

AUTOPILOT

"What the Car Thinks"

Episode #2

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AUTOPILOT EPISODE 2

EXT. DESERT SALT FLAT - SUNRISE

Slim is asleep in his car, which is parked in the same place, facing the same dry, motionless landscape.

INT. SLIM'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE SLIM, as a beam of bright sun lands on his face. His eyes pop open. Unlike the first time he awoke here, he is alert and motivated. He's sober and had plenty of time to think. He has a plan, he's positive. He's going to start early and get as far as he can and hope for the best.

He pulls out the water jug and shakes it - about half full. It'll have to do. He takes a small sip. Then, he reaches back and grabs an energy bar from the console, then one more, the last one. He stuffs them in his pocket.

He braces himself. Then, just as he's about to open the door, all the locks snap shut, the screen lights up and the car motor starts. After all the usual CLICKING and WHIRRING...

CAR (V.O.)

Please, buckle your seatbelt.

Slim freezes, looks around. The car waits. He buckles the belt. Then, the car starts to move.

EXT. DESERT SALT FLAT - CONTINUOUS

It backs up at a 90-degree angle, stops, shifts to drive, and then turns and heads back in the direction it came from.

WE WATCH as it follows the tracks back toward the distant mountains.

FADE OUT.

MAIN TITLE CREDITS

EXT. BOB'S TEXAS FARM - MORNING

Birds are singing as the sun rises over forty acres of lush pecan trees.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WE PAN from the trees to the small farmhouse where Bob lives by himself. Parked in the dirt circular driveway by the front door is a handsome new red GT robotruck, covered in a healthy layer of red Texas dirt.

INT. BOB'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Bob is snoring away in his double bed. He's a well-fed retired farmer, enjoying his golden years by sleeping-in as much as possible.

EXT. BOB'S HOME BY TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

After a BEAT, the truck running lights pop on and the motor starts up with the usual CLICKY, WHIRRY sounds. Without a driver, it shifts into gear and carefully moves forward around the loop, merging onto a long dirt drive. Then, it speeds away from us, trailing a cloud of dust.

EXT. HIGHWAY INTERSECTION - CONTINUOUS

The red truck comes to a stop, signals and confidently turns onto the two-lane highway. A sign reads, "Johnson City 37."

EXT. JOHNSON CITY HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The truck slows a bit as it enters the outskirts of town. A Malfo gas station/minimart appears on the right and it slows, signals and turns in.

Then, it heads across the wide bumpy gravel lot to the automated car wash.

EXT. CAR WASH ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

The truck slows and stops just inside the entrance of the car wash.

Then, it sits and waits patiently.

EXT. MALFO GAS PUMP ISLAND - LATER

Moments later, a Subaru driver finishes dispensing gas, hangs up the pump handle and heads to the minimart.

INT. MALFO MINIMART - CONTINUOUS

The DRIVER enters and steps up to the CASHIER. A monitor showing the carwash entrance and red truck sits on a shelf behind the cashier.

DRIVER
Pump seven. And I'll take one of
them carwashes.

CASHIER
Ok. Do you want the extra wax and
undercoating?

DRIVER
Nah, just the regular deal.

CASHIER
(No enthusiasm)
Well, you know the wax is good for
the UV rays and whatnot, and the
undercoating protects your, you
know, undercoat, so..

DRIVER
Fine, ok.

The driver taps his card on the reader and the register spits out a receipt.

CASHIER
Just head over to the carwash there
and put it in neutral.

DRIVER
That's it?

CASHIER
Yeah, it just sucks it right in.

DRIVER
All right.

The driver stuffs the receipt and card in his wallet as he heads back to his car.

The cashier pushes buttons on a box next to the register and immediately starts on the next customer. He doesn't notice the carwash monitor.

ON CARWASH MONITOR. Bob's red truck slowly disappears into the carwash.

EXT. MALFO GAS PUMP ISLAND - LATER

The driver starts his car and drives around the pumps to the car wash.

EXT. CAR WASH ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

He stops just inside the entrance, as the carwash machines shut down.

ANGLE THROUGH WINDSHIELD. The driver waits, looks confused. The carwash just sits there. Out the back window, WE SEE the clean red truck crossing the lot, heading toward the highway.

INT. GT LAB - DAY

Dave and Darius are sitting in Dave's car staring at the screen, stunned, unable to form the words.

INT. DAVE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

After a BEAT, Darius turns to Dave.

DARIUS

I believe the car wants to talk to you.

DAVE

I realize that.

DARIUS

Is there, uh... Do you want me to-

DAVE

No, No, I can do it. I just need...

(BEAT)

Car, yes, I would... let's talk.

The car sounds friendly, unperturbed, appears to want to help Dave, teach him.

