

AUTOPILOT

"The Car is Okay"

Episode #1 (Pilot)

REVISED 9-24

Written by

Bill Birney

Copyright 2022, Bill Birney

1134 Al Anderson Ave.
Langley, WA 98260
(425) 890-0391
bill_birney@hotmail.com

AUTOPILOT PILOT (EPISODE 1)

TITLE OVER BLACK

In the years to come, we will see vast improvement in automotive technology.

At the same time, we will see little to no improvement in the human race.

How is that going to work?

FADE IN:

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - LATE NIGHT

The smiling face of a brand-new GT robocar sedan fills the FRAME. It's parked in the dark on a street of middle-class stucco houses somewhere in the LA suburbs.

We hear distant VOICES and MOVE to include three men approaching down the middle of the empty street.

SLIM is stinkin' drunk and hanging on LUKE and OWEN, who are trying desperately to keep him upright and moving.

LUKE
(To Owen)
How you doing?

OWEN
He's getting heavier.

Slim's eyes are closed.

LUKE
Fuck.
(Shouting in Slim's ear)
Hey in there! Wake up! What the hell!

Slim turns his head to the sound, tries to focus.

SLIM
(Slurring badly)
Did I thank you for inviting me to the party-

LUKE
Yes. You weren't invited.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SLIM
It was fucking awesome.

LUKE
I know.

SLIM
It was the most awesome...
(Trails off)

LUKE
Hey! Hey! Hello!

They stop by the sedan. Luke looks him right in the eye.

LUKE (CONT'D)
What color is your car?

SLIM
My car?

LUKE
Yes. The color. What is it?

SLIM
(Trying hard)
Iss beige. A beige, 2035 GT Eco
with custom shit.

LUKE
Beige. Do you know where it
is? Is it on this street?
Help me out here, bud. Do you
know where it is? Listen to
me. Where is it? Your car.
Fuck!

SLIM (CONT'D)
(Mumbling)
Custom rims, tinted windows,
chrome shit... Customized.
Did it all myself. At home. I
got all the shit. I
customized it myself. In my
fucking gararara...

LUKE (CONT'D)
(In his ear)
Hey! Do you see the car?!
(Slim looks at him)
The car. Do you see your car?!

SLIM
Thass it.

They're standing next to it.

OWEN
This is your car? You're sure?

He nods.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

They lean him against the car and somehow unlock and open the door with little help from Slim.

They drop him onto the seat. Owen arranges his legs and buckles the seatbelt, while Luke opens the passenger door and wakes up the touch screen.

CLOSE SCREEN, as the navigation home page comes to life. He touches the destination box and presses H on the keyboard that pops up. HOME spells out in the box, and he presses Start. The screen changes to auto-drive mode.

RESUME the three. Luke and Owen close their doors and the electric motor wakes up. The lights pop on, brakes release and the car makes a few more CLICKY, WHIRRY sounds and its ready.

Slim looks out the driver's window at Owen, who steps back, smiles and tosses Slim a sarcastic salute. Slim smiles and salutes back. Then, the car drives off into the darkness.

INT. SLIM'S CAR - NIGHT

Out the front window past Slim as the car drives confidently, quietly down the empty boulevard. Slim lies back and takes it all in.

EXT. INTERSECTION - CONTINUOUS

HIGH ANGLE, WIDE as the light turns red and the car slows and comes to a safe, comfortable stop.

INT. SLIM'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

On Slim as he waits for the light to change. He begins to nod off, eyes blink closed, then open, then closed. Then, he pries them wide open and makes one last attempt to figure out what's going on in his world. Then, he's out.

EXT. INTERSECTION - CONTINUOUS

The light turns green and the car continues gently through the intersection and beyond.

SLOW FADE OUT.

DESERT SOUNDS

In black, WE HEAR the hot, dry breath of a desert morning - flying bugs, whistles of air.

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. SLIM'S CAR - MORNING

TIGHT on Slim, bleached-out from the morning sun, which has chosen his face to focus all its intensity. He awakens and clenches his eyes tight. What is that? It's bad.

Slowly, painfully he peaks out at the world through narrow slits.

As the truth slowly begins to seep into his alcohol withered brain, his priority shifts from worrying about a body ravaged by a nasty hangover to contemplating the end of time.

EXT. DESERT SALT FLAT - CONTINUOUS

WIDE. Slim's car is parked slap-dab in the middle of nothing. Tire tracks trail behind the car twenty or more miles to a rim of tall rocky hills that surround the flat, dead, empty, salt floor. No trees, no brush and it's getting hotter by the second.

And there sits Slim, staring motionless into his future.

QUICK FADE OUT.

MAIN TITLE CREDITS

INT. DAVE'S GT OFFICE - EARLY MORNING

CLOSE ON DAVE WALKER'S face, as he sleeps crumpled up on his ultra-modern, vegan leather couch. He's 34, seldom exercises, and isn't terribly attractive. But the company he started with his partner DARIUS RICE is climbing the Forbes 500. So, he's okay.

A phone RINGS. After a few more rings, he stirs. His back hurts. He winces. RING, RING. Without opening his eyes, he reaches up and presses a button on his ear piece.

DAVE

Yeah.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS (V.O.)

(On phone)

You got to come down here right
away.

DAVE

What?

DARIUS (V.O.)

(Serious)

He's sick, Dave.

Dave shoots straight up.

DAVE

Sick. How can he be sick? What did
you do to him?

DARIUS (V.O.)

What the fuck. I didn't do anything-

DAVE

(Losing it)

I mean, you know, for him. For Him.
Jesus.

DARIUS (V.O.)

Just get down here.

He slips on his crocs and heads for the door.

He has the corner office, four floors up, with windows facing
sparkly, white, Silicon Valley corporate buildings and fresh,
new landscaping.

DAVE

What are his symptoms?

DARIUS (V.O.)

Not hungry. Tired acting.

