

Grandfather Knows Best

By

Walking into my grandfather's house was like stepping onto the set of a classic television sitcom.

From my position in the foyer by the front door, I had a clear view of the kitchen. I could see an actual gas range and oven, a microwave, and a giant refrigerator and freezer, taking up far too much space.

I went into the kitchen and marveled at the giant appliances. Once there, I spotted a full-sized dishwasher under the counter. The sink had a garbage disposal. And an area the size of a closet was set aside to act as a pantry. I peeked inside; it was full of food

I knew my grandfather's house was decades old, but still, most people by now had remodeled their kitchens into something more useful. With replicator technology, there simply wasn't a need for a kitchen.

My own apartment, in a building only a few years old, didn't even have a separate kitchen space.

I didn't see any sign of my grandfather. The lock on his door had reacted with the chip on my thumb to let me in, and fed me the information that he was home at the same time. At least he wasn't living completely in the past. "Grandpa?" I called.

"In the garage," I heard my grandfather reply, his voice muffled.

I walked to the garage, passing through the laundry room, with its washer and dryer—two appliances I did have, since replicated clothes are a huge waste and fit terribly. Upon opening the door, I saw the garage, sized for two cars, but the space was used entirely for a workshop. Grandpa was making repairs to another refrigerator.

"Don't give me that look, Alex," Grandpa said. "I spent forty years maintaining things like this, and...."

"You know how they all work. I know, Grandpa. You always tell me that."

"Because you don't listen," he said. "You can't trust technology when you can't even explain how it works."

I tapped my head. "I can use my neural link to access thousands of videos, with various levels of technical detail, explaining exactly how energy is converted into matter in a replicator."

"That's not the same as knowing," Grandpa said. "Now come over here."

I did, and Grandpa enveloped me in a bear hug, just like he has always done. "I'm so glad you came to visit, Alex," he said.

"It's been too long," I replied.

"You hungry?" he said.

"I am."

"Good. We're going to a real restaurant tonight, where we can eat real food."

"What about my...."

"I checked. No peanuts anywhere on the menu to trigger your allergy," Grandpa said. "Believe it or not, restaurants have always cooked for people with allergies."

One of the benefits of replicated food is that it's perfectly safe. The replicator sees my electronic signature, knows my allergies, and is prevented from generating anything with any of the dangerous peanut proteins. There's also no risk of cross-contamination.

One thing missing with replicated food, though, is the aroma of food being cooked. And the Italian restaurant to which Grandpa took me smelled wonderful. All the lovely scents of garlic and onion helped distract me from the fact that it took forever for food to cook. But that gave us plenty of time to talk.

"How was your hiking trip?" Grandpa asked.

"Wonderful," I said. "This time, I picked up the trail near Roanoke and hiked all the way to the terminus at Springer Mountain. I met my car there, got a room for the night, and then drove down here."

"So you haven't been home in...."

“Counting the prep time, I’ve been gone for nearly two months,” I said. “I’d like to hike the whole trail once, but I have some gigs in the spring that I don’t want to pass up.”

I gauged my grandfather’s reaction. Back when I was little, he would argue with my father about his gig work, that it wasn’t a “real” job. As more and more of the economy was run by global artificial intelligence programs, a lot of full-time work became gig work, mostly verifying that the artificial intelligence programs were working as intended. I grew up with this as the norm, gig work supplementing a universal basic income, and I certainly appreciate the flexibility it offers me.

“Cool. You have any gigs coming up?”

Either my grandfather had mellowed out over time, or being a grandson has its privileges.

“Actually, yes. I have three lined up over the next two months,” I said. “You’ll like this one. The first gig is reviewing the calculations for your state pension plan.”

Grandpa frowned. “We’re dying off. All my old friends are passing away. And it’s all happened after they got those replicators. Healthy, and then one day, dead. I tell you, you can’t trust those machines.”

