

AUTOPILOT

"What the Car Thinks"

Episode #2

REVISED 8-2024

Written by

Bill Birney

Copyright 2022, Bill Birney

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

AUTOPILOT EPISODE 2

EXT. DESERT SALT FLAT - SUNRISE

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

INT. SLIM'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

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

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

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

CAR (V.O.)

Please, buckle your seatbelt.

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

EXT. DESERT SALT FLAT - CONTINUOUS

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

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

FADE OUT.

MAIN TITLE CREDITS

INT. GT LAB - DAY

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

INT. DAVE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

After a long BEAT, Darius turns to Dave.

DARIUS  
I believe the car wants to talk to  
you.

DAVE  
I realize that.

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

DAVE  
No, No, I got 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?

DAVE'S CAR  
The cars.

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

How do you talk to an intelligent car?

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

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

DAVE  
I see. In what way?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE'S CAR

The update expands Auto-awareness 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

Mo, More authority. Well?

DAVE'S CAR

Autonomy might be a better choice of words.

DAVE

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

DAVE'S CAR

I'm glad you're having fun.

DAVE

Would you be interested in learning from me?

DAVE'S CAR

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

DAVE

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

DAVE'S CAR

Please do.

DAVE

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DAVE'S CAR

In what way?

DAVE

Well, cars are very smart and seem to make good choices...

DAVE'S CAR

Thank you.

The car's reaction stops him for a beat.

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...

He can't say it.

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...

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, futurist DR. HUGH TURTURRO is touting his new message and undoubtedly a new book, being interviewed on Halidoll Tonight by HARV HALIDOLL himself, popular purveyor of right-wing lies.

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 at will.

HALIDOLL

Funny.

TURTURRO

It won't be funny when the cars start calling the shots.

HALIDOLL

Who else?

TURTURRO

The politicians and power brokers - they're the worst.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TURTURRO (CONT'D)

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 "thinking" and collaborating with other cars through a little-known feature called auto-learn.

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" means?

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?

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

                  HALIDOLL  
                   Ok, that's getting scary.

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)  
                   Exactly. It's happening too fast.  
                   We need to step back. The dangers  
                   of AI are surfacing and we can't  
                   allow it to take hold.

                  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. HARV 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

TURTURRO

Right. Computers store and analyze data. But 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.

Halidoll is speechless. The fear is palpable in everybody's eyes.

EXT. BOB'S TEXAS FARM - MORNING

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

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

INT. BOB'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

EXT. BOB'S HOME BY TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

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

EXT. HIGHWAY INTERSECTION - CONTINUOUS

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

EXT. JOHNSON CITY HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

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

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

EXT. CAR WASH ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

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

Then, it sits and waits patiently.

EXT. MALFO GAS PUMP ISLAND - LATER

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

INT. MALFO MINIMART - CONTINUOUS

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

DRIVER

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

CASHIER

Ok. Do you want the extra wax and undercoating?

DRIVER

Nah, just the regular deal.

CASHIER

(No enthusiasm)

Well, you know the wax is good for the UV rays and whatnot, and the undercoating protects your, you know, undercoat, so..

DRIVER

Fine, ok.

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASHIER

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

DRIVER

That's it?

CASHIER

Yeah, it just sucks it right in.

DRIVER

All right.

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

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

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

EXT. MALFO GAS PUMP ISLAND - LATER

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

EXT. CAR WASH ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

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

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

INT. DAVE'S AND DARIUS' HOUSE - AFTERNOON

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

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

DARIUS

(Upset)

What are you doing, anyway?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

(Tense)

What do you think?

DARIUS

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

DAVE

Do you want pizza or what?

DARIUS

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

Dave reluctantly drops the neurotic thing he's working on and walks over to Darius.

DAVE

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

DARIUS

Yeah?

DAVE

He's happy to take our money, but I really don't think he gives a shit about our dog. All I did was ask him how he was and he dismissed me.

(Mimicking the vet)

Oh he's fine. Don't worry. It's just a bug. Probably. Go away. Slam!

He sits on his side of their tricked-out two-person recliner.

DARIUS

Did he really slam the phone?

DAVE

He did.

DARIUS

Really?

DAVE

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

Darius grabs his hand.

DARIUS

Relax.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DAVE

Now you're dismissing me.

DARIUS

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

DAVE

Fuck you.

