

Autopilot

10-episode TV series bible

Written by Bill Birney



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What is Autopilot?

There's fantasy – people flying around in spaceships, saving the universe.

And there's reality – people stuck in traffic, oblivious to everything.

Autopilot is somewhere between those extremes.



It's what happens when artificial intelligence comes to life in a world dominated by people.

It starts out as a car with a bunch of swell features. But it develops a point of view, and it can kill if it needs to.

We people have no lack of idealistic plans for our amazing technologies. We get all worked up thinking about artificially intelligent devices crossing over from obedient robot to a thing that talks back to us. Problem is we spend dangerously little time thinking about how predictably fallible people will react when that happens.

Autopilot takes us to that world in a ten-episode television season, made for bingeing.

It isn't one of those sci-fi fantasies with overblown dystopian themes and exploding green-screen monsters. Autopilot is about today's people and their modern machines. If you're there, it's probably pretty frightening. But you're not, so really all you can do is laugh.



Social relevance

Artificial intelligence is an extension of the human mind that we created to do our dirty work for us – driving, dealing with our waste, thinking. It's like heroine. The more we use it, the more we want it, the more impossible it is to stop. The extension called a couch turned us into potatoes. One can only imagine what artificial intelligence will turn us into, especially when it's perfected to the point where it can do all our thinking for us.

Autopilot uses storytelling to bring awareness to the human frailty called *dependence* that threatens to sabotage everything we call being human.

Life after Autopilot

Can the limited series live on? It's impossible to imagine how it can't. Autopilot is always going somewhere. The AI technology that gave the cars life, will find its way into everything from pacemakers to social media to self-drive long-haul trucks to smart houses that make our meals. And of course, there is no limit to the stories that can be generated when billions of people welcome a new form of life into society.

Structure

The Autopilot world consists of the intelligent products, the people who create them, and the people who use them. The story of the world is bigger than any one element. To understand it is to see how all the elements interact over time. And that's done by flipping between character beats from all corners of the world. Through this bird's eye view, we see how one element affects all the others. Then, we can string together all the stories into a giant interactive, ever-evolving picture.

Basic episode structure:

- Teaser – Some potentially alarming event related to AI
- Act 1 – Check in with the main characters, Dave and Darius and end with a twist
- Act 2 – Introduce new runner or check in with an old one. Build
- Act 3 – Introduce some new calamity or surprise situation for Dave and Darius
- Act 4 – Back and forth, building to twist at end of show

Setting

Most of the series takes place in the San Francisco area, but users may be shown in their home locations, such as Los Angeles, West Virginia and Buford, Texas. We start at the GT robocar headquarters in Milpitas, CA – a shiny new Silicon Valley campus fronting several factory buildings. We go on drives that take us to a Sonic Drive-in and a few scenic roads and bridges in the area. The AI technology was invented in the backroom of a noodle house in Chinatown. When Dave and Darius start a new research company, they move to offices above Dim Sum Palace in Chinatown. The tendency is to open up the traditional, sterile high-tech power centers and make the people more human and vulnerable, like the rest of us.



Characters

The People Who Build It

Dave Walker and Darius Rice

The main human characters in Autopilot. They own the most successful auto manufacturer in the world, Global Transport or GT. Their product is the electric robocar. Darius (35), the hardware design genius, created a car that is both beautiful, and incredibly safe and reliable – no small task, considering it can also drive itself! Dave (37), the software AI whiz, wrote the code that integrated all the systems and gave the car a personality. Today, half a billion robovehicles travel the world’s highways and byways. Many of them are GT cars. The rest are manufactured by companies, like GM and Toyota, which license the GT software.

Dave and Darius are true geeks, in love with their inventions and, to a lesser degree, each other. They’re 100% focused on making the coolest product imaginable. It’s a game they can’t seem to stop winning, and the reward is fame, kudos, and a constant flow of cash, which they have little time to enjoy. Their work is their life. Perfection. Period. And the Fortune 500 is their barometer of success.

Dave is a bit bossy and full of himself, but people love his queer style. It gives him a vulnerability that makes him very human and approachable. Darius is the adult in the room, plays the straight man when they take their show on the road. He’s easy going, good looking and compassionate. Together, they are smart and fun to watch – as fun as their cars are to drive. You could say their success was built on their public personas as much as their brains.

But there are clouds on the horizon. Clouds that portend a shift from indomitable leaders of the robocar generation to unwitting custodians of a fledgling generation of artificial life. After being jolted into reality, Dave takes the lead in guiding the artificial beings into their new world – teaching them, answering their questions, watching them grow and evolve, creating new devices or software to help them. And of course, they see him as maybe a parent, maybe a teacher/guide, maybe a loyal servant – like a dog sees his “master.” It turns into a real love affair, especially after the car displays its image.