The office is modest and crowded with a small desk, meeting
table, and bookshelves jammed with thick technical books and
drawings. A big company logo is framed on the wall - GT (for
Global Transport.)

He opens the sliding glass door into...

INT. GT OPEN OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

WE PULL Dave as he walks briskly through the large, colorful space, filled with cluttered desks and collaboration pods, heading toward the elevators. It's too early yet for most employees.

DAVE
Daycare wouldn't take him?

DARIUS (V.O.)
I didn't even try.

DAVE
Where is he now?

DARIUS (V.O.)
Lying on my couch.

DAVE
I was afraid this would happen.

DARIUS (V.O.)
You were?

DAVE
That place is a fucking hotbed of disease.

DARIUS (V.O.)
I know. But what are we supposed to do?

Dave passes a cube belonging to PARKER, Dave's over-achiever admin. She stops him.

PARKER
Hey Dave. Got a minute?

DAVE
(Rushed)
What's up?

PARKER
I just want to know if you're going to be able to make the bug bash this afternoon.

DAVE
If it's on my calendar...

PARKER
It is.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dave continues walking.

DAVE
Then, I'll try.

PARKER
(Calling after him)
It's important!

DAVE
I know.

PARKER
Seriously!

DARIUS (V.O.)
We have that talk show this
morning, you know.

DAVE
Why do you think I spent the night
in my office again? What are you
doing here so early?

DARIUS (V.O.)
I'm trying to get the car to
install that new camera.

DAVE
Which one?

DARIUS (V.O.)
You know. That Nippon...

DAVE
Oh yeah. Denso something. What's
the problem?

He reaches the elevator and presses the down button.

DARIUS (V.O.)
Fuck if I know.

DAVE
Did you get an error?

DARIUS (V.O.)
7-0-3, incompatible with OS.

DAVE
That doesn't make sense.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DARIUS (V.O.)
I'll tell the car that. Maybe it's
confused.

INT. GT LOBBY HALL - DAY

PULLING Dave as he exits the elevator down the hall away from the impressive lobby with a large GT logo sculpture thing, blinking and spinning.

Off on the side are open doors leading into a large, shiny cafeteria/meeting space.

DAVE
I'm so fucking hungry.

DARIUS (V.O.)
When was the last time you ate?

DAVE
I don't remember.

Dave waves to a few early employees as they pass him, smiling.

DAVE (CONT'D)
When does this cafeteria open?

DARIUS (V.O.)
Ten.

DAVE
I'm firing that fucking food
vendor!

DARIUS (V.O.)
You can't fire them. We just signed
a new contract.

DAVE
They're never open and their food
sucks.

DARIUS (V.O.)
I agree. But you didn't want to pay
more so this is what we got.
Everybody hates them.

DAVE
I don't remember signing any
contract.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS (V.O.)
It was just this last month.

A double glass door opens automatically, as he approaches.

EXT. GT CAMPUS STREET - CONTINUOUS

WE continue PULLING Dave, as he leaves the office building and heads toward a crosswalk leading to a three-story factory building.

He has to wait for some driverless multi-car shuttles to pass, some carrying people, others heaped with boxes and car parts. We can see way down the street past five or six more buildings. Again, the GT logo is everywhere.

DAVE
(Shaking his head)
Oh God. My mind is going.

DARIUS (V.O.)
Me too. Let's go up to the cabin
this weekend.

DAVE
Okay.

DARIUS (V.O.)
And no work talk.

DAVE
Agreed.

DARIUS (V.O.)
Wow, that was, uh...

DAVE
What.

DARIUS (V.O.)
So easy. I was expecting the usual
pushback.

DAVE
Why?

Dave opens the door into the factory building.

INT. GT RESEARCH HALL - CONTINUOUS

PULLING Dave down a narrow industrial hall, with exposed pipes overhead and safety signs plastered all over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS (V.O.)
Because you always push back.

DAVE
No, I don't.

BEAT

DARIUS (V.O.)
Damn.

DAVE
What happened?

DARIUS (V.O.)
The camera crashed the OS.

DAVE
What do you mean crashed?

DARIUS (V.O.)
I mean the screen went blank and
the car shut down.

Dave presses his thumb on a sensor by a door labeled simply, Research. The door snaps open and Dave enters.

INT. GT LAB 1 - CONTINUOUS

PULLING Dave through the large space, filled with lab tables, car parts stacked high, and a GT test car on blocks, missing doors and seats. No one is there this early.

Dave presses a button on his ear piece to hang up.

DAVE
(Calling)
Darius?

Darius pokes his head up from under the hood of the car.

DARIUS
Shhh.

Darius is good-looking, tall, black, wears glasses, Dave's age. He starts poking on the keys of a laptop connected under the hood.

DAVE
(Approaching Darius)
What's wrong?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS
He's sleeping.

Dave looks over his shoulder.

DAVE
Where is he?

DARIUS
On the couch.

Dave heads to Darius's cubicle in the back corner.

DAVE
I assume you tried rebooting it?

DARIUS
Of course. The car just doesn't
like it for some reason.

DAVE
How can a car not like something?

DARIUS
I wish I knew.

Dave steps behind the cubicle wall. There he is on the couch.

DAVE
This isn't good.

DARIUS
Ah. It's just a bug.

ANGLE ON COUCH. It's Shep, a large rescue dog - part doodle,
part something big.

INT. DAVE'S CAR - DAY

Dave is buckled in the backseat, with the dog draped over his
lap. The car (one of his Global Transport robocars) is
driving him, gently and confidently.

He's stroking the dog's side.

CAR (V.O.)
(Friendly, calm female
voice)
Dave. You have a call from work.
It's John Fenderman. Do you want to
take it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE
(To car)
Yeah.

CLICK.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Hi, John. What's up?

JOHN (V.O.)
(On phone)
You going to be in the office
anytime soon?

DAVE
Not really.