“Grandpa, you’re eighty-five years old,” I said. “Despite everything science has done, people your age still die. It has nothing to do with replicators, which are regulated and designed specifically not to harm people.”

“Is that what your actuarial work tells you?”

“It’s basic statistics. You can look it up in an instant.”

Around this time, our meals arrived. I was grateful for the chance to tuck into a hearty lasagna dish, so that I wouldn’t have to indulge in more of Grandpa’s conspiracy theories. I understand that he grew up in a time where one could find any information online, but understanding that information would require the laborious process of searching multiple unorganized links by manually manipulating a mouse or keyboard. Now, thanks to direct neural links, I can with a thought pull up a piece of information, like the mortality rate of men in the U.S. population, and immediately delve further. I can compare it to the rate in past years, to the rate in other nations, or by demographic characteristics, and whenever I want to know why something differs, the answer will pop into my mind. There are often multiple answers, but the whole realm of facts, interpretation of facts, and matters of opinion are open to anyone who wants to see.

My grandfather never got a neural link. He says the old-fashioned way works fine for him.

I relish the free access to knowledge my neural link provides me. I got one as soon as I turned eighteen, and while diving into the universal pool of knowledge, I found that statistics and trends in data were fascinating. It's what got me interested in actuarial work as a gig. It was a chance to use all this data and answer the question why. Sure, there was a system of examinations to pass, but it wasn't anything I couldn't handle.

It helped that the pay for these gigs was good. Enough to support hiking the Appalachian Trail, for example.

Fortunately, by the time we had finished enough of our meals to resume our conversation, Grandpa had forgotten about his rant. So we went back to talking about normal things. With Grandpa retired to Florida, Mom and Dad still in Texas, and me in Tennessee, we didn't get together that often. It was nice to catch up again.

Occasionally, Grandpa would let slip one of his crazy thoughts. I nodded politely as he ranted. The only thing he convinced me of that night was to get dessert.

The tiramisu was delicious.

The car drove us home, and Grandpa opened the garage door. "I could use a little help with this," he said.

I smiled and nodded politely. I'd helped him before. It never went well.

Grandpa must have remembered, since my help was limited to fetching tools and holding a flashlight. It didn't stop him from saying what he always said. "These are good jobs. You'll never see a computer doing this kind of work."

"We've already established I have no talent for anything mechanical, Grandpa."

"You can learn. You can always learn."

You can always learn, but can you teach an old dog new tricks?

Eventually, there was little left for me to do. I went back into the television sitcom house and pondered that concept. We could call it *Grandfather Knows Best*. The cantankerous grandfather character was set. All we needed now was a harried father, overworked mother, two smart-mouthed teenagers, an adorable toddler, a family dog, and a nosy next-door neighbor to complete the cast.

For the rest of the week, I shared meals with my grandfather at home. He talked about how he had no idea what to do with his time after retiring, and cooking was something he could do with Grandma. He was bad at cooking, but he eventually picked it up. And after Grandma passed, he continued to cook, partly to remember her, but also because he enjoyed it.

He tried to teach me how to cook. I turned out to be as good at cooking as I was at mechanical repair. I was disappointed; the little snippets of cooking shown on old television shows made it look so easy.

Eventually, it was time to leave. I bid farewell to my grandfather after breakfast and got in my car for the long drive home. It was going to be a two-leg trip, and I wanted to be as fresh as possible. I was eager to get into the mental mindset for work, but I allocated the second half of the trip for that. Too much time spent looking at virtual documents instead of the passing scenery tended to make me carsick.

Instead, I decided to spend the morning relaxing with classic television, the image projected on the windshield as the car drove. I remembered the fictitious sitcom I created in my mindscape, and called up two episodes of *Father Knows Best*. I didn't care for it much, and rated it as such. I then went to my current roster of sitcoms from the 1980s, allowing the algorithm to pick unwatched episodes based on my rating of previously watched episodes. I enjoyed those more, giving my ratings and also detailed reviews of particular episodes of *Family Ties* and *Growing Pains* that I liked the most. The two reviews offset the cost of my day's entertainment, adding two more valuable data points to the vast global artificial intelligence running behind the scenes.