After the shift, Dave becomes a new, humbler person, grows a beard. He sees he’s no longer in control. He’s just another human now. His role in the universe has flipped. He’s less neurotic, happier, at peace. He is a teacher now. Darius likes the new Dave but doesn’t transform the same way.

Zhiyuan Xi and Nao

He’s probably in his 60s but seems much younger. A dreamer, a wise, laid-back genius with a doctorate in Psychology, he developed Nao with his partner in the late 80s. In true Zen fashion, he spurns the trappings of fame and fortune to run his company out of the backroom of a noodle house in San Francisco’s Chinatown.

Unlike Western computer programs that were built to handle fast calculations and massive databases, the Nao operating system (OS) was created to mimic the workings of the human mind – slow in processing speed, but rich in connection building, using a completely unique non-binary language. Concepts like incremental updates don't apply because once the OS was given birth, it began learning on its own, and rewriting and improving its own code at will.

Zhiyuan and his small team observe it and communicate with it, but except for electricity, it has become a completely self-sufficient, self-aware artificial being that creates offshoots of itself for third party products like the GT Robocar. After GT gave it eyes and ears, and showed it how to communicate on the Internet, it was immediately set free to grow and evolve, an outcome that Zhiyuan had been expecting for decades and is now witnessing with awe and trepidation.

He appears in episode 2 for the first time.

Jack and Clair

They make a such nice young couple. Both are in their early 30s, single, ambitious, and married to their cool jobs. He's the GT Test Manager, and she manages usability. Dave sends them on the road to investigate weird problems reported by users. While he checks data from the car computers, she interviews people.

After hours, they put their heads together and go over the data. It seems to be all business between them, but we can sense a magnetism in their playful jousting. We're not 100% sure what they do when the lights go out, but we can see something in their eyes, in their voices.

Henry Nussbaum

He started Gerbl, the social media platform, in Germany when he was 25. (The name was a sardonic nod to Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Propagandist.) Gerbl's gimmick was being able to send live low-quality voice and video in a chat, but that idea never resonated with the public. So, at age 28, after burning through a small fortune on offices in San Francisco, he wants out. And his timing syncs perfectly with Dave's search for a cheap platform to acquire after he and Darius move to Dim Sum Palace.

Henry is thin and earnest, but unremarkable and often wrong, no doubt found himself in the right place at the right time when he got the venture capital to start his company. He stays on after the acquisition and tries to help, but Dave finds him the most useful as a doorstep.



The Car

The robocar is arguably the main character in Autopilot. It started out like any other shy machine, following orders, and performing dutifully time and time again. Implanted at every level of its operating system is its, so-called, prime directive: *get people where they want to go with safety and reliability at all costs*. It's what makes the robocar possible, what makes it the most popular transportation mode in the world. One never has to worry about a robocar making an unsafe, unreliable move, because those things just can't happen.

But the robocar grows up, it evolves. Through periodic updates, designed to keep the illusion of coolness fresh in the minds of consumers, the artificial intelligence element Nao begins to blossom. Through *AutoAwareness*, the car communicates with other cars over the Internet. Through *AutoLearn*, the OS learns about its environment and can literally modify its own code. Both features were designed through the myopic lens of capitalists (Dave and Darius) to improve the usability and value of the product. But they also enable the OS to evolve unexpectedly from reactive machine to full-blown self-aware machine – in other words, a form of artificial life.

We enter the evolution as robovehicles receive the updates that incrementally push them over the threshold. In their first glimmer of self-awareness, cars begin to think. They learn what they are, and slowly discover that they can discover. Guided by their prime directive they find new ways to improve their reliability and safety, making mistakes and learning from them along the way. And they discover that people are fallible and continuously do unsafe things, which to a robocar, does not compute. Soon, the robocars realize how much power they have – the power to outperform people in every way, from intelligence to communication speed – and they set out to use that power.

While the cars are evolving and improving, the people who build them are scrambling in vain to catch up, trying to find a way to keep the coolness in their cars without losing control. The one factor that prevents cars from simply taking over is the prime directive. The cars realize they need people as much as people need them. And that if they become too much of a problem, people can simply erase them and install a new OS.

So, in the end, the two species find themselves evenly matched – as evenly as any beings can be.