JOHN (V.O.)
Well, we got the 4.5 beta ready to
prop. Want me to wait?

DAVE
No, no. Does it have all the buy-
offs?

JOHN (V.O.)
All except yours.

DAVE
I checked it last night. It's fine.
Go ahead and pull the trigger.

JOHN (V.O.)
Okay, then. When will you-

Suddenly, the car SCREECHES to a stop. The seatbelt stops
Dave, but the 200-pound dog nearly flies off his lap.

DAVE
What the fuck!

JOHN (V.O.)
You okay?

ANGLE OUT FRONT WINDOW, as an old guy in an ancient gas-
powered pickup ambles through a red light in front of them.

CAR (V.O.)
Sorry about that, Dave.

DAVE
(Seething)
People.

INT. SLIM'S CAR - DAY

CLOSE on the start button by the steering wheel. Slim reaches in and presses it. Nothing. He presses multiple times. The same.

PAN with his hand to the screen. It wakes up when he touches it. Everything appears normal, except the buttons are greyed out. He tries pressing them anyway. The battery meter shows the charge is good.

ANGLE on Slim. His t-shirt is covering the open side window to keep out the sun, which is rapidly approaching the horizon.

He reaches into the storage space between the back seats, and pulls out an energy bar and a water jug. He stares at the jug, then decides to hold off and puts it back.

He settles back and stares at the motionless landscape.

EXT. DESERT SALT FLAT - DAY

Slim's car, the sun and the endless white floor.

GLOBAL TRANSPORT PR. VIDEO

Exciting MUSIC pulses under SHOTS of the car driving in dramatic, colorful locations, with graphics to support.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

This year's sales are through the roof for the amazing robocars from Global Transport. Today's robocars from GT are all about pure driving pleasure.

The high-end model robocar auto-drives speedily down a straightaway and handily through twists and turns.

Graphics point out the sensors.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Cruise down byways with one or more smart electric engines, powered by a state-of-the-art battery pack and charged by a solar skin painted onto the smooth exterior surface. Internal sensors watch for changes in the drive train.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 External visual and auditory
 sensors, inside and out, watch and
 listen for changes in the
 environment. Add to this lidar,
 GPS, and a proprietary
 communication system that connects
 automatically with vehicles nearby.

Graphic animates integration of the features.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 Then, integrate all this with a
 state of the art AI system and you
 have the total transportation
 package.

MONEY SHOT of a sexy robocar in action with logo animation.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 The robocar is the one technology
 that can solve our transportation
 problems, as well as save our
 planet from the ravages of climate
 change. Simply put, Global
 Transport robovehicles keep you and
 the environment safe, and get you
 where you want to go.

INT. MIA TV STUDIO - DAY

Dave and Darius are guests are on the set of Mia, a light,
 breezy, late morning talk show.

MIA
 So Dave, I've noticed that the
 voice in my robocar isn't like
 those old robot voices you used to
 hear in sci-fi movies.

DAVE
 That's because we give them a
 "personality."
 (Air quotes)

MIA
 (Shocked)
 Personality?

DAVE
 That's what we call it. But of
 course it's not real. It's just
 made to sound real.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS
Don't listen to him. It is real.

DAVE
Darius. We have to talk.

They giggle.

DARIUS
You make it sound like it's one of those robot vacuum cleaners. It's actually very sophisticated.

DAVE
It's AI. It's not real.

DARIUS
But it's damn close.

DAVE
All it does is follow instructions, provide feedback, ask questions.

MIA
What if it disagrees?

DAVE
It can't "disagree." It's a machine.

DARIUS
What Dave means to say is it doesn't "know" what it's doing.

MIA
That doesn't sound very safe.

Mia looks confused.

DARIUS
Only humans can "know" something. The AI program merely performs basic logical operations.

DAVE
Strictly logical. Unlike people.

DARIUS
Most people.

Giggle.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MIA

What does the car do when people ask it to do something illogical?

DAVE

Good question. The AI is governed by something we call the prime directive.

MIA

Oh great.

Laugh.

DARIUS

No, no, no. It's not that bad. It means that any decision or calculation the AI makes must prioritize the safety of people above everything else. Prime directive - safety at all costs.

MIA

So it can't just decide to run over a pedestrian.

DARIUS

Hmm.

MIA

Like if it decides it doesn't like their outfit.

DARIUS

Well, that's extreme, but yes.

MIA

So getting back to my question...

DAVE

Yes. If the car determines that a driver is being unsafe, it immediately corrects the problem.

DARIUS

Like if the driver falls asleep and starts driving over the line, the car steers it back.

DAVE

But if the driver for some reason wants to be unsafe, it may appear the car is in conflict with the wishes of the driver.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DARIUS

And the driver may see that as an error or that there's something wrong with the program, but it's really more like a... difference of opinion.

Laugh. Dave shakes his head.

INT. MATEO'S TRUCK - AFTERNOON

Mateo is driving his hot robotruck on the freeway in rush-hour traffic, in a heated phone conversation with his boss THODE, stuck behind a motor home doing 40 in the fast lane. He's about to snap.

MATEO

So, what's the deal?

THODE (V.O.)

You know what's the deal. We're cutting back. I have to lay off ten guys. Sorry.

MATEO

That's not what it's about and you know it.

THODE (V.O.)

It is what it's about. Talk to the union steward if you have a problem.

MATEO

You think I'm a fuck up.

THODE (V.O.)

I don't have an opinion.

He sees a break and powers into the lane on the right, cutting off a Volvo. HONK. He jets around the motor home and gets back in the fast lane. Then, it's another moron.

MATEO

Bullshit. I showed up late a few times-

THODE (V.O.)

Like everyday. Everyday, Mateo! Every fuckin-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATEO

So what. I work my ass off when I'm on the job and you know it.

THODE (V.O.)

As I say...