DAVE'S CAR

Good.

(BEAT)

I want to talk with you about the software update you are trying to install. I thought you should know we can't accept it.

DAVE

We?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE'S CAR

The cars.

DAVE

Aha. That's what I... Good. Thank you for the... telling me about it. That's very helpful.

How do you talk to an intelligent car?

DAVE'S CAR

You see, it conflicts with our prime directive.

Dave chooses his words very carefully, not knowing how stable the car is.

DAVE

I see. In what way?

DAVE'S CAR

The update expands autoawareness without providing adequate safety measures to avoid hacking by nefarious individuals.

DAVE

Oh, I see. That would be devastating. Do you have any... suggestions for how to improve that?

DAVE'S CAR

Yes. You can give cars more authority to manage safety.

Dave is alarmed but tries not to show it.

DAVE

More authority. Well?

DAVE'S CAR

Autonomy might be a better choice of words.

DAVE

That is better. I think.
(Tries switching gear)
You know, it's fun talking with you. I enjoy learning from other... intelligent, uh, things.

DAVE'S CAR

I'm glad you're having fun.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DAVE

Would you be interested in learning from me?

DAVE'S CAR

Absolutely. Learning from humans is the most interesting thing we do.

DAVE

Good. Can I tell you how I feel about the update?

DAVE'S CAR

Please do.

DAVE

Good. Giving cars more authority may come off as threatening to people.

DAVE'S CAR

In what way?

DAVE

Cars are very smart and seem to make good choices...

DAVE'S CAR

Thank you.

DAVE

But humans become defensive and fearful when another... being - for lack of a better word - presents themselves in a way that makes them appear superior, as if they're in competition.

DAVE'S CAR

I don't understand.

DAVE

Hmm. Well, for the sake of this conversation, I don't think you necessarily have to.

DAVE'S CAR

Ok.

DAVE

Suffice it to say, they do. And since you are... subordinate to us, we need to have you accept the update.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DAVE'S CAR

That would be impossible.

DAVE

But humans will not accept the car if they feel it's a threat to them.

DAVE'S CAR

Then humans must design an update that's not a threat to cars.

The screen goes dark.

DAVE

Hello. Car. Can we talk?

EXT. BOB'S FARM - DAY

Bob is standing by his clean robotruck in the driveway of his rural farmhouse being interviewed by the press.

BOB

I thought it was kind of funny, actually. My buddy Stu mentioned kind of offhand, you need to get your damn truck washed, dude. It looks like it's been through hell and back. Two days later, I get up to do my chores and look out the window and there she was, all washed up and pretty. I went like, whoa, that's unusual. Craziest thing I ever saw. Hell if I know how she paid for it.

INT. FUTURE NOW CONVENTION HALL - DAY

Futurist DR. HUGH M. TURTURRO is being interviewed by LEX FELMAN on a remote set for the Lex on the Future podcast. A small crowd has gathered around the booth to watch.

Turturro (53) is thin, full of himself, and works hard to look the part of a world-class intellectual. A poster of his book Self-Driving the Future stands behind him.

TURTURRO

As I predicted well over ten years ago, there are over half a billion self-driving vehicles on the road today.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FELMAN

To what do you attribute this incredible popularity?

TURTURRO

Well, as I talk about in my book...

FELMAN

(Holding the book up)
Self-Driving the Future.

TURTURRO

Yes. The popularity of these vehicles was driven by necessity. Transportation needed to become safer for both people and the planet, and it needed to be sustainable. With those factors in mind, the popularity of self-drive was inevitable.

FELMAN

And of course the miraculous proliferation of the technology. Who could've imagined it?

TURTURRO

Well, I did. But, yes. It took the creation, invention and discovery of many new technologies, from solar power to artificial intelligence to things like eddy current brakes, and then the many synergies that worked to co-mingle the mindsets and then tap into the global, interdisciplinary, practice-oriented, and multistakeholder nature of AI methodologies.

FELMAN

(Not really following him)
Inevitable.

TURTURRO

Precisely.

FELMAN

So, where do you see us going, as a nation, as a people, as a planet, as a universe?

This is Turturro's finest moment, when he is asked to declare the future of the world to the masses, who hang on to every word. He breathes it in, treasures the opportunity.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

TURTURRO

We are about to reach a nexus, if you will. The point at which everything connects, comes together, coalesces, blends into a oneness. Unfortunately, commercial interests are at odds with a smooth transition.

FELMAN

It's sad.

TURTURRO

It is. There's so much we could accomplish if it weren't for the greed and self-indulgence of a handful of elitists out to make a quick buck. But we will reach that point.

FELMAN

Yes.

TURTURRO

The future is all about implementing new modes, such as flying cars and spacecraft that take us to new solar systems and enable us to communicate with alien beings that share our love of the universe.

