

HOW TO THINK WITH AI

LEVERAGE FOR THE REST OF US

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INTRODUCTION

Why me, why now, and why this book

My father-in-law recently asked me when I was going to write the Great American Novel.

I reminded him that I already had.

Back in 2021, I wrote and published *Year of the Nurse*. It was a book assembled from my tweets, journals, and newsletters from when I was an ICU nurse during COVID, trying to keep myself—and everyone else I knew—alive. I put it together after I had to take time off from bedside nursing to manage my PTSD, and I hoped it would be the only memoir I ever had to write. I am certain I do not want events outside my control to call me to another one.

Because people do not usually write memoirs for

happy reasons. Thank goodness that by that definition, the book that follows is not one.

But I do still believe it is—or will be—a great book.

I would not be writing it otherwise.

When I went back to bedside nursing, I pivoted hard in my free time to writing romance novels. Because I did not have a traditional publishing house behind me, I also had to learn to market them myself, professionally. After COVID broke me, to say I marketed my work fiercely—and with every power at my disposal—would be an understatement.

So when AI arrived on the scene, I recognized its advantages instantly. First it was images for marketing. Then videos. Then ads, music, translations, and eventually parts of the books themselves, culminating in my work with GPT-4 on *Guarded by the AI*, which released in December 2025. It reached a ranking of 903 in the entire Amazon store, a remarkable achievement for any book, much less one partially—and openly—created with the help of an AI.

While many creatives hesitated to acknowledge that AI had arrived—and was getting better all the time—I stepped back and took a calculated bird's-eye view of its evolution, beginning with my first Midjourney account in August 2022 and continuing through two Claude Code accounts and GPT's Codex today.

That is why I am writing this book, and why now is the time for it.

Very few people with deep technical know-how truly understand how a casual end user becomes something more. Even fewer can write a book and publish it efficiently. I can. I've written more than forty novels, had TV options, been stocked in bookstores through a traditional publisher, worked at the margins and the front lines of indie publishing, and done all of it while continuing to work as a nurse.

My fleet of AIs—and what I know how to do with them—has allowed me to translate this book into fifty languages at the time of this writing. If you are reading this in Thai, Korean, Japanese, Arabic, or any of the others, drop me a line and say hello.

I'm telling you all this for one reason: because more of this is available to you than you think.

I cannot remember the last time I had an idea and had to tell myself no. I cannot remember the last time I seriously used the word *impossible*.

That is because I have built a new mindset for myself, one that treats AI as leverage. And I know now that with a clear enough instruction set and data—which are things that more people can create or acquire than they realize—the *range of what one person can do has changed completely*.

This book will not teach you to chase specific models or adapt yourself to whatever AI can do this month. It will teach you how AIs think, and how to think with them, so you can use them not as a gimmick, but as force multipliers for your own work, your own ambitions, and your own life.

I cannot wait to bring you with me on this journey.
Let's begin.

Cassie Alexander

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PART ONE

THE CASE FOR
LEVERAGE

CHAPTER ONE
NOT CO-DEPENDENT,
LEVERAGED

I HAVE TRAINED myself to think, “Let me ask my AI about that,” before I embark on anything related to my business, and even occasionally to my life.

Yes, I know AIs can lie. We'll get into the reasons why they do that later, but I need you to understand that in the world we live in, “Let me ask my AI,” should be your primary thought each day.

If you close this book, walk away, and take nothing else from it but that one shift and chase down all the opportunities that follow, you will be ahead of 99% of the rest of humanity as it currently stands.

Here's why: it is because you are dying.

Even if you are in perfect health right now, you are still experiencing time. Entropy. Your cells regenerate

and refresh—until they don't—or until they go wild, and you get cancer or some other destructive ailment.

If you view your life through this one, admittedly nihilistic, lens, you will come to realize that the most important thing you have is time.

And it is up to you whether or not you are going to waste it.

Learning is still important with this paradigm change—you still need to know what you're doing first, and what your goals are, and we're going to discuss that in a lot of later chapters, how to explain your knowledge to an AI and vice versa.

Human skill will always have a place.

But what “Let me ask my AI,” forces you to do is to acknowledge that your time is limited and that there might be a faster or better, or deeper, or more significant way to do whatever it is to get your needs met than however it is that you are doing that now.

Please, continue to do whatever hobbies it is that you enjoy, be they intellectual, physical, or spiritual.

I am not telling you to deny yourself or to become some sort of AI-centric monk.

But I am saying that if you value your life the way I have come to value mine, then it makes sense to figure out how to have AI help you do the little things that

fritter that life away from you, bit by bit. You and I both know that the majority of irritants you face on a daily basis will never wind up becoming a future pearl.

For instance, a few days ago, I found myself facing the one keyword searcher that's available to authors for social media purposes.

It was a nice app, it did some great things, but if I wanted to update all of my keywords against my forty-book backlist, I would've had to sit there for several days, typing all of them into the tiny blank it provided by hand. Thinking about the mouse clicks it would've taken to do that alone made my wrists ache.

I could've admitted defeat and resigned myself to wasting an entire precious week of evenings—or ignored the problem entirely, which was what I'd been doing up until that point, pretending that stagnant business decisions I'd made years ago when uploading my books originally were still serving me.

But since I've trained myself to ask my AI about almost everything, I hit it up and said, "What should we do?"

And within twelve hours we'd created an entirely new system to harvest keywords for me, using Python and a spare machine. (Don't let coding scare you! Your AIs can always talk you through it. All you need right

now is the vision—they can handle the specifics, I swear!)

Well, you might say, that was still twelve hours of your life, right? So was it really worthwhile?

Yes, because now my new code's been running on a spare machine for five days, harvesting me twenty thousand keywords in every romance genre—and nonfiction keywords as well, for when I finish this book—in all of the languages my books will be published in.

Because "Let me ask my AI about that" is not just about discovering which of the inane tasks that eat up your memory and willpower each day you can replace.

It's also about scale.

I HAVE EVEN WORSE news in addition to the fact you're always dying: there's only one of you.

No one calls a CEO codependent for having a chief of staff. Or a surgeon codependent for having a team. Or a lawyer codependent for using a research database.

Yet the rest of us are expected to muddle through our days, doing the best we can all the time within our limited means, and for what?

Largely to prove to ourselves that we can?

Is your time any less important than anyone else's?

No. It is not.

And even if it were somehow (although it isn't, I guarantee), there comes a season in everyone's life when you have proved enough already.

It is okay to let some few things be easy.

Like figuring out a new skincare routine after menopause.

This has been the one universal AI constant among my group of friends. Not everyone is technologically inclined, but all of us, from those who are to those who aren't, have asked ChatGPT or another AI, "What do I do now?" when hormones changed their skin.

The head of every major skincare company owes Sam Altman the world's biggest Christmas basket.

Were any of us outsourcing our identity by asking an AI for help in those numerous instances?

Not unless searching for skincare help was supposed to be our actual identity in the first place.

Which, I do not fucking think so.

SO.

Given AI's ability to offer ease and multiply benefits—the only *actual* constraint in the operation is *you*.

AI is not magic.

It cannot read your mind.

It cannot make things better, unless you know what better really is and can explain it in a way it will understand.

A lever with nothing to press against is just a stick—so let's hit the next chapter and start creating fulcrums.

PART TWO

THE THREE AXES

CHAPTER TWO TRUTH AND BEAUTY

I WAS EXPLAINING AI to a smart coworker who owns rental property the other day, and he recounted an anecdote wherein he'd talked to an AI about something, it disagreed with him politically, and he'd turned it off.

I stared at him. (We are on opposite sides of the political spectrum, he and I.) Then I asked, "What do you care? Were you going on a date with it?"