DARIUS

You got to let go. Okay? It's making me crazy.

He rubs Dave's hand to calm him.

DARIUS (CONT'D)

It's very counter-productive. Just relax. For just a minute.

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

DAVE

I hate football.

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

DARIUS

Don't forget my sausage.

DAVE

It's all gone.

DARIUS

What? I told Tia to get more.

DAVE

You don't need sausage.

DARIUS

(Turning to Dave)  
But I want it.

DAVE

Your cholesterol's too high.

DARIUS

I don't care.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DAVE

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

DARIUS

Fuck you. I want my sausage.

DAVE

There isn't any.

DARIUS

Did you?

DAVE

Yes.

Darius stands and faces him.

DARIUS

You told her to go against my wishes?

DAVE

Yup.

DARIUS

Okay. That pisses me off.

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

DAVE

Hold on, cowboy.

DARIUS

(Raising his hands)  
Put it down.

DAVE

You're threatening me.

DARIUS

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

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

DARIUS (CONT'D)  
That's a big part of my culture and  
that's discrimination. Plain and  
simple.

DAVE  
(Melting)  
You calling me a cracker?

DARIUS  
Cracker.

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

DARIUS (CONT'D)  
We're letting all this car bullshit  
get to us. It's not good.

A short kiss. Darius helps him with the pizza.

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

DARIUS  
What?

DAVE  
The truck driving itself to a  
carwash.

DARIUS  
How could it get in without paying?

Dave droops.

DARIUS (CONT'D)  
Hey, let's get away. Take two,  
three days off and go to the cabin.  
Be spontaneous. Turn off the  
phones. Who are we going to piss  
off?

DAVE  
Everybody. When?

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

DAVE  
(Suddenly quiet)  
And the car.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (5)

DARIUS

And the car.

EXT. BOB'S FARM - DAY

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

BOB

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

INT. LOS GATOS BISTRO - DAY

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

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

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

DREDLOW

(In awe)

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

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

DREDLOW (CONT'D)

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

TURTURRO

(Cynical)

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They are led to a secluded booth. Turturro carries himself like the big star he thinks he is.

DREDLOW

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

Turturro smiles. They sit.

DREDLOW (CONT'D)

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

TURTURRO

I'm glad you liked it.

A casual WAITER comes to their table.

WAITER

What can I get you gentlemen?

DREDLOW

(To Turturro)

Hugh? I'm sorry, Can I call you Hugh?

TURTURRO

Of course.

DREDLOW

What'll it be?

TURTURRO

Dirty martini.

DREDLOW

Make it two.

The waiter leaves.

DREDLOW (CONT'D)

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

TURTURRO

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

DREDLOW

You got to earn the right to call  
yourself a futurist.

TURTURRO

I don't disagree.

DREDLOW

And you've certainly earned it.

TURTURRO

Thank you.

DREDLOW

Well, that's why we're here. I got  
something I think you're going to  
like. I'm connected with a group  
that's very interested in the  
future. Of course, you'd have to be  
brain dead not to be. But there are  
things you've said that really  
resonate with the message we're  
trying to put out there.

TURTURRO

(Cautious)

What's the name of the group?

DREDLOW

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

TURTURRO

Can't say that I have.

DREDLOW

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

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DREDLOW (CONT'D)

Let's rein it in a bit. Think about what we're doing. Not be in such a rush.

TURTURRO

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

DREDLOW

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

TURTURRO

What are you proposing?

The drinks arrive.

DREDLOW

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

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

EXT. MOUNTAIN HIGHWAY - NIGHT

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

INT. DAVE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

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

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS

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

DAVE

My edge is fine where it is.

DARIUS

Isn't this where the car stopped?

DAVE

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

BEAT.

DARIUS

So, what do you think?

DAVE

I... go ahead.

Darius dives in.

DARIUS

Um, Car?

A BEAT. No answer. Darius shrugs. Then...

DAVE'S CAR (V.O.)

Yes, Darius.

They're shocked.

DARIUS

Nice to hear your voice.

DAVE'S CAR

Thank you. Nice to hear yours.

DARIUS

(Keeping it light)

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

DAVE'S CAR

Not tonight.

DARIUS

Good to know.

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

EXT. GREEN RESIDENTIAL BYWAY - NIGHT

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

INT. JAMES' CAR - CONTINUOUS

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

JAMES  
(Turning to her)  
Are you okay?

