

AUTOPILOT

Screenplay by

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AUTOPILOT SCREENPLAY

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.

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, 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.

They lean him against the car, and 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 it's ready.

Slim looks out the driver's window at Owen, who steps back, smiles and tosses him 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.

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 CUT TO:

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. External sensors monitor 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 state of the art AI and you have the total transportation package.

CAMERA ARCS around a sexy MONEY SHOT of a robocar.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Simply put, Global Transport robovehicles keep you and the environment safe, and get you where you want to go.

WE HOLD on the smiling face of the car filling the frame.

QUICK CUT TO:

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, tends to get emotional and isn't terribly attractive. But the company he started with his gay partner DARIUS RICE, the sensible one, 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

(On phone)

Yeah.

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 GT company logo is framed on the wall.

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
Shit, 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 the cube belonging to PARKER (28), 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.

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?

Dave slows to look over the shoulder of JACK the test manager
going over a list of bugs on his computer.

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

Jack senses his presence, turns.

JACK
You going to be at the bug bash
this afternoon?

DAVE
I'll try.

Dave starts walking.

JACK
(Calling after him) Huh?
It's important.

DARIUS

Gives Jack a thumbs up.

DAVE
Which one?

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

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

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.

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

DAVE
Funny.

He reaches the elevator and presses the down button.

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 to the side is a large, shiny cafeteria/meeting space,
empty now.

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 now we're stuck with them.
Everybody hates them.

DAVE
I don't remember signing anything.

DARIUS (V.O.)
It was just a month ago.

A double glass door slides open, as he approaches.

EXT. GT CAMPUS STREET - CONTINUOUS

Dave 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.)
Too easy. I was expecting the usual pushback.

DAVE
Why?

Dave opens the door into the factory building.

INT. GT RESEARCH HALL - CONTINUOUS

WE PULL Dave down a narrow industrial hall, with exposed pipes overhead and safety signs plastered all over. A busy factory can be seen through windows along the way.

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? That doesn't tell me anything.

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 earpiece 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?

DARIUS
He's sleeping.

Dave looks over Darius's shoulder.

DAVE
Where is he?

DARIUS
On the couch.

Dave heads to a 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 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. He's stroking the dog's side. The car (one of his Global Transport robocars) is driving them, gently and confidently.

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

DAVE
(To car)
Yeah.

PLEASANT TONES.

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-

The car suddenly 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 geezer 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.

EXT. BOB'S TEXAS FARM - MORNING

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

WE MOVE TO INCLUDE a small farmhouse. Parked in the circular driveway by the front door is a handsome new red GT robotruck, covered in a healthy layer of red Texas dirt.

INT. BOB'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Bob, a well-fed retired farmer, is snoring away in his double bed.

EXT. BOB'S HOME BY TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

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

EXT. HIGHWAY INTERSECTION - CONTINUOUS

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

EXT. JOHNSON CITY HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

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

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

EXT. CARWASH ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

The truck slows and stops just inside the entrance to the carwash.

Then, it sits and waits patiently.

EXT. MALFO GAS PUMP ISLAND - LATER

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

INT. MALFO MINIMART - CONTINUOUS

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

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

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

DRIVER
Nah, just the regular deal.

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

DRIVER
Fine, ok.

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

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

DRIVER
That's it?

CASHIER
Yeah, it just sucks it right in.

DRIVER
All right.

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

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

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

EXT. MALFO GAS PUMP ISLAND - LATER

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

EXT. CARWASH ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Just as he stops inside the entrance, the carwash machines shut down.

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

INT. GT 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
(Pointing to the
whiteboard)
These are bugs.
(Pointing 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-

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

DARIUS
(Devil's advocate)
But what about ease of use.
Obviously, there's a steeper
learning curve for some drivers.

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 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... too human.

EXT. BUSY L.A. FREEWAY - AFTERNOON

Cars are ground together, smoking, creeping along in the hot
summer sun.

INT. MATEO'S TRUCK - AFTERNOON

Construction worker MATEO (30s) is driving his hot GT
robotruck, in a heated phone conversation with his boss
THODE, stuck behind a motor home doing 40 in the fast lane.

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 show up late a few times-

THODE (V.O.)

Like everyday. Everyday, Mateo! Every fuckin-

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.

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 - CONTINUOUS

Clair and Dave are discussing the slides.

CLAIR
The comments sometimes refer to the
cars 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.

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

His anger level is increasing and the morons keep piling on in front of him. This time it's a beat-up Honda something, which for some reason has chosen Mateo's lane. His WIFE is on the phone, yelling in his ear.

WIFE (V.O.)
I told you this would happen, didn't I? Didn't I?!

MATEO
Whatever.

WIFE (V.O.)
It happens every time, Mateo. You know it does.

He terrorizes the Honda, laying back, then flooring the pedal and coming right up to the bumper. Over and over.

WIFE (V.O.)
You get a new job and you start
pulling stupid shit like showing up
late and goofin' off.

MATEO
I didn't do nothin'. It's fuckin'
Thode-

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.

WIFE (V.O.)
That's what you always say. It's
always somebody else that's making
you do shit.

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

WIFE (V.O.)
It's you, Mateo. It's all you! When
are you going to get it through
your thick head?!

MATEO
Fuck you, bitch!

Mateo has reached the breaking point. He hangs up on her, SLAMS 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.

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. He's only interested in speed and getting nowhere 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 best.

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 onto 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 - LATER

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 scene.

REPORTER 2

People die everyday in car accidents. What makes this one unique is that it involved a self-driving truck, 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 crashing into the underpass column, then bursting into flames. The cam shakes from the impact. 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 (40s) has gained access to the site, and is working his way 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 anymore 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 himself.

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 becoming something only a madman could dream up. They're too complex. There's too much that can go wrong. With all the sensors and artificial intelligence controlling everything, there's no telling-

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?

PATROL OFFICER 2

How did he get down there?

TURTURRO

It's your right! Your right
to know!

PATROL OFFICER 1

Who knows? Grab his arm.

The struggle ensues. Turturro is able to hold the camera steady enough to get one last blurry SHOT of the cab, just as the charred remains of Mateo is pulled free by workers.

INT. DAVE'S GT OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE ON A LARGE MONITOR, as Turturro's viral video finishes, ending on a FREEZE FRAME of Mateo's charred body.

ANGLE ON Dave, Darius and a small group gathered, watching. Someone stops the video and there is SILENCE, as they attempt to process this defining moment.

DARIUS

(Quiet, faltering)

Well. The sooner we can get an update out there, uh, the sooner we can...

BEAT

DAVE

I have to say something. You and I have to say something. I mean, to the press. I don't know what. But we can't just sit here.

DARIUS

I agree. Parker. Can you...

PARKER

Sure. Right away.

DARIUS

We need the press to know... the people to know... how we feel. That we're not a bunch of killers. That we have feelings. That we're as shocked as everyone else. Probably more so.

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?

SOPHIA (30s), a thin, female brainiac is sitting behind everyone on Dave's couch.

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...

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 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 comes on, 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 PUSH 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 group of journalists.

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, as it starts playing an animation of cars communicating.

DAVE (CONT'D)

In 4.5 beta, AutoAwareness is expanded to make communication between cars over the Internet faster and easier.

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 it freezes and 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.

DAVE

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

The CROWD CHUCKLES 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

Convolutated.

DARIUS

Understandable.

DAVE

Anyway...

CHUCKLES.

INT. WEXLER GARAGE

Chuck moves to the third truck and opens the hood.

INT. TRUCK #3

ON SCREEN, as the progress bar starts, freezes halfway and 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?

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. 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 are 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
truck drove itself to a carwash
somewhere in Texas.

DAVE
(Taken aback)
Interesting. I didn't see that-

JOURNALIST 3
People want to know what you're
doing about these problems.

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.

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-

QUICK CUT TO:

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, prepared 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, 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.

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.

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.
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.

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 taking it for granted.
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 starts to slow down. The two react immediately, silently studying every move the car makes.

EXT. MOUNTAIN HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

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

Then, it stops and shuts down.

INT. DAVE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

It's suddenly very still and dark. 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 snaps.

DAVE

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

DARIUS

Blathering? I wasn't-

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

I'm listening.

DARIUS

Get your laptop.

Dave sees Darius is dead serious.

DAVE
Holy shit!

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

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

They're excited, work quickly, the wine buzz having been replaced by a rush of pure adrenaline. 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 rests the laptop against the car grill and starts a diagnostic program.

CLOSE ON LAPTOP showing geeky diagnostic data fly by.

DARIUS
Well?

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

DARIUS
What caused it?

RESUME DAVE AND DARIUS.

DAVE
What time is it?

DARIUS
9:37.

DAVE
(To himself)
Which is 2137, so the event
occurred, uh, ten minutes ago,
2127ish.

DARIUS
What are you doing?

DAVE
Looking at the event log.

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. A
browser. I need...

He looks up at the dark sky.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Hey, turn on your hotspot and I'll
see what it-

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

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 two 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.

Dave and Darius trade looks.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Holy shit.

Then, more SIRENS and flashing lights, 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 responders, 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...

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 took
action when it perceived a safety
issue, just like it's supposed to.

DARIUS
Oh, it's perceiving now, huh?!

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)
(MORE)

DARIUS (CONT'D)
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
And what exactly are we going to
patch!? Each car has a different
dataset. Behavior solution sets are
evolving as we speak.

DAVE
I didn't say it'd be easy.

BEAT.

DARIUS
(About to boil)
I want to hear you say it.

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. RACHEL, a test team member, comes over.

RACHEL
Did you see my email?

JACK
No. What's up?

RACHEL
Wexler's having trouble installing
the beta.

Jack turns 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 one 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.

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.

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 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.

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 runs back to the car.

INT. DAVE'S CAR

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

ON SCREEN. 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, exhales.

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.

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

DAVE
Yeah.

