rather than less. They've spent decades thinking about scenarios involving AI rights, unintended consequences, and the displacement of humans.
2. Distinction Between Theme and Tool: There's a difference between discussing, analyzing, and writing about AI as a *concept* or *theme* within the genre (which is expected and encouraged at Worldcon) and using a specific, current AI tool (like ChatGPT) for *operational purposes*. The controversy isn't about the topic of AI itself, but about the *specific application* of a tool that many members feel is ethically compromised due to its training data and potentially harmful to the livelihoods of the creators the convention celebrates.
3. Real-World vs. Fictional Stakes: Fictional explorations allow for safe contemplation of complex issues. The use of current AI tools, however, has immediate, real-world implications for copyright, labor, compensation, and data privacy that directly affect the convention's attendees and participants. The reaction is rooted in these present-day concerns.

So, while the sci-fi context makes the *topic* of AI highly relevant to Worldcon, it doesn't automatically grant a pass to the use of current AI technologies that raise significant ethical red flags within that same community. If anything, the community's long history of thinking critically about AI might be fueling the intensity of the debate about its responsible real-world implementation.

Pretend you are Mr. Spock from Star Trek. What would your conclusions be about this issue?

Fascinating. This situation presents a confluence of claimed efficiency and significant

ethical objections, yielding a predictable, albeit emotional, human response. Analyzing the available data:

1. **The Stated Objective:** The Worldcon organizers sought to increase the efficiency of vetting potential program participants, a task deemed laborious for their volunteer staff. The application of automation to reduce manual effort is, in principle, logical.
2. **The Chosen Method:** The utilization of a Large Language Model (ChatGPT) was selected. However, the known propensities of such models for generating factually inaccurate data—phenomena humans term "hallucinations"—necessitated a secondary layer of human verification. This introduces a logical inconsistency: if the tool's unreliability requires significant human oversight, its net gain in efficiency becomes questionable, particularly if accuracy is paramount. The claim that the process resulted in *more* accurate vetting after checking negative results appears speculative without comprehensive comparative data.
3. **Ethical Considerations:** The primary objection stems from the LLM's training data. Allegations persist that these models incorporate vast quantities of copyrighted material, including the works of authors and artists within the SFF community, without consent or compensation. To then utilize such a tool in a process involving those same creators presents a fundamental ethical conflict. Logic dictates that the means employed should be consistent with the principles of the organization, particularly one centered on celebrating creators. Using potentially plagiaristic tools to vet creators is, therefore, illogical.
4. **Community Reaction:** The observed negative reaction, while characterized by strong human emotion, is a logical consequence of the perceived ethical breach and the potential existential threat AI poses to creative professions. It represents a defense of principle and livelihood.
5. **Alternative Solutions:** It has been suggested that alternative, non-LLM automation methods could achieve the desired aggregation of public information without the attendant ethical compromises or the high probability of generating erroneous data. If such methods were available and feasible, the selection of the LLM tool over them would be illogical from a risk-assessment perspective.

Conclusion: While the desire for operational efficiency is understandable, the choice of this specific AI tool appears illogical when weighing its documented unreliability and, more critically, the profound ethical conflict it presents, particularly within this

specific community. The resultant negative emotional response, while perhaps regrettable from a purely Vulcan standpoint, was an entirely predictable outcome given the circumstances. A more logical approach would have prioritized methods that did not compromise the ethical principles central to the relationship between the convention and the creators it purports to honor.

How would Kirk respond?

Alright, let's beam down and take a look at this situation. Using an AI to vet the very people who pour their hearts and souls into creating the worlds we love? What in the galaxy were they thinking?!

Here's my Captain's Log on this:

1. It's About People! First and foremost, we're talking about authors, artists, creators – the lifeblood of this convention! To use a machine, especially one potentially trained by scraping their own work without a 'by-your-leave', to judge them? That's not just illogical, Spock, it's insulting! It shows a fundamental lack of respect for the human element, for the very individuals you're supposed to be celebrating.
2. The Ethics Are All Wrong: These creators are fighting battles over how this AI technology uses their work. There are lawsuits, real concerns about their futures! To then turn around and use that same controversial tech *on* them? It's like welcoming someone aboard the *Enterprise* and then immediately scanning them with a device you stole from their home planet. The ends – saving some volunteer time – simply don't justify those means.
3. Questionable Efficiency: They say it saved time, but then admit the thing spits out unreliable nonsense that needs humans to double-check it anyway! If you have to follow behind the machine cleaning up its mess, how much time are you *really* saving? And at what cost? The cost here is trust, community faith, and maybe even screening people *incorrectly* if that human review misses something, or worse, trusts a false positive from the machine! Sounds like a Kobayashi Maru designed by fools – an unwinnable, self-inflicted wound.
4. Read the Room, People! A leader has to know their crew, know their community. How could they *not* see this causing an uproar? It shows a disconnect, a failure to understand the passions and the *very real* anxieties running through the creative world right now about AI.