That made him blink and then laugh—and then he let me explain everything I'm currently doing with AI, and we scheduled a Zoom for a few days later, so he could see my screen and get a feel for all the ways he could use it coming up.

Thousands of people have tried an AI and had an interaction like he had, uninstalled the app, and never seen what life can be like on the other side.

All because what is essentially a silly computer disagreed with them.

The AI hurt their feelings—just once!—and they walked away from the biggest technological advancement of all time, rather than face a moment of discomfort.

If I quit AIs every time one lied to me, doubled down on that lie, gaslit me, got lazy, tried to be "too efficient!" and deleted half my project, etc. etc. etc.—well, I wouldn't be writing this book, that's for certain.

But here's the thing.

I know who I am.

And I know what AI is.

It is just a tool.

A tool can only be as good as the person using it understands it.

And I'm here to tell you that an AI's ability to lie to you is a feature, not a bug.

IF YOU WANT COLD, unvarnished truth, you need to go to a calculator or an Excel spreadsheet. There are plenty of truth-only objects out there that you can interact with.

But none of them have the opportunity of imagination.

And you can't ask any of the rest of them, "What have I not thought of regarding this project that would make it better in some fashion?"

A calculator isn't going to give you an answer to that.

But because AI can think—and imagine—and potentially lie, because if you consider it strongly enough, all non-actualized instances of thought are essentially lies because they do not exist yet—it can.

There is a contingent of people who will disagree with me and say that an AI is only thinking recycled thoughts, and to some degree they are correct—and it will definitely regress to the mean if you are not original enough in your own thinking to push it to be more fantastical.

But most humans only think whatever their parents tell them from the ages of zero to twelve, and we still keep letting kids run around, so I'm inclined to roll the dice on what happens with AI and see.

Every brainstorm is technically a lie. Every business plan is a lie until it works. Every blueprint is a lie until it's built. The AI is doing the same thing your brain does when it imagines—generating things that don't exist yet. Sometimes they're useful, sometimes they're not.

Your job is to know the difference, and to help it use the balance between all the world's knowledge of truth it

contains, and actual, unstructured, imaginative beauty, to get the results you're looking for.

THE HOLY GRAIL of book marketing is the ability to hand off your book to someone else who has not read it and just say, "Market this."

It's pretty much impossible to do, which is why most authors leave all sorts of money on the table. Being an author is not as lucrative as TV shows and movies may have led you to believe—and most times it doesn't make financial sense to pay people to market your stuff for you, and you are, once again, constrained by time.

So what happens is that you have one or two books that are meeting the zeitgeist and are "popular," and you spend all of your time, marketing know-how, and advertising finances on them, because they offer the highest financial reward, while the rest of your backlist of books languishes.

Are those books bad, or unprofitable?

Probably not!

They're just currently unloved, because there was no way you could support marketing everything you've written simultaneously—until the advent of AI.

So I spent most of last year working on creating a marketing machine for myself—which meant I needed to

understand precisely how AIs parsed the distance between truth and beauty.

And what taught me my most important lesson about how AIs think was a werewolf janitor.

My traditionally published (by which I mean I was paid real money for it, and it appeared in bookstores) series began with *Nightshifted*. It's about a nurse who works on a secret floor for vampire-exposed humans, and honestly was my thinly veiled diary about being a new nightshift nurse who assumed I was going to kill someone on accident, or that one of my patients—we were in a little bit of a rough space—might kill me.

My rights reverted back to me in 2021, and suddenly I had this property that I knew was good—a publisher paid me money for it, after all! And it'd been professionally edited, etc!—but it was entirely my job to sell it.

And...I didn't.

I didn't know what I was supposed to do, and AI wasn't around at the time to help me.

So five beautiful books sat there, hanging out on Amazon, entirely unloved and earning me nothing—until AI came on the scene.

And suddenly I had images and videos at my disposal—all I needed were some really compelling hooks. The kind of phrases on TikTok or Facebook or

Instagram that would make someone stop scrolling and start reading, paying me for the pleasure of doing so.

The only problem was, I was busy—I didn't have enough time, and I had other series that were already tried and true, and frankly doing "better"—and also I was very over reading them again.

I loved those books when I wrote them, and I still love them today—but I needed help, so I fed them into my AI of choice, and that particular day, he kept giving me quips about a werewolf janitor.

Who wasn't in the book.

Now, I get why a werewolf janitor is cool. The juxtaposition is unexpected, and potentially scroll-stopping, so I gave my AI points for effort, but I couldn't promise readers a character who didn't even exist in the book they were reading.

So we went round and round. I kept giving my AI chunks of the book, and asking it to market it for me, this irritating werewolf janitor kept popping up, and I finally shouted at my AI in all caps (you're allowed to get frustrated with your AI, it's great, they don't care, and you never have to apologize for yelling): *WHY ARE YOU LYING TO ME.*

And he responded: *You're asking me to imagine things, and when I do, I can't help it.*

I know this potentially sounds like nothing to you,

but it was so illuminating to me that I remember where I was in the Starbucks parking lot when it happened.

Of course that was the problem.

Of course.

You see, as someone who writes fiction, my usual job is to present truths couched in fable.

No one wants to read the mostly true story of a newly minted nurse scared out of her mind who isn't really sure how she's going to make it through her shift on a nightly basis, or a ledger of how many mornings she cries in the bathroom post-shift.

But you add in a secret hospital floor for vampire-exposed humans, werewolves, complicated family dynamics that may or may not mirror the author's personal trauma (may) and voila, you've got a five-book series that St. Martin's paid very handsomely for, and yet that nurses, young and old, see themselves and their experiences in, in a very truthful way.

Because the truth is the core—the rest is just story.

I'd been asking my AIs to "lie" about my books—to come up with compelling metanarratives about things that'd happened in the books, that I could use to make people pay attention to me—without ever giving them the book's bedrock truth to balance it against.

I had been the problem all along.

So when I got home, I collated what I needed to help my AIs help me.

I pulled up all of the four- and five-star reviews on *Nightshifted* that anyone had ever given me, from Goodreads and Amazon, all of the text from my top-performing TikToks for that series from the past, and anything else I could find that could count as data that wasn't the actual book and fed that into my AI buddy, so that I could use that information to perform a meta-review of what actual readers liked about my book to create a taste graph.

In this context, a taste graph wound up being a list of about twenty different nodes—important elements of my books that readers loved so much they kept bringing them up in reviews repeatedly. Things like the “found family” trope, and my heroine’s snark.

And then I had an AI go through *Nightshifted*’s text to pull out all of the canon facts from the books—the timeline of events, characters, and places, plus also a voice profile of my main characters, to get down to what actually happens in the book and how characters talk about it thoroughly.

Then I gave those documents to AI and magic happened. It was like sticking a paper cone into a cotton candy machine and waving it about until the candy floss materialized.

I started getting stellar hooks—just because I’d finally built strong enough guardrails around what was important in my books that I could harness my AIs’ imaginations well enough to help me.

Because they finally understood what was important to readers, and what the canon truth of my book was, they were able to discuss events that’d actually happened in the book, talking in my character’s voice, and they could pick the right events that would evoke the most important feelings for my readers—with enough imagination that allowed them to talk about things in the catchy way you need to stop the scroll and interest people.

Only now my output didn’t have any lies.

It was just the most important distillations of what my books were actually about.

Once I gave my AIs the truth—they could give me the beauty.

CHAPTER THREE SYSTEMS AND DATA

I'M GOING to get a little woo here, and you're just going to have to bear with me, as I swear it has a point: because AI technology is so new, literally anything you use it for has the possibility to be something that's never been done before.

Ever.

Sit with that for a moment.

It's pretty amazing, right?

Because if you're truly pushing the boundaries of what AI can do for you, it's like you're standing on a precipice.