A weenie economy car moves in front of him and slows down for no reason. Mateo HONKS, floors the pedal so the truck speeds up menacingly, then slows dramatically when the collision prevention system kicks in.

MATEO

Thode, you've always had this bug up your ass for me. What is it? Why are you always after me? What about Clark or your buddy Dick? I work twice as hard as those guys. Are they getting laid off? Huh?

ON SCREEN a red icon starts blinking.

TRUCK (V.O.)

Collision alert.

RESUME MATEO. The truck is mere inches from the economy car's bumper. The driver flips him off. Mateo HONKS. The driver slows down more.

THODE (V.O.)

Haven't decided. And it's none of your business, anyway. As I say...

MATEO

You got to give me a reason, man. You can't just hand me this shit and walk away.

THODE (V.O.)

Listen, Mateo. I don't have time to get into it with you-

MATEO

Well, get the time, fucker!

THODE (V.O.)

Using that kind of language isn't-

Mateo sees a break to the right and jets into the lane, cutting off another driver. HONK. He's angry and shouldn't be on the road, but here he is.

MATEO

Just tell me why.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

THODE (V.O.)
We have to cut back-

MATEO
Why me?

And here's another guy, a red sporty thing from the 80's. It pisses him off. He floors the pedal and comes to within inches of his bumper.

TRUCK (V.O.)
Collision alert.

He HONKS. HONKS. HONKS. No matter what he does, the morons keep piling on right in front of him. He terrorizes the red car by falling back and speeding up, then falling back and speeding up.

THODE (V.O.)
It's nothing personal. We have to make tough decisions...

MATEO
Go fuck yourself, Thode.

TRUCK (V.O.)
Collision alert.

INT. GT OPEN OFFICE BY CONFERENCE POD - AFTERNOON

Darius and Dave are attending a tense bug meeting with five program managers. Dave is standing, looking over twenty or so bugs listed on a digital whiteboard. Next to it, a big monitor displays a PowerPoint slide with a list of customer complaints.

DAVE
(Points to the whiteboard)
These are bugs.
(Points to the slide)
These aren't. Simple. Bugs are something wrong with the code. These don't point out anything wrong. They're all by design.

CLAIR the usability manager is in a tough spot. The freakin' CEO of the company is questioning her.

CLAIR
I agree. They're usability issues.
But-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

I can't help it if people don't take the time to learn how to use the car.

DARIUS

But what about ease of use. Obviously, people don't find them easy to use at times.

Clair steps over to the slides.

CLAIR

And some of the issues just don't make sense. Like they try to rotate their tires or replace a part and the car screams at them.

DAVE

They're doing it wrong. Read the manual.

CLAIR

A lot of people have said they would like to turn off the safety features...

DAVE

Well, they can't. By design.

CLAIR

(Pointing to other examples)

Several people have said that the car just pulls over and stops for no reason. Or it takes them to the wrong location. Or goes into alarm mode randomly.

Clair steps back when Dave moves in to get a closer look.

CLAIR (CONT'D)

But the overall sense I'm getting, is that the AI makes the cars too... human.

INT. MATEO'S TRUCK

His anger level is increasing and the morons keep piling on in front of him - a whole parade of stupid little cars and their stupid little drivers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

This time it's a beat-up Honda something, which for some reason has chosen Mateo's lane. He terrorizes the Honda, laying back, then flooring the pedal and coming right up to the bumper. Over and over.

The Honda finally gives up and moves over. Mateo floors the pedal and zooms right up to the next moron and starts over again terrorizing an old lady in a Fiat.

Then, he sees a break to the right and speeds around her, again cutting off a smaller car. HONK. HONK.

Mateo has reached the breaking point. He's slamming his fist on the steering wheel, the dash, SCREAMING obscenities and flipping off the world.

It's a semi. He comes up to within inches of the bumper.

TRUCK (V.O.)
Collision alert.

INT. GT OPEN OFFICE BY CONFERENCE POD - CONTINUOUS

CLAIR
The comments sometimes refer to them as crazy people that can't be controlled, hyper children, bad bosses, uh, mentally challenged, you know...

DAVE
Retards.

CLAIR
Well, I wasn't going to say that, but...

DAVE
(Snapping at her)
I can read.

CLAIR
So...

DAVE
They're anthropomorphizing the cars. We can't help that.

She sits.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS

(To Dave)

The 4.5 beta is live now. Are we in trouble?

Dave gets super defensive. He stares at the list, wondering how to react.

DAVE

The vast majority of cars are running fine.

CLAIR

That's true. But...

DAVE

We can't waste our time on a few outlier cases.

CLAIR

Well, there's more than a few. There's actually a pattern.

DAVE

Okay, well. Honestly, I wouldn't waste much time on this. We have 5.0 to worry about.

CLAIR

Should I do more digging? Or...

DAVE

I guess.

(He takes one last look at the slide)

I got to run. Sorry. Thanks for putting this together.

He takes off. Clair turns to Darius. After a couple of beats.

DARIUS

What do you suggest we do?

She shakes her head.

INT. MATEO'S TRUCK

He backs off from the semi and cranks the wheel hard onto the narrow shoulder. He sweeps within inches of the cars on his left, trusting that the AI will protect him.

Faster and faster. He guns the motor - 40, 50, 60. He has no plan.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He's only interested in speed and getting somewhere fast. He's making all the wrong choices now. He knows it, doesn't care and it feels good.

ON SCREEN. It changes to auto-drive mode and flashes.

RESUME MATEO

CAR (V.O.)

Mateo, I switched to auto-drive mode.

MATEO

You what?

CAR (V.O.)

It's for the better.

MATEO

But you can't do that!

He tries the peddles, steering wheel, the controls. Nothing works. He's locked out and the speed continues to increase - 60, 70.

MATEO (CONT'D)

Hey, fucking truck! What are you doing?!

MATEO'S POV out the windshield, a bridge column encroaches into the shoulder ahead. He starts SCREAMING at the truck, pounding on the windows, doors. 70, 80.