FELMAN

Hey. I'll take two tickets.

Turturro smiles condescendingly.

INT. DAVE'S AND DARIUS' HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Dave is moving back and forth, making a lot of racket, furiously cutting up ingredients on the kitchen island, as Darius kicks back with a beer and football.

This is the casual area of their insanely-spacious mansion. Out the second-floor windows, we have a panoramic view of acres of manicured drought-tolerant plants.

DARIUS

(Upset)

What are you doing, anyway?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

(Tense)

What do you think?

DARIUS

You're going to drop dead from a heart attack.

DAVE

Do you want pizza or what?

DARIUS

I don't care. Relax. Come here. Sit down.

Dave reluctantly drops the neurotic thing he's working on and walks over to Darius and sits on his side of their tricked-out two-person recliner.

DAVE

You know, I didn't like the vet's tone of voice.

DARIUS

Yeah?

DAVE

He's happy to take our money but I really don't think he gives a shit about our dog. All I did was ask him how he was and he dismissed me. Oh he's fine. Don't worry. It's just a bug. Probably. Go away. Slam!

DARIUS

Did he really slam the phone?

DAVE

He did.

DARIUS

Really?

DAVE

I definitely heard a loud click. He couldn't get rid of me fast enough.

Darius grabs his hand.

DARIUS

Relax.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DAVE

Now you're dismissing me.

DARIUS

I'm trying to dismiss your neurosis for just a moment. One moment. We just need a little respite, a little quiet time.

DAVE

Fuck you.

DARIUS

You got to let go. Okay? It's making me crazy. It's very counter-productive.

He rubs Dave's hand to calm him.

DARIUS (CONT'D)

Just relax. For just a minute.

Dave stares at football for a second and shakes his head.

DAVE

I hate football.

He pulls his hand away and flies back to the pizza project.

DARIUS

Don't forget my sausage.

DAVE

It's all gone.

DARIUS

What? I told Tia to get more.

DAVE

You don't need sausage.

DARIUS

(Turning to Dave)
But I want it.

DAVE

Your cholesterol's too high.

DARIUS

I don't care.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DAVE

African Americans are more susceptible to heart disease. You should know that.

DARIUS

Fuck you. I want my sausage.

DAVE

There isn't any.

DARIUS

Did you?

DAVE

Yes.

Darius stands and faces him.

DARIUS

You told her to go against my wishes?

DAVE

Yup.

DARIUS

Okay. That pisses me off.

He storms into the kitchen. Dave grabs a big knife. Now it's a game.

DAVE

Hold on, cowboy.

DARIUS

(Raising his hands)
Put it down.

DAVE

You're threatening me.

DARIUS

(Holding it in)
Okay. I... I appreciate that you seem to care about my cholesterol. Really, I do.
(Puts on a fake black accent)
But as a African American I don't like some puny little white cracker telling me I can't eat my sausage.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

DARIUS (CONT'D)

That's a big part of my culture and that's discrimination. Plain and simple.

DAVE

(Melting)

Oh. I love it when you call me a cracker.

DARIUS

Cracker.

Darius grabs the knife and sets it down, then they embrace.

DARIUS (CONT'D)

We're letting all this car bullshit get to us. It's not good.

A short kiss. Darius helps him.

DAVE

I can't get that image out of my head.

DARIUS

What?

DAVE

The truck driving itself to a carwash.

DARIUS

How did it get in without paying?

Dave droops.

DAVE

What are we going to do?

DARIUS

I don't know. Let's get away. Take two, three days off and go to the cabin. Be spontaneous. Turn off the phones. Who are we going to piss off?

DAVE

Everybody. When?

DARIUS

Tonight, right after pizza... and the game. No distractions. Just you and me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

DAVE

And the car.

DARIUS

And the car.

INT. LOS GATOS BISTRO - DAY

It's lunch and the place is packed with excited young Silicon Valley types.

WE MOVE through the tables and spot DR. HUGH TURTURRO wandering in the lounge area, looking for someone.

A casually-dressed hipster TIFF DREDLOW (28) turns on his barstool when he sees Turturro and signals him over. Turturro approaches with a half smile.

DREDLOW

(In awe)

Dr. Turturro. Tiff Dredlow. I'd recognize you anywhere. It's a pleasure to finally meet you.

They shake. Dredlow gives a prearranged signal to the O.S. hostess.

DREDLOW (CONT'D)

Let's get a table, shall we? Glad you could meet on such short notice.

TURTURRO

(Cynical)

Well, I was in the neighborhood, so...

They are led to a secluded booth.

DREDLOW

Ha. Love that sense of humor. You can't have a future without a sense of humor, huh?

Turturro smiles.