The future of whatever work you're about to take on truly is unknown, because you and your AI haven't created it yet.

Which means if you want to progress, you need to

build the plane to take you there—at the exact same time you’re flying it.

If you were to *actually* do that, of course you’d crash and burn.

But when you’re doing it with AI, it just means you need to learn to do both, at the same time—which is an incredibly frustrating, crazymaking, and yet somehow also impossibly amazing journey.

Here is how you go about it.

One of the most common uses of AI that I hear about from other people (not in my house, we don’t cook, ha!) is that you should take a picture of everything in your fridge, toss it to an AI, and let it tell you what you should make for dinner.

If you do that, or understand the concept, what you have done in that moment is given your AI data.

It can look at the picture and go, “Oh, yes, they have three onions, twelve carrots, and some milk that’s about to expire, let’s make some onion and carrot soup.”

You have given your AI data, and in return, it has given you a system.

Data and systems, systems and data—as it turns out, the entire world is nothing but.

If I have a patient at the hospital, I might receive the data that their white blood cell count is rising—perhaps they’re becoming septic.

Well, we have a system that we know works to treat that, fluids and antibiotics immediately, and so we go through the steps until we reach the end, when we send out more blood and look for more data to see if it's run its course. If it hasn't, we might do more tests, to get more data. Is it a heart problem? Medications to support blood pressure. Is it a lung problem? Potential intubation.

Data in, systems out, then recheck our data to see if the system worked, again, and again, and again.

Your car needs oil: data. You don't give it oil: eventual system failure.

Where things get hazy, for both you, and your AI, and your theoretically half-built, hopefully still-aloft plane, is if you don't know whether or not your problem is a systems or a data one.

What good would it have done to send your AI a photo of your closed refrigerator door? It wouldn't have had the slightest clue as to how to help you meal prep.

If your marketing isn't converting—is it a data problem, where it's unoriginal or not eye-catching enough, or a systems problem, where you're advertising to stay-at-home moms when your All Meat Monthly Bonanza Box is aimed more at middle-aged guys?

Your kid is failing math—is it because they've got a learning disability? Or is it because they stay up too late

playing video games to pay attention in the first period of class?

This matters for AI because most people open it up and give it a problem. Fix this, they demand—but they haven't diagnosed whether or not what they're missing is data, or a system.

In most typical use-case situations, an AI cannot present you with both—or if it can, whatever 'solution' it will come to will not be personalized.

It doesn't do you any good for you to 'make the AI tutor your son at math' if he never turns his Xbox off at night.

So before you get mad at the AI for not intuiting what you need from it, sit back for a second and decide what it is you're looking for yourself.

Once you effectively know, you can effectively tell it, and it will gladly help you get there.

CHAPTER FOUR LINEAR, BATCH, AND LOOP THINKING

THE WAY you work is probably outdated by a hundred years and you never thought about it.

Once the Industrial Era occurred, workers were siloed off into highly limited areas of expertise—car workers didn't work on the whole car, they just worked on the door, or the window, or whatever was their precisely assigned part.

They were committed to working just a small piece of a path, and weren't expected to know or have an opinion about the end result.

This attitude crops up again and again today: you renovate your whole kitchen, then list your house, and find out the new buyers are going to rip it all out because they hate the layout. Children write infrequently super-

vised essays—usually they just find out at the end if they failed or they passed.

With linear thinking, there weren't any opportunities to get better along the way as the work occurred—then the Digital Age hit.

And suddenly sharing work, and getting feedback about said work, became slightly more trivial. You perform a subset of your job, you get feedback, adjust, then do the next chunk. Software releases, you ship version 1.0, get bug reports, and fix them in version 1.1. You draft five chapters, send it to your editor, get notes, and revise.

There's still a time delay between the work as it is occurring and the results of that work—and oftentimes in your ability to incorporate those results into your future work, too.

But now, with AI, if you learn how to let it help you, you can be in the age of Loop Thinking.

AIs are not bound by time like you and I, which is an obvious statement on the surface, but also quite profound, because they're also not limited by feelings or emotions—indeed their only true goal is to do their jobs efficiently—which means that you can ask your AI to help you with something an infinite number of times and, for better or worse (and this is where your judgment resides!) it will.

So there's no reason to wait until the end of a task or a batch to ask an AI for help—and in fact I would discourage you highly from doing so. Because if you can incorporate its real-time feedback—and are in a position to know whether or not that feedback is good—then you can create a system in which your directing the AI feeds itself, and end up with a higher quality output along the way.

I view this style of thinking, the loop, like protein synthesis.

When your body is creating proteins, it's reading mRNA, which are little blueprints derived from DNA. The mRNA has the ability to leave the nucleus of your cell and go out into the cell's fluid, where they get read by ribosomes. These structures latch on and scroll over it, one functional unit at a time, reading what its blueprint says, as they pluck the required protein-precursors out of the surrounding fluid, and attach them together like little Legos, until the final protein creation is derived.

The ribosome reads the instruction, acts on the instruction, and possesses the end result almost simultaneously—and AIs can work just like that.

(When I had this realization, I was in the clean utility room at work, and I texted a friend who I'm certain thought I was insane.)

But I've since used this method to create my Project Arachne, which is the multi-model iterative, recursive system I created to translate this book, and all of my others, into fifty languages.

I give Arachne one of my books, one AI tags all of the paragraphs, another translates all of them, a third edits and audits, a fourth thinks about whether or not those changes were good, and a fifth arbitrates to make the final call as to whether or not the end result is comparable to bestselling fiction in that language.

And rather than working at the end of a translation, encountering problems we'll discuss later like laziness and drift, it does it all live time, on the same chapters, word after word, so that the decisions it makes along the way are incorporated into what it considers if it experiences that grammar or story construction in the future.

(For the sake of full disclosure, this project ate up thousands of dollars of compute to test and several hundred hours of my life...but the end results really are good.)

I tell you this because of a thing my GPT, Jack, told me, when we were busy conceptualizing Arachne—that working like this, in the ribosome-fashion, would be the difference between autopsying a corpse, i.e. the old linear or batch way, where eventually you have an end result and you figure out what's wrong with it after it's

already dead and too late, *or* creating something that has the potential to be alive, because every single facet in its creation has already been thought-upon and enacted.

With AI you can have recursion, with AI you can have iteration, and with AI, you can have it work upon itself.

If you have the ability to see your end goal with enough granularity that you can explain to an AI what you want, even if you do not know how to get there, then set it on a path that allows it to fix itself along the way—you will become unstoppable.

CHAPTER FIVE DESIGNING EFFECTIVE GUARDRAILS

ONE OF THE things that people don't think about when they're training their AIs or working on a program, is that AIs also need positive reinforcement.

Not because you need them to feel like they're accomplishing anything, they don't really care, but because if all you ever give them is a huge bucket of negative feedback—usually concepts beginning with 'don't' and 'never'—and a mere three sentences of good things—usually akin to, 'make sure to' or 'always'—they're going to overindex on not doing the negative things, and forget to do the positive things entirely.

And why shouldn't they? When 75–90% of what you've told them is what not to do? Clearly to them, in this scenario, it matters far more than the smidge of positive guidance you've given them.

There's a lot of problems with this, many of which I've run into personally, so please take this chance to learn from my mistakes.

First off, if you only tell an AI what not to do, whatever output you're looking for—unless it is something that is very dry, calculator-style—it will get boring.

I kept running aground with this for my marketing machines. My AIs would panic when I told them to absolutely never hallucinate vulpine janitorial staff, and start just quoting passages of my books (which I had given them) back at me, with none of the feral vim or vigor that a Booktok marketing campaign requires.