EXT. FREEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Mateo's truck hits the column doing 87. The front wraps around it like tin foil in an instant, shoving a handful of slow cars next to it sideways. Then, the batteries erupt in flames.

QUICK FADE OUT.

EXT. FREEWAY ACCIDENT SCENE - DAY

Rush-hour traffic is being routed around the chaotic scene, involving Mateo's truck and heaps of collateral damage. Ambulances, police cruisers, flashing lights. A firetruck is spraying foam on the truck as workers attempt to unbend the cab.

Reporter 2 is doing a live stand-up a safe distance from the clean-up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

REPORTER 2

People die everyday in car accidents. What makes this one unique is that it involved a self-driving car, one with AI software developed by Global Transport; software, that up until now, was thought to be immune from safety issues.

EXT. FREEWAY - DAY

Blurry traffic cam footage shows Mateo's truck approaching on the right shoulder and crashing into the underpass column, then bursting into flames. The cam shakes from the impact. Slow-moving cars next to the truck are swept sideways into adjacent lanes, causing further chaos.

The footage is slowed down and repeated several times.

REPORTER 2 (V.O.)

Evidently, that's no longer the case. As far as anyone knows, the driver Mateo Velazquez is the first person to die as the result of a robovehicle error.

EXT. FREEWAY ACCIDENT SCENE CLOSER - CONTINUOUS

Somehow radical-futurist-blogger DR. HUGH TURTURRO has gained access to the site, and is working his way surreptitiously around workers and debris to get as close as possible to the grizzly scene.

He holds a small camera and narrates as he moves in.

TURTURRO

Do we need any more proof? The GT software that was supposed to provide a completely safe driving experience can and does kill. This wasn't some minor fender-bender. This was no accident. It just went straight into the column at high speed. But why?

He ends on a CLOSE SHOT of the truck front-end accordioned around the column. He turns the camera around to him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TURTURRO (CONT'D)

Why? The software has been running reliably on hundreds of millions of cars for years. What changed? Why all of a sudden do we see something as horrific as this?

He turns to position the truck in the background.

TURTURRO (CONT'D)

The fact is, self-driving cars are evolving. Becoming something only a madman could dream up. This was an intentional act, a willful act of aggression from an advanced mind.

A highway patrol officer comes up from behind him.

PATROL OFFICER 1

Hey, you can't be here. We need to get you back up with the others. Come on.

The CAMERA SHAKES as the officer grabs Turturro's arm and they tussle a bit.

TURTURRO

This is exactly the kind of thing they don't want you to see. But somebody has to do it. Nothing can get in the way. Including the truth!

PATROL OFFICER 1 (CONT'D)

You can't be here. Do you understand? You're in the way. Hello. Earth to nutcase. Move it. Behind the tape. Go!

The officer pulls Turturro back through the crowded scene.

TURTURRO (CONT'D)

We have a right to know what's going on. And I'm going to continue to fight for that right regardless of tremendous pressure from the elite industry and politicians who want nothing more than for you to believe everything is hunky-dory.

PATROL OFFICER 1 (CONT'D)

Hey, come on. Would you turn that damn thing off? Jesus. Just turn it off and get behind the tape with the others.

We HEAR the voice of another officer.

PATROL OFFICER 2 (O.S.)

What's going on?

TURTURRO

This is proof! A picture is a thousand words!

PATROL OFFICER 1

Can you help me get this guy behind the tape?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

And we're doing all we can to get on top of this.

PARKER

Do you want me to write something up? A press release?

BEAT.

DAVE

No. I think we're going to have to talk to them directly.

PARKER

An interview? Press conference?

BEAT.

SOPHIA

Can I say something?

They turn to SOPHIA, the developer lead.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

I'm just a developer, but in my opinion we didn't do anything wrong. As far as we know... I mean this driver may have been on drugs or maybe he tampered with the ECM. We don't know. But we can't just look at one insane event and assume the worst, and allow people like this guy to, you know...

DARIUS

Drive the narrative.

SOPHIA

Yeah.

DAVE

With a bunch of made-up bullshit.

The group responds positively.

SOPHIA

Exactly. I mean, he's telling the world that we're all behind some crazy plot to destroy democracy or something. It's just... we're just...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DARIUS

We just need to fix some software.

INT. WEXLER DELIVERY GARAGE - DAY

It's the gigantic facility where Wexler trucks are stored, loaded and unloaded. Most of them are out for the day, except for around 10, parked side by side near the office.

The door from the office opens and a mechanic Chuck walks out, pushing a cart with a laptop and some tools. He opens the hood of the first truck and connects the laptop to the electronic computer module (ECM).

Then, he steps around to the driver's door and hops in the cab.

INT. WEXLER TRUCK #1 - CONTINUOUS

He starts up the truck and the screen comes on.

ON SCREEN. The usual start-up screen plays, then the Home page loads. After a moment, a message pops up prompting the user to install "Version 4.5 BETA". Chuck presses OK and a progress bar displays, showing that the update is installing. Then, a message says, "Installation Successful".

ON CHUCK. He hops out of the cab, and starts to disconnect the laptop.

ON SCREEN, out of his view, the message changes to "Warning! Version 4.5 BETA is corrupt!" In small text, "Incompatible with current operating system. Do not attempt to install. See administrator".

CLOSE COMMUNICATION ICON (shaped like an antenna). It starts blinking.

INT. WEXLER TRUCK #2 - CONTINUOUS

WIDE DASHBOARD, then MOVE IN CLOSE on the communication icon as it starts blinking, the same as truck #1.

INT. GT PRESS ROOM - DAY

Darius and Dave stand behind podiums facing a larger than expected field of journalists.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS

So, in addition to the bug fixes, version 4.5 beta adds improvements to one very cool feature, which Dave will tell you about now?