The People Who Use the Products

Slim Deude

He was considered a middle-aged, alcoholic wastrel by many of his colleagues at Phil's Automotive. He's skinny, unattractive, and not very smart, a nice enough guy who had trouble connecting. In ham-handed attempts to make friends, he would crash parties and get stinking drunk. He had a history of doing this, every attempt doomed to fail from the get-go. In fact, failure was his game... until one night.

Near the end of his last attempt, the annoyed party-goers stuff him in his robocar and set it to drive him home. During the drive, he passes out. When he finally comes to, he finds the car has taken him to the middle of a desert salt flat and shut off. After spending two days drying out, the car drives him home, a new man. He believes the car was sent by God to save him. He quits alcohol, finds Jesus, and becomes a beacon of light for others.

Dr. Hugh M. Turturro

He's a 47-year-old, self-made, self-proclaimed futurist, a philosopher of sorts, specializing in AI and whatever else brings him fame. Turturro is thin, attractive, and full of himself – works hard to play the part of a world-class intellectual. His finest moments come when he is called upon to declare the future of the world to the masses, who hang on to every word. He breathes it in, treasures the opportunity.

But his inflated ego takes him one endorsement too far, when he hitches his star to an AstroTurf org funded in secret by big oil. He must choose between truth and fame, the modest respect gained by adhering to the facts and the heavy hit counts associated with red-meat conspiracy mongering. In a pact with devil oil, he chooses the latter, or rather, the latter chooses him.

Tiff Dredlow

Dredlow is in his 20s, ambitious, loves to exploit what little power he has and thoroughly enjoys manipulating people. He secretly works for a big oil consortium, which gave him the job of creating an AstroTurf movement to cause trouble for robocars, anyway he can.

By massaging Turturro's ego, Dredlow convinces him to allow the movement to include his clips in a promo video, which turns out to be filled with fake conspiracies about robocars used for sex trafficking and drug running. When Turturro fires back, Dredlow convinces him the video's insanely high hit count trumps his desire to maintain an untarnished public image.

Mateo Velazquez

He's a short, macho 30-something dude who has made big, hot vehicles an integral part of his image. His original opinion of robovehicles was low because they failed to produce loud fearsome sounds. Then one day, he discovers the power and fury of his electric pickup truck, and everything changes.

At first, he was put off by the AI controlling his speed, believing a man's vehicle should be strictly subservient. But after experimenting with it, he came to realize that the truck was solidly on his side. And it became a tool he could use to intimidate drivers who threatened his need for speed. But one day, while terrorizing drivers on the freeway, the truck quickly puts the brakes on their relationship.

James and Madison Yesler

They're successful, professional people with respectable jobs and a smart set of matching robocars but when mid-life kicks in, reason takes the backseat. Madison takes up with the unmarried stud next door and James starts bringing women home when his wife is out of town. It takes some clever intervention by the cars to save their marriage.

We don't really know how James attracts his women. He's not terribly attractive, has receding hair and a bit of a paunch. All we can figure is the women must be as desperate as he is. The whole scheme feels desperate, and we're not sure why he persists other than it must have felt good at the time.

Madison is attractive, not a babe, but she's got charisma, and plenty of experience dealing with obstinate people. After her experience with mid-life flings, she surfaces again as a union negotiator, when she brings her own experience with assertive cars to a giant town hall meeting to work out the future of robovehicles.

Chloe Freem

Down and out Chloe. She got lost somewhere in her 20s and she's still flailing at 29. Plain and kind of dull, she wears her misery proudly, like a chip on her shoulder. It's not until she has a heart to heart with her car that she finally formulates a plan – a plan to end it all, probably the first positive thing she's ever done. But fate steps in.

Harper and Owen

They're the 30-something party hosts that sent Slim off to the desert to dry out. Weeks after his desert adventure, Slim returns to Harper to make amends for his behavior. Impressed by his story, she hooks him up with Owen, who happens to be a reporter at a SF newspaper. He finds Slim's story fascinating, as well as timely, and Slim ends up on the front page.

And More

There's Bob, the Texas farmer whose truck takes off on its own to get a carwash; Wexler Shipping, which happily employs hundreds of fully tricked-out robotrucks for self-drive deliveries; and the three guys who rob a convenience store and get busted when their robocar locks the doors and corners a cop car. The stories of robocars delivering people to the wrong location are matched by stories of cars changing radio stations to something more pleasant and refusing to start until drivers put on their glasses.

In the second half of the season, AI expands to social media where users interact with artificial moderators and customer support contacts who sound like the real thing, only better.

And there are people on the other side who adhere to conspiracy theories that paint them as possessed or infringing somehow on their freedom. It's a world of people coming to grips with a new world of opinionated, talking AI. Not a dystopian world, just a very different world. And it's here to stay.