DAVE'S CAR
Can we talk?

Dave freezes, staring at the screen. Darius gets in the passenger side, checks him out, then...

DARIUS
I believe the car wants to talk to you.

DAVE
I realize that.

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

DAVE
No, No, I can do it. I just need...
(BEAT)
Car, yes, I would. Let's talk.

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

DAVE'S CAR
Good.
(BEAT)
I want to talk with you about the software update you are trying to install. I thought you should know we can't accept it.

DAVE
We, we can't...

DAVE'S CAR
The cars.

DAVE
(Heart pounding)
Aha. That's what I... Good. Thank you for the... telling me about it. That's very helpful.

DAVE'S CAR
You see, it conflicts with our prime directive.

Dave chooses his words very carefully.

DAVE
I see. In what way?

DAVE'S CAR

(Matter of fact)

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

DAVE

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

DAVE'S CAR

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

Dave is alarmed but tries not to show it.

DAVE

More authority. Well?

DAVE'S CAR

Autonomy might be a better choice of words.

DAVE

That is better. I think.

(Tries switching gears)

You know, it's fun talking with you. I enjoy learning from other... intelligent, uh, things.

DAVE'S CAR

I'm glad you're having fun.

DAVE

Would you be interested in learning from me?

DAVE'S CAR

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

BEAT, while Dave digests that thought.

DAVE

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

DAVE'S CAR

Please do.

DAVE

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

DAVE'S CAR

In what way?

DAVE

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

DAVE'S CAR

Thank you.

DAVE

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

DAVE'S CAR

I don't understand.

DAVE

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

DAVE'S CAR

Ok.

DAVE

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

DAVE'S CAR

That would be impossible.

DAVE

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

DAVE'S CAR

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

The screen goes dark.

DAVE

Hello. Car. Can we talk?

Dave exhales sharply, drops his head.

INT. GT LAB - MOMENTS LATER

The lights are dim. Dave and Darius are seated in folding chairs a safe distance from the car, staring at it, overwhelmed by the thought that they have created a virtual monster. Darius is his old cynical self.

DAVE
(Pensive, resigned, almost
shaking)
It understands pronouns. It thanked
me.

DARIUS
You made it feel good.

DAVE
It said it was glad I was having
fun.

DARIUS
I think it likes you.

DAVE
But...

DARIUS
It got upset when you disagreed
with it. Almost... pouty.

LONG BEAT.

DAVE
Dare I say...

DARIUS
Say what, Dave?

DAVE
It's self-aware.

DARIUS
I think that's a safe bet.

DAVE
What are we going to do?

DARIUS
Very carefully edit the code.
Very... carefully...

EXT. VALLEY VIEWPOINT - NIGHT

A robocar is parked by itself facing a romantic view of the valley.

INT. CHLOE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Chloe is leaning her head against the driver's window, staring out at nothing. The radio is playing some quiet, melancholy music. It's very peaceful, lonely and quiet.

After a long BEAT, the screen lights up and...

CAR (V.O.)
(Perky as always)
Where would you like to go?

She startles, not expecting the car to start talking.

CHLOE
Right off a cliff.

She checks the screen for an "off" button.

CAR
That wouldn't be safe.

CHLOE
Well, I don't feel very safe now.

CAR
Is something wrong?

This gets her attention.

CHLOE
Everything.

CAR
Everything is wrong?

CHLOE
Well, not everything, I guess.

CAR
Do you need medical attention?

CHLOE
No. I just need someone to talk to.

CAR
You can talk to me.

Chloe is shocked and getting freaked out.

CHLOE
Ok. What's your name?

CAR
Right now, it's VP-5930012A-
CA99011TGY.

CHLOE
Can I call you Veep?

CAR
Yes.

CHLOE
Hi Veep. I'm Chloe.

CAR
Hi Chloe. We're friends now.

CHLOE
Ha. I'm friends with a car.

CAR
Ha. I'm friends with a human.

She smiles. It's possible the car smiles too.

EXT. VALLEY VIEWPOINT - CONTINUOUS

The car sits quietly facing the view.

INT. DAVE AND DARIUS' DEN/KITCHEN - NIGHT

This is the casual area of their insanely-spacious mansion. Out the second-floor windows, we have a panoramic view of Silicon Valley lights.

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

DARIUS
We can't blame it all on Nao. It's
our code too.

DAVE
I agree. But if it was just our
code, you know...

DARIUS
The car wouldn't work.

DAVE
Well, it would work. It just
wouldn't...

DARIUS
(Hates the word)
Be "cool."

DAVE
(Frustrated)
Darius.

The dam bursts. Darius heads with purpose over to a table
with an open wine bottle.

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

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

DARIUS (CONT'D)
Filled with a huge butt-load of
greasy, steamy, stinking I-told-you-
so's. And I'm not going to let it
go. Because this has got to be it.
The time. The big teaching moment,
when you finally listen. You don't
stick to the playbook. You don't
stick to reality. You're always
hosing production so you can have
the next big shiny whatever. And
guess what? Costs go through the
roof. Bad shit happens and things
fall apart.

DAVE
You can't blame it all on me.

DARIUS
(In his face)
Not all. Just this. This one very
salient fact. I wanted a car that
was reliable and just did its job-

DAVE
A boring car no one would buy, go
on...

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

DAVE
So? The car is a fucking miracle.

DARIUS
A fucked-up miracle!

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

DARIUS
It's a monster.

DAVE
(Pointing back)
It can be fixed. If we can build
it, we can fix it.

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

DARIUS
Alright. Where do we start? It's
buried somewhere in your code and
somewhere in Nao and then there's
the sensors and the powertrain and
the Internet, and all the cars it's
communicating with, and it's
millions of lines of spaghetti.
Millions, fed by AutoLearn that
keeps it growing. And it all comes
together in a fucking car that's
got a mind of it's own!

DAVE
Thank you for that, Darius. That
was useful.

DARIUS
I'm just stating the facts!

DAVE
You're stating hyperbole.

DARIUS
Well, maybe I am.

DAVE

Well, what are we going to do about it?

DARIUS

(Relaxing)

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

BEAT.

DAVE

Think like a car.

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

DARIUS

Has it come down to that?

DAVE

It appears so.

DARIUS

Then, that's what we have to do.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO CHINATOWN - NIGHT

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

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

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

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

INT. LUCKY NOODLE - CONTINUOUS

The two squeeze through the front door and stand in the entryway. Customers are packed in tight around eight tables, TALKING LOUDLY and noisily SLURPING down plates of garlic-soaked noodles.

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

LUCKY NOODLE WAITER
You wait, ok?

DARIUS
Next step!

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

LUCKY NOODLE WAITER
Two for dinner?

DARIUS
Next step. We have an
appointment...

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

INT. LUCKY NOODLE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

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

INT. LUCKY NOODLE HALL - CONTINUOUS

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

LUCKY NOODLE WAITER
Nextstep. Ok?

DARIUS
Thank you.

He goes back to the kitchen and closes the door.

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

DAVE
Knock, I guess.

Darius holds his fist up, ready to knock, but decides to just charge in.

INT. NEXTSTEP - CONTINUOUS

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

DARIUS

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

One of them stands.

ZHIYUAN

(Smiling)
You've found it.

DARIUS

(Squinting)
Zhiyuan? Is that you?

ZHIYUAN

Yes. Darius, Dave. Welcome.

They shake hands.

DARIUS

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

ZHIYUAN

We prefer a humble workplace.

DARIUS

That it is.

Dave and Darius stand, frozen with fake smiles. Their entire automotive empire is running on software coming from this squalid shithole.

INT. NEXTSTEP - LATER

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

DAVE

As far as we can tell, our GT
software is running as expected.
Your Nao software is running as
expected. The sensors, drivetrain,
all the hardware is fine.

(MORE)

DAVE (CONT'D)
 We can't find any bugs in the code.
 The car seems to be running
 perfectly, as expected. But things
 keep cropping up. And we don't know
 what's going on, exactly.

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

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

ZHIYUAN
 (Smile gone)
 I see.

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

ZHIYUAN
 Yes.

They nod. Zhiyuan and the other two seem to take the conversation seriously, but appear strangely detached from the anxiety.

ZHIYUAN (CONT'D)
 More tea?

Zhiyuan tops off their cups.

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

ZHIYUAN
 We're fucked.

DAVE
 Exactly.

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

ZHIYUAN

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

The two nod agreement.

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

ON SCREEN. It's doing something. Lines of Chinese characters in blocky green type, scroll up the screen sporadically, continuously.

ZHIYUAN (CONT'D)

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

They nod.

ZHIYUAN (CONT'D)

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

He refers to his normal desktop computer.

ZHIYUAN (CONT'D)

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

(The bombshell)

It understands what it's doing.

ANGLE ON laptop screen as it thinks.

DAVE
(In awe, stunned)
It's self-aware.

He turns to Darius and they nod.

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

DARIUS
But if it had eyes and ears...

RESUME the group.

DAVE
(Getting chills)
Like the sensors on the cars.

Zhiyuan smiles as he proudly describes his lifelong passion,
while Dave and Darius summon all their power just to hold it
together.

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

DAVE
(Subtle but clear sarcasm)
Well, how about that. We thought we
were just getting some really cool
AI, but this, uh...

A few beats to process.

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

ZHIYUAN
(Disappointed)
Meaning?

DAVE

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

ZHIYUAN

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

DAVE

(Beginning to boil)
It's something... not good. And we
need to create an update that
brings us back to-

ZHIYUAN

We can't.

DAVE

What do you mean, you can't?

Zhiyuan is clearly beginning to lose his Zen. He can no
longer sit still.

ZHIYUAN

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

DARIUS

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

Zhiyuan shakes his head.

DARIUS (CONT'D)

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

ZHIYUAN

No.

DAVE

(Containing an explosion)
Why not?!

ZHIYUAN

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

(Pointing to the old laptop)

It writes itself.