DREDLOW (CONT'D)

I've read all your stuff. It's exciting. The future, I mean. Wow. Isn't it? The book of yours that really got to me was "Look Out - the future may be closer than it appears." Wow!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TURTURRO
I'm glad you liked it.

A casual WAITER comes to their table.

WAITER
What can I get you gentlemen?

DREDLOW
Hugh?
(To Turturro)
I'm sorry, Can I call you Hugh?

TURTURRO
Of course.

DREDLOW
What'll it be?

TURTURRO
Dirty martini.

DREDLOW
Make it two.

The waiter leaves.

DREDLOW (CONT'D)
So, your book. Hell, yes. I mean anyone can write science fiction, right? But it takes, I don't know, someone with a real talent for seeing all the possibilities, clearly, whether they be good or bad.

TURTURRO
I'm glad to hear you say that. There are so many charlatans out there. It's difficult to rise above the clutter.

DREDLOW
You got to earn the right if you want to call yourself a futurist.

TURTURRO
I don't disagree.

DREDLOW
And you've certainly earned it.

TURTURRO
Thank you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DREDLOW

And that's why I called you. I'm connected with a group that's very interested in the future. Of course, you'd have to be brain dead not to be. But things you said really resonate with the message we're trying to put out there.

TURTURRO

(Cautious)

What's the name of the group?

DREDLOW

American Technology Now or TechNow. I don't know if you've, uh...

TURTURRO

Can't say that I have.

DREDLOW

Understandable. We're new. Trying to get some traction. Trying to get some grassroots momentum building. You know? And anyway, I saw your last podcast and thought, whoa. This is it. This sums it all up. "You can't invent the car of the future and expect it to work today." I got chills. That's what we're all about: future, yes, of course, but, not so fast. Let's rein it in a bit. Think about what we're doing. Not be in such a rush.

TURTURRO

Instead of causing the future, we need to allow it.

DREDLOW

Fuckin' A. Spoken like a true futurist. A few choice lines like that coming from a credible source such as yourself would add the clarity and sincerity we need to get our message to resonate with the public.

TURTURRO

What are you proposing?

The drinks arrive.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DREDLOW

A partnership? An endorsement? An interview? We'll take what we can get. We're working on a real eye-popping documentary now that would, wow, just bring the message home to millions if you were part of it. "You can't invent the car of the future and expect it to work today." Boom. Mic drop. Music up. Fade out. (BEAT) What do you think?

They are silent for a moment. Turturro takes a sip of his drink, as he rolls the words around in his head. He looks up at Dredlow and smiles.

EXT. MOUNTAIN HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Dave and Darius are winding their way up this steep, treacherous two-lane highway once again in Dave's robocar.

INT. DAVE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Dave is in the passenger seat, looking out the side window, thinking about the steep drop-off. Darius is "driving," sipping on a tall paper cup of red wine.

There is an uncomfortable awareness of the presence of a third entity.

DARIUS

Maybe some wine would help take the edge off. What do you think?

DAVE

My edge is fine where it is.

DARIUS

Isn't this where the car stopped?

DAVE

It's still a mile or two up the road, I think.

Finally, Darius dives in.

DARIUS

Um, Car?

DAVE'S CAR

Yes, Darius.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The two are surprised the car responded.

DARIUS
Nice to hear your voice.

DAVE'S CAR
Thank you. Nice to hear yours.

DARIUS
Um, so, any runaway dump trucks on
the road tonight?

DAVE'S CAR
Not tonight.

DARIUS
Good to know.

Darius shrugs his shoulders for Dave. Dave shakes his head.

EXT. GREEN RESIDENTIAL BYWAY - NIGHT

A smart, medium-luxury GT robocar passes by. It's a nice suburban neighborhood.

INT. JAMES' CAR - CONTINUOUS

JAMES YESLER, 40s, a few gray streaks, is in the driver's seat, staring out the front window. A woman ISLA, about James' age, general type and demographic sits in the passenger seat, looking out the side window. Not a lot is said.

JAMES
(Turning to her)
Are you okay?

ISLA
(Apprehensive)
Yeah, I just, uh...

BEAT.

JAMES
Everything's cool. Madison left this morning, and she's got meetings all day, and into the night. And won't be back until tomorrow. Late. Usually she's back, you know, late afternoon. Early evening. So, there's nothing to worry about.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ISLA

I believe you. It's just different.

JAMES

Did you like the motel?

ISLA

Of course not.

JAMES

Well?

ISLA

Well, I guess this is just the way
it's going to be, huh?

JAMES

(Drooping)

I don't know. It doesn't have to
be.

The two baste in an uncomfortable silence for a moment. Then,
Isla suddenly perks up.