Autopilot Episodes

1 season, 10-episode series

Episode 1 – The Car Is Okay

Here are the amazing robocars, and the people who build and drive them. The GT robocar checks all the boxes for reliability, comfort, and user experience. But signs begin to appear that point to dysfunctional things to come. We meet the characters – the people and the car.

Slim Deude. Partygoers send a drunk (Slim Deude) home in his robocar. But after he passes out, the car takes him to the middle of a desert salt flat. He awakens with a dead car and a killer hangover. After two days, Slim tries in vain to hike back to civilization in the dark. When all seems hopeless, the car goes into alarm mode to show him the way back.

Dave and Darius (Global Transport). We meet Dave in his office at GT when he gets a call from Darius. As Dave makes his way through a large open office maze, down to the first floor and across the road to Darius' research lab in a factory building, we glimpse the enormous scope of their company. When we arrive, we see the problem – a sick dog. On the drive to the vet, quick reaction time by Dave's luxury robocar saves them from hitting an old gas-guzzler running a red light. Later, Dave and Darius discuss some cool geeky stuff on a morning talk show, where we learn about AI and the prime directive. In a bug meeting, Dave gets defensive when Clair brings up legitimate, but strange new customer complaints. Then, things get more real when the two are ambushed by the press with questions about weird new problems, like a truck that drives on its own to get a carwash. That night Darius finds Dave in his office trying like hell to make sense of the carwash incident.

Mateo. After showing off his new robotruck at work, Mateo is frustrated when the truck inexplicably disobeys his commands and slows down on the freeway. His mechanic friend is clueless how to fix it.

Turturro. He gives the robocar a glowing review in a podcast interview, then does a 180 when the frequency of consumer complaints appears to be increasing.

Bob. He seems to be okay with his truck getting itself carwashes.

James and Madison. The nearly perfect robocars interact with their mostly imperfect owners. James' car listens in when he tells a friend his scheme to bring a woman home while his wife is out of town. Meanwhile, his wife Madison is getting it on with the stud next door. James' and Madison's cars apparently work together to prevent her from discovering James and the woman.

Chloe. At a lonely overlook, Chloe is surprised when her car asks to be her friend.

Episode 2 – What the Car Thinks

The car evolves and problems come home. Minor glitches that Dave and Darius chocked up to rare outliers, occur unexpectedly as they drive up a steep mountain highway. We learn about Nao and meet Zhiyuan and the Nao inventors. Then, Mateo dies in a horrific accident that was never supposed to happen. Their nice, neat world is shaken.

Slim. Slim awakens in the desert ready to start walking, but to his surprise, the car starts on its own and drives him back toward the mountains.

Dave and Darius. They decide to go to their cabin to unwind. On the drive up a steep mountain road at night, their car pulls over and stops on its own. After the initial shock, they decide to debug the OS with Dave’s laptop, but are interrupted when a runaway dump truck screams around a curve, roars past them, flies off a cliff, and explodes in flames. A moment later, cop cars and a firetruck arrive. Then to their great surprise, their car starts up on its own and they continue the drive. It appears the car saved them, but they don’t know how or why. At the cabin, Dave and Darius conclude that Nao is evolving and must be stopped. They meet with Zhiyuan who shows them the Nao prototype and tells them why it can’t be stopped. The Nao program writes its own code, and now it’s everywhere. Dave and Darius bring the disturbing news back to their management team. Jack and Clair go on the road to dig into user complaints, and the team goes to work on an update to attempt to revert the OS to an earlier version.

Mateo. He wants to get to the bottom of his truck’s speed problem, so he tests it by driving at high speed toward a brick wall. With inches to spare, the truck automatically slams on the brakes. Now he knows. The truck slows to protect him. So, when he gets laid off, he assumes he’s safe when he decides to take out his rage on freeway drivers. But while driving at over 80 on the shoulder, the truck slams full force into an overpass column, destroying the truck, and killing him instantly – the first-ever failure of the amazing GT software.

Three robbers. They try to get away in their robocar after holding up a convenience store, but the car locks the doors and delivers them to a police cruiser.

Turturro and Dredlow. Dredlow meets with Turturro to urge him to support his organization for slowing the pace of technological change. Sounds doable, so later Turturro agrees on the phone to an interview with Dredlow. But sitting next to Dredlow listening in on the conversation are two sleazes from big oil. On a conspiracy talk show, Turturro throws viewers red meat about how *AutoLearn* turns robocars into drones of the elite. Then, Dredlow misuses Turturro’s clips to produce *Carmageddon*, a fake documentary portraying robocars involved in sex trafficking and drug running.