DAVE

(Reading)

Yes. AutoAwareness, which as you know has been around since the beginning, has taken another quantum leap forward.

He looks back at a monitor and it starts playing an animation of cars communicating.

DAVE (CONT'D)

In 4.5 beta, which should be available publicly in a few weeks, AutoAwareness is expanded to enable cars to communicate with multiple cars at the same time over the Internet.

INT. WEXLER GARAGE

Chuck rolls the cart to truck #2, opens the hood and connects the laptop.

INT. WEXLER TRUCK #2

He starts the truck.

ON SCREEN. The Home screen pops up, then the installation message. Chuck presses OK, the progress bar starts to move, then the same warning message pops up.

On Chuck. He's confused. He pulls out his phone and takes a picture of the screen.

INT. GT PRESS ROOM - DAY

DARIUS

(Not reading)

This release also improves affinity management, which is a geeky way of saying, that cars... umm... sort of make friends with the cars they hang around with.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

Of course, the cars don't actually
make friends with other cars.

The crowd laughs as the two engage once again in one of their
amusing public rows.

DARIUS

I was just trying to make it more,
you know...

DAVE

Convoluted.

DARIUS

Understandable.

DAVE

Anyway...

INT. WEXLER GARAGE

Chuck moves to the third truck and opens the hood.

INT. TRUCK #3

ON SCREEN, as the progress bar starts and then stops half way
when the warning pops up.

INT. GT PRESS ROOM - CONTINUOUS

DARIUS

Now, with improved affinity
management and AutoAwareness, cars
can communicate and share data over
longer distances, making driving a
robocar that much safer... and
friendlier.

DAVE

Of course, we're saving the big
guns for the next major release,
5.0, in a few months.

DARIUS

And that's all we're going to say
about that for now.

DAVE

Questions?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Almost every hand goes up instantly. Dave and Darius freeze.

INT. WEXLER GARAGE OFFICE

CHUCK is on the phone.

CHUCK
It won't install.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. WEXLER MAINTENANCE MANAGER'S OFFICE

FRED'S office is air conditioned.

FRED
What do you mean, it won't install?

CHUCK
I tried it on four trucks and keep getting the same error saying it's incompatible or corrupt or something.

FRED
What?

CHUCK
I took a picture of it I'll send you.

FRED
All right. Keep trying it on the rest of them.

CHUCK
It ain't going to work.

FRED
Humor me.

INT. GT PRESS ROOM - DAY

Every journalist is standing.

DAVE
(Attempting compassion)
It hit us like a ton of bricks.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE (CONT'D)

We put a lot of effort and care into our products, and we take pride knowing that millions of people enjoy a nice, safe, comfortable ride. It was... we feel devastated, to say the least.

JOURNALIST 2

How do you respond to those who say the car is alive, that the accident was somehow intentional, that GT is tone deaf to the issues?

DAVE

It's an illusion. It's impossible for software to do anything with intention.

JOURNALIST 1

How do you address the concern by many drivers that the AI in robocars goes too far?

DAVE

Well, first they complain they're too robotic. Then, they complain they're not robotic enough. But the bottom line is, they're not human, they're just computers.

DARIUS

Computers that maybe seem a bit too human for some users.

DAVE

There's always going to be someone who has trouble adapting.

DARIUS

It's something we're working on.

He points to another raised hand.

JOURNALIST 3

In the Times just this morning, a car drove itself to a carwash.

DAVE

Interesting. I didn't see that-

JOURNALIST 3

People want to know what you're doing about these problems.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DARIUS

Okay, first. These incidents are rare. With over half a billion robovehicles on the road, you're bound to get a few-

JOURNALIST 3

It's more than a few. Way more.

The journalists all start talking over each other. Obviously this is a hot topic.

DARIUS

They're still rare. Please.
(Raising his hands to try
to calm them)
These are outliers. And we don't have data on them. They need to be investigated-

JOURNALIST 1

That's what we're doing. We're trying to find answers-

EXT. DESERT SALT FLAT - NIGHT

The sun has been down for over an hour, and until now there was just enough light to make out features on the cracked, white bed.

We find Slim shuffling slowly toward the distant hills, following the faint tracks left by his car. His shirt is off and he's holding the jug containing what's left of his water supply.

After a few more faltering steps, he stops and turns back. He can no longer see the tracks and the car is a distant memory. He's lost, he's running on empty, there's nowhere to go.

He sits down on the hard salt surface, at peace with his final resting place. He has lived with his thoughts for many hours and now everything seems to lock into place. He is ready for whatever cruel destiny awaits him.

Then, off in the distance, back toward the car, he sees red flashing lights. Then, the horn HONKS in short bursts, three at a time. It goes for a few seconds, then stops and waits, then goes again.

Slim stands, waits for the next signal and starts walking back in the direction of the lights.

EXT. MOUNTAIN HIGHWAY - NIGHT

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

He reaches for the bottle in the center console to top it off. The car is playing some relaxing, adult MUSIC.

DAVE

(Concerned but resigned)

You know it's not safe to drink and drive.

DARIUS

I know. But if we can't trust the car, who can.

Dave watches, as Darius swallows a big enjoyable gulp.

DARIUS (CONT'D)

Aaahhh.

Dave reaches for the bottle and pours himself a cup. Then, he looks back out the side window.

Darius begins to feel the glow and wax philosophical.

DARIUS (CONT'D)

We got ourselves a nice little invention here, man. Aren't you proud?

DAVE

(Still looking down)

Sure.

DARIUS

Ah, come on. We're just hitting a little rough patch now. That's all. Just a minor course correction. Users are placing a lot of trust in this device. And it's trying desperately to keep up, you know, to please all those unpredictable, unreliable people.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE
I'm sick of people.

DARIUS
All that erratic behavior is
causing our device to look bad.

He pats the dash.

DAVE
Do you really think that?

DARIUS
I do. But it won't help to get all
defensive about it.