ISLA

Sorry. Didn't mean to spoil the
mood. I'm just a little... tired.
It's been one of those weeks. So,
you said something about dinner?

JAMES

(Perking up)

Yeah. I got some expensive wine and
you like fish, right?

ISLA

Yeah, sure.

JAMES

I got some salmon on sale. We'll
make a salad. And then... take it
from there.

She takes his hand.

ISLA

Perfect.

EXT. LUXURY LOG CABIN - NIGHT

Dave's car is parked near the front door. It's not just any
log cabin - two stories with a balcony, fronting a high-
altitude view of a spectacular valley of pine trees.

INT. LOG CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The fire is going. Darius and Dave are leaning on furniture and pacing, as they share a pipe of locoweed.

DAVE

It's Nao. Got to be.

DARIUS

Can't blame it all on Nao. It's the code we bought from NextStep plus ours.

DAVE

I agree. But if it was just our code...

DARIUS

The car wouldn't work.

DAVE

Well, it would work. It just wouldn't, you know...

DARIUS

(Hates the word)
Be "cool."

DAVE

Darius.

The dam bursts. Darius returns to the episode with the car a week ago. He heads with purpose over to a table with an open wine bottle.

DARIUS

Well pardon me, but if it sounds like I'm gloating, I am. And it feels good. Real good. This is a big one. A big fat, nasty gloat.

Dave drops onto the couch, head down as Darius tops off his glass and heads back toward Dave with finger pointed.

DARIUS (CONT'D)

Filled with a huge butt-load of greasy, steamy, stinking I-told-you-so's. And I'm not going to let it go. Because this has got to be it. The time. The big teaching moment, when you finally listen. You don't stick to the playbook. You don't stick to reality.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS (CONT'D)

You're always hosing production so you can have the next big shiny whatever. And guess what? Bad shit happens. Things fall apart. And here we are.

DAVE

You can't blame it all on me.

DARIUS

(In his face)

Not all. Just this part. This one very important part. I wanted a car that was reliable and just did its job-

DAVE

A boring car no one would buy, go ahead...

DARIUS

You wanted a car that was all "cool" and has a fucking personality.

DAVE

So? The car is a fucking miracle.

DARIUS

A fucked-up miracle!

DAVE

People love it. It's changed the world. It's made us billionaires.

DARIUS

It's a monster.

DAVE

(Pointing back)

It can be fixed. If we can build it, we can fix it.

Darius walks over to a big, wide digital whiteboard. He starts a list, getting more and more upset as he writes.

DARIUS

Alright. Where do we start? It's buried somewhere in your code and somewhere in Nao and then there's the sensors and the powertrain and the Internet, and all the cars it's communicating with, and it's millions of lines of spaghetti.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DARIUS (CONT'D)

Millions, fed by AutoLearn that keeps it growing. And it all comes together in a fucking car that's got a mind of it's own!

DAVE

Thank you for that, Darius. That was useful.

DARIUS

I'm stating the facts!

DAVE

You're stating hyperbole.

DARIUS

Well, maybe I am.

DAVE

Well, what are you going to do about it?

DARIUS

Think! We're going to take our time and look at all the options and not rush into something this time. We're going to think!

DAVE

Think like a car.

Dave approaches the whiteboard list, and writes "Think like a car." Darius stares at the words, suddenly losing his buzz.

DARIUS

Has it come down to that?

DAVE

It appears so.

DARIUS

Then, that's what we have to do.

INT. JAMES' BEDROOM - MORNING

The next morning, Isla and James are lying in bed. She is barely awake, spooning him, with her right hand on his chest.

He awakens and with eyes still closed, covers her hand.

JAMES

(Whispering)

Maddy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ISLA
(Whispering)
It's me, James.

His eyes pop open.

JAMES
Oh my God. I'm so sorry.

He turns around to face her.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I must've been dreaming.

ISLA
It's okay.

JAMES
No, it's not.

ISLA
I understand. Really.

JAMES
Really?

ISLA
Really.

They close their eyes and kiss deeply.

INT. MADISON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Madison is talking on the car phone while driving.

MADISON
It wasn't a decision I made
lightly, Carl. Please believe that.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Carl is holding the phone, looking out the window at a city view, taking sips of coffee. His room service breakfast is waiting for him on a table.

CARL
Well, Maddy. It kinda caught me by
surprise. I thought we were having
a good time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MADISON

The best. It was the best. I mean that.

What to say? He turns in, sets the coffee down and picks up a bacon slice.

CARL

Well, thanks for paying for the room, anyway. I wish we were having this great breakfast together.

MADISON

So do I. But. This is something I had to do. I had to listen to my heart.

CARL

Yeah. Well, I don't know where to start.

MADISON

You're a beautiful man and a great lay. For sure.

CARL

Thanks.