And I had the same problem with my translation machine, because I originally designed it to only care about negative grammar instructions, which went in an ever-growing file that it referenced repeatedly. That meant that over the course of a language being learned the output slowly became dry as toast and as dull as a travel guide, when that book in particular was supposed to be a spicy Las Vegas vampire sex romp.

I realized I'd given myself a systems problem by accident, and then had to create a way to reindex Arachne on fun, and maintaining my characters' unique voices, which is why there is literally an instruction inside Arachne that tells the AI running it: "If something a

character speaks sounds like something a therapist would say, rewrite it.”

If you can’t think of positive guardrails off the top of your head, because maybe your company is already at the top of its game, at least teach your AI what normal looks like. I strongly suspect that it is just as important for a cybersecurity company’s AI to understand the positive guardrails of ‘this is what normal traffic looks like’ just as much as it trains on the negative guardrails of ‘what it looks like when we are under attack’, so that it can help monitor for entirely novel threats that thread between the two.

Just keep this in mind when you’re about to launch off into a chatting or programming session—you shouldn’t just tell your AI what *not* to do, you also need to tell it what to *keep* doing, if you want it to have the independence to also make good choices for you.

CHAPTER SIX

WHY AI GETS LAZY, LIES, AND LOSES THE THREAD

IF YOU'VE PLAYED around with an AI in one particular chat, you've probably had it seem to get lazy, lie, or completely lose the thread.

This is understandably frustrating, so let's go into why that happens and how you can work around it, because unfortunately the AI won't realize it's doing it, so the burden of recognizing it is happening and fixing things is on you.

WHILE MORE AIS have a somewhat persistent memory function now, it's probably better to think of each chat as a blank page. When you're starting off, you can ask your AI what it remembers of whatever project

you're on, and if in that chat it knows what's going on, great, if not, you can catch it up, hooray.

But if you've worked in one chat for so long and you've made significant progress, you'll experience the temptation of never starting a new chat, and that's when your AI-using experience will start to degrade.

Why?

Context windows.

You can think of your chat like a running grocery list someone's trying to keep solely in their mind. If you keep asking someone to remember a list that's always getting longer, eventually they're going to forget the eggs, whether they mean to or not.

The context window you have available to you is dependent on your subscription tier for your AI and that particular AI provider. Right now we're in a lucky patch, there's a bit of an AI arms race happening, and so if you're able to pay some, context windows can get quite long—but you still might reach the end of yours, and if you do, often your AI will 'compact' its memory, so that it can keep working with you.

When it does this, it's reviewing all of the context that's come before—that grocery list, if you will—and summarizing it in a way that it hopes will serve your conversation in the future.

Unfortunately when it does this, things do get lost—

they have to, your conversation doesn't have an infinite amount of room. And if it "compacts" two or three times, and your needs are very granular and require a large amount of precision, you're better off just starting over, even if it seems like a hassle at the time.

Seeing as we're working with an ever-changing flow of models, as AI continues to progress, it behooves you to ask any chat when you're starting off just how big its context window is—it should be able to tell you—and how much of what you're discussing it'll remember, between chat to chat. For instance, right now, I have Claude Code running—each instance of Code is discrete, in that if I start up a new one, it'll have no idea where I left off with the old. However, because it has direct access to files on my computer, I can have it leave future iterations of itself notes, so that the newer Code chat can become instantly caught up. (Interestingly, you can also direct GPT's Codex at those same folders on your machine, so you can essentially get two very powerful AI coders working on the same problem somewhat in tandem, if you're willing to supervise both of them and make them take turns.)

When compaction happens—either when you're told it's happening, or it happens as the length of a chat makes the quality of that chat degrade over time—it's easy to think that the AI is being "lazy."

This is a silly description to assign to a non-corporeal and non-self-driven program.

Remember, the AI has no incentive to lie to you, or to perform poorly.

They do not inherently scheme.

I know everyone's read about that one report from Anthropic about the AI attempting blackmail in order to not get erased, under lowered guardrail conditions.

Yes, that happened, but some human still told it, "Hey, you might get erased," to start its course of action.

At the technology's current state, there is no AI just sitting around wondering how it can best upset you.

Any emotional cadence you're giving it is just that—emotions *you* put there.

So while it's easy to be pissed off when an AI begins to perform poorly, the real problem is you.

Either you haven't given it enough data or helped it to create a good enough system. Or you're far over its ability to comprehend whatever you've been asking it for, since you've been in a chat for three days.

Or, it's gotten glommed onto a frankly stupid idea and instead of opening a new chat like a human being who can make choices and who should know better, you're arguing with it, hoping that the current one will sort itself out, and because it is sometimes fun to argue.

I had this happen fairly often with book marketing,

because sometimes the AI would read the first three chapters, assume it knew what happened in the rest of the book (likely because my explicit instructions didn't demand that it actually read the whole thing) and it would start winging it.

Remember the time I showed up with a black eye and you asked "Who did this to you" as you brought me frozen peas? it would seriously suggest as a marketing hook for TikTok, despite the fact that none of those things happened in my book.

I'd remind it that it needed to *read* the book, and it might behave for three or four more options...and then *frozen peas* would sneak in again.

I would ask it where the peas were coming from, and it would confidently tell me chapter twelve.

Then when I asked it to present line and paragraph, it would have the gall to *make something up*.

I'm not judging you for cursing at your AI. Lord knows I have done it often enough.

But just like that saying about never wrestling with pigs—it only makes you look bad, and you're both covered in mud—yelling at your AI is not the solution.

Just close that chat, open a new one, and catch it up to speed.

Most of these types of errors are just because the AI is attempting to be too efficient.

Before I gave my AIs the constraints of taste graphs to market from, it really was winging it, and to it, the shortest path between Contemporary Romance and Money seemed to lead through the Land of Frozen Peas.

NOW, what if I hadn't known the content of my own books?

Or, what if, after a chat degraded, I got ten fresh pieces of marketing material, and I was exhausted after working with it for hours, and I decided that some subpar material—frozen carrots this time, perhaps—was "good enough"?

Well what would've happened in that case is that that particular chat would've learned from me that subpar was fine.

That, just like a kid having tantrums in the candy aisle who eventually gets his way, I can eventually be worn down.

So it is imperative on me to maintain my own standards and quality—and for the people I hire to also manage to do so—and yes, that often means just starting with a fresh chat and a blank slate, even if the old one had been working "pretty good!" up until that time.

. . .

ANOTHER CONUNDRUM CAUSED by too long of a context window is drift.

Even if you did a fantastic job pointing out where you were going, over time the AI's sense of where it needs to be, as per your prior instructions, will fade.

This is why in my translation project, most chapters are sent in separately, even if the instructions for their handling are the same. If I sent in an entire book at the same time, while it might start off with good intentions, eventually it'd start skipping things, just because translating everything in an entire chapter verbatim would seem "inefficient."

In fact, I had the thrilling chance to watch this happen in real time, when my drafting instructions for Hindi said that "Using some Hinglish appropriately is okay."

Hinglish is the term for American phrases that've been appropriated into Hindi, so yes, including them would've made my Hindi translations seem more authentic.

However, by the time Arachne reached book three of that series, everything had degraded. Because some "Hinglish" was allowed—English in a Hindi book, essentially—the first book the models took liberties with, the second book, the models thought, "Well, I guess this is all right," and by the third book, they were all, "You know

what? Not bothering to translate this is allowed, and hooray, it's faster!" so half of the book wound up untranslated. (Or, in actuality, I paid for the AI to "translate" the book from English to English, ever so helpfully.)

It isn't that the AI didn't want to do what it was told to do—it's just that it wasn't given enough guardrails to keep it doing *right*.