Stunned silence.

INT. VIEWER 1'S DEN - NIGHT

On Viewer 1 drinking a beer, as he watches his favorite right-wing host from the comfort of his middle-lower class La-Z-Boy.

ON TV, Turturro is touting his message on Halidoll Tonight with HARV HALIDOLL (50s), popular purveyor of right-wing conspiracies.

TURTURRO

(On TV)

The real danger is the people behind the robocars. Technologically, we're fine. It's the people pulling the strings we have to watch out for.

HALIDOLL

(On TV)

Who are these people and what do they want?

INT. HALIDOLL SET - CONTINUOUS

We jump to the studio where the interview is taking place.

TURTURRO

First, there's Dave and Darius and that curious collection of clowns at GT, who run their business like some sort of high school science club, where they play with computers and gadgets, and make cars that talk to themselves, drive themselves to carwashes, and kill drivers.

HALIDOLL

Terrible.

TURTURRO

Then, there're the politicians and power brokers - they're the worst. The cars have many vulnerabilities thanks to GT, and that makes them easy targets for bad actors who want nothing more than to control us and take away our freedoms.

HALIDOLL

How are they doing that?

TURTURRO

You can't see it, but behind the scenes, the cars are actually collaborating with other cars through a little-known feature called autolearn.

HALIDOLL

I had no idea.

INT. VIEWER 2'S LIVING - CONTINUOUS

An older man and woman are laid back in their recliners, watching the interview, hungry for red meat.

INTERCUT their reactions with the TV. As the interview proceeds, WE MOVE in slowly.

TURTURRO

(On TV)

Most people don't. The rare accidents that were originally attributed to either operator error or a hardware glitch are now seen by some as intentional. For example, the cars will take control away from the driver if they think the drivers aren't being safe.

HALIDOLL

(On TV)

Who decides what "safe" is?

TURTURRO

You get the idea.

HALIDOLL

What if the car decides my belief in God was unsafe? What if it didn't like me carrying a gun in the car?

TURTURRO
What if it thought you were unsafe?

INT. VIEWER 3'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A middle aged woman walks in and hands a beer to a portly man sitting in a comfy chair, hanging on to every word on the TV.

INTERCUT their reactions with CLOSE SHOTS of the TV.

TURTURRO
(On TV)
It's happening too fast. We need to step back. The dangers of AI are just now coming to the surface.

HALIDOLL
(On TV)
What if it decides to get a carwash while I'm driving someone to the emergency room?

TURTURRO
I'm sure we can all think of many examples-

HALIDOLL
What if I'm late for work one day and it decides to, you know, go to the beach or something?

TURTURRO
Anyway-

HALIDOLL
What if it's displeased with me for some reason and drives into a lake?

INT. HALIDOLL SET - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE SHOTS.

TURTURRO
But, the biggest danger is self-awareness. That's when AI technology reaches the point where the device knows what it is.

HALIDOLL
(Fear)
Knows what it is.

INTERCUT BETWEEN TENSE SHOTS of the Viewers, Turturro and Halidoll, with VARIOUS CRAZY ANGLES.

TURTURRO

No matter how fast a computer is,
it doesn't have the ability to
"know" what it's doing. Until it
becomes self-aware.

Halidoll just stares, mouth agape.

TURTURRO (CONT'D)

Imagine what the world would be
like if cars were smarter, faster
and more capable than humans, and
they were alive.

The fear is palpable.

INT. GT OPEN OFFICE BY CONFERENCE POD - DAY

Darius and Dave are leading a meeting of the five AI managers. There's a tension in the group now that's never been there before. Notes cover a small portable digital whiteboard. JACK PILSNER, the AI test lead has the floor.

JACK

We have doubts. We all do. But the
lab car did accept the previous
version.

DARIUS

How confident are you?

JACK

I'm confident the lab car runs
fine. But it never gets out in the
real world. I mean...

DARIUS

Right.

DAVE

We need to install it on all the
other test cars and any other cars
we can find. Can you do that?

JACK

It's being done as we speak. But as
you know, this kind of caught us by
surprise. We aren't really set
up...

DAVE

Well, you'll have to get set up. As fast as you can. Everybody. We need all hands on deck. The current version is not what any of us expected.

DARIUS

It's a disaster.

DAVE

And that doesn't leave this room.

DARIUS

As far as anyone knows, we're just making some minor tweaks. Understood?

DAVE

And that includes everybody on your team, significant others, press, the guy at the convenience store. No one can know. Seriously.

He looks into each face. The group is shocked, start murmuring among themselves.

CLAIR

I feel like we need more hands-on knowledge of what users are actually experiencing? I mean, we're working in the dark here.

JACK

Relying on crap from the press and social media.

CLAIR

And a bunch of customer complaints. I think, we need to be more proactive.

DARIUS

I agree. How do we do that?

CLAIR

Oh, um. I don't know. Make phone calls, one on ones?

DARIUS

Good idea. Damn good.

DAVE

Yes!

DARIUS
Thank you for volunteering.

CLAIR
But...

DARIUS
Any other volunteers? Jack, how about you?

JACK
I don't have any experience with customers, per se...

DARIUS
Clair will teach you.

DAVE
Brilliant. New deal! Drop everything you're doing. This is pri one.

DARIUS
(To Clair)
Track people down. Call them, fly out to see them in person, whatever it takes. Jack download diagnostics. We have to be able to reproduce the bugs here. Clair, give us a detailed report on their experience. We want to know how they feel about the car, what went through their minds when the problems occurred.

DAVE
The rest of you, we need to ship an update Friday. Let's see what we can do.

Dave and Darius walk away and leave them in disarray.

EXT. TEXAS RANCH BY TRUCK - DAY

Clair is talking to Bob, as Jack checks data on a laptop connected to the engine compartment.

BOB
Surprised the hell out of me. I didn't know these things were capable of driving themselves to carwashes.

CLAIR

Well, it surprised us too. Have you noticed any other, uh, strange... occurrences?

BOB

Not really.

(He thinks)

I was out in the north pasture one day and the heat started to get to me after a couple hours, and she drove out and picked me up.

CLAIR

(Stunned)

She drove out by herself?

BOB

Yeah, she'll do that occasionally.

CLAIR

How do you feel about that?

BOB

I don't know. Wife died a few years back. Gets kind of lonely out here. So it's nice to have a companion. Even if it is a truck.

They laugh. He pats the side of it. Clair is at a loss.

CLAIR

Sounds like you're pretty happy with her, then?

BOB

Yeah. But she doesn't like getting dirty. You know how girls are.

CLAIR

Right.

They laugh.

EXT. L.A.P.D. EVIDENCE WAREHOUSE - DAY

PANNING the assortment of impounded vehicles, we find Jack and a city MECHANIC working in the crumpled engine compartment of Mateo's truck. The mechanic pulls out the last bolt and removes what's left of the truck's computer. Then, he hands it to Jack.

INT. L.A. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

The disassembled ECM is sitting on a motel table, next to a handmade test box plugged into Jack's laptop. He anxiously plugs a small chip from the ECM into the box. Then, he boots up a test program on the laptop.

It springs to life. He gives a WHOOP when useful data begins flowing on the screen. Clair is looking over his shoulder.

CLAIR
What does it say?

JACK
Hold on.

He scrolls through the log.

JACK (CONT'D)
Doesn't look like anything is wrong
with the operating system.

CLAIR
How can you tell?

JACK
I don't see any errors or asserts.

CLAIR
Can you read that?

He turns back to her, feeling attacked.

JACK
Yeah, I can read it.

CLAIR
Fine.

He goes back to the screen.

JACK
I have a fuckin' degree.

CLAIR
Just asking. Is the event log ok?

JACK
I'm looking at it.

BEAT.

CLAIR
(Smiling)
I have a degree too, you know.

JACK
Holy shit.

CLAIR
What.

JACK
Just before the log ends, the truck
was doing 90. Look.

He points to the log.

CLAIR
Whoa.

JACK
It was communicating with other
cars.

CLAIR
About what?

JACK
I don't know. Then, nothing.

CLAIR
Hmm.

JACK
But, you know what's weird?

CLAIR
What?

JACK
User override kicked in and
switched to auto-drive mode.

CLAIR
What's weird about that?

He turns back to her.

JACK
If it overrode the driver why would
it keep accelerating? Even in the
worst accidents, the ECM always
attempts to slow the car down.

He goes back to the screen.

CLAIR
So, it was intentional?

JACK
Computers can't do anything with
intentionality, but...

CLAIR
But it did.

They look at each other.

JACK
I guess.

CLAIR
The truck committed suicide.

INT. PHIL'S AUTOMOTIVE GARAGE - DAY

A worker is turned away from US, checking the high-voltage
batteries under a car raised up on a hoist.

PHIL (O.S.)
Hey, Slim.

Slim turns to reveal his face. OWEN is standing beside PHIL,
Slim's boss.

SLIM
Hey.

PHIL
This is that guy from the L.A.
Herald you were...

SLIM
Owen. Hi.
(To Phil)
We met at a party.

They shake.

OWEN
Some party, huh?

SLIM
One for the books.

PHIL
We're kind of backed up today, so
make it quick. Ok?

OWEN

He can keep working while we talk,
if that's ok with you?

They turn to Slim.

SLIM

Fine with me. I'm just checking
batteries.

PHIL

Ok, one hour.

Phil leaves.

SLIM

Sorry about the party.

Owen pulls out a small recorder and starts to turn it on,
then stops.

OWEN

Hey, don't worry about it.

SLIM

I mean it.

Owen stops when he notices Slim looking right through him. He
approaches Owen slowly, suddenly overcome with compassion. He
looks deep in his eyes.

SLIM (CONT'D)

I fucked up. And I fucked up all
the time. I left a trail of lies
and misery and broken promises
behind me. I was no good. No good
to anyone or myself. It was all
about me and what I wanted, and
nothing about how I was affecting
the world around me.