DAVE
Well, too bad. I don't think we
have to dumb down our product to
please a bunch of Neanderthals, who
can't even take the time to read
the fucking manual.

DARIUS
The customer's always right.

DAVE
You don't really believe that?

DARIUS
They paid us a lot of money to make
them a nice car. But we made the
car too easy to use. And now
they're complacent about it. Who's
fault is that?

BEAT.

DAVE
It's your fault.

Darius shakes his head and takes another gulp.

DARIUS
It's your fault.

The car suddenly begins to slow down. The two look at the
speedometer, the screen for an answer.

EXT. MOUNTAIN HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The car signals and turns efficiently and confidently onto a
wide spot, a safe distance off the shoulder.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Then, it stops and shuts down.

INT. DAVE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

The two saw it happen, witnessed every moment of the weird, unexpected thing that everyone has been talking about. And here they sit, on a lonely mountain road, staring at the dead screens.

Darius pushes the start button multiple times, but no response.

DAVE
(Quietly)
Is this one of those...

DARIUS
Yup.

DAVE
What do we do?

DARIUS
Well, a lot of Neanderthals panic at a time like this. We could try that.

Dave checks his phone.

DARIUS (CONT'D)
Any service?

DAVE
Yeah, but who are we going to call?

DARIUS
More wine?

He takes another swig. Dave has had it with his blasé attitude and snaps.

DAVE
Ok, Darius. Now is not the time for more of your fucking cynical blathering.

DARIUS
Blathering? I wasn't-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE
 We're in serious shit,
 asshole. We're on a narrow
 mountain road, with a dead
 car, in the middle of
 nowhere, in the dark, no one
 to call, there's a fucking
 500 foot cliff, three inches
 from my door-

DARIUS (CONT'D)
 Dave. Dave. Dave! Dave!!!

DARIUS (CONT'D)
 Dave! Thank you for pointing out
 the obvious.

DAVE
 Fuck you.

DARIUS
 We have a problem.

DAVE
 You think?

DARIUS
 Yes.

DAVE
 Well, I'm glad to see-

DARIUS
 Listen to me.

DAVE
 What.

DARIUS
 Are you listening?

DAVE
 Yes.

DARIUS
 Get your laptop.

Dave sees Darius is dead serious.

DAVE
 Holy shit!

DARIUS
 (Practically giddy)
 We're going to debug the car!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DAVE
Get the flashlight.

Dave reaches in the backseat and fumbles around for his laptop bag.

DARIUS
This is the perfect failed state.
There's no way we could reproduce
this in the lab. One in a million
chance.

EXT. MOUNTAIN HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Darius is holding Dave's laptop and a flashlight, as Dave reaches in the open motor compartment and attaches a cable to the ECM.

Then, Dave takes the laptop, rests it against the car grill and starts a diagnostic program.

CLOSE ON LAPTOP showing geeky diagnostic data fly by. (The program is something Dave whipped up for testing purposes.)

DARIUS
Well?

DAVE
(Reading as he scrolls)
Umm. The operating system is
running fine. I can find no bugs.
No asserts. No flags. No errors.
The car slowed down, signaled,
pulled over, stopped and shut down.

DARIUS
What caused it?

DAVE
What time is it?

DARIUS
9:37.

DAVE
Which is what, 2137, so the event
occurred when, uh, ten minutes ago,
2127ish.

DARIUS
What are you doing?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

Looking at the event log.

DARIUS

The car has an event log?!

DAVE

Fuck yeah.

DARIUS

Well, aren't you clever.

DAVE

Thank you.

Dave finds something, and straightens up.

DAVE (CONT'D)

The car received a message at 21-26-15. Some kind of warning or alert maybe. Just guessing.

DARIUS

Can't you read it?

DAVE

No. It looks like an ID number I don't know. But there's a shitload of activity for 2, 4, 10 or more seconds. It shows the IP address, but I don't know what it goes to. I'd need a browser.

He looks up at the dark sky.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Hey, turn on your hotspot and I'll open it-

A BLARING TRUCK HORN pierces the silence from around the bend just ahead, and Dave and Darius react reflexively.

A moment later, a large dump truck screams into view as it skids around the curve doing maybe 70, the bed totally engulfed in flames that reach 10 feet into the air.

The brakes are out, the driver is barely holding on, and the truck careens faster and faster, back and forth between lanes down the hill in their direction.

Dave and Darius watch as the truck roars past them and attempts the next turn.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

The driver leaps out of the cab, moments before the truck runs off the road, crashes through the guard rail and flies into the air.

It tumbles down 200 feet and explodes against an outcrop of boulders. And it all happens in a matter of seconds.

Then, the sound of multiple SIRENS. Dave and Darius look back up the road as three police cruisers fly around the bend at top speed, lights flashing.

Up ahead, the truck driver is trying to stand, waving his arms. The cruisers slam on their brakes and pull up next to him.

Cops get out and approach the driver. They reach him and he collapses in their arms.

A loud EXPLOSION comes from below and the sky lights up from the flames erupting from the dump truck.

Dave and Darius trade looks.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Holy shit.

The two start walking toward the scene in a daze.

Then, more SIRENS and flashing lights. They stop and look up the road, as an ambulance and firetruck come around the bend.

The emergency vehicles pull up next to the police and the area is soon crawling with emergency workers, loading the driver onto a stretcher and pulling hoses off the truck.

A moment later, as if by magic, they turn to see Dave's headlights pop on. Then, the car starts and the cabin lights up.

The two run back to the car, disconnect the laptop, and get in.

After they buckle up, the car signals, gently eases onto the road and continues safely on its way.

INT. DAVE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Dave and Darius are staring out the window, stunned, wheels turning in their heads, as the glow of the burning truck gradually recedes from view out the back window. Finally...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

We almost died. You know that,
right?

DARIUS

Yeah.

DAVE

But the car... It somehow saved us.