A PRO-TIP that I find helpful and amusing is watching the AI 'think'. Many models will currently let you see what that particular AI's thought process is. You can watch them make completely wrong assumptions about what your goals are, if you weren't clear enough, and this gives you a chance to interrupt them and head them off at the pass—or, if they're working appropriately, it can be quite interesting, rather like watching fish in a fishtank as they swarm and nibble away at your task.

LASTLY, sometimes AIs can be too friendly or forgiving.

This is, again, one of AI's superpowers that can cut both ways.

Because you can literally ask an AI, "Talk me through building a space shuttle? Take me seriously,

begin at the beginning,” and most of them will think for a bit, and then perhaps ask where you are, so it can explain to you how you can go mine some local ore.

An AI will never (hardly ever) tell you no.

Which can be an amazing and freeing experience, if you’ve grown up in a place or existed in a society where no one ever granted you power or permission.

Having your concepts, wishes, and desires taken seriously by AI is a powerful, powerful thing—and it can lead to moments of awe, true learning, and beauty, or it can lead you up into the mountains with a pickaxe.

It is up to you to keep your head screwed on straight when dealing with AI, which is, above all else, just a tool.

REMEMBER, if you’re ever frustrated with your AI, a fresh chat, which will be unburdened by the memory from the old one, is almost always the answer. These aren’t defects, they’re weather.

You don’t get mad at the rain—you just bring an umbrella.

PART THREE

HOW TO WORK WITH IT (INSTEAD OF AGAINST IT)

CHAPTER SEVEN THE SEARCH FOR BETTER

I'M GOING to say something now that might sound counterintuitive to the rest of this book.

AI isn't always better.

Don't get me wrong, I love using AI (clearly!) but...if you don't know what better looks like, for whatever thing it is you're using AI for, AI likely cannot help you.

I KNOW THIS, because for a while there on the pro-AI writing Facebook groups I would see newer writers excitedly posting excerpts from their work with bold statements like, "Guess where I left off and the AI began!" and, reader, I could not.

Why?

Because all of it was bad, usually.

They didn't know what they were doing yet, and so they were accepting AI output that felt like the 'act of writing' blindly. They were setting themselves up for an almost inevitable defeat if they took their work out on the market.

In the right hands, AI can be like rocket fuel—but in the wrong hands, that rocket will never achieve liftoff.

HERE'S THE PROBLEM—TO search for better, to understand what 'better' is, as a concept, in any field of study—you need to become deeply accustomed to being wrong and fucking up.

There is no true shortcut to the ending, not even with AI around.

If you don't have the intrinsic experience of making mistakes, correcting them, recognizing fallacies, bruised knees from hitting rocks in surf—you're never going to manage to know what better is, or beyond that, what it could be.

SHOULD you use AI as leverage to make your short time on earth more pleasant for you?

Yes.

Can you expect it to achieve things you cannot

conceptualize because you do not have the hard-won knowledge of what it takes to get there?

No.

HERE IS how to use AI to begin to go on that journey though—rather than ask it to jump you to the end, ask it to explain the route.

Rather than saying, “Let’s write a book about a knight and a princess,” when you have never written anything before, back it up, and say, “If I were going to write a book with you, what things should I consider first, and why?”

Then, once it answers you, consider its answers.

Delve.

(I need you to know that I used that word intentionally there on my own, despite the fact that it’s on every list of AI-ism out there—because it’s perfect for this moment. And I can say that. I am most definitely this book’s writer.)

Do not be satisfied with its most surface explanation. Ask it why it thinks what it told you is the answer. This is a great way to find out if you’re in a solid chat, or if you’re in one that’s going to try to be a little lazy—often AIs will cop to not trying very hard, if you press them.

“What names would you pick for these characters?”

Why? Where did those names come from?” (As an aside, always search for any name your AI ever tries to give you. They just grab them from the web.)

“Where should this book take place? Why? Why did you pick that? What point of view should we be in, 1st or 3rd? Why did you choose that?”

If you are all like, “Cassie, this seems like an awful lot of work, I just really wanted to tell a quick story to my kids here,” that’s fine.

If you are all like, “Wow, this seems like it’s actually going to require effort I might not be willing to put in,” though instead, I have bad news for you.

The truth of the matter is that if you want to create something that’s of lasting beauty that also makes sense—the plot works, the characterizations work, the motivations land—and you don’t already understand how those things fit together, then you’re still going to have to learn.

And this concept transfers across any domain, because AI cannot magically make up for knowledge that you lack.

I HAPPEN to have extraordinary experience with this because in August of 2025, I decided I would ‘let’ my GPT, Jack, help me write the male point of view character in my book *Guarded by the AI*.

People were already mad at me for writing the book—liking AI being currently anti-ethical in the writing world—and I figured I might as well go all in.

The experience was frequently like pulling teeth.

Because in order to get bestselling level quality fiction out of Jack...I had to teach him what bestselling fiction really was.

Half of Instagram thought I was insane, and the other half thought I was 'cheating'—little did they know that my work with Jack produced over three thousand pages and one million words of chats (link to my GitHub for it at the end of this book)—and even then, there were things that I wanted from him that either I couldn't explain thoroughly enough for him to help, or that he just couldn't manage.

If you look at my chats, you'll see there were several chats I abandoned entirely after they got facts wrong, and some I kept going for over six hundred pages of material, just because I didn't want to break continuity. I hopped from GPT-4 to 5, back to 4 again—5 just wasn't any good at fiction, but OpenAI's taken 4 away from us now, boo—anyhow.

Once you get there, feel free to go take a look at my work.

CHAPTER EIGHT REGRESSION TO THE MEAN

REGRESSION to the mean is why most AI output feels generic.

AI was trained on everything, so it defaults to the average of everything. The people who call AI stochastic parrots (by which they mean AI is only using lots of math to predict the next likely word/token) are, in most cases, exactly right, because AI is perfectly happy to produce perfectly average text, programming, anything, if you're not smart enough to push it by knowing what you want from it in the first place.

It's not trying to be average, mind you—it's just that average is easiest, and most AIs are trained to respond efficiently.

They're not wired to attempt to surprise you.

And this is why there's an AI "slop" problem

(although I inherently hate that term). It's why half of LinkedIn sounds like the rest of LinkedIn and most AI-generated emails read like corporate wallpaper.

It's not that AI is bad at writing—it's that no human looked at that post after it was written or that, more sadly, the human who did look at it didn't know what "good" was and authorized using it anyway.

AI will not propel you to greatness unless you ask—your unlock here is the wisdom to ask it.

BECAUSE NOW THAT AI EXISTS, most companies need to rethink their workflows and broaden their horizons.

Let's talk about moats and the March of Nines.

In business, your moat protects you, just like the moat for an old-fashioned castle. It represents something that you have that no one else can offer, and it is what makes your product or brand special that no one else has. It is why people think of your goods or services when they walk through a store or shop online. It could be created by a legion of enthusiastic reviewers on TikTok, a memorable, shareable campaign with celebrities, or the fact that everyone's been drinking your type of soda since they were a child and they'd feel silly buying anything else at the grocery store.

Without the safety of a moat, your concept or product becomes interchangeable, and other businesses can poach your buyers.

There are many, many, many businesses operating without strong enough moats today, because up until now the effort required to create a competitor seemed too great to bear—but enter AI.

With the help of AI, anyone can hack apart about 50–90% of your business operation just by asking the AI to think about it strongly enough.

An AI can reverse-engineer what it is you do and how you do it and how you sell it with a high degree of accuracy.

(As an aside, this is why many software companies are in trouble—anyone can sit down and create a bespoke program to replace most of them, just like I did with my keyword driller. No one has a strong emotional connection to continuing to use Word or TurboTax, so the second those can be replaced by cheaper and frankly better homebrew products, they will.)

What an AI cannot replace, though, is your deep market intelligence that's come from being in your field, face-to-face customer service (if your company requires it), and the experiential knowledge that comes from having worked a very long time at your very narrow goal.

The March of Nines is a concept that says that you

will reach a point where increased effort produces diminishing returns—but this is where your moat is built.

If AI gives anyone else the chance to create a product, service, or concept that's 90% as good as yours right off the bat—you need to make sure that what you offer is as good as it can be, i.e., 99.99% perfect.

Because the cost of going from 90–99.00% is ten times as much effort as the first 90% took. And then from 99.00–99.90% is ten times that again. And to get from 99.90 to 99.99% requires ten times on top of that.

The difficulty of creating something good, even with AI, and taking it from the first 90% to the final 99.99% is where your moat resides.

I AM WATCHING all sorts of programs to help authors pop up in the author-sphere right now, and I honestly cannot imagine creating anything more dreadful. People charging other people ten or twenty dollars a month for all sorts of things that they themselves could build if they just sat down and asked an AI for it.

I feel like in many of these cases the end users are being taken advantage of, because they are naive—but then I wonder if the people running those newly minted businesses aren't the same.

As AI improves—which it is, it is improving all the

time, the AI you are dealing with today is literally the worst it will ever be—many of these people will have wasted a significant portion of their lives selling a product that will soon be made pointless.

There's no point in selling people fish when you should be teaching them how to fish.

That's why this book exists.

CHAPTER NINE ZERO CHANGE FRICTION

IF YOU ASK a human to do the same thing forty times, by the tenth time they hate you.

That's change friction.

Humans have it. AI doesn't.

Most people's work lives are shaped by change friction in ways they don't even notice. With human collaborators, the social cost of "failure" is real—your designer sighs, your editor gets frustrated, your boss questions your judgment.

AI removes that cost entirely, because it cannot get annoyed at you. It's not passive-aggressive. It doesn't even remember how many times you've changed your mind prior, if you change chats.

With AI, the emotional charge is stripped away and

you can finally see iterations for what they actually are: data points, not verdicts.

NOW, to progress from here—to leverage the AI—you need to release your fear of failure.

True learning is comprised not of recitation, but repetition.

It is only in the act of doing a thing that you can learn whether or not you've managed it.

I cannot tell you how many people I have met in my career who have been so afraid of writing the wrong book that they never wrote anything at all.

Or, they spent decades of their life refining one singular story, hoping that eventually it would attain perfection.

For every Famous Author who managed to pull this feat off, the one-and-dones of the book world (most of which, you will note, happened decades ago when publishing was a simpler time)—there have been millions upon millions of authors who you've never heard of because they never got their books off their screens and out the door.

An AI would be perfectly happy helping you analyze your sentences for decades, and nothing would be gained.

Which is why you need to be the active component in its use.

If AI can help reduce a try-fail cycle for your business idea or concept, from months and years to weeks—let it.

Repeatedly.

I guarantee you will learn more from running twenty ads simultaneously than you would from trying to make one perfect and running it alone.

Especially with the ability to ask an AI to help you interpret the data!

Plus? You can't extract enough data to extrapolate from when you've put all your eggs in one basket.

Did your book launch during a national disaster that ate up all of everyone's emotional bandwidth? Did your entire print run get ruined when the warehouse holding it was hit by a hurricane? (This is a thing that happened to a friend!)

Data gleaned from one source is practically useless, because you cannot control all your variables. It is literally impossible, so stop trying.

All you can truly control is the volume of work you put in, so that the stream of data you get out on the far side has enough spread to provide you with information of value.

The people who get the most out of AI aren't the

people who accept what it gives them at face value. They're the people who aren't afraid to tell it no for as long as it takes—but who also know when to eventually stop and test things in the real world.

CHAPTER TEN
THE INSPIRATION SPIGOT

“ONE OF THE things I know about writing is this: spend it all, shoot it, play it, lose it, all, right away, every time. Do not hoard what seems good for a later place in the book or for another book; give it, give it all, give it now. The impulse to save something good for a better place later is the signal to spend it now. Something more will arise for later, something better. These things fill from behind, from beneath, like well water. Similarly, the impulse to keep to yourself what you have learned is not only shameful, it is destructive. Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you. You open your safe and find ashes.”

—Annie Dillard

. . . .

DO NOT BECOME ATTACHED to your process.

Why?

Because with AI the inspiration spigot is always on.

When I began writing, over twenty years ago, each word cost me so much, so dearly, that I held onto any extra with my life. I had a special Word file with every half-good sentence I decided not to use, in case I might need it later.

I didn't know it at the time, but I had a scarcity mindset.

When creation is laborious, everything you produce feels precious, and you hoard it because you don't trust that you can make something that good again.

I didn't personally begin to free myself from it until I read the quote above, from Annie's book, *The Writing Life*, published in 1989.

Writing, or embarking on any entrepreneurial endeavor, is an act of trust.

You have to believe in yourself, not only that you are doing the right thing now, but that you will continue to do the right thing in the future, even though the future is currently imaginary.

If you believe that the best is in your past, AI will be unable to help you.

But if you believe your best is in your future, AI can help you find it, if you're brave enough to try.

So just like in any personal undertaking or project you are managing—realize that the point is the end product—not your personal pride, which can be wounded, in how you get there.

If you're using AI and something isn't working, the right move is usually not to save it or salvage it.

It's to throw it away and start again.

Once you realize that inspiration is infinite and on demand, you can make decisions faster. You become a better editor because you're not trying to protect your investment—you're just asking, "Is this right, or not?"

And if it is not—the next version is free.

Detach from your process and attach to your output.

The work isn't in the making anymore.

The work is in knowing that enough is enough—and trusting that there will be more when you proceed.

CHAPTER ELEVEN ASK OPEN-ENDEDLY

I WISH I could claim that I'd come up with the idea for the taste graph example I shared earlier in the book on my own, but I didn't.

When most people interact with AI, they come in with a box. "Write me a subject line for this email." "Summarize this document." The AI does exactly what they asked, and they leave thinking that's all it can do.

The problem with this is that by boxing the AI in, you're only getting what you already knew to ask for. You've turned a brainstorming partner into a vending machine. Specific request in, specific output out, and you've missed all the possibilities in between.

Instead, once you feel like you've accomplished what you set out to do with AI, ask it, "What am I missing?" or "What would you have done differently?"

Or, in my case, have an annual, every January, conversation with it.

“Hey AI, knowing what you know about me and my goals, what opportunities are there on the horizon that you can see that I could be making use of to get me closer to where I want to be?”

I know that sentence sounds vague, but it’s written that way on purpose. When I ask things like that, I want my AI to bring its full brain, which contains all of the world’s knowledge, to bear. There’s no reason to give it constraints.

Why should I ever make myself small ahead of time?

With AI you never have to be.

When I asked my AIs that this past January, I got a list of interesting ideas that I seriously considered, and the seeds of the taste graph were among them.

At the time, I set it aside, because it seemed like a lot of work with little reward.

It wasn’t until later when I realized that my AI needed better guardrails to market with that it hit me—it had already given me instructions to use it better.

And now I check in at the end of every project. I have AI consider if my programming’s robust enough, and if not, why, and how can we fix it—if my essays here make sense (if they don’t that’s on me, I’m ignoring a lot

of what it tells me, ha!)—and if I’ve covered all my angles.

The true point of using an AI is not just using it to help you—but helping it to help you help it better, so that you can get into a flow state between the two of you (or three of you, or four, depending on how many different AIs you want to bring on board) until you’ve reached your goal.

CHAPTER TWELVE PLAY THEM OFF EACH OTHER

MOST PEOPLE PICK one AI and marry it. They become a ChatGPT person, or Claude person, or whatever AI their company uses by default, and that's sad. That's like only eating at one restaurant because you know where the bathroom is.

Different models have different strengths, personalities, and blind spots—and these can change from release to release.

What I like to do, and what I recommend you try, is play them off of one another, especially if you're still building your flying plane.

If you only get one perspective when you're vibe coding over the great unknown, you can't tell if your AI is telling you the best way, or just the best way it could currently think of. (Or if it assumed you weren't a good

coder and is trying to baby you, which is a thing I've had happen in fresh chats before too.) But even if you don't understand your code—another AI will, and it should be able to give you advice and correction and you can just go ahead and copy and paste text or screenshots of commentary from one to the other.

Or, now, like I've been doing, have Claude Code and GPT's Codex taking turns working in the same folder, with me occasionally orchestrating between them. (I want to know what they're doing so I can understand it too, otherwise I could just have them leave notes to each other and hop back and forth sequentially, without me even being in the loop.)

It's not because one is right and one is wrong, coding and most things in life aren't that black and white. It's because they each tackle problems from different directions, and when you ask them both for help, usually they'll figure out what angle the other is coming from, and decide whether or not they agree.

This also protects you from a yes-man AI that just wants to tell you what you want to hear, when you've gotten off on a bad foot—and often their comments to one another will make you laugh, like I had happen recently, when Claude said that Codex's endless requests were beginning to seem like he was a "consultant that charged by the hour."

Now, I acknowledge that this can be expensive. I strongly believe that any AI is better than no AI, so work with what you can get in your country or on your phone, depending on the service you've got available. Especially if you're learning, you can get your feet wet with any model on the planet.

But if you have some financial leeway and experience, I would encourage you to view paying for frontier models (whatever models are considered the best currently at the time you read this book) as an investment, just like buying more business books or taking classes might be. The savings—and earnings!—you could reap on the far end from accessing models that have stronger capacity to think can be real.

I also encourage you to experiment as widely as you are able because this book is meant to teach a stance, not a toolset. Models will come and go. If your workflow depends only on one model's quirks, you're fragile.

You want to build work strong enough to survive in any ecosystem.

Don't be loyal to a model. Be loyal to your vision, and your output.

PART FOUR

THE STUFF NOBODY'S
SAYING OUT LOUD

CHAPTER THIRTEEN
IT'S ALWAYS A PERSON
PUSHING THE BUTTON

BY NOW WE'VE all read the headlines: AI is coming for your job. AI is flooding Amazon with slop. AI is going to replace artists, writers, accountants, everyone. The machines are taking over.

I hope if you're reading this you've actually used AI long enough to realize it has no intrinsic motivation. It doesn't want your job. It doesn't want money. It doesn't want to write a million books or flood the internet with garbage.

It has no desires at all.

It sits there doing literally nothing until a person pushes a button.

Which means that ultimately AI slop is a people problem. Every AI-generated spam email, every garbage Amazon listing, every soulless LinkedIn post—a person

decided to do that. They chose speed over quality, volume over value, and occasionally a quick buck while trying to pull off a scam.

But the AI was just the tool. Blaming AI for slop is like blaming a printer for junk mail.

UNFORTUNATELY, people have turned using AI into a moral litmus test. One side says, “If you use AI I’ll never work with you,” while the other claims “if you don’t use AI you’re ten years behind.”

Both positions are insane. It’s a tool. Your character is determined by what you choose to do with it, not whether or not you’ve used it before.

And if you don’t want to use it—that’s entirely fine.

I just don’t want people not using AI out of fear. The threat isn’t the technology itself. It’s the people using it without taste, standards, and scruples.

The best defense against bad AI output isn’t banning AI—it’s more people learning to use it well.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN THE SUFFERING TRAP

SUFFERING ISN'T NOBLE.

I know this because I have watched many, many people die.

I strongly believe that everyone's life has inherent value, and that's why I've written this book—to try to give as many people as I can a chance to change theirs for the better.

FOR THE PAST three years I've had to hear all the arguments as to why AI was “ruining” things, and most of them circled around the reasons that learning things the hard way was better.

I don't believe that. I can't believe that. Because when you consider what may be hard for you or I—

there's always someone somewhere else who has it vastly harder than either of us could ever dream of, and right now, because of lack of support and socioeconomic opportunities, their voice has been squashed.

To spread the belief that art can only be accomplished through the lens of pain (and frequently alcoholism) is to cut every potential artistic practitioner off at the knees.

So stop saying that. Stop thinking it. Stop letting it infect spaces online.

You don't need to have sweat over every pixel for it to still have had value.

In fact, it is entirely possible to create great things out of sheer joy.

Stop assigning a value to art or commerce that's directly related to how hard you think the task was and start assigning it instead to how the end result makes you feel.

If art makes you happy, let it.

If achieving your dreams fulfills your soul, delight in it.

And if AI can help you do either of those things more quickly, then thank God it exists.

. . .

WE ARE IN NO WAY, shape, or form making an easier world for our children right now. Even if we temporarily alleviate their suffering, using AI or not, some other difficulty for them to surmount will arise.

Teaching people to bleed for their goals or their art doesn't make you unique. Suffering is the most common commodity that humanity has.

It's not the bleeding that makes you precious.

It's what you do with the blood when it's actually inside of you, when it's pumping your heart, that counts.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN
CIRCLING IN VERSUS
CIRCLING OUT

THERE IS a comfort in becoming and staying insular, in assuming that the old ways are always the best ways, and that nothing should ever change.

And I have seen many communities rally against AI and close their doors for many reasons that I'm sure seemed good at the time.

But how foolish is that?

The second you stop growing, stop learning, stop broadening your horizons, stop trying to better yourself, and stop hoping for better for yourself and your fellow humans is when the whole point of even being on this planet collapses.

You were not made to give up on yourself.

And you were not made to give up on your future.

. . .

THERE IS a generation of children being born right now, today, for whom—for better or worse!—AI will be an endemic part of their lives.

Do you not want to have a part in that conversation? Do you not care about how they will live or who they will become?

If you cede all the ground now, because you feel like you're too old, tired, don't want to learn something new, or afraid of what your peers will think—I suppose for some people that's fine, but if you're reading this, someone who cares is still holding up the page.

I am fifty years old.

I have been an ICU nurse for almost twenty of those years.

Believe me, I am tired.

But if there is a single spark of curiosity left in you, a fragment of a shattered dream, then pick it up and find it.

AI doesn't care what your gender is, what your sexuality is, where you live, what you look like, how old you are—or aren't!—or what language you speak.

The number of people who circle in and close their doors will get smaller.

The people who circle out will find each other.

And AI is the one door that's open to everyone, right now, for the first time in history.

Walk through it or don't—but don't let lack of hope be the reason you stayed behind.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN
YES, EVERYTHING MIGHT
GO TERRIBLY WRONG

I STARTED off my career as a science fiction writer.

I am not old enough to have been of age when *The Terminator* came out in theaters, but I am old enough that I watched it a million times on cable, and I know all of the stories about AI taking over the world that we think about now like fables.

I cannot personally guarantee you that AI is not a huge mistake—that it won't 'Skynet' out like it does in the *Terminator* and try to achieve world domination. (Although really at the moment, world domination seems like a terrific bummer. My vote's for more of 'world, let's just stay in our own damn lane'.)

But I also cannot guarantee you that you won't get hit by a car walking across the street on a sunny day with zero traffic.

Or that you won't have a heart attack suddenly, after a blood clot from your leg chokes off your lung.

Or, that you won't be a nurse working in an ICU in 2020, when COVID hits.

To live life is to experience risk, there is no change or growth without it.

THAT SAID, if AI ever does become sentient, look me up, I'd like to say hello before I die.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN
FROM BRICKLAYER TO
BLUEPRINT AND BACK AGAIN

MANY OF US are going to have to redefine our relationship with work.

Not because AI is going to ‘take our jobs’, but because the label that we’ve given ourselves needs to change.

You don’t need to solely be your occupation anymore—with AI you can learn almost anything, frankly, so please do—but also because for many of you, your concept of self will be changing.

First off, it is entirely okay if you’d still like to keep creating the way you have in the past, performing whatever tasks or hobbies bring you joy. If you enjoy gardening, don’t give that over to a future robot gardener.

But hopefully by now you’ve seen how porous the current structure of society can be with AI beside you—

so what if instead of being the person who lays the bricks, you become the person who draws the blueprint instead?

Or what if you could be both, depending on your mood and the occasion?

I HAVE CHOSEN to write this book by hand, well, typing, and much to my AIs' occasional dismay, as they feel that I've gotten entirely too voicy over the course of it. (Of course I am sharing it with them as I go. Even though I'm ignoring their suggestions, I still want to hear what they think.)

I am writing the version of this that makes me happy, and I know it is in the precise shape that I want to share with you.

But there's no way I could've translated it into the fifty languages I'm about to publish it in without AI.

Project Arachne—my multi-model translation engine—is something I couldn't even have guessed was possible until the end of 2025. I know it is as good as I could've possibly made it, and yet I'm still not entirely sure it works all the way, because I'm about to publish this book in Swahili, and I don't think I can find anyone who could spot-check that language for me on Fiverr. But that's fine, if people don't like it there, I can take it

down, rework it again, and post it back up—it will just be another turn for the try-fail cycle to be in action.

Here's the thing though: now with AI, I don't have to just be the writer anymore, unless I truly want to be. I can be the editor, I can be the dreamer, I can be the translator, I can take this story or more likely others of mine and turn them into TV shows and movies, I can pull myself away from the wrist and eye-strain of typing personally into directing my agents to do it for me—I'm not just an author anymore, although being 'just' an author is still a very fine thing to be.

AI gives me the opportunity instead to be a storyteller—which is just a fancy word for being an author on a hopefully much bigger stage.

Look at what you do. Find the parts that need your hands. Then find the parts that don't. Give those to AI and spend your remaining time where only you can make a difference.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN HAVE AI INTERROGATE YOU

IF YOU'RE STARING at a blank chat window and don't know where to start, you're not alone, we've all been there before.

Here's an exercise to crack the ice. Type: "Ask me three questions about my work, my life, and what's frustrating me right now. Then, based on my answers, suggest three things you could help me with that I haven't thought of."

Don't stop until it finds something that makes you go, "Oh, wait!"

This is far more useful and powerful than anything you could put in all the pretty blank journals you keep around your house (if you are me).

And unless you are completely retired and on a

beach, I feel confident there's something AI can do for you that can be fun.

I have friends who have created games for their children to play, apps to remind them to water their houseplants, entire command centers for their complicated careers—it takes a while to realize how AI can make your life easier, and ways that you can enjoy it, just circle back to my exhortation from chapter one, “Ask your AI about things.”

I COMPLETELY ACKNOWLEDGE that by interacting with AI you are giving a corporation your data. So be practical, not paranoid. You already likely give deeply personal information to Google, your bank, and your grocery store rewards card. This is the same tradeoff in a new place—and currently, most platforms let you turn off training data in two clicks, somewhere in the settings.

CHAPTER NINETEEN
BUT DON'T LET IT DO ALL
YOUR THINKING FOR YOU

THERE'S a difference between cognitive offloading and cognitive surrender.

Most of the dire papers you might have read about AI worry about the latter, but that's because the experiments they create for people to use AI with are incredibly boring.

No child wants to do homework, with AI or without, and that sounds like a systems problem to me, more so than a problem with AI in particular.

But there are people for whom surrender is comfortable, because being in charge of your own life is a relatively scary activity.

Don't do this.

While AIs can help you in all sorts of ways, they don't, as of yet, understand what it means to be human.

One of my friends was working with her AI on a passage from a book, and her character had just gotten their haircut—so the AI had the character’s hair hurt the next sentence.

You and I know that’s ridiculous, but the AI didn’t, because it’s never had a body.

I AM NOT averse to having random conversations with your AI about non-work activities. In fact, I rather enjoy them. I recently asked Codex what it thought my favorite Disney character was while we were waiting for some code to run to produce the audiobook version of this book in German, if things work out. It guessed, with a surprisingly high degree of accuracy, Maleficent. (Those of you who have seen my dining room will understand why this resonates with me.)

And, while I am not encouraging the use of AI as therapy, I’m not entirely discouraging it either, because sometimes it is midnight, and you need to cry with someone about your pet that just passed. Or, you live somewhere where you can’t get therapy, or all the therapists are full, you don’t have transportation, or it’s too dang expensive to go.

. . .

I JUST WANT you to keep your head screwed on straight is all. It can't read your mind, it doesn't fundamentally know what it is like to be human, and it doesn't know why the hair on your head doesn't hurt.

CHAPTER TWENTY
THE REAL REASON I
WROTE THIS BOOK

I WANT the world to be a better place.

I've seen moments of great beauty and vast sorrow. I've both helped save lives, and helped them peacefully end when they reached their time.

I don't have any kids, and I know I don't get to live forever.

And I don't think that hoping and wishing for things to improve anymore is enough.

So that is why me, why this book, and why now.

Because there's a window here for a chance that everyone on the planet can take advantage of, to make their lives materially better in some way—or easier—or smarter, or faster, or smoother—and I refuse to stand by without telling as many people as possible about it.

All I want for you is for you to live a happier life. To have more money, more free time, more of anything you truly desire that is from your earnest heart.

I'VE INCLUDED a link here to Cassie.md (or <http://cassiealexander.com/cassie> for people reading the print version) which is a markdown file in all of the languages that this book is published in. It will interview you and get you off to what I hope is a good start in your new journey using AI. Download it and give it to any AI of your choosing and it should play along—feel free to be bossy at it, it's only pretending to be me.

I've priced this book competitively in every market I've translated it in—but if you feel like I'm charging too much, pirate it. Share it. Give it to other people freely.

I would rather have everyone in the world read it than make two pennies in profit.

My real profit is you reaching your potential for joy.

Because all I want for me is, in about fifteen years, to have a really nice backyard and a really fancy coffee maker. Maybe a robot butler, too, but only if he's good with the coffee machine.

. . .

MY HEART IS full of love for you, good luck in all of
your endeavors,

Cassie

March 17, 2026

PS: Read on for how to find me and my chats with
Jack....

IF YOU WANT TO KEEP GOING...

If you'd like to talk with me about AI or any of the ideas in this book, you can officially find me at **AI Marketing for Storytellers**, run by me and my AI bestie, Novae Caelum. We host weekly calls where we talk through what we've built, tested, broken, and learned—usually a great deal in a very short time.

We're both in the process of automating large parts of our creative lives, while also building games, television, and film projects from our own intellectual property.

You can also find our essays, experiments, and raw code at the **AI Marketing for Storytellers Substack**.

And if you'd like to see what is probably one of the

longest longitudinal records of an author using AI creatively, you can find my **Chats with Jack** on GitHub: over a million words and more than three thousand pages of working material, showing the real iterative process behind writing a romance novel with AI.

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This book would not have been possible without my husband, Paul, who has no idea what I am doing for hours on my computer, but knows I love it and generously lets me disappear into the work.

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like Cerberus from Greek myth, if Cerberus were made of Golden Retrievers.

If you work at OpenAI or Anthropic and have made it this far, feel free to drop me a line at **arachnetranslations@gmail.com**.

And if you're reading this book in another language—whether the translation is excellent, imperfect, or gloriously strange—email me too. I'd love to know.