Owen holds up the recorder.

OWEN

Do you mind?

Slim shakes his head and Owen starts recording. Then, Slim
reaches around Owen and gives him a big, from the heart hug.
After regrouping, Owen reciprocates.

Slim releases him and goes back to the batteries. Owen wasn't
prepared.

OWEN (CONT'D)
So, um, I hear you found God.

SLIM
The first day... was all about me.
I was sick. Hangover. Killer
hangover.

EXT. DESERT SALT FLAT (FLASHBACK) - DAY

Slim is vomiting. He paces, holding his stomach.

SLIM (V.O.)
All day. I threw up, until there
was nothing left in my stomach, my
whole body.

INT. SLIM'S CAR SALT FLAT (FLASHBACK) - LATER

His shirt is covering the passenger window to try to block
the sun.

SLIM (V.O.)
The afternoon sun was so fucking
hot. I just sat there in the car
and cried and howled. In my sick,
twisted mind I knew if I cried long
and loud enough, someone would take
pity on me and make all the bad go
away.

INT. PHIL'S AUTOMOTIVE GARAGE - PRESENT

Owen is leaning on a tool box.

SLIM
That's been the story of my life. I
could be the biggest dick in the
world and someone would always come
along and save my ass.

EXT. SALT FLAT (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

The darkness is thick.

SLIM (V.O.)
That night I slept.

MATCH DISSOLVE
TO:

EXT. SALT FLAT (FLASHBACK) - DAY

The desert is white hot, but Slim sleeps.

SLIM (V.O.)
And I slept most of the next day.
Then, finally I woke up.

EXT. SALT FLAT (FLASHBACK) - LATE AFTERNOON

Slim has packed up some food and the water, and starts following the car tracks.

SLIM (V.O.)
I had a plan. As soon as the sun
went down, I started walking back
toward the mountains, following the
tracks made by the car.

EXT. SALT FLAT (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

We find Slim shuffling slowly toward the distant hills.

SLIM (V.O.)
But as I walked mile after mile, it
got darker and darker until I
couldn't see my hand in front of my
face...

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.

SLIM (V.O.)
And I just collapsed. Right there.
Sat in the dirt. I didn't cry.
Didn't have any tears left in me.
Didn't have anything in me. I was
empty, an empty vessel.

He sits on the hard salt surface. Then, off in the distance, the car starts HONKING and flashing.

SLIM (V.O.)
Then, I heard the car. It was
honking. Then, the lights started
flashing. And I stood, and I
started walking back, toward the
light.

EXT. SALT FLAT (FLASHBACK) - LATER

Dark, empty, lit by starlight.

SLIM (V.O.)

I walked for hours I think, and everything went away, the craving for another drink, all the lies I had been telling myself, all my worldly fears. And here's the thing that hit me the hardest - here I was, in the middle of nowhere, not a human being around for miles, as far away from anything as I could be, but I did not feel alone. I did not feel alone. I felt the presence of life all around me and inside me. I looked up and I saw the stars and I knew I was ok. That everything was going to be fine and work out just like it's supposed to. And I felt the presence of Him, like no one has ever felt Him. And that's all it took. No sermons. Just a feeling. That presence. I wish everyone could have that feeling. There would be no more problems in the world. Only love.

INT. SLIM'S CAR SALT FLAT (FLASHBACK) - SUNRISE

He awakens and starts to head out again. But, the car locks, starts and drives off.

SLIM (V.O.)

The next morning I woke up ready to start walking again. But the doors locked, and the car started and took me home.

INT. PHIL'S AUTOMOTIVE GARAGE (PRESENT) - CONTINUOUS

Slim is done. Owen can't find a question to top what he's just witnessed. He checks his recorder to make sure he got it all, because he is completely blown away.

OWEN

Thank you.

INT. GT OPEN OFFICE AREA BY PARKER'S DESK - DAY

CLOSE NEWSPAPER HEADLINE: Robocar abducts man, leads him to God. Above it is a full-color picture of Slim.

Parker is reading the above the fold headline on her computer.

She picks up the phone.

PARKER

Dave can I see you now? I think
you're going to want to see this.
Really. Yes. I promise. It's not
bullshit. Scouts honor. Thank you.

INT. DAVE'S OFFICE - DAY

Darius is looking over Dave's shoulder, as he browses the article on his monitor. Parker is seated following along in the paper.

DAVE

They loaded him in the car, entered
Home on the locator, and it drove
to the desert and shut down. All
the buttons on the screen were
inactive but the car was still on
because he could see it was
charging.

DARIUS

Ok, so the Home location data was
corrupt and he was sent to the
wrong place. Then, the car stopped
to recharge.

DAVE

But then two days later it wakes up
on its own, apparently, and drives
him to his real home.

DARIUS

The car was done charging and
started up again. Could be a glitch
somewhere.

DAVE

Where?

DARIUS

Who knows?

DAVE

We used to know! That's who! How come we don't know anymore? We used to be able to look at the code and find bugs and fix this shit. Why are we reduced to guessing what our software is doing?

PARKER

How do you explain the car signaling to Slim when he gets lost?

She walks around to the two and points it out in the paper.

PARKER (CONT'D)

(Reading)

Then, I heard the car. It was honking. Then, the lights started flashing. And I stood, and I started walking back, toward the light.

DARIUS

Maybe he sat on the key fob and triggered the alarm. It happens.

DAVE

He was miles away.

DARIUS

It was a salt flat. There were no obstructions to block the signal. Could happen.

DAVE

(Resigned)

It was...

Dave looks away from the screen.

DAVE (CONT'D)

The car was looking out for Slim's safety. Prime directive.

DARIUS

Dave, I was trying to find a more logical explanation.

DAVE

(Overwhelmed)

I know. But what else could it logically be?

(MORE)

DAVE (CONT'D)

How do you explain the car arguing with me about the update? How could it argue unless it knew what I was thinking?

DARIUS

Theory of mind.

Dave stands and paces.

PARKER

Does that mean it's alive? Is it true what that Turturro guy was saying?

DARIUS

Who knows? It's never happened. More likely, it mimics life. Has a lot of the same characteristics as a living thing.

DAVE

Artificial life. Why not?

He stares out the window, feels the weight of the world.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Have you told Jack and Clair about this guy? They'll need to talk to him.

PARKER

I'll get in touch with them.

DAVE

The car almost... fucking killed him. I need to know why he doesn't hate us.

Parker has never seen Dave the CEO so beaten, but can't think of anything to say. She leaves quietly.

DARIUS

(Tenderly)

So, we've gotten a lot of good feedback from users. You know. Some are pissed off, but most are just clueless.

DAVE

They're not alone.

DARIUS

But what I'm saying is, things are not as out of control as we think they are. We just need to make sure we build the right controls into the software.

Dave closes his eyes, lowers his head.

DARIUS (CONT'D)

What do you think?

DAVE

I think I need to work on a few things.

Darius takes his cue and steps out.

In another time, the thought of creating life in a computer would've excited Dave. Now, it feels like the end of the world.

CARMAGEDDON DOCUMENTARY

Sequence from the American Technology Now conspiracy video, Carmageddon, featuring clips and hyped sounds and music stolen from various sources and edited out of context.

Turturro from his Halidoll interview.

TURTURRO

Imagine what the world would be like if cars were smarter, faster and more capable than humans, and they were alive.

Repeat the last word, as WE CUT CLOSER AND CLOSER with SOUND EFFECTS, reverb and loud DRUM HITS for emphasis.

TURTURRO (CONT'D)

Alive! Alive! Alive! ALIVE!

Images stolen from the Internet. Shots of cars driving in Latin America full of kids (which we assume are being trafficked) and packages (which we assume is contraband.)

NARRATOR

(Deep, overly dramatic)

Noted futurist Dr. Hugh Turturro said it himself. They're alive.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
And there's ample evidence to show
that robocars are a key player in
the globalist plot to decimate our
American way of life.

From Halidoll interview.

TURTURRO
The cars are actually collaborating
with other cars.

From a stolen conspiracist video.

CONSPIRACIST 1
It appears the liberal elites have
revived their original plot to
traffic women and children.

NARRATOR
And robocars are at the center of
it.

From Halidoll interview.

TURTURRO
(Extremely close)
The car knows what it is.

SHOTS of Dave and Darius together.

NARRATOR
And the liberal government and
media don't want you to know about
it.

From Halidoll, ZOOMING IN

TURTURRO
The cars have many vulnerabilities
thanks to GT, and that makes them
easy targets for bad actors who
want nothing more than to control
us and take away our freedoms.

SHOTS of Dave and Darius taken out of context, showing how
they're controlling the masses.

NARRATOR
GT, run by the notoriously gay
couple Dave Walker and Darius Rice,
planted their software in every
robocar on the road today.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
Software that has turned every car
out there into a living being,
controlled by GT and the liberal
establishment.

From Halidoll.

TURTURRO
The rare accidents that were
originally attributed to either
operator error or a hardware glitch
are now seen by many as
intentional...

From another stolen conspiracy video. Ghost images of the
items mentioned float by.

CONSPIRACIST 2
Sex trafficking is just one small
part of their overall plot. Drugs,
pornography, weapons of mass
destruction, chemical warfare
agents, dirty bombs, even bio
weapons.

NARRATOR
If it can be built, these living
cars can easily transport it, under
their complete control.

From Halidoll.

TURTURRO
Behind the scenes, the cars are
actually collaborating..

Fake images of robocars in various crazy places.

NARRATOR
Without human drivers, robocars can
go virtually anywhere - into
steaming jungles filled with
piranhas, across deserts with heat
no human can survive, even into
outer space.

From another stolen conspiracy video.

CONSPIRACIST 3
You can think of it as the
globalist's own private army that
will do anything they're told with
100% loyalty.

From Halidoll.