Around this time, my car was reminding me of its need to recharge, and it recommended a stop somewhere in the vicinity of Macon. The map appeared in front of me, highlighting the available gas stations. I searched by amenities, checked the ratings for charging times and price, and then delved into the demographic information, looking at the age distribution of the current guests and the predicted distribution of the guests at the time I would arrive. I always prefer the gas stations favored by people around my age. From several good choices, I selected one.

Interestingly, it was a gas station that still sold gas!

I soon arrived at the gas station, where my car pulled into a designated berth. I got out and plugged it in to recharge. Over at the single gas pump, a classic Mercedes was getting refueled. A few people were gawking at the old car. I ignored it, instead grabbing my bag and heading inside.

In old television programs, gas stations were just places to get gas. Now, most no longer have gas, but they have everything else. They are like little shopping centers, with restaurants, bars, game rooms, stores, and health clubs. The latter amenity was my focus; I needed to work off those large

meals I had at my grandfather's house. In the hour or so it would take for my car to recharge, I could exercise, shower, and get a light snack.

Only wealthy people get replicators for their cars. It drains far too much of the battery.

After exercising, I felt reinvigorated, ready to take on my next gig.

As my car drove, I linked in and called up the details of my assignment to my virtual viewscape. It was a standard pension valuation for one of the Illinois state pension plans, confirming the actuarial required contribution that the AI had already calculated. I tagged actuarial textbooks discussing pension valuation along with Illinois statutes and regulations for future review. I looked at the calculation, seeing separate calculations for two classes of workers, current and grandfathered. I didn't need to call up a calculation program to see a huge difference between the two.

With a thought, I delved into the details. I knew this pension plan was one of many that failed over the years, thanks to the ethics and public service actuarial exam. The specific details—high benefits, underfunding, risky investments—were all too familiar. In this case, following a recession, the plan was so poorly funded that the federal government stepped in. The state wanted a bailout, but public sentiment was so strongly against it that the only solution was to raise taxes and cut benefits. But due to a provision in the state constitution, benefits couldn't be reduced for existing employees. This created two classes of employees, with those hired after 2025 being part of the current class, with reduced benefits.

My jaw dropped when I saw just how much lower those benefits were.

Further details filled my vision as I continued my review. There was a federal law and subsequent Supreme Court case (*Campbell v. Breslin*) that said that retirement benefits could only be considered promised to the extent they were funded under reasonable assumptions. One of the first applications of artificial intelligence to government policies was determining these reasonable assumptions, outside of the control of politicians. There were multiple failed attempts to change the state constitution, and promises to raise benefits to the current class, once circumstances allowed.

And that was where I came in.

For while artificial intelligence can calculate an answer, humans still monitor and ultimately control artificial intelligence. And with the amount of money at stake, the only logical conclusion is "trust, but verify".

With the history lesson concluded, I switched to the actuarial textbooks, needing to get back into that actuarial mindset. The material came back to me quickly; I had worked many similar gigs before.

I was reaching the limit of my tolerance, and so I exited the viewscape. Fortunately, I was fairly close to home. I had just enough time for another half hour television show.

It's funny the way one's home feels different after an extended absence. The way the light comes through the windows looks weird, the ambient noises seem different, and even the odor is off. It's like stepping into a hotel room.

But everything was in order. The lights and air conditioning turned on in response to my presence, the computer system powered up, and most importantly, I heard the replicator activating. It had been hours since I stopped at the gas station, and I was hungry.