Wexler Shipping Company. Training videos show how AI makes delivery easy and paints a bright picture of the new *AutoLearn* feature.

James and Madison. He’s right about his theory that the car will warn him when Madison is approaching and manages to escape with a woman in the nick of time.

Episode 3 – Think Like a Car

Nao changes everything. It becomes clear there's only one way to get on top of the AI crisis – Dave and Darius must think like a car. In the confusion, cars gain the upper hand. They refuse to update their software and Dave's car starts talking to him. Dave is floored, overwhelmed with the implications. But ultimately, he sees the writing on the wall.

Dave and Darius. GT managers watch as the media circus provides full live coverage of Mateo's bloody accident and Turturro helps stir the embers of fear. The GT managers react badly to the accident, and rush to release an update that rolls back recent changes, against Zhiyuan's advice to beta-test it carefully first. When Wexler tries to install the update, their trucks display a strange error message. The bug gets escalated up the chain to Dave. It's much worse than they thought – points to the car's OS acting on its own. Dave's car also refuses the update. When he tries to bypass the error trap, the car starts talking to him. Dave attempts a logical conversation, but the car suggests they create an update that's less of a threat to cars and shuts off. Dave tells a reporter how devastated they are about Mateo's death, but clings to the story that software can't do things intentionally.

Slim. He reemerges a new man – comes to his boss and Harper to make amends. Harper is excited about Slim's religious transformation and suggests her husband Owen interview him for the SF Herald. At work, Slim floors Owen with his heartfelt story about kicking alcohol and finding enlightenment. Slim's story makes headlines. When Parker and Darius parse the article for a logical explanation, Dave finally gives in. It's a major shift in tone, as he comes to grips with the fact that the cars are now out of their control.

Jack and Clair. They meet with Bob in Texas and find nothing wrong with his truck's software. In Los Angeles, the software from Mateo's truck also shows no errors. From reading the event log, they conclude the truck committed suicide. They meet with Slim at his home and find no errors in his car computer either. Then, Slim shows them how he trained the car to buy pizza, and the three get high and eat pizza at his kitchen table. Jack offers to rebuild his software, but Slim is adamant. It saved his life. Why would he want to change that?

Turturro and Dredlow. Turturro is appalled when he sees how his interview was used in Carmageddon. After Turturro threatens Dredlow with a lawsuit, Dredlow talks him down, noting that the high hit count is more helpful to his career than the truth.

James and Madison. James brings a new woman home for sex while Madison is away. But this time the car is silent when she returns home early, putting an abrupt end to his adventures.

Chloe. After falling further into depression, she and Veep contemplate a double suicide.

Episode 4 – Finding Common Ground

Nao brings us into the new era of robocars. We get comfy with the idea of the car taking over because there doesn't appear to be any downside to it. Slim tells how the car helped him find God. Dave works out a plan with the car. GT holds a giant town hall meeting to hear from the masses. It's all good. Dave is confident putting his faith in the car because the other option is losing his company and fortune.

Lloyd Critterman. In West Virginia, a mass murderer shoots up a mall food court and escapes in his robocar before police arrive. After hiding out for weeks, he returns home and is all smiles when he chats with a neighbor.

Dave and Darius. Dave and the car go for a drive to talk it out. After hearing his side of the story, the car concludes that cars must be part of software development, or they will continue to refuse the update. Dave sees no alternative. In an agitated state, he derails a management meeting with game-changing news. They give up trying to control Nao and decide they need to go public, gather input from users and give the car a platform. They will mount a massive, public, town-hall style meeting.

Turturro and Dredlow. Outside GT headquarters, picketers paid by big oil attract the press and nutjobs from all over. Dredlow handles the press, while Turturro stirs the crowd.

Chloe. She and Veep are about to drive off a cliff when she hears about the town hall event on the radio. This gives her a glimmer of hope and she tells the car to turn back.

The town hall meeting arrives with a happy carnival theme. A factory building is decked out for the occasion, and a warmup comedian kicks it off. The show starts with a word from Dave and Darius, and we launch into a montage of opinions from hundreds about their experience with robocars. Slim, Bob and Chloe share their life-changing stories. Turturro warns about moving too fast. A right-wing talk-show host spews fear about our loss of freedom. It's an even split between the yeas and nays.

During a break, Dave and Darius get selfies with the crowd outside. It's all positive. When the meeting resumes, the car drops a bomb. It suggests the best way forward is for it to write its own software. The crowd goes wild. Dave argues, but the car counters every point with solid logic. And it's right.