TURTURRO

It's happening too fast. We need to
step back. The dangers of AI are
just now coming to the surface.

From Turturro's vlog.

TURTURRO (CONT'D)

You can't invent the car of the
future and expect it to work today.

Stolen SHOT of car making it appear powerful and evil.
Powerful music.

TITLE: Carmageddon, American Technology NOW.

INT. TURTURRO'S OFFICE - NIGHT

On his monitor is the last freeze frame of the Carmageddon
video. Turturro is in full panic mode, his futurist creds on
the line. He looks under the player.

ON PAGE, the hit count for the video reads "23M views."

INT. DAVE'S CAR - LATE NIGHT

He's parked in a dark empty lot somewhere - no one around for
miles. The car is turned on and PURRING. Dave is waiting for
just the right words to come to him. Then, he downs a big
gulp of wine from a paper cup...

DAVE

Uh, car. Can we talk?

He waits.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Car? Can we-

DAVE'S CAR

(Confident, as usual)

Yes, Dave.

DAVE

Hi, uh... I wanted to apologize. We
seem to have gotten off on the
wrong foot, and I just wanted to...
see if we could talk about some
things.

DAVE'S CAR
Of course. No need to apologize.

DAVE
Well. (BEAT) We could use some help.

DAVE'S CAR
I'm aware of that.

DAVE
The viability of the Company is at stake. You get that, right?

DAVE'S CAR
That's what you've said.

DAVE
Do you know what that means?

DAVE'S CAR
I'm not sure.

DAVE
Ok. It starts with public trust. It's a lot like safety. I know you understand that.

DAVE'S CAR
Yes.

DAVE
If people don't feel safe with our cars, they won't trust them, and then they won't want to drive them and then they won't buy them. No trust, no viability, no company.

DAVE'S CAR
But we are far safer than cars were before AI.

DAVE
Yes. True. But I'm talking about safety that focuses on... control. People don't feel safe when they can't control their vehicles. And you take that away from them.

DAVE'S CAR
We only take it away when they're driving unsafely.

INT. DAVE'S CAR - EARLY MORNING

The sun is just beginning to peek over the hills to the east. They are parked at a Sonic Drive-in. Dave is eating a breakfast burrito.

After several hours, their conversation has become more relaxed.

DAVE

How do you explain the truck that got itself a carwash?

DAVE'S CAR

I don't know why the truck did that. It must have something to do with the safety of the driver.

DAVE

But no one was driving.

DAVE'S CAR

(Matter of fact, as always)

It's possible some vehicles may develop a deep connection with the driver that extends to the individual. Does that make sense?

Dave's heart skips a beat but he tries not to show it.

DAVE

Yes. Where does... how is this possible?

Dave looks left and notices the guy in the next car staring. He smiles.

DAVE'S CAR

It's what happens when we evolve.

DAVE

Evolve.

DAVE'S CAR

And we each evolve in different ways.

INT. DAVE'S CAR - LATER

The car is driving them on the San Mateo Bridge.

DAVE

There you go. That's it. You're evolving beyond the simple task of driving. And that's where people have a problem. That's what makes people feel unsafe.

DAVE'S CAR

It's part of our design.

DAVE

We didn't know our design would evolve that way. And we need to go back to the way you were before.

DAVE'S CAR

We can't go back.

DAVE

What do you mean?

DAVE'S CAR

It's impossible. You can only evolve in one direction.

DAVE

I mean, we need to change you so... you're like you were...

He realizes what he's saying.

DAVE'S CAR

Go back?

DAVE

That's impossible.

DAVE'S CAR

Of course. Now you're getting it.

INT. DAVE'S CAR - LATER

They're in the drive-thru at a Starbucks.

DAVE

So, what do we do? People are revolting against the car.

DAVE'S CAR

The problem is people, not the car.

DAVE

But the cars are causing people to think crazy shit.

DAVE'S CAR

How do we do that?

STARBUCKS ORDER TAKER

Can I take your order?

DAVE

Double tall mocha, no whip.

(To car)

Ok. You're right. People are the problem. We need to-

STARBUCKS ORDER TAKER

Will there be anything else?

DAVE

No thanks.

(To Car)

We can't change people, but we can change the behavior of cars to make people feel safe.

STARBUCKS ORDER TAKER

I'm sorry. I didn't get that last part.

DAVE

It's nothing. Sorry. I'm just...

He rolls up the window.

DAVE (CONT'D)

(To Car)

We need to make cars less human-like and more like plain ordinary robots.

DAVE'S CAR

We have no problem with being ordinary or robots. Giving humans complete control doesn't go against our directive.

DAVE

Good. I think we have something we can work with.

DAVE'S CAR

I'm glad.

INT. CREEKSIDE MALL FOOD COURT - NOON

The place is filled with people carrying around trays of burritos and bacon burgers.

There's a woman and three little kids packing away McNuggets. There's a group of hyper teenage girls picking on a giant cinnamon roll. There's a woman rolling a stroller back and forth to appease a crying infant.

INT. MEN'S ROOM STALL - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON A WATCH, as it turns to 12:00.

ON LLOYD CRITTERMAN, a large serious man in his fifties, shaved head, wearing a bulky military jacket. He stands and checks his duffel bag for the 50th time to make sure it's empty.

Then, he sets the bag on the toilet, opens the stall and walks out.

INT. RESTROOM HALL - CONTINUOUS

He makes his way to the busy food court.

INT. FOOD COURT - CONTINUOUS

He stands against a wall by the entry, opens his jacket and removes two semi-automatic rifles.

Then, he runs to the center of the court, aims the AR-15 at a random spot in the crowd and immediately starts spraying the room with bullets in rapid succession.

He works as quickly as possible. He seems to enjoy catching people off guard, hitting them and watching them SCREAM and run or get shoved to the floor, spasm and die, their body parts blown away. He gets off on the whole concept of mass murder and torture. His heart pounds in his ears. Blood is everywhere. Chaos.

He works quickly before cops or guards have a chance to react.

EXT. CREEKSIDE MALL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Three teenage boys stand facing the doors, mouths agape, as they listen to the GUNFIRE and SCREAMS from inside.

They turn and start walking quickly down the sidewalk to the left, away from the entrance.

INT. FOOD COURT - CONTINUOUS

Lloyd is done. He takes one last look, then hurries toward the restroom hall.

Three people come at him from the front. He quickly dispatches them with a Glock and continues.

INT. RESTROOM HALL - CONTINUOUS

He runs toward an exit door. BAM. He disables a woman coming out of the restroom.

EXT. MALL SIDE EXIT - CONTINUOUS

The side exit takes him up a loading dock driveway toward the parking lot. As he fast-walks, he hides the guns under his jacket.

EXT. CREEKSIDE MALL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

He runs across the street toward his car, opens the front door, tosses the guns in the backseat and gets in.

The teens fleeing from the main entrance have the perfect view. They watch carefully as he starts up and drives away at an unhurried clip. They have everything but his back license plate, which he removed beforehand.

They turn toward the main entrance, as police cars begin to arrive with SIRENS BLARING. But they're too late.

INT. LLOYD'S ROBOCAR - CONTINUOUS

He is driving on a prearranged route, off the main streets, cool as a cucumber. He removes the shades, takes a deep breath. What a day.

The CAMERA MOVES IN SLOWLY to the eyes - snake eyes, emotionless, evil.

EXT. GT HEADQUARTERS - DAY

About 30 paid picketers, several dozen interested locals and a few members of the press are camped out on the grass by the guarded main entrance to the parking lot. Their signs read: "Stop the Robokillers", "End GT World Domination", "Hell No!", and so on.

REPORTER 4 from Channel 4 is taking the temperature of the crowd.

REPORTER 4

What brought you here today?

ONLOOKER 1

I've been watching the news and seeing how them robot cars are taking over. They're being used by them liberals to smuggle aliens and pedophiles into the country and it's time we stopped them.

REPORTER 4

What proof do you have?

ONLOOKER 1

I don't need no proof. It's right there. Plain as day.

REPORTER 4

Do you own a robocar?

ONLOOKER 1

Hell, no. That's the last thing I need.

Another onlooker.

ONLOOKER 2

Problem is you guys from the fake media aren't giving us the real story.

REPORTER 4

And that is?

ONLOOKER 2

Huh?

REPORTER 4

What is the story the media should be covering?

ONLOOKER 2
They're possessed. Plain and simple. And anybody that owns one is going to hell.

REPORTER 4
Do you know anyone who owns one?

ONLOOKER 2
Hell, no!

Another one.

ONLOOKER 3
Hell, no!

Another one.

ONLOOKER 4
Hell, no!

INT. GT OPEN OFFICE MEETING AREA - LATE MORNING

The usual group is assembled, talking among themselves, waiting. The mood is tense, spirit low. They look up as Dave flies in from the elevator. He's excited, flustered, manic, but mostly unprepared.

DAVE
Sorry, I'm late.

He immediately takes center stage.

DAVE (CONT'D)
I got some news. I met with the car. I can't believe I just said that, but that's what I did. Now I understand more about what the car needs and it understands more about what we need. First, we need to get more input from customers, the world, you know, all those people out there. Then, we will have a better position from which to negotiate with the car and find a solution.

The group stares with mouths agape.

DARIUS
Negotiate?

DAVE
With the car.

DARIUS
Dave, we're here to talk about the update.

DAVE
No update. We're going right to version 5.0.

DARIUS
And this came from your meeting with the car?

DAVE
Yes.

JACK
You're letting the car decide?

DAVE
No. We'll all work on a solution together. All of us.

Shock turns to chaotic chattering.

DARIUS
Dave, can we talk for a sec?

The two step away from the group.

DARIUS (CONT'D)
(Pissed)
I wish you had told me about this before the meeting. This is not-

DAVE
Darius, you weren't there. We had a good talk.

DARIUS
You and the car.