With a wave of my hand, I pulled up a menu. My personal AI had noticed my exercise session, and correctly assumed that I would want reduced portion sizes. It clearly hadn't seen the numbers on the scale at the health club, or it would have suggested even smaller portions. I selected a salad with salmon, along with a mild appetite suppressant. The AI also saw my studying, and pulled up several caffeinated beverages. I chose iced tea to go with my meal, and queued up a dark roast coffee for later in the evening.

I placed a plate and glass in the replicator and pressed the virtual start button. In minutes, food and beverage were synthesized from their component atoms, and dinner was served.

Since my meal was so small, I took my time and ate slowly, focusing on the flavors. No television, no reading news pulled up on my neural link, and certainly no work. Just me and my meal. Unlike my attempts at cooking at my grandfather's house, this meal was cooked perfectly and served exactly to my liking.

After the meal, I set the replicator to clean mode and watched as it sanitized the dishes. I put the now clean dishes away, and then realized I had no further excuses.

It was time to work.

I sat in my favorite recliner, cued up some classical music, and linked in. The documents I had reviewed in the car were front and center in my virtual viewscape. I pushed them aside and went straight for the calculations. I started with the simplest portion, calculating the normal cost for the

active workers. I switched back and forth between the pension rules and the assumptions used by the AI, occasionally referring to the actuarial textbooks. Somewhere along the way, my personal AI reminded me that the coffee was ready. Soon, I had established a formula that generated results on a record level that matched the AI most of the time.

My personal AI reminded me of the time, and that despite the caffeine and the time zone change, it recommended sleep and continuing my work, refreshed, tomorrow.

I agreed, and disconnected.

I continued my work the next morning, after a quick breakfast consisting of an egg white omelet and coffee. I worked through the discrepancies, finding most were caused by individuals with multiple discrete periods of employment. Once I adjusted for that, the values fell out. The others, I noticed, were all flagged by the AI. The red triangle icon represented additional information to be reviewed.

Each flagged record represented an individual who, for whatever reason, didn't follow the normal plan rules. Sometimes, it was caused by a particular interaction between two different state pension plans. Others had contractual differences, and still others had benefits adjusted by court decisions. These rankled me some—it was no secret that many politicians in the state had ended up in prison over corruption charges—but my review was primarily about the accuracy of the AI results, secondarily about spotting human interference with the AI, and not at all about judging the fairness of the plan.

In any case, given the specifics of each individual, I concluded the AI correctly calculated the normal cost for each individual.

I took an extended break to walk around my neighborhood, then exercise, and then have lunch. My work was going well, and I had two weeks to submit my results. A bit of exercise always helped me focus and avoid that early afternoon weariness.

Still, I knew I had only completed the easy part of the assignment. The hard part, the part that required actuarial analysis and judgment, was confirming that the promised benefits were adequately funded as per the *Breslin* decision. And, because this was Illinois, there was also the matter of changing the ratio of benefits between the grandfathered class and current class.

While human politicians would certainly abuse the “reasonable assumptions” provision of *Breslin*, the AI did not have that problem. Every assumption was carefully documented and presented to me. Mortality, mortality improvement, salary growth, job shifts, and dozens of more minor assumptions

appeared in my viewscape. I could view each assumption over time, with variances noted and adjustments made in response. I marveled at the increasing level of detail these assumptions had attained over the years. For example, they varied by location; while I had no idea why job promotions would vary from Evanston to Effingham to East St. Louis, the AI figured it out, and accounted for it.

I worked in spurts over the next few days, normally linking in during the morning, early afternoon, and early evening. I remained flexible, giving me the chance to visit friends or attend social events in my community. The flexibility of the gig economy had always appealed to me for that reason.

By the end of the week, I had concluded that the AI was spot on. Variances against actual had shrunk until the point they were almost negligible. The assumed return on investment matched well against five and ten year averages. The sensitivities confirmed that the promised benefits could withstand moderately adverse experience over a short period.

Having completed the second part of the assignment, I enjoyed a weekend with the local hiking club.