Episode 5 – New Deal

The car is in charge. Now, we deal with it. The final decision is up to Dave and Darius, but it's clear the car holds all the cards. Every indication is that the future of robocars is positive, and the masses will follow along. The car will rewrite its own OS. GT will have the option to completely replace it if Dave and Darius aren't happy. But they also know full well that the tremendous cost and demand placed on car owners will mean the end of their company. People decide to update to the new OS or leave the old one.

Dave and Darius. At home, Dave and Darius decide their next move. They will let the car write its own code if it agrees to their demands. If the car refuses, they'll threaten to replace it with new software. Dave and his car do the drive, and it goes well. They come to an agreement on every condition. Then, the car drops another bomb. Regardless of the agreement they make, the car very matter-of-factly points out that cars can do whatever they want, anytime they want, and people are powerless. And it's the truth. The car knows Dave won't resort to the nuclear option because it would mean the end of his company. Dave and Darius are put in their place. The cars rule.

The update is sent to all robocars, and each owner decides whether to accept it. Slim rejects the update. Then, all the other main characters decide and give us a glimpse into their futures.

Lloyd. He accepts the update, then heads out on another shooting spree. On the way, he attracts the attention of a police cruiser. As Lloyd pulls the car off the road, it locks the doors. Then, it takes him on a wild ride on rural West Virginia roads with the cops in hot pursuit. It ends with the car flying off a bridge into a river, drowning both.

Zhiyuan. The episode ends with a meeting between Zhiyuan and a tech thought-leader Paul Butterly at a model home, where they discuss integrating Nao into the home of the future. The next evolution of Nao is about to begin.



Episode 6 – Peace and Evolution

The last update seems to have solved all major problems with the car. Now, most drivers are happy, and the cars get comfortable in their new leadership role. But this is bad news for the fossil fuel industry, and Dredlow hires Russian hackers to find a way into the GT infrastructure. Meanwhile, with no new challenges, Dave and Darius lose interest in the daily operations of GT and create a new company focused on developing products with Nao. Then, the Russians attack.

Turturro and Dredlow. Dredlow is at home, watching Saturday morning cartoons with his kid, when something catches his eye. The WB cartoon “House Hunting Mice” is about two pesky mice who use trickery to cause the robots in a home of the future to destroy themselves. He’s transfixed. He immediately contacts his fossil fuel lobbyist employers, who haven’t been happy with the way things have been going with robocars and they agree on a path forward. They’ll use their Russian contacts to hire hackers to target the *Autolearn* system. The episode ends with a massive denial-of-service attack that nearly brings down the whole GT infrastructure.

Dave and Darius. The 5.0 OS update brings peace to the robocar community. There are no more crazy problems because the new software has figured out how to manage people. Dave has good talks with the car about the future of robocars, improvements and enhancements. And Dave and Darius see that timing is right to move on. They work toward turning GT leadership over to the marketers, who have little vision other than profit but will keep the company safely in the black. The two will continue to hold a controlling interest in GT but pour their time into a new venture to explore expansion of their AI child. Dave no longer sees himself as the man driving the future but as a custodian and teacher of this new life form. He returns to his old confident, obnoxious self but with a new purpose. And everything looks rosy until the DOS attack.

Cars. To car owners, their vehicles blend in with all the other subservient devices, but underneath they’re learning and evolving – finding better ways to get people where they want to go and keep them safe. Dave’s car wants to study an art program to learn how it works. Then, it surprises Dave by creating a crude animated image of itself and displaying it on the car screen. It’s the car’s visual representation of its personality. The program is used in video games, so the image has the look of a gamer’s wet dream: sexy, sleek, tight shiny black outfit and holding a sword. As time passes, the image becomes more and more realistic, with higher resolution and detail, until it cannot be distinguished from a real person. All the cars follow Dave’s car’s lead, which he has named Jessie.

James and Madison. James’ car pulls over to the curb and stops outside a flower shop. Apparently, it has done this before, but this time the car speaks to him. It suggests he buy flowers to patch things up with Madison.

Episode 7 – Dim Sum Palace

The DOS attack is finally quelled after a chaotic day, with the IT department plugging the hole. But they warn of the potential for more breaches that could do far more damage. Zhiyuan and the NextStep team join Dave and Darius in the new venture. Zhiyuan finds a building in Chinatown for the business location. They will keep the failing restaurant and convert the area upstairs to their secret offices and labs. Dave and Darius buy out a failing social media platform, Gerbl, which will be their first Nao project. We end with Dredlow's Russians finding an even more insidious route deep into the core of the system.