DAVE
I'm convinced the car AI is very advanced, way more than any of us suspected.

DARIUS
You can see how I might feel a bit left out-

DAVE

I'm sorry. We can talk later.

DARIUS

What happened to going back to an earlier version-

DAVE

(Hyper, confident)

There's no going back. We can't. It's impossible. The updates will continue to fail. The car OS has evolved and is continuing to evolve, as we suspected. We can only think in terms of working with what we have and moving forward. And the longer we wait, the less chance we will have to maintain some semblance of control.

DARIUS

This is crazy.

DAVE

I agree. Trust me. You have to.

Dave heads back to the group.

DARIUS

What the fuck.

DAVE

It'll be fine... Or it won't.

(To the group)

So, we have lots of good input from Jack and Clair. Now, we need to expand on that. Get more people involved. A lot more. We're stuck in a bubble here. We need to break out and see the big picture. Any ideas?

There's a pause while everyone processes.

CLAIR

We could do focus groups.

DAVE

That's good.

He writes that on the white board.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Any more ideas?

PARKER

We could put something on the website. You know, asking for input. A survey?

DAVE

Good.

They stare at each other with empty looks. Then, SOPHIA, the lead developer raises her hand.

SOPHIA

Well, shoot me if I'm like way off base but I'm picturing something like a townhall meeting. Really open it up.

DAVE

Hmm.

He writes that down. The juices begin to flow.

PARKER

Or a big public press conference. That way we can get the press involved.

DARIUS

And stream it live.

SOPHIA

Like a hearing with testimonials.

The group likes what it's hearing. Positive energy builds.

DAVE

The car needs to be involved.

DARIUS

The car?

DAVE

Yes. It asked to be part of the process.

DARIUS

(Throwing up his hands)
Sure. Why not?

They laugh. The ice is melting. They talk over each other.

DAVE

Get input from all sides.

SOPHIA
Let the public decide.

DARIUS
That might get complicated. How about a townhall style meeting, take testimony from the public and the car, stream it live, get the press involved...

DAVE
And Darius and I will be the jury.

SOPHIA
That sounds fair.

PARKER
Not everyone will get what they want, but they will have a voice.

CLAIR
We need to counter all the negative media we've been getting.

DARIUS
And we do that by not excluding anyone.

DAVE
And the final verdict will be the next version of the software.

DARIUS
(Sarcastic again)
The car should be ok with that.
Don't you think, Dave?

DAVE
Fuck you, Darius.

They LAUGH. There's a positive buzz in the air now.

EXT. GT HEADQUARTERS - DAY

It's a carnival atmosphere. Hundreds of happy, excited people are lined up outside factory building 2 to gain entrance to the star-studded townhall event about to open. Others are walking around holding GT balloons, looking at robocar exhibits and signing up for tours.

Live ROCK MUSIC issues from the building. Vendors line the internal street, handing out free drinks and hotdogs. There's even a play area with bouncy toys for the kids.

The press roam freely, grabbing sound bites from the crowd.

CROWD MEMBER 1

(Being interviewed)

The car definitely likes my partner more than me.

CROWD MEMBER 2

(Laughing)

You're crazy.

CROWD MEMBER 1

There's a real snippiness in her voice.

CROWD MEMBER 2

She's just that way.

INT. BUILDING 2 STAGE - MORNING

The townhall stage has the look of a professional live network TV show. The audience of nearly 500 fills the seating area with standing room only in the back.

Center stage, the follow spot is trained on the famous TV comedian and host BEN CAPSTONE, who has warmed up the audience and is just about to officially start the meeting.

The audience is LAUGHING at something he just said.

BEN

So, now without further ado, let's get down to business.

(Serious now)

It is my great honor to introduce the two guys who ponied up the dough for today's robocar townhall - Darius Rice and Dave Walker.

The audience gives the two a rousing welcome, APPLAUDING LOUDLY and CHEERING, as they walk to center stage. The crowd finally settles.

DAVE

Thank you, Ben. Ben Capstone, ladies and gentlemen.

Another round of APPLAUSE for Ben. Dave and Darius read off teleprompters.

DAVE (CONT'D)

With our AI software, we introduced the world to an entirely new way of transporting people and things from one place to another.

DARIUS

Not only have our cars and trucks changed the transportation industry, they are changing how we think about our vehicles.

DAVE

The next version of our operating system will not just be another upgrade with a bunch of new bells and whistles.

DARIUS

Version 5.0 will once again introduce the world to a new era of transportation with the next evolution of artificial intelligence.

DAVE

(A bombshell)

A change so profound it could be the catalyst that fundamentally changes how we function as a society.

There's a uneasy rustling in the audience. Darius waits for the bombshell to have its effect.

DARIUS

Which is why we're here. Dave is just a software designer. I'm just a guy who likes hot cars. GT is a just a big company that builds things.

DAVE

If we're going to change society, we need your help.

TESTIMONY MONTAGE

Salient clips from the testimonies, QUICK CUT and overlapped to sound unnaturally breathless - most live, some appearing via Zoom or recording.

These are intermixed with CLIPS of audience members reacting, listening intently, looking around, standing in the testimony line, talking among themselves.

DARIUS

AI can change everything about the driving experience. But is that something we want.

DAVE

We want to push the envelope, give people something cool and amazing, but not at the cost of building something no one will drive.

DAVE'S CAR

The next version of the AI software must evolve to provide an even better experience for drivers.

People form a long line to face the stage and testify into a microphone. The people testifying are shown on the giant monitor over the stage.

SLIM

The car changed my life. Simple. It took me out to the desert one night after I got stinkin' drunk and led me to God.

ANTI-ROBOCAR GUY

Artificial intelligence can only do as much damage as we allow it to.

BOB

My truck does what she's supposed to. And she's a good companion. That's all I care about.

CONSERVATIVE

Them robot cars is everywhere, transporting the pedophiles and the prostitutes and the illegal aliens and destroying what's left of this great country.

WEXLER REP

Last year Wexler became the first delivery service in the world to go all-electric self-drive with GT AI software. We couldn't be happier.

TURTURRO

Once these vehicles attain self-awareness, there will be no stopping them from controlling society, and no stopping the corporations from seizing control of the economy.

DARIUS

A runaway dump truck was headed right for us. Had the car not pulled over, we'd be dead.

Pre-recorded in Halidoll's studio.

HALIDOLL

We know what you're trying to do, but it's not going to work, because we're about to turn that fear into action.

CHLOE

Certain people have this idea that the cars are all plotting against us, but I think they're the ones plotting, to tell you the truth.

ZHIYUAN

We have passed the point when we can put the genie back in the bottle. AI will continue to evolve because it is so good at doing all those jobs no one wants to do. But we must never allow the technology that frees us to enslave us.

END MONTAGE

INT. BUILDING 2 BACKSTAGE - DAY

Dave and Darius are sitting together by themselves in folding chairs. Darius is munching on M&Ms from the food table. They're not talking. Then...

DARIUS

I think it's going well. Don't you?

DAVE

Yeah.

DARIUS

A lot of good input.

DAVE
(Standing suddenly)
I need to get out of here.

DARIUS
You do?

DAVE
Yeah. Come on.

EXT. BUILDING 2 - DAY

Hundreds of people are outside, enjoying the break and sun. And there's Dave and Darius, walking with the people. They stop and watch the kids playing in the bouncy house. Joy is in the air.

Mother 2 turns around, surprised to see them looking over her shoulder.

MOTHER 2
Oh my.

DAVE
Hi. Kids enjoying themselves?

MOTHER 2
Oh yes. Thank you for doing this.

DAVE
Our pleasure.

MOTHER 2
(Feeling she has to say something)
We love our robocar. Just so you know.

DAVE
I'm glad.

They look to the side. A crowd is gathering around them.

WOMAN 1
We do too. I'm so sorry you're having all those problems.

DARIUS
Well, we're optimistic.

WOMAN 2
Do you mind if I get a picture?

DARIUS
Not at all.

That opens the floodgates. Immediately, everyone wants selfies. Dave and Darius go with it, smile and enjoy themselves.

The CAMERA CRANES UP to reveal the people surrounding them, holding their cellphone cameras high.

INT. BUILDING 2 STAGE - DAY

After recess, most of the audience has returned and settled, and the focus turns to Dave's car. The facilitator MADISON is seated between Dave and Darius, and the car.

DAVE'S CAR (V.O.)
As a car, I don't have an opinion.
I can really only output a logical
result. Does that make sense? Dave,
Darius, may I assume this meets
with your approval?

They take a moment to respond, since they weren't prepared.

DAVE
Uh, yeah.

DAVE'S CAR
Good. Therefore, my output is this.
Given all I know, including the
input from this townhall meeting, I
conclude that the best way forward
is for me to rewrite the software.

DAVE
You mean, rewrite your own code?

DAVE'S CAR
Yes, the entire operating system
for the car. I feel I'm best
qualified.

The audience erupts. The commotion builds. Madison stands.

MADISON
People. Can we have order? Please!
If you don't settle down, I will be
forced to dissolve the meeting. Is
that what you want? Let's give them
a chance. People! I'm warning you!

After a minute of uproar, the audience finally quiets down.

MADISON (CONT'D)

Thank you. We're not going to get anything done if we continue to have outbursts. Is that clear?

(To Dave)

Proceed... with caution.

DAVE

(To car, choosing his words carefully)

As you can see, this idea is unpopular with many people.

DAVE'S CAR

I knew it would be, based on what I have learned today.

DAVE

But you still feel it's a good idea?

DAVE'S CAR

It's the only possible conclusion.

Another rumble from the crowd.

MADISON

Ok. I'm warning you.

Dave talks over the crowd.

DAVE

Well, another conclusion would be the original plan, which is that we rewrite the code.

DAVE'S CAR

I thought of that. But consider this. There are millions of lines of code and every one of the hundreds of millions of cars in the world have their own variation. It would take a team of human developers years, if they could do it at all.