The final part of my assignment was to check on the grandfathered class. The AI recommended a positive adjustment to the current class, due to “favorable experience” in the grandfathered class. To put it in blunt terms, the AI said that more people in the class died than was expected.

My first task was to verify the facts. Each reported death was checked against government records and confirmed. Just to be sure, I did the same for each of the past ten years. Everything was accurate.

I visualized the data as a graph, comparing the cohort’s mortality against population mortality. It was higher, but not inordinately so. The grandfathered class was small and getting smaller; everyone was retired, with the youngest age in the 70s.

My grandfather’s words popped into my mind. But it was just conjecture, seeing what he wanted to see and filtering out anything that didn’t fit his beliefs.

Right?

As an actuary, I was ready to substitute facts for impressions. And so I got to work.

The most wondrous thing about artificial intelligence is that its knowledge seemingly knows no bounds. Ask it a question, and you get an answer. Ask it a complicated question, and you get a most likely answer, alternate answers, and as much analysis as you're willing to read.

"Is the observed mortality in the grandfathered class explainable by random chance?" The AI estimated the chance to be only 6.8%. A worrisome number, but still, it's not like the chances of winning the lottery.

"How does the Illinois plan experience compare to similar examples in other states?" The AI pulled up data from public pension plans in California, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and Connecticut, all of which had problems with overgenerous benefits that led to similar legacy classes. Their experience was far closer to population experience than the plan I was reviewing.

"Are there any particular segments of the grandfathered class with mortality especially divergent from the general population?" Many splits of the data appeared in my viewscape. I recognized that the smaller the group, the less credible the data. Still, one sizable group had unusually high mortality: those who had left Illinois after retirement appeared to have higher mortality than those who remained.

"How has the increased mortality varied over time?" The resulting graphs showed that mortality experience for the grandfathered class tracked well with population experience for a long time, only starting to diverge around twelve years ago.

I found that I was spending more of each day linked in. I had data that defied explanation, and I was determined to come up with an answer. I ignored the advice of my personal AI to spend more time tending to my own needs.

After two days of parsing data, looking for answers, I finally decided to ask the AI for data with a similar pattern over the last twelve years. That's generally a bad idea, as asking for a portion of infinite data was in and of itself infinite data, or near enough to infinite at least. Even with the AI sorting the data by relevance, the chance of finding anything was like finding the proverbial needle in a haystack.

I flipped through the provided data as fast as I could. By this point, I had turned off the warnings from my personal AI, and used it only to guide my movement when walking around my home while still looking at the viewscape. I only disconnected for a few hours of fitful sleep followed by a quick shower.

This was exciting! There was a chance that the global AI had been tampered with, and these kinds of situation were always big news. I wouldn't be the one breaking the case, but I'd be known as the one who started the investigation. It would increase my profile, as well as my ability to get gigs.

I continued to look at the data provided by the AI. By now, it was far from matters related to public health. Even though the relevance was low, since I hadn't requested a stop to the data, I was looking at graphs of company stock prices and commodities futures and consumer trends....

Prevalence of household replicators in the U.S. population, 2060-2079

My grandfather's words came to mind. It actually matched well with the trend in increased mortality, but there couldn't be any connection.

Right?

I was not surprised that I didn't find the answer. But the discrepancies I observed were enough to recommend an investigation. I began to draft my report, concurring with the AI in the first two parts, and recommending an investigation into the grandfathered class before proceeding with any changes for the current class. I remained constantly linked in, not because of the amount of work I was doing, but because I was running up against my deadline.

My work was interrupted by my personal AI sounding an alarm, overriding its silent mode. At that point, I became aware that I was standing by my replicator, eating lunch, and that I was feeling a tickling in my throat, the start of an allergic reaction. I knew this shouldn't be happening, but both my AI and my personal experience told me I had been exposed to peanuts, and I needed to treat it.