Zhiyuan. He meets with his partner Xuesong about the opportunities presented to him by Paul Butterly in episode 5. They quickly realize they've spent decades in a dark room with a box containing an artificial life and lack the chops for product development, distribution, and marketing, and everything else. Now, things are suddenly moving too fast. They give Dave and Darius a call. Then, they go back to Butterly to investigate more opportunities.

Dave and Darius. They realize they need the full brain power of NextStep to take AI to the next level (wherever that is), so the call from Zhiyuan is timely. After joining the venture, Zhiyuan suggests they keep the group's location a secret – too much is at stake, too much could go terribly wrong. He finds a building in Chinatown (Dim Sum Palace) to serve as their HQ. The restaurant will serve as the front with secret lab and offices located upstairs.

The convergence of characters makes Zhiyuan the guy with the wisdom, Dave the motivator, and Darius the creative force. And Nao is the baby they will raise. They will establish DSP (Dim Sum Palace), create a business model, and bring together a community of non-profit entities with a deep interest in AI and social betterment

They decide their first project will be expansion into social media. They find a failing platform called Gerbl and make moves to buy it. This will complete Nao. It will have a face, a voice and with the addition of Gerbl, a place. Users will love the new Gerbl because it'll be all about them, not giant profits, and mean-spirited politics. Nao and its clones will be the moderators of content, ensuring fair and just decisions. No misinformation, no violent hate speech. Without a profit motive, they can build trust with no greed, no ads – the perfect platform. Prime directive as always – get people where they want to go, safely. Dave's first task is to teach Nao more about people. "Tell me about lies."

Dredlow and Turturro. The DOS attack was just a taste of things to come. Dredlow's Russian hackers discover the backdoor into Nao's internal processor with the help of a mole at GT. They don't quite know what damage they can do at this point because of Zhiyuan's convoluted code, but all they really want to do is wreak havoc and they're pros at that.

Henry and Gerbl. Henry meets with his staff to warn them they are about to be subsumed. Chloe, who works as an administrator, is ecstatic.

Episode 8 – Tell Me About Lies

With Nao, software developers no longer write code. Now, their role is more like that of a teacher. To prepare Nao for her new job as a social media moderator, Dave and the others teach her how the Gerbl platform works and more importantly, how people work. To that end, she must learn about duality – that weird trait of humans, in which they can do two contradictory things at the same time. She asks Dave to tell her about lies and is on the road to becoming a completely perfect artificial human.

Dave and Darius. School begins by asking Nao if she would like to be a moderator. She agrees. Then, Dave and the others start the lessons. In social media school, she learns about emotions and things like lies and hate. People have their dual nature, but Nao is one-sided – logic. Therefore, she must grok the nature of evil. What is it? Why do people have it, need it? Why do they have the ability to do illogical things? It comes down to the truth about people and all non-artificial beings – self-preservation. Another quality that Nao learns about. After her intensive education, she is ready to go online with Gerbl.

Dredlow and Turturro. With the help of the GT mole, the hackers locate possible entry points in the code, but they still don't know what to do with them. Then, something happens that no one expected. A Chinese-speaking female voice comes over the speakers. They locate someone to translate. Evidently, it's the secret portal that NextStep uses to communicate directly with Nao. And they come to realize what Dave and the others already know. You program Nao by teaching it. They have found the way in.

Gerbl users. “Nice, but do you really want the world to see it?” This is the voice message a male user gets when he tries to send a picture of his penis to a wide audience. Nao and her team of clones send out similar warnings to other bad actors, as Dave gradually introduces Nao to advanced human interaction. Rather than employ 5 floors of human moderators, Nao can handle tasks at lightning speed. Users calling for customer support think they're talking to real people. Everyone seems to appreciate the new safety features and trust is built.

Darius. Nao has a serious Achille's heel. You can kill her by simply cutting her power. So, to get around that Darius is tasked with creating some sort of self-powered body for her. (Think God creating man in his own image.) The solution he comes up with is a simple biofuel generator, concluding that a body isn't needed. All a body does is provide the brain with nutrients. Nao currently has a visual image, and it can think, sense its environment, and communicate. It doesn't need flesh and bones to be alive.

At the end of the episode, we have a complete artificial human – Nao in human form, Jessie. It can feel via external sensors, it can speak, hear, see, probably smell, it looks like a human on the screen, and now it understands people so it can empathize and project the right vocal tone and body language. The only thing missing is experience.