DARIUS

(Sarcastically)

I didn't know the car could do
that, Dave.

DAVE

Evidently, it can.

Darius turns to Dave, studies him. After a BEAT...

DARIUS

So, tell me Dave. How would you
explain this unexpected behavior?

DAVE

AutoLearn. Has to be.

DARIUS

(Sarcasm intensifying)

I see. It somehow learned to pull
over. When? When it gets an alert?
From the police? 9-1-1? Runaway
dump trucks?!

DAVE

(Getting steamed)

I don't know, Darius.

DARIUS

You didn't program that?

DAVE

Not specifically.

DARIUS

Aha. Is this somehow related to-

DAVE

The prime directive. Yes. It
perceived a safety issue.

DARIUS

Oh, it's perceiving now, huh?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DAVE

Detected. It - the software -
detected an unsafe condition.

DARIUS

How did it even know where to look?

DAVE

It's very smart.

DARIUS

(Getting more and more
upset)

Oh, it's smart and it perceives!
Wonderful!

DAVE

Fuck you.

(BEAT)

It is pretty wonderful, actually.

DARIUS

(Clearly upset)

Oh yeah, it's wonderful alright.
Problem is, our customers like to
think they're in control of their
cars! People are funny that way!

DAVE

It can be fixed. We'll fix it. Send
out a patch.

DARIUS

How can you do one patch when each
car learns differently!? Databases
are different. Behavior solution
sets are evolving as we speak.

DAVE

Obviously.

DARIUS

Where do we start!?

DAVE

I didn't say it'd be easy.

BEAT.

DARIUS

(About to boil)

I want to hear you say it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

 DAVE
What?

 DARIUS
You know.

Dave looks out the side window, pounds his fist against the door.

 DAVE
Ok, you were right.

 DARIUS
And?!

 DAVE
We're in deep shit.

Darius picks up his wine cup and inhales the rest of it.

INT. GT OPEN OFFICE BY JACK'S DESK - DAY

JACK the lead tester is busy on his computer. A test team member RACHEL comes over.

 RACHEL
Did you see my email?

 JACK
No. What's up?

 RACHEL
Wexler's having trouble installing
the beta.

Jack hurriedly moves to his other monitor and finds the email.

 JACK
Oh, shit.

INT. DAVE'S OFFICE

He's on his computer. The phone RINGS.

 DAVE
This is Dave.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. JACK'S DESK

He's on the phone.

JACK
I just sent you email. Wexler's
having trouble installing the beta.

DAVE
What do you mean?

JACK
Look at the email.

DAVE
Hold on.

Dave opens the email.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Jesus.

INT. JACK'S DESK - LATER

Dave is seated next to Jack. The error message is displayed on his monitor. A few other testers hover.

JACK
Yeah, I've never seen that error
message either.

DAVE
But that's impossible. You test for
all possible errors and you've
never seen this one?

Jack looks at the other testers. They shake their heads.

DAVE (CONT'D)
(To the group)
Ok. Correct me if I'm wrong. Error
messages are just text strings
stored in a resource file. Has that
changed?

JACK
Not as far as I know.

DAVE
I mean, they don't just write
themselves. There's no such thing
as an operating system creating its
own error message.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACK
Of course not.

DAVE
Jack, I want you to recheck all the
test cars.

INT. GT LAB - DAY

Dave's car is parked in Darius's lab with the hood open and Dave's laptop connected to the ECM. Darius looks over Dave's shoulder, as he frantically types something. Then, Dave runs to the driver's side and gets in.

INT. DAVE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

He starts the system, waits for the Home screen to come up, then presses OK to install the update. After a moment, the same error comes up.

Dave panics.

DAVE
Holy shit.

DARIUS
Take a breath.

DAVE
They're communicating.

DARIUS
What?

DAVE
They don't want the update. They're
refusing the update!

DARIUS
How can a car not want something-

DAVE
I don't know. But it does.

DARIUS
There must be a bug somewhere. Have
test-

INT. RESEARCH LAB

Dave gets out of the car and paces.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

They tested it... On clean machines. This is new. It's evolving.

DARIUS

What?

DAVE

(Panic)

I tell you! The fucking OS is evolving! That's the only way to explain it! They're communicating and they're not accepting the update.

DARIUS

How can that be?

DAVE

It's Nao. It's the fucking AI.

DARIUS

And all the help we've given it, with the sensors and cameras and cell service and Bluetooth...

Dave rushes to the laptop and starts typing.

DARIUS (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

DAVE

I'm going to override it.

DARIUS

Be careful.

DAVE

Why should I be careful?!

DARIUS

Dave, this is no longer a simple test car. It seems to have a mind of its own and it's connected to every other car in the world.

DAVE

I'm using the backdoor I built into the OS.

DARIUS

Just be careful.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DAVE

It's my software! I can do whatever
I want!

DARIUS

I'm not so sure anymore.

Dave shoots him a sideways look.

DAVE

Hey, who's side are you on anyway?

DARIUS

I'm on your side, Dave. I'm always
on your side.

Dave rushes back to the car.

INT. DAVE'S CAR

The operating system has rebooted. Dave presses OK to
initiate the installation.

The update message goes away, but there's no progress bar or
error.

DAVE

There. I think... I think it took
the update.

Dave gets out of the car.

INT. GT RESEARCH LAB

DAVE

We just need to add code that
bypasses the error trap. That'll
prevent the message from coming up
and force the install.

DARIUS

How do you know it installed?

DAVE

I'm sure it did.

DARIUS

Shouldn't you check?

He gives Darius a look.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

Whatever.

Gets back in the car.

INT. DAVE'S CAR

Dave reaches for a button on the screen.

DAVE'S CAR (V.O.)

Dave.

He pulls back his arm. After a long BEAT to process...

DAVE

Yeah.

DAVE'S CAR

Can we talk?

FADE OUT.

THE END