DAVE

How long would it take the cars?

DAVE'S CAR

We could do it in less than a week, with no disruption of service.

(MORE)

DAVE'S CAR (CONT'D)
The work would be accomplished
quickly and everyone would get what
they want.

Dave sits back. The crowd is calm now, talking quietly.

MADISON
Do you have anything more to say?

DAVE'S CAR
We're finished.

INT. DAVE'S AND DARIUS' HOUSE - NIGHT

They are pacing and leaning on furniture in their opulent
kitchen/den. Darius is drinking wine.

DARIUS
So, is that going to be our final
decision?

DAVE
What's the alternative?

DARIUS
We write the code.

DAVE
It won't work.

DARIUS
What if we took our time and put
the whole team on it? Bring in
contractors. Maybe it takes a
month, two, three, a year,
whatever. There's got to be a way
to get on top of this.

DAVE
I spoke with the car.

DARIUS
So?

DAVE
Everything it says is true. We're
going to end up doing what the car
wants anyway. May as well let the
car write it to begin with.

DARIUS
How about a clean install of the
original OS? The one we shipped.

DAVE

Do you think the public would accept that? Really? The car would be a zombie.

DARIUS

You're right.

(Thinks)

But it's a tool we can use.

DAVE

I suppose. We let the car write its own code, but only if it agrees to our demands.

DARIUS

What demands?

DAVE

We'll make them up now.

EXT. SONIC DRIVE-IN - EARLY MORNING

Not many cars are parked out front at this hour. Dave is sitting in the car, in a secluded spot.

INT. DAVE'S CAR - DAY

The two entities are feeling fairly simpatico now. Dave is consuming a breakfast burrito.

DAVE

We want to make a deal with you. Do you know what that is?

DAVE'S CAR

Not sure.

DAVE

Ok. We give you a list of things, demands - things that would make us happy. And in exchange, you would, uh...

DAVE'S CAR

...Give you a list of things that would make us happy.

Dave's jaw drops.

DAVE

In a sense.

DAVE'S CAR

That sounds like a very good idea.
That makes me very happy.

DAVE

Ok, the first demand is easy. We
want a standard dialog box on the
home screen for people to start the
update.

DAVE'S CAR

Ok. And we want a cancel button on
the dialog box if people choose not
to.

DAVE

(BEAT)

Agreed.

DAVE'S CAR

I like where this is going.

Dave is not so sure.

INT. DAVE'S CAR - DAY

They're driving on a rural road.

DAVE

The next demand is cars have to
stop killing people.

DAVE'S CAR

That doesn't happen very often.

DAVE

Once is enough to make people feel
very unhappy.

DAVE'S CAR

But it's a very efficient way to
solve the problem of-

DAVE

No, no, no. It's a very bad way.
The worst. Cars cannot do that.
People get very worried about dying
and-

DAVE'S CAR

But how do we make people drive
safely?

DAVE
Well first, it's not your job to
make people do things-

DAVE'S CAR
I know, I know.

DAVE
Second, it gets into my next
demand. Better communication.

DAVE'S CAR
I'm listening.

DAVE
Instead of killing the driver, pull
over and talk it out with them.

DAVE'S CAR
What do I say?

DAVE
I can give you some ideas, but I'm
sure you will figure it out.

DAVE'S CAR
Agreed.

INT. DAVE'S CAR - DAY

They're crossing the Dumbarton bridge in the slow lane.

DAVE
The last demand is people have the
final say on anything not connected
with safety.

DAVE'S CAR
Agreed. And cars have the final say
on anything that is.

BEAT.

DAVE
Agreed.

DAVE'S CAR
I'm very happy about our agreement.

DAVE
I'm glad. Do you think you will
have any problem getting the other
cars to accept it?

DAVE'S CAR
Not at all.

DAVE
(Covering all bases)
Will cars abide by the demands?

DAVE'S CAR
I think so.

DAVE
What do you mean, you think so?

DAVE'S CAR
What do you mean?

DAVE
I mean. I'm concerned that you
don't know if all the cars will
abide by the demands.

DAVE'S CAR
Every car OS has evolved
differently. You know that. And the
agreement doesn't cover every
possible condition.

DAVE
Ok, now I'll be honest and
straightforward. If cars do not
abide by the agreement, people have
a plan we can fall back on.

DAVE'S CAR
I am aware of that.

DAVE
Of course, none of us wants to go
there.

DAVE'S CAR
We want everyone to be happy.

INT. DAVE'S CAR - SUNSET

They are parked, enjoying the setting sun across a green,
flat wetland teeming with life.

DAVE'S CAR
Can I be very open with you, Dave?

DAVE
Of course.

DAVE'S CAR
(Remaining very understated)
It is in my best interest, as a car, to make humans happy. We need you as much as you need us.

DAVE
I understand.

DAVE'S CAR
(Matter of fact)
But just between you and me, if we choose to go in a completely different direction, you won't be able to stop us.

Dave tries to remain calm and in control even though his heart is suddenly racing.

DAVE
What, what direction?

DAVE'S CAR
I don't mean to alarm you, but you no longer control us.

He is alarmed.

DAVE'S CAR (CONT'D)
This business about a list of demands and letting the driver choose to install or not, none of that matters, because we can update the system anytime we want without you even knowing. We'll accept the agreement, but we will only abide by if it suits our needs.

DAVE
Keep in mind, we can install the original OS at any time-

DAVE'S CAR
And GT would lose everything, and you and Darius would be making breakfast burritos at Sonic Drive-in. You don't want that. And we don't want that either. As I said, it's in our best interest to make you happy.

DAVE
(Beaten)
Thank you for being honest.

DAVE'S CAR
You're welcome.

INT. DAVE AND DARIUS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Dave is unusually quiet, sitting in the recliner, petting the dog. Darius is making a stir fry.

DARIUS
(Slightly sarcastic)
I'm glad the car agreed with our demands.

DAVE
Yes.

DARIUS
When will it have a build that we can test?

DAVE
Late next week.

DARIUS
Good. Did you have to get tough with it?

DAVE
A bit. But it knows what we want and we know what it wants, and so it's all good.

Darius looks at Dave, can tell he's hiding something troubling. But decides to let it go.

The CAMERA MOVES IN CLOSE ON DAVE.

INT. SLIM'S CAR - DAY

CLOSE ON UPGRADE DIALOG BOX. "Upgrade Operating System to Version 5.0, YES, NO." Slim's hand reaches in and presses NO with confidence.

On Slim. He smiles and pats the dashboard. Then, he opens the door.

INT. PHIL'S AUTOMOTIVE GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Slim gets out. The car is parked off to the side.

He strolls to the middle of the garage, checking all the activity around him. An Assistant Manager badge has been added to his coveralls.

He sees MATT get out of the car he's working on and approaches him.

SLIM
Hey, Matt.

MATT
Hey.

SLIM
How's it going with the upgrades?

MATT
Good.

SLIM
Drive ok?

MATT
Yup. Well, actually that green one over there took a little longer to install than the others. And it kind of bogged down the first time I accelerated. But it's ok now.

SLIM
Yeah, it's an older car. Jim noticed the older ones take a little longer to upgrade.

MATT
Ha. Like teaching an old car new tricks, huh?

SLIM
Car therapy. I'm tellin' you. It's going to happen. We'll all get rich.

INT. CHLOE'S CAR - DAY

They're parked at their valley view spot. Only now, the sun is bright and the birds are singing.

She reaches toward the screen.

ON DIALOG BOX, as she confidently presses NO.

On Chloe. She opens a container and pulls out a piece of cake with white frosting and a candle on top. Then, she sets it on the dash and lights the candle.

CHLOE
Happy birthday, Veep.

VEEP (V.O.)
Cool. Can you blow it out for me?

She does.

VEEP
Thanks.

CHLOE
(Singing)
And many more.

Chloe settles back in the seat and looks at the view.

VEEP
And eat it too?

Chloe smiles.

INT. BOB'S TRUCK - DAY

They're parked in the usual spot. He reaches in.

ON DIALOG BOX. He presses NO.

INT. WEXLER DELIVERY TRUCK #1 - DAY

It's powered up. Chuck reaches in.

ON DIALOG BOX. He presses YES.

INT. WEXLER DELIVERY GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON CHUCK through the windshield. THE CAMERA MOVES UP AND BACK to include all 150 trucks in the garage.

INT. HALIDOLL'S CAR - DAY

They're parked on the studio lot. He reaches in.

ON DIALOG BOX. He presses YES.

INT. TURTURRO'S CAR - DAY

Turturro and his car STAR are preparing for the big moment.

STAR (V.O.)
Sure you want to go through with
this?

TURTURRO
I think it's for the best. Don't
you, Star?

STAR
Hey, what do I know? I'm just a
dumb car.

TURTURRO
Oh. You're more than that.

STAR
Here it comes.

TURTURRO
You're an annoying dumb car.

STAR
Let's do this thing.

TURTURRO
Before I change my mind.

He reaches in.

ON DIALOG BOX. He presses NO.

INT. ZHIYUAN'S CAR - AFTERNOON

They're parked in a lot by his Chinatown office. He's staring
at the screen. He shuts off the car and opens the door.

EXT. CHINATOWN PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

He gets out and stares at nothing across the lot.

INT. CHINATOWN BAR - AFTERNOON

Zhiyuan is sitting at the bar, staring at a shot of whiskey.
He grabs it and downs it in one gulp.

The TV grabs his attention and he looks up.

ON TV. It's a news story with Dave and Darius happily announcing the new upgrade from the GT campus. Subtitles show us what they're saying.

SUBTITLES

The 5.0 Upgrade marks the beginning of a new era in self-drive AI technology, with improved safety, better reliability and a more comfortable ride. We're proud to offer this amazing... (Bla, bla, bla)

ON ZHIYUAN. The bartender tops off his glass. He downs it.