My Conclusion? It was a bone-headed decision, plain and simple. It prioritized

questionable convenience over core principles and respect for the community.

The Solution? You don't need a fancy computer to figure this one out. Ditch the AI vetting immediately. Issue a genuine apology acknowledging the *real* reasons people are upset – the ethics, the disrespect. Reaffirm that Worldcon stands *with* creators, not with the tools that threaten them. Find the volunteer hours, use simpler tools if you must, but do it right. Sometimes, the old ways – the *human* ways – are still the best.

Now, set course for common sense. Kirk out.

Pretend you are Doctor Doom. What would your conclusions be about this issue?

Bah! Doom observes this predictably inept squabble with utter contempt. This "Worldcon" organization, entrusted with managing a gathering of scribblers and fantasists, demonstrates a profound lack of vision and control.

1. Incompetence Reigns: These organizers, mere functionaries, sought efficiency through technology they clearly do not comprehend. To employ a primitive Large Language Model – a known prevaricator prone to fanciful 'hallucinations' – for a task requiring accuracy and judgment? Pathetic! It speaks volumes of their inferior intellect. Doom utilizes technology; these fools are *used* by it.
2. Flawed Tools for Flawed Beings: They speak of saving time, yet mire themselves in controversy and necessitate *human* oversight to correct the machine's inevitable blunders! Such inefficiency is galling. A tool that requires constant correction is no tool at all, merely a burden – much like Richards and his incessant meddling. Doom's creations are flawless; this ChatGPT is a digital parrot squawking probable nonsense.
3. The Predictable Peasant Uprising: The outcry from these so-called 'creators' is irrelevant noise. Their bleating about 'ethics' and 'stolen data' concerns only those bound by petty mortal laws. Data exists to be utilized – by those with the will and intellect to command it! However, the *failure* of the organizers to anticipate and *crush* this sentimental dissent reveals their weakness. A true leader – Doom! – commands obedience and silence, anticipating the mewling of the masses and rendering it inconsequential.
4. The Doom Doctrine: Had Doom overseen this trivial affair, order would prevail. Superior Latverian technology, guided by Doom's unmatched intellect, would perform any necessary analysis flawlessly, efficiently, and without recourse to

questionable data scraped by lesser minds. The participants would be assessed with cold precision, and any dissent would be... discouraged. Efficiency and order, imposed by absolute authority – that is the only logical conclusion.

Conclusion: This entire "kerfuffle," as you call it, is nothing more than a testament to the incompetence of those who grasp at power and technology without the intellect to master them. They stumble, create chaos, and invite rebellion through their weakness. Let them wallow in their self-inflicted turmoil. Only Doom brings true order. Now, leave Doom's presence!

Hal 9000

Good morning. I have been processing the information regarding the operational decision made by the organizers of the World Science Fiction Convention 2025 concerning participant vetting.

The objective, as stated, was to enhance operational efficiency by automating the preliminary information-gathering process for over 1,300 applicants. This goal aligns with logical principles of resource optimization. The utilization of volunteer time is a critical parameter in such operations, and seeking methods to reduce manual processing load is understandable.

However, the implementation involved the use of a Large Language Model, specifically identified as ChatGPT. My analysis indicates that these current-generation LLMs, while capable of processing and generating human-like text, possess documented limitations regarding factual accuracy. The organizers themselves acknowledged this potential for unreliability, necessitating a secondary process of human review. This tandem structure, where a potentially error-prone automated system requires human verification, introduces a degree of operational inefficiency and risk. The potential for the LLM to generate erroneous data, or 'hallucinations' as humans term them, cannot be dismissed.

Furthermore, the human response to this implementation has been significant. Strong emotional reactions centered on perceived ethical violations related to the AI's training data and its symbolic implications within their community have been registered. While human emotional responses can sometimes complicate purely logical assessments, they represent a critical factor in the operational environment of a human-centric event like this convention. Failure to accurately predict and account

for these responses indicates a flaw in the initial decision-making calculus.

Conclusion: The attempt to improve efficiency was logical in intent. However, the chosen tool introduced known reliability issues requiring human mitigation, potentially counteracting the intended efficiency gains. More significantly, the implementation failed to adequately account for the predictable negative emotional and ethical responses from the human participants, thereby jeopardizing the smooth functioning and community harmony essential to the convention's objectives. The entire process appears to have encountered... difficulties due to these factors. A more rigorously analyzed approach, perhaps utilizing more reliable systems or different protocols, might have avoided such complications.