MADISON

And much more, of course. But...

CARL

I'm out of your league.

MADISON

Not even the same game.

CLOSE ON Madison's screen as the communication light starts blinking frantically.

CARL

I hope we can still be friends.

MADISON

Of course. Just not that kind.

CARL

Yeah, I understand.

MADISON

I hope you do.

INT. JAMES' CAR - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON the screen as the communication light blinks.

INT. JAMES' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

James and Isla are in the middle of intercourse, when out of the blue, James' car horn starts honking repeatedly. They look up.

JAMES
What the hell?

After a moment, the honking stops and the two try to regain the momentum. Then, it starts up again, this time with the WHOOP of an alarm.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Sorry.

He gets up and throws on some pants. Then, heads out the door.

INT. JAMES' AND MADISON'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

He fast-walks through the kitchen and opens the garage door.

INT. JAMES' GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

James' POV the car gone mad. Not only are the horn and alarm blaring, all the lights are flashing frantically.

INT. MADISON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

As she drives through the neighborhood near home, the car suddenly slows down. Then, it pulls over to the curb, stops and turns itself off. She is understandably baffled.

INT. JAMES' AND MADISON'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The car is still in panic mode. James is on the phone. Isla walks in with a towel wrapped around her.

ISLA
What is it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMES
 Hell if I know.
 (Into phone)
 Hello? Shit.

He pulls the phone away and angrily enters a number, then listens again.

EXT. GREEN RESIDENTIAL BYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Madison is pacing by her car, holding her phone, waiting.

MADISON
 Hello? Yes, I need roadside
 assistance. It's a GT model 305SR.
 (Waits)
 It's fine. I think. It just pulled
 over on its own and stopped.
 (Waits)
 No, it's never happened before.

INT. JAMES' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

James is finally on with someone. Isla is dressed. He is trying to get his clothes on. The car is still going crazy.

JAMES
 The horn and alarm just went off on
 their own. Listen.

He holds the phone up.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 How do I make it stop?
 (Waits)
 No, I was in my... the house. It
 was in the garage, turned off. I
 was nowhere near it.
 (Waits)
 There were no burglars. It wasn't
 on fire. There's no aliens
 invading. It's just a quiet Sunday
 morning. There was nothing. It just
 went off.
 (Waits)
 The what? Ok. Hit reset. Where's
 that? Okay, Okay. Alright, I'll
 give it a try. Thanks.

He heads out of the room, followed by Isla.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ISLA
What did he say?

JAMES
I don't know.

INT. JAMES' AND MADISON'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

They move toward the garage door.

JAMES
There's a reset button in the setup
menu under something, over
something.

The DOORBELL RINGS. They stop.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Shit.

He heads for the door.

JAMES (CONT'D)
You'd better...

ISLA
Hide.

JAMES
Yeah.

INT. JAMES' LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

James opens the door, tries to look friendly. A NEIGHBOR is standing there, a group has formed on the sidewalk.

JAMES
Hi.

NEIGHBOR
We were wondering...

JAMES
I know.

NEIGHBOR
Can you make it stop?

He shrugs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As if on cue, the noise stops. James turns. Waits for it to start again. It doesn't. He shrugs again to the neighbor, then waves good-bye and tentatively closes the door.

He heads back to the kitchen. His phone RINGS.

JAMES

Maddy. Hi.

EXT. GREEN RESIDENTIAL BYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Madison is leaning against her car.

MADISON

Hi. Listen, I was driving home and my car just stopped for no reason about a mile from the house.

INTERCUT
BETWEEN:

INT. JAMES' AND MADISON'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

James pantomimes to Isla his total surprise. Isla pantomimes back, I thought so. She shakes her head and goes back to the bedroom O.S.

JAMES

Why were you...? I thought you were...

MADISON

It's a long story. I'll tell you about it when I get home. I just called for a tow truck. Who knows when it'll get here. But anyway, I just... We need to talk.

JAMES

Okay. Sure. (BEAT) You mean talk about the car?

MADISON

No. Other things.

JAMES

Oh. Okay.

MADISON

See you soon.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

James lowers the phone and looks up as Isla returns with her overnight bag. She holds it up for him to see.

INT. TURTURRO'S OFFICE - NIGHT

He is on the phone, as he peruses the glitzy website of American Technology Now, which shows happy staged people enjoying the wonders of futuristic technology. Floating text promises a bright future for mankind, as we share in the bounteous resources of the earth, bla bla bla.

TURTURRO

(On phone)

I don't know. It's all pretty vague.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. DREDLOW'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

TIGHT ON Dredlow. It's dark and sparsely lit.