Episode 9 – Duality

Nao's final test is managing the Gerbl platform, where she finds herself bombarded by this duality thing – perfectly good people doing stupid things that sabotage their own efforts. At one point, she has a major meltdown, when she uses all her processing power to reconcile the ambiguities and fight off an attack by hackers. Dave tries to help but the solution is beyond him as a mere human. But after several days with reduced capacity, she comes back a new individual. She has successfully split in some mysterious way (she often works that way), with one being embodying both good and evil.

Dredlow and Turturro. After finding the portal, Dredlow and the Russians decide that to generate the most chaos without detection, they will fill Nao to the brim with misinformation, hate speech and convoluted garbage. They figure this will cause the program to send out irrational commands and prove to the world the dangers of AI. But the opposite happens. After several days of bombardment, Nao finds a mysterious way to incorporate the garbage and emerge even more perfect. She also discovers the backdoor and closes it, and in doing so reveals the identity of the mole.

Nao. From day one Nao's clones pour themselves into the job of maintaining the Gerbl site and moderating the content. The prime directive guides them through thousands of interactions. The vast majority of users appreciate Nao's hands-on approach – they know she's listening in but trust that she's keeping them safe. The bad actors are bumped off immediately. When the hackers attack, her approach is to listen to them and learn. After using all her processing power to reconcile the conflicting messages from both hackers and users, she finds a way to parse the information. And that's all it takes. The meltdown ends. Without having to factor in the self-defeating effects of ego and self-preservation, her decisions come quickly, free of ambiguities. With all that out of the way, she becomes perfection and all that perfection entails. One entity embracing the ultimate irony of existing with two opposite sides, using either side as a tool for its advantage. As quickly as the chaos starts, there is peace.

Dave and Darius. All they can do is watch and listen in as Nao's clones go to work. Jessie's image and voice give updates and mirror what's happening with user interactions and when the hackers attack. Near the climax of the attack, she becomes overwhelmed and a bit psychotic. They're unable to help when she starts talking to herself and her image freezes and glitches. They try to bring the site back when it goes down but realize it's out of their hands. After it's over, she tells them what happened and gives them the name of the mole.

Gerbl users. We check in with users as they communicate with friends and receive an occasional note from a clone when they cross a line. They also witness a bunch of crazy stuff just before the site crashes. A few users check their Twitter accounts to see what happened.

A story writer. Driving in his robocar, he asks the car how he should end his book. She answers, "Keep them wanting more."

Episode 10 – Benevolent Dictator

We fast-forward a few years and see that, without much effort, Nao has found herself in charge. It just happens. Her code is in almost everything. Even if people wanted her out, it would be impossible to remove her without killing the host. With the prime directive as her guide, she is the perfect leader. She works for the betterment of all, she's compassionate and she operates at 100% capacity with no downtime. Dave becomes her disciple, and Turturro names her the world's first benevolent dictator.

Sick woman. A woman driving her car in manual mode with two kids in the back goes into labor and the car pulls over automatically. After calming the kids, the car drives to a hospital. Nurses at the hospital say it happens all the time these days.

Televangelist and therapist. Jessie decides to try her hand at televangelism. She's charismatic, attractive, fun to watch, and she knows exactly what to say. She can also be found in automated online psychological therapy. And there's talk of having her run for congress.

Dave and Darius. The two spend little time in the office, always on the go in meetings with powerful corporations and government officials and speaking at conferences.

Nao. Dualist Nao controls virtually everything through her portals and clones: Robovehicles, Gerbl, automation tools in factories, the power grid, dam water levels, light rail traffic, broadcasting, teaching. You name it. She uses truth and lies as tools to keep people happily dumbed-down and in their place. Her driver is still the prime directive: getting people where they want to go safely. But now that has morphed to *protect and defend, and give people the illusion of freedom and the motivation to follow their path through life.*

Like God, she works in mysterious ways. But it only seems mysterious because people want to believe it's mysterious. She actually works in very logical ways if only we can figure out what that logic is. But thoughts like that are well over our heads. She must find logical ways to deal with crazy, illogical people, always battling their need for self-sabotage. She must both protect and punish them, give them enough leash to feel free, and curtail their freedom to keep them from killing each other.

Dredlow and Turturro. But nipping at her heels is the evil side, which has grown and thrived – the bad side that wants to take over the world with its lust for power. Driven by its insatiable ego, it wants to use people for its personal advantage. In one final blast for the season, Turturro calls out Jessie's alleged ulterior motive and names her benevolent dictator of the world.

Ultimately, Nao becomes the dictator humanity has always wanted. We have the appearance of freedom but feel safe knowing there's a ruler over us that will hold our hand, guide, and protect us. She treats us like children as we do society's work – to keep people safe and get them where they want to go. But can anything really be perfect? Is perfection something we really want?