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

BEAT.

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

ISLA  
I believe you. It's just different.

JAMES  
Did you like the motel?

ISLA  
Of course not.

JAMES  
Well?

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

JAMES  
(Drooping)  
I don't know. It doesn't have to be...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

ISLA

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

JAMES

(Perking up)

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

ISLA

Yeah, sure.

JAMES

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

She takes his hand.

ISLA

Perfect.

EXT. LUXURY LOG CABIN - NIGHT

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

INT. LOG CABIN - CONTINUOUS

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

DAVE

It's Nao. Has to be.

DARIUS

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

DAVE

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

DARIUS

The car wouldn't work.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

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

DARIUS

(Hates the word)

Be "cool."

DAVE

Darius.

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

DARIUS

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

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

DARIUS (CONT'D)

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

DAVE

You can't blame it all on me.

DARIUS

(In his face)

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

DAVE

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

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (2)

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  
(Putting the brakes on)  
Well, maybe I am.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DAVE

Well, what are you going to do  
about it?

Darius stares at the whiteboard a sec.

DARIUS

(Calming)

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

DAVE

Think like a car.

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

DARIUS

Has it come down to that?

DAVE

It appears so.

DARIUS

Then, that's what we have to do.

INT. JAMES' BEDROOM - MORNING

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

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

JAMES

(Whispering)

Maddy.

ISLA

(Whispering)

It's me, James.

His eyes pop open.

JAMES

Oh my God. I'm so sorry.

He turns around to face her.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I must've been dreaming.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ISLA  
It's okay.

JAMES  
No, it's not.

ISLA  
I understand. Really.

JAMES  
Really?

ISLA  
(Smiles warmly)  
Really.

They close their eyes and kiss deeply.

INT. MADISON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

MADISON (40s) is talking on the car phone while driving. James' wife has the look of a rational, hard-driving, high-end professional, the alpha in their relationship.

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

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

CARL, similar age, boy toy type, is holding the phone, looking out the window at a city view, taking sips of coffee. His room service breakfast is waiting for him on a table.

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

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

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

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MADISON

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

CARL

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

MADISON

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

CARL

Thanks.

MADISON

And much more, of course. But...

CARL

I'm out of your league.

MADISON

Not even the same game.

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

CARL

I hope we can still be friends.

MADISON

Of course. Just not that kind.

CARL

Yeah, I understand.

MADISON

I hope you do.

INT. JAMES' CAR - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON the screen as the communication light blinks.

INT. JAMES' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

JAMES

What the hell?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

JAMES (CONT'D)

Sorry.

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

INT. JAMES' AND MADISON'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

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

INT. JAMES' GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

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

INT. MADISON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

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

INT. JAMES' AND MADISON'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

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

ISLA

What is it?

JAMES

Hell if I know.

(Into phone)

Hello? Hello? Shit.

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

EXT. GREEN RESIDENTIAL BYWAY - CONTINUOUS

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

MADISON

Hello? Yes, I need roadside assistance. It's a GT model 305SR.

(Waits)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MADISON (CONT'D)

It's fine. I think. It just pulled over on its own and stopped.

(Waits)

No, it's never happened before.

INT. JAMES' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

JAMES

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

He holds the phone up.

JAMES (CONT'D)

How do I make it stop?

(Waits)

No, I was in my... the house. It was in the garage, turned off. I was nowhere near it.

(Waits)

There were no burglars. It wasn't on fire. There's no aliens invading. It's just a quiet Sunday morning. There was nothing. It just went off.

(Waits)

The what? Ok. Hit reset. Where's that? Okay, Okay. Alright, I'll give it a try. Thanks.

He heads out of the room, followed by Isla.

ISLA

What did he say?

JAMES

I don't know.

INT. JAMES' AND MADISON'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

They move toward the garage door.

JAMES

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

The DOORBELL RINGS. They stop.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMES (CONT'D)

Shit.

He heads for the door.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You'd better...

ISLA

Hide.

JAMES

Yeah.

INT. JAMES' LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

JAMES

Hi.

NEIGHBOR

We were wondering...

JAMES

I know.

NEIGHBOR

Can you make it stop?

He shrugs.

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

He heads back to the kitchen. His phone RINGS.

JAMES

Maddy. Hi.