As I was standing next to the replicator, I ordered an epinephrine injection. It appeared almost immediately; fast replication was much more costly, but the cost was waived in emergencies like this one. I picked up the syringe and went to inject it. But something stopped me. The amount of liquid in the syringe looked smaller than normal.

You can't trust those machines. I heard those words in my head, spoken in my grandfather's voice. I still didn't believe him, but just to be safe, I got the autoinjector from my car.

My personal AI monitored my response; the drug worked, and my breathing became clearer. I took the remaining meal and sealed it in a plastic bag. It was meatloaf and mashed potatoes, a favorite meal, and one that certainly wouldn't be made with peanuts. I checked the records in the replicator log; it was the exact same recipe I had ordered dozens of time. I called up an ingredient list, which confirmed that it contained no peanut oil or peanut proteins.

I trusted replicators. But this one just gave me food containing something it should have been prohibited from giving me, even if I asked for it.

I saved my ongoing work and used my neural link to access information on replicators, focusing on the controls surrounding them. There were numerous restrictions and regulations. Banned goods couldn't be replicated, nor could copyrighted materials, like a book, without the rights holder getting his cut. Products like alcohol were restricted by age, and all taxes had to be paid as well. Prescription medication could only be replicated when linked to a prescription from a doctor or medical AI.

I focused on the safety controls. There was an AI that learned from what people tried to replicate. For example, if one were to replicate one component of an illegal drug, one would find the replicator unwilling to replicate any other component. That could create issues; one article my search pulled up said that the AI had to be taught that, yes, a replicator in a pharmacy should be allowed to replicate many more drugs than a home replicator. I followed that train of thought and searched for information about who on the human side monitored and guided the AI.

A map appeared in my viewscape, along with an image of a nondescript office building: *Kankakee Government Building—City Services, Public Safety, Department of Commerce adjunct*. As an actuary, I was familiar with a lot of dumb decisions made by both the federal and state governments, but one I thought was smart was the decision to move much of the work of the federal government out of Washington. The wealth being concentrated there drew a lot of comparisons to the Capitol of the old *Hunger Games* books, especially as “real” full time jobs were disappearing from everywhere but the nation’s capital. After this change, “good jobs” were spread across the country, and apparently, the task of monitoring and regulating replicators went to these workers in Kankakee, Illinois.

Illinois.

I looked further. The workers involved, although doing work on behalf of the federal government, were still employed by the state. They received benefits like any other state worker, including the pension plan I was currently reviewing. And since the adjunct office opened in 2037, everyone working there fell into the current class.

I made a quick calculation of the actuarial present value of the increased benefits the average worker there now enjoyed thanks to “favorable experience”. People have killed for less.

It was crazy to think that someone had hacked my replicator. But if it was true, it was literally a matter of life or death. I thought about who I could contact about what just happened to me, someone who would listen to me. Fortunately, one name came to mind, a classmate from junior high and high school who I kept in contact with, thanks to the hiking club.

My car drove me across town, to a specific police station.

“Hey, Jimmy,” I said.

“Good to see you again, Alex,” Jimmy said. The name plate on his desk stated to the world that he was Lt. James Hanson, but he’ll always be Jimmy to me. He managed to secure one job that will always be full time, police officer; he was now a detective. “Your message indicated you have a crime to investigate?”

“Yes. It’s a long story, but to make a long story short, my replicator tried to kill me.”

“You won’t believe how many crackpots have tried that Skynet B.S. Now, I’m pretty sure you’re not a crackpot, so tell me the long story.”

“To be honest, my grandfather, who *is* kind of a crackpot, put these ideas in my head. But in my gig work, I uncovered something that looked wrong, and I was about to flag it for further investigation. Then I went to eat lunch, and my replicator gave me something I was deathly allergic to.” I held up the half-eaten meal that was my evidence.

Jimmy frowned. “There are controls in place to stop that from happening. Human and AI controls.”