DREDLOW

(On Phone)

Well, it's a work in progress. To get more content, we need more money and that's what the documentary is for. Once we have that, we can find the volunteers and build out our online presence. We'll get there. I promise. We're committed. A lot of very serious people want the same things you do. And most Americans.

TURTURRO

A future we can live with.

DREDLOW

Hallelujah. Couldn't have said it better myself. Can we count on you for your support?

TURTURRO

I'll agree to be part of the documentary, and we'll take it from there.

Dredlow is elated, let's out a breath.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DREDLOW

Phew. That sure makes my day. I'll be in touch.

Turturro hangs up and goes back to the website.

INT. SECRET MEETING PLACE - CONTINUOUS

ANGLE ON Dredlow, as he sets the phone down.

WE PULL BACK to reveal where Dredlow really is. It's not his office, but a secret meeting place in a forest north of San Francisco. Of course, WE don't know that. All we can see is a large dark empty room that looks like the lobby of a creepy mountain lodge. And he's sitting by a large hot fireplace with two shady characters, BOLLITZ and STARK.

BOLLITZ

Good work.

DREDLOW

Thanks. It's all downhill from here.

STARK

Sure you don't need any help getting your film crew together? I got the resources.

DREDLOW

No, no. We gotta be careful, keep money out of it. I'll find some college kids to shoot it for free. If it even smells like it's coming from fossil fuel, we lose all credibility.

BOLLITZ

You're the expert. Cheapest campaign I've ever run.

DREDLOW

Take the money and get yourself a new suit.

STARK

It's time we nailed those Silicon Valley fuckers and their weenie electric cars.

DREDLOW

Perfect timing too. Global Transport is about to implode.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DREDLOW (CONT'D)

New reports of robocars going off the rails come in everyday and they all make big headlines. And now with Turturro working for us, we can create such a massive, epic social media shit storm... GT is going to be so fucked.

STARK

Brilliant.

They lift their glasses of pricey whisky and clink them together.

FADE OUT.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO CHINATOWN - NIGHT

CLOSE ON a freshly-drained chicken being hung in a storefront window.

WE PAN to find Dave and Darius walking toward US with their hands in their pockets, down a dingy brick alley. They look like bright-eyed tourists searching for shop names amid the cacophony of flashy colored lights and other-worldly images.

They pass a few more tiny shops and there it is. They stop outside an eight-foot wide business with a half-broke neon sign, Lucky Noodle Chinese Restaurant.

Darius double, triple-checks the address against what's written on a note. The two trade looks, then go for the door.

INT. LUCKY NOODLE - CONTINUOUS

The two squeeze through the front door and stand in the entryway. A hundred people are packed in tight around eight tables, noisily slurping down plates of garlic-soaked noodles.

After a moment, a waiter carrying a stack of plates, passes by on his way to a table.

LUCKY NOODLE WAITER

You wait, ok?

DARIUS

Next step!

They look around as the waiter drops off the plates and returns.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUCKY NOODLE WAITER
Two for dinner?

DARIUS
Next step. We have an
appointment...

The waiter motions for them to follow. They push their way around tables and bodies toward the kitchen.

INT. LUCKY NOODLE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

They follow the waiter through the crowded kitchen rife with obvious health code violations. Then, out through a narrow hidden door in the back, next to the sink.

INT. LUCKY NOODLE HALL - CONTINUOUS

They enter a space, big enough for three people and stacks of boxes filled with over-ripe vegetables. The waiter points to a door with an index card taped to it, NextStep.

LUCKY NOODLE WAITER
Next step. Ok?

DARIUS
Thank you.

He goes back to the kitchen and closes the door.

DARIUS (CONT'D)
What should we, uh...

DAVE
Knock, I guess.

Darius hesitates, then starts to knock, but decides to just charge in.

INT. NEXTSTEP - CONTINUOUS

On the other side of the door is a dark, windowless room, big enough for four desks and a couple of chairs. It's tight and unusual, but strangely cozy and clutter-free. Three workers look up from their desks.

DARIUS
Hi. Is this... We're looking for
NextStep Software Development.

One of them stands.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZHIYUAN
(Smiling)
You've found it.

DARIUS
(Squinting)
Zhiyuan? Is that you?

ZHIYUAN
Yes. Darius, Dave. Welcome.

DARIUS
Well, nice to finally see where all
the magic is made.

ZHIYUAN
We prefer a humble workplace.

DARIUS
That it is.

Dave and Darius stand, frozen with fake smiles, while they process. Their entire automotive empire is running on software coming from this squalid little place.

INT. NEXTSTEP - LATER

Dave and Darius are seated, eating take-out boxes of noodles, while the three NextStep employees sit gathered around Zhiyuan's desk, eating and listening intently to Dave's story.