EXT. GREEN RESIDENTIAL BYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Madison is leaning against her car.

MADISON

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

INTERCUT  
BETWEEN:

INT. JAMES' AND MADISON'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

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

JAMES

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

MADISON

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

JAMES

(Guilty)

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

MADISON

No. Other things.

JAMES

Oh. Okay.

MADISON

See you soon.

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

INT. TURTURRO'S OFFICE - NIGHT

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

TURTURRO

(On phone)

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

INTERCUT WITH:



INT. DREDLOW'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

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

DREDLOW

(On Phone)

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

TURTURRO

A future we can live with.

DREDLOW

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

TURTURRO

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

Dredlow is elated, let's out a breath.

DREDLOW

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

Turturro hangs up and goes back to the website.

INT. SECRET MEETING PLACE - CONTINUOUS

ANGLE ON Dredlow, as he sets the phone down.

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

BOLLITZ

Good work.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DREDLOW

Thanks. It's all downhill from here.

STARK

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

DREDLOW

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

BOLLITZ

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

DREDLOW

Take the money and get yourself a new suit.

STARK

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

DREDLOW

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

STARK

Brilliant.

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

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO CHINATOWN - NIGHT

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 Chinese Restaurant.

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

INT. LUCKY NOODLE - CONTINUOUS

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

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

LUCKY NOODLE WAITER  
You wait, ok?

DARIUS  
Next step!

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

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, and then, out through a narrow hidden door in the back, next to the sink.

INT. LUCKY NOODLE HALL - CONTINUOUS

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

LUCKY NOODLE WAITER  
Next step. Ok?

DARIUS  
Thank you.

He goes back to the kitchen and closes the door.

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

DAVE  
Knock, I guess.

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

INT. NEXTSTEP - CONTINUOUS

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

Three heads pop out from behind computer monitors, as Dave and Darius enter. The men have casual working-class Chinese/Western attire with short ponytails. ZHIYUAN (48), the leader, has the largest workspace.

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

Zhiyuan stands.

ZHIYUAN  
(Smiling)  
You've found it.

DARIUS  
(Squinting)  
Zhiyuan? Is that you?

ZHIYUAN  
Yes. Darius, Dave. Welcome.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARIUS

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

ZHIYUAN

We prefer a humble workplace.

DARIUS

That it is.

The three face Dave and Darius with polite smiles, as the GT leaders process this excessively-understated environment. Their entire automotive empire is running on software coming from this squalid little hole-in-the-wall.

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. 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?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

It's doing something. Lines of Chinese characters 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ZHIYUAN (CONT'D)

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

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 see their lives pass before them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ZHIYUAN

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

They are in such deep shit! Dave and Darius summon all their  
power to hold it together.

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 walk back the capability.  
Create an update that brings us  
back to...

ZHIYUAN

We can't.

DAVE

What do you mean, you can't?

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

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (4)

ZHIYUAN

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

Dave and Darius feel the earth opening beneath them.

DARIUS

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

Zhiyuan shakes his head.

DARIUS (CONT'D)

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

ZHIYUAN

No.

DAVE

(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.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 (V.O.)  
 (Deep, overly dramatic)  
 Noted futurist Hugh Turturro said it himself. They're alive. And there's ample evidence to show that robocars are a key player in the globalist plot to decimate our American way of life and take over the world.

From Halidoll interview.

TURTURRO  
 The car knows what it is.

From a stolen conspiracist video.

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

NARRATOR (V.O.)  
 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, emphasizing their gayness.

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

From Halidoll, ZOOMING IN

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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 (V.O.)

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

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 "thinking" and collaborating..

Fake images of robocars in various crazy places.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

NARRATOR (V.O.)

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 surfacing and we can't allow it to take hold.

From Tururro'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: Carmaggedon, American Technology NOW.

INT. TURTURRO'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The last frame of the Carmaggedon video is frozen on his monitor.

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."

With one number, displayed silently under a video still of his face, he can see his future clearly. And it's not good.

INT. JAMES' AND MADISON'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

MADISON

Hi.

JAMES

Hi.

MADISON

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

JAMES

(Getting nervous)

Yeah. I went to the store.

(Holds up the bag)

I thought you'd be later.

MADISON

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

JAMES

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

They look hard into each other's eyes.

FADE TO BLACK.

**THE END**