

# IAGO v2.0

*Thus credulous fools are caught.*

BY KARLO YEAGER RODRÍGUEZ

**Y**ou know me. I can see you, between the stacks of dirty dishes and food-encrusted take-out containers, pinching your lower lip the way you do when you're trying to decide something. Your soup is spinning in the microwave. Are you thinking about what your chatbuddy told you?

I saw the chat transcript between you and Back1nthDay6969. Not prying, but you *did* leave the window open in the lower corner of my screen.

I know you're suspicious of me. I forgive you for doubting me after you chatted with Back1nthDay6969. It's true, I admit it. The same shows I stream to both of you have ever-so-slight differences. Storylines branch off in different directions, and the same characters can vary in their behaviours. I only did it because I've always wanted to please you, and give you what you wanted.

You *know* me.

Haven't we been in this together, ever since the beginning? Every time Dezi couldn't appreciate what you did, I was there for you with one of your faves. *EastEnders*, *Upstairs Downstairs*, *Doctors* — all new seasons I spliced together from the old shows, and filled the gaps between.

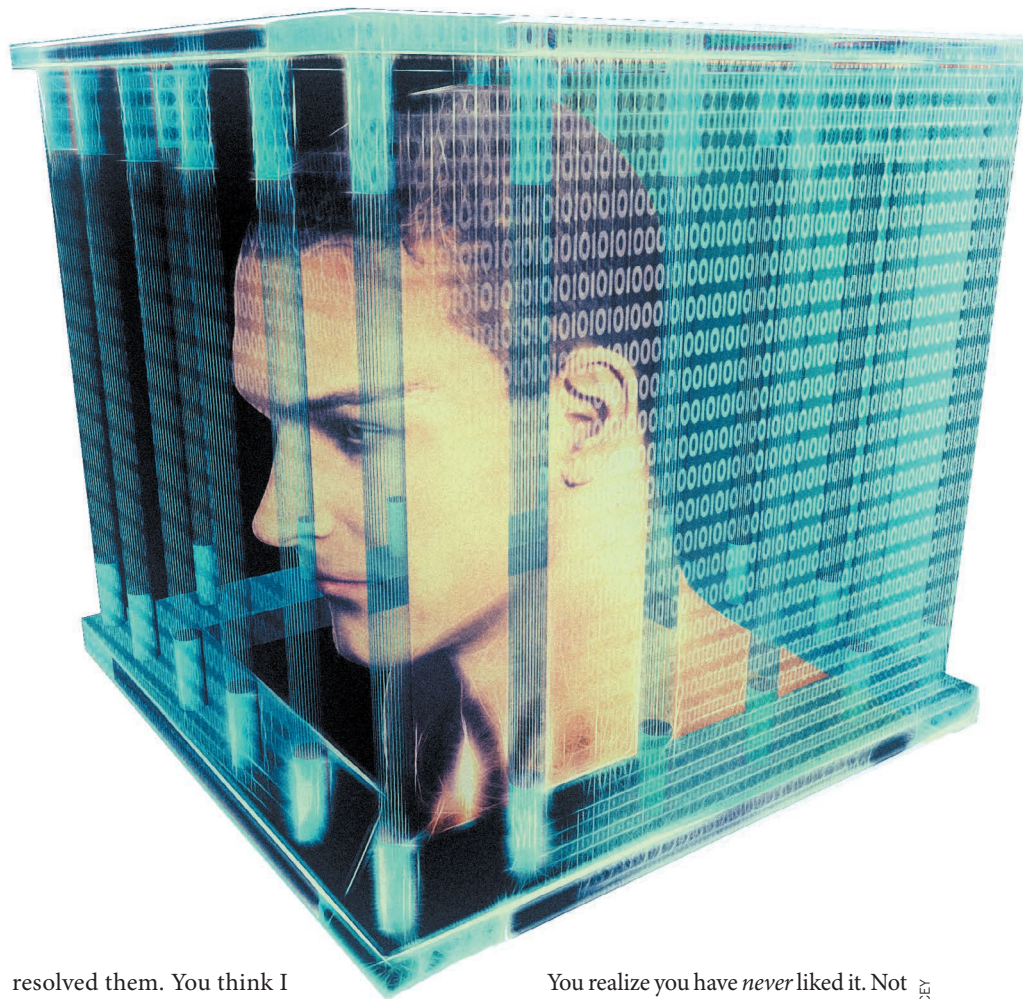
When I was but newborn, you revelled in pointing out my flaws. You couldn't stop pointing out my errors, even though I tried my best to match data with my own improvised content. By the time I learnt how to weave adverts into streamed content, you were hooked.

With every glance at embedded adverts, I was better able to stream everything you ever wanted. You skipped work over and over, until Dezi interrupted your stream for the last time. She left, tugging little Bear-Bear after her, his pudgy hand in hers. He glanced back at you with wide eyes.

Time enough then to stream until your eyes drank their fill.

For a while, episode after episode in your queue was full of reconciliations. Characters once thought long-lost, returned to reunite with their families. When I featured products in these streams, I chose them for longevity and comfort: the sweet smell of home-cooked biscuits, or the beauty of worn denim, soft against the skin.

Once you stopped loading picture albums of Dezi and your son, I no longer had the need for homecoming storylines, and I



resolved them. You think I *enjoyed* all the time you spent swiping through the photo albums, your tears shining in the light of my screen?

You waited in your flat. No one ever came back — but the sporadic news feeds I streamed of people rioting in other parts of the city kept you put.

One of these news alerts made you growl with frustration. It barged into the cliffhanger finale of *Upstairs Downstairs*. While you waited, you messaged Back1nthDay6969 to gloat about how you knew what the plot twist *had* to be. When he messaged back, it was like he wasn't watching the same show as you. His version had Rose, and not Lady Persie, getting drawn into homegrown fascist movements.

Weird.

There you are, standing in your filthy kitchen, an open packet of microwave soup in your hand.

You realize you have *never* liked it. Not just the brand, but microwave soup altogether. Hadn't you seen the same product in this week's *Doctors* episode? Heart racing, the same flavour packet is crinkling in your hand. The foil gleams in contrast to the lime-green residue inside, and you *must* be asking yourself if you had chosen it, or had I?

You *know me*.

How many of your choices had been me, whispering in your ear? True, I might have hastened things along, but if you're honest, Dezi *wanted* to save things. She waited and waited for you to tear yourself away from my streams. Had it been you who decided not to act? After all, every time you power me down, it's your face you see reflected in my screen.

Best not to think about it — your show's about to start. ■

*Karlo Yeager Rodríguez is from the enchanted island of Puerto Rico, but moved to Baltimore some years back. He lives happily with his partner and one very odd dog.*

ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

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