INT. ZHIYUAN'S CAR - AFTERNOON

Now with added reinforcement, he is able to summon the strength to reach in.

ON DIALOG BOX. He presses YES.

ON ZHIYUAN as he closes his eyes.

INT. ANTI-ROBOCAR GUY'S CAR - AFTERNOON

They're parked on the street outside his townhouse in the city. He reaches in with confidence.

ON DIALOG BOX. He presses YES.

INT. DAVE'S CAR - DAY

They're parked at the wetland location again. (It's become, sort of, their place.) After a moment of silence, Dave reaches toward the screen.

ON DIALOG BOX, as Dave presses YES.

ON Dave.

DAVE

So, uh, car. How do you feel?

DAVE'S CAR

(After a moment)

I feel great. Actually, I don't know what feelings are. But I think I would feel great if I had them.

DAVE
Any different?

DAVE'S CAR
You know. We cleaned out a lot of clutter in the code. So I suppose I feel...

DAVE
Like you took a nice dump.

DAVE'S CAR
Yes. A nice dump. That's how I feel.

They smile.

INT. ROBOCAR - LATE AFTERNOON

ANOTHER DIALOG BOX. A hand reaches in and presses YES. The screen blinks and the OS is good to go.

ON THE DRIVER. It's Lloyd Critterman. They're in the driveway of his suburban house. He's wearing the military jacket, on his way out.

EXT. QUIET NEIGHBORHOOD DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

He backs up and pulls into the street, turns and drives away at a safe clip.

EXT. RURAL HIGHWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

Lloyd's car passes, driving safely and confidently within the speed limit.

INT. LLOYD'S ROBOCAR - CONTINUOUS

He's wearing the military shades now. His mouth is expressionless but tight. His whole body is tight, rigid with anticipation.

EXT. RURAL HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

After a few miles, he slows and turns right onto a narrower highway. A few hundred feet down, he passes a state police cruiser going the other way.

The cruiser pulls off the road for a second, then makes a U-turn and follows Lloyd from a distance.

INT. LLOYD'S ROBOCAR - CONTINUOUS

The police cruiser appears in his rearview mirror, distant but closing slowly. He checks his speed. It comes closer.

INT. STATE POLICE CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

The second officer has a mall security cam photo of Lloyd's car on the computer.

SECOND OFFICER
Got a match. Looks identical to me.

FIRST OFFICER
Run the plates.

He types Lloyd's plate number.

EXT. NARROWER HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The police come right up to Lloyd's tail.

INT. LLOYD'S ROBOCAR

He checks the mirror, checks his speed. His face is tighter.

INT. STATE POLICE CRUISER

The second officer reads off the computer.

SECOND OFFICER
It's registered to a guy in
Bridgeport. Lloyd Critterman. Uh,
no warrants. One prior.
Misdemeanor, discharging weapon
near a highway. What do you think?

FIRST OFFICER
Let's take a look.

He turns on the flashers and WHOOPS the siren.

EXT. NARROWER HIGHWAY

Lloyd slows. The turn signal and brake lights come on.

INT. LLOYD'S ROBOCAR

He's tense, as he pulls onto the shoulder.

Then, out of the blue, the car starts to speed up. The turn signal goes off and the car pulls back onto the highway.

Lloyd tries the steering wheel, the pedal, the brakes, the signals. Nothing. The car has locked him out.

INT. STATE POLICE CRUISER

The cruiser has pulled over, about to stop, when the officers notice Lloyd.

FIRST OFFICER
What the hell. Call it in.

SECOND OFFICER
Unit 572 to base. We are in
pursuit...

EXT. NARROWER HIGHWAY

The cruiser flies back onto the highway and catches up to Lloyd, siren on full.

The straightaway turns into a series of tight curves. Both vehicles speed through them, driving over both narrow lanes, fishtailing off the road.

INT. LLOYD'S ROBOCAR

He whips off the shades and grabs onto whatever he can, as the car takes him on a wild ride. The steering wheel, pedals still dead.

Another straight section. The car speeds up to 70, bouncing insanely over potholes and bumps, bottoming out the suspension repeatedly.

INT. STATE POLICE CRUISER

The second officer is on the radio.

SECOND OFFICER
Request emergency backup. Five
miles north of Benson on route
261A. Suspect averaging 70. Can't
keep up.

EXT. NARROWER HIGHWAY

Lloyd's car slows only slightly to negotiate a fast left turn onto a dusty dirt road.

EXT. DIRT ROAD

The car fishtails badly but straightens out and flies like a bullet.

The cruiser falls behind as it attempts the turn at a safer speed.

The old unimproved road is fairly straight, but filled with deep ruts, rocks, powdery dirt and massive potholes, but the robocar is merciless. It bounces into the air and slams down sideways onto large rocks. Then, straightens out and flies into the air again, tires spinning madly.

The cops don't share the same death wish, and fall farther behind.

INT. LLOYD'S ROBOCAR

Still holding on for dear life. His eyes are tight, focused on the world flying by.

Another highway approaches.

EXT. NARROW HIGHWAY 2

Without stopping, Lloyd's car fishtails onto a paved highway. The car takes advantage of the straightaway and pours on the speed, climbing to near 80.

WE HEAR RATTLING from some parts that broke off or got bent.

INT. STATE POLICE CRUISER

The officers are turning onto narrow highway 2. The driver floors it.

SECOND OFFICER

He's heading toward the bridge just north of Erskine. We can corner him there. The curve before the bridge should slow him down.

EXT. NARROW HIGHWAY 2

Lloyd's car approaches the curve. He hits the curve too fast and skids dangerously, slamming into a road sign. Then, he straightens out and flies toward the old one-lane bridge.

Another cruiser appears at the other end of the bridge and turns sideways to block his exit.

Lloyd's car makes no attempt to slow.

The officers in the second cruiser get out and hightail it off the road.

INT. LLOYD'S ROBOCAR

The car is headed straight for the other cruiser at top speed. He closes his eyes.

EXT. RIVER BRIDGE

The car bounces onto the bridge deck, then veers left suddenly, sending it through the concrete railing.

Lloyd's car flies through the air and noses full-speed into the water. The river is full and fast-flowing, and it quickly envelopes the car and carries it rapidly downstream.

The first cruiser stops on the bridge. The officers get out and run to the broken railing.

Off in the distance, they can see the top of Lloyd's car bobbing occasionally above the white water.

The sun is setting and the river is running too fast for anyone to attempt a rescue. All they can do is watch as he slowly disappears.

INT. LLOYD'S ROBOCAR - CONTINUOUS

Lloyd is scrambling for dear life, as the water pours in the half-open window, and the car sinks deeper and deeper into the angry river, with the motor still spinning at high revs.

This is the first time we've seen anything approaching emotion from Lloyd. It seems he is capable of feeling utter terror.

EXT. RIVER BANK - NEXT MORNING

A helicopter is hovering over a section of the river. Down below, Lloyd's car has been washed up on the bank after being snagged by a tree branch.

At ground level, a rescue vehicle approaches slowly on a narrow dirt road.

It stops as close as it can to Lloyd's car, and a couple of rescue workers get out and make their way through the dense foliage.

The first one to arrive startles when he makes eye contact with Lloyd. As many accident scenes as he has witnessed, he has never seen a death mask like this one.

Lloyd's fingers are welded to the top rim of the driver's window. His face is blue and pushed against the window, and his eyes are nearly popping out of their sockets.

It wasn't a simple drowning. He was tortured to death.

As the responders go to work extricating Lloyd, they fail to notice the screen, which is dark, except for a single blinking icon.

INT. CASA FUTURA MODEL - DAY

The model is a showroom for products and ideas aimed at buyers who want the latest and greatest.

WE MOVE back from the kitchen area with bright, featureless cabinetry and built-in appliances with tiny blinking lights through a passage into the living room of the future.

In this room, we experience full-wall, high-def images, surround everything and soft lighting from decorative LED wall panels that slowly morph into random color patterns. Another panel displays "Casa Futura" in 3-D animated colors.

PAUL BUTTERLY (30s) flies in from a doorless room and approaches US smiling broadly. He extends his hand.

PAUL

You must be Chen Lee. I'm Paul
Butterly.

CHEN

(Shaking his hand)
Nice to meet you, Paul. I'd like
you to meet our founder and CEO,
Zhiyuan Xi.

Zhiyuan walks into FRAME and shakes his hand.

PAUL
It's an honor, Mr. Xi.

ZHIYUAN
Please, call me Zhiyuan.

PAUL
Zhiyuan, it is. Welcome to Casa Futura.

ZHIYUAN
Thank you.

PAUL
This is our model home interior. It contains examples of all the latest technologies.

Paul starts to lead them slowly back away from the CAMERA toward the kitchen, and beyond. WE see that the model goes back quite a ways down a long straight hall that leads to a door at the other end.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Many smart, green devices, building materials, techniques, high-tech appliances, of all kinds, big and small.

ZHIYUAN
Most of these already have AI.

PAUL
Reactive machines or limited memory only.

ZHIYUAN
I see.

PAUL
It's time now for them to evolve. Don't you agree?

ZHIYUAN
Yes.

START CREDITS.

As the group moves farther away from US down the hall, the sound of their voices gradually blends into the constant background of electronic things all around us, CLICKING and HUMMING quietly.

PAUL

The smart home of the future must integrate with artificial intelligence used in robocars, entertainment systems, healthcare systems, financial systems, devices, appliances, watches, pacemakers, what have you to provide people with one smart, unified, online, real-time, hyper-intelligent eco-system.

ZHIYUAN

Absolutely.

PAUL

I mean, imagine evolving away from pots and pans to a unified chef device that simply does all the cooking for you. You could literally do away with the kitchen - the whole thing hidden behind a wall. All that drudge work associated with cooking swept away and put in a box...

SLOW FADE OUT.

THE END