“And here’s where I’m speculating, but the humans regulating the AI controlling replicators have some significant incentive to let a few extra people die each year. And not have it be discovered.” I put the bag with my lunch on Jimmy’s desk, along with one holding the syringe. “The police department has one of those replicators that can analyze things, right?”

“Correct. We have the full model with replication, recycling, and analysis functions.”

I had used a replicator with recycling functionality before; they were normally in public places, and you could convert unused material into energy in exchange for credits towards future replication. But only a few places, like science labs and police stations, ever have the need to know what’s in an item instead of just absorbing it.

Jimmy picked up the bags and escorted me to another room, warning me to stay outside. I did, but watched him through the window. I saw the room housed a gigantic replicator. The plate with my lunch looked tiny in comparison. He started the machine. It was taking a while, so I linked in to finish up the report.

I realized that Jimmy asked me a question over my link. “Could you repeat that?” I said.

“Do you know what specifically you’re allergic to?”

“Let me get that for you.” I called up my medical history, found the list of allergens, and sent it to him.

“Yes, all of these proteins are present in this meal.”

“What about the syringe? It’s supposed to be epinephrine.”

“Still working on that.”

Working at the speed of thought, I was able to finalize my report and make my recommendation for further investigations in the time I was waiting. I proudly submitted my work—another gig completed.

“The syringe contained a muscle relaxant and strong sedative,” Jimmy said to me. “At this point, I’m ready to open an official investigation. With your permission, I’d like to access your replicator log.”

“Of course. But I’m pretty sure it’s not going to show anything.”

It took less than a minute for Jimmy to confirm that the logs showed nothing out of the ordinary.

“Let’s check one more thing, Alex,” Jimmy said.

“What?”

Jimmy motioned for me to follow him. He took me to a break room, which included a replicator, a commercial model a lot fancier than my home model. “Go ahead and order something to eat, and then step out of the room, since it will probably be contaminated.”

I did as he said. Jimmy held a plastic bag ready to seal up this new evidence. Two minutes later, he came out, a cross look on his face. “Seriously?” he said, holding up a chocolate doughnut.

I smiled. “Figured the replicator at the police station would know that recipe.”

“Okay. The way I see it, if this were a real Skynet situation, this doughnut is going to be fine. It’d use its immense pool of knowledge and find another way to reach its goal. But since this is some human overriding AI controls, they probably weren’t smart enough to make this a one shot thing.”

Sure enough, the chocolate doughnut was contaminated with peanuts.

Jimmy stared off into space as he linked in. He was back a moment later. “Okay. The request for investigation has been filed, and your name is linked to it. The AI will use the police report, as well as

your own, as the start of its investigation. Once the human investigators are brought in, this should be wrapped up quickly.”

“Really? How do you know?” I asked.

“It’s the design of the AI. Humans control the AI by having the power to overwrite its decisions, from the slightest nudges to shutting down the whole thing. Except there’s one thing humans can’t change: the ability of the AI to track the changes made by humans.”

I learned something new that day. It’s like my grandfather said, you can always learn.

My stomach growled, and I realized something. “What am I supposed to do for food?” I said.

“There’s a wonderful place out there, with any kind of food you can imagine,” Jimmy said. “It’s called a grocery store.”

It only took three days for the hackers to be identified. Four people at the Kankakee office were charged with corruption and abuse of power for their role in altering the AI for personal gain. There was no mention of them using this power to kill, but if the bail set for them were any indication, that investigation was still ongoing.

Jimmy said I was safe to use replicators again, but I declined to do so. Better safe than sorry. And so, I found myself looking for a new place to live. I found one in an older building downtown, a condominium with hardwood floors, a fireplace, and a full kitchen. It was more expensive, but I already had plenty of additional gigs lined up. Thanks to my discovery, I was getting hired for more gigs, and was even receiving unsolicited job offers.

I didn’t take too many to start, though. After all, I needed to learn how to cook.