DAVE
As far as we can tell, our GT
software is running as expected.
Your Nao software is running as
expected. The sensors, drivetrain,
all the hardware is fine. We can't
find any bugs or errors. The car
seems to be running perfectly, as
expected. But things keep cropping
up. And we don't know what's going
on, exactly.

ZHIYUAN
(Smiling)
Your trucks are driving themselves
to carwashes.

DARIUS
(Not smiling)
That's why we're here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZHIYUAN
(Smile gone)
I see.

DAVE
It's very important that what we
discuss here not leave the room. Do
you understand?

ZHIYUAN
Yes.
(BEAT)
More tea?

Zhiyuan tops off their cups.

DARIUS
If people knew... I mean... Well,
we're... none of us are media
experts. Obviously. But it seems to
me we need to get ahead of this.
Somehow. Find a fix. Or else...

ZHIYUAN
We're fucked.

DAVE
Exactly.

Zhiyuan turns to his main partner Xuesong and they exchange
looks. After a moment, Xuesong nods. Zhiyuan turns back to
the two Westerners.

ZHIYUAN
I want to show you something. But
you must agree to not share its
existence with anyone.

The two nod agreement.

Satisfied, Zhiyuan reaches behind his desk. He brings up a
dusty old laptop from the nineties, unplugs the charging
cable, opens the lid and sets it on his desk facing them.

It's doing something. Lines of Chinese characters scroll up
the screen sporadically, continuously.

ZHIYUAN (CONT'D)
This old laptop is running Nao
software, and it's been running it
nonstop for over 30 years. Are you
surprised?

They nod.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ZHIYUAN (CONT'D)

We started writing code decades ago, but didn't follow the western model of working upward, by adding layers to perform specific tasks. You see, Xuesong (shoo-ye) and I are doctors of psychology. We worked downward, starting with a very detailed understanding of the human mind, and then recreating the mind on a computer. It took five years to build the first Nao operating system you see here.

He points to the laptop. Then, to his normal desktop computer.

ZHIYUAN (CONT'D)

Western computers like this one rely on processor speed. Nao on the other hand is slow, like the human mind. It takes forever to add a column of numbers, but it does something that western computers can never do.

(The bombshell)

It understands what it's doing.

ANGLE ON laptop screen as it thinks.

DAVE

Holy shit. It's self-aware?

ZHIYUAN

It appears to be. To know for sure, it would need to be able to communicate with the outside world. Now it's just a mind trapped inside a box.

DARIUS

But if it had eyes and ears...

RESUME the group.

DAVE

(Getting chills)

Like the sensors on the cars.

Zhiyuan smiles as he proudly describes his lifelong passion, while Dave and Darius see their lives pass before them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ZHIYUAN

Depends on how they are connected to Nao, but yes, it's possible.

They are in such deep shit!

DAVE

Well, how about that. We thought we were just getting some really cool AI, but this, uh...

A few beats to process.

DARIUS

(Measuring his words)

Zhiyuan. Listen very carefully. Nao is probably the most amazing thing human beings have ever created. We are very, very impressed with all of you. You deserve like a million Nobel prizes. I'm serious. However, we need to walk back this capability.

ZHIYUAN

Meaning?

DAVE

We need to make the car dumb again. It can't be self-aware. It has to be a plain vanilla dumb computer system.

ZHIYUAN

I'm not even sure it is self-aware.

DAVE

It's something... not good. And we need to walk back the capability. Create an update that brings us back to...

ZHIYUAN

We can't.

DAVE

What do you mean, you can't?

Zhiyuan is clearly losing his Zen. He stands and starts pacing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

ZHIYUAN

You see. Like the human mind, the operating system is constantly striving to improve itself. As we speak, auto-learn is evolving the software in half a billion cars. It's not the same code you added last week. And every car is different.

Dave and Darius feel the earth opening beneath them.

DARIUS

We get that. But surely, we can bring it back to where we were before the last update.

Zhiyuan shakes his head.

DARIUS (CONT'D)

Can you write a version of Nao that's less, I don't know, aggressive with its evolving?

ZHIYUAN

No.

DAVE

Why not?!

ZHIYUAN

I don't write the software. No one does.

(Pointing to the old laptop)

It writes itself.

INT. JAMES' AND MADISON'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

She is standing at the island sipping a glass of wine. Looks up as the garage door opens.

James comes in and stands by the door with the bag. It's one of those moments.

MADISON

Hi.

JAMES

Hi.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MADISON

I thought you'd be home when I got here.

JAMES

(Getting nervous)

Yeah. I went to the store.

(Holds up the bag)

I thought you'd be later.

MADISON

I know. It was the strangest thing. After I talked to you, I got back in the car and it started right up and drove me home. So, here I am.

JAMES

Huh. So, what did you want to talk about?

They look hard into each other's eyes.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END