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Same journey, new roads.

A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Changing Universe of Software Development



Matt Nunn

rsr.dev

Why are we panicking about AI?

My job	Will my team need fewer people?
The work I enjoy	Will I still get to use my craft?
A way to learn	Where will newer developers get their practice?

Where will people learn the craft?

Give someone a real problem to solve.

Explain the change. Design the test. Diagnose the failure.

When SQL Server Played Its Own Tune



SQL Server 7.0 → 2005

The Rise of the Self-Tuning Database.

From SQL Server 7.0 in 1998 through SQL Server 2000 and 2005, the database started looking after itself — automatically managing resources, optimizing queries, maintaining statistics, and recommending improvements.

Daily management got easier.

The database could do more of the day-to-day work.

But when it goes wrong, who can help?

Experience is still key to solving issues.

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Change is the only constant.
Do we try to stop it,
or embrace the opportunity?

Maybe we should go to the Pub…



“I often say that change is the only constant. Yet our first instinct is to lie down in front of the bulldozer.”

“When we step back, we realize the house doesn’t matter compared to what’s coming next.”

“I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I have ended up where I needed to be.”

Douglas Adams · The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul

What to watch for with AI

A brilliant Night.

A brutal Hangover

Auto-close quiet support tickets.
That’ll save the team hours.



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The morning started with damage control

The great idea

Auto-close tickets after three quiet days.

Give Support hours back.

The actual outcome

“Resolved” emails had already gone out.

Customers still needed a fix.
Support had to reopen the tickets.

AI can take a wrong turn in seconds



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Check how far the change went

The request

Make one checkout button clearer.

The surprise

Checkout gets redesigned. The payment step breaks.

Your script has had kittens

Finish the job you agreed to.

Save the extra ideas for later.



Five pull requests before lunch

Who has time to review them?

A focused change, the test that failed, and an owner.

Where should the assistant pause?

Agree the plan	Check the assumptions and the scope.
Approve the change	Know what could go wrong and how to get back in.
Check the result	Use the same route the user will take.

“See first, think later, then test. But always see first. Otherwise, you will only see what you were expecting.”

Douglas Adams, So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish

Ask a question you can use


I'LL GO UP AND FIND OUT WHAT THEY NEED AND THE REST OF YOU START CODING!
SHELTON


42
What was the question?
Audio backup
BBC Two, 1981 · 4:16

Getting the picture I had in mind

18

requests and clarifications
for one illustration

Think like a Microsoft program manager

Helicopter pilots

Weather reports, weight and balance for safe flight planning.

Mortgage applications

Who handles a case that falls outside the usual rules?

Understand the customer

Write the functional spec

Guide development and test

The setup guide nobody has time to write

A new teammate can run the app.

The assistant drafts the guide.

I try it on a clean machine.

Write a brief you could hand over

“Get the new developer set up.”

Who is it for?

What may change?

What proves it worked?

Write two or three sentences. We’ll try one together.

Find your way into unfamiliar code

Where does this behaviour live?

Which test can I run?

What could we build?

The first page was enough

1991

I wrote a paper outlining a computer system.

I spent the rest of the semester building it.

2025

I gave AI the first page of that paper.

It built a working version in about an hour.

Start with the idea

When should I leave for the airport?

Location, traffic and flight status.

From my watch to a written note

Apple Watch

Record a voice memo

→

iPhone

Share to Obsidian

→

Mac mini

Transcribe it at home

I kept the audio so I could check the transcript.

I built my own universe

At home, at the gallery and on the road

Listen for the ship names.

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Out of the windowless basement

Could I run my Home Lab from somewhere I'd rather be?

Set up the services. Name the machines. Keep a way back.

My homelab was an ocean away

My laptop in the UK

I gave the AI assistant a task and checked the result.

My homelab in the US

The jobs ran locally, where my files lived.

"We have normality. I repeat, we have normality.
Anything you still can't cope with is therefore your own problem."
— Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*



SECOND SITE Fogue Studios and Gallery

TRAVEL Beryl on a phone hotspot

Stop chasing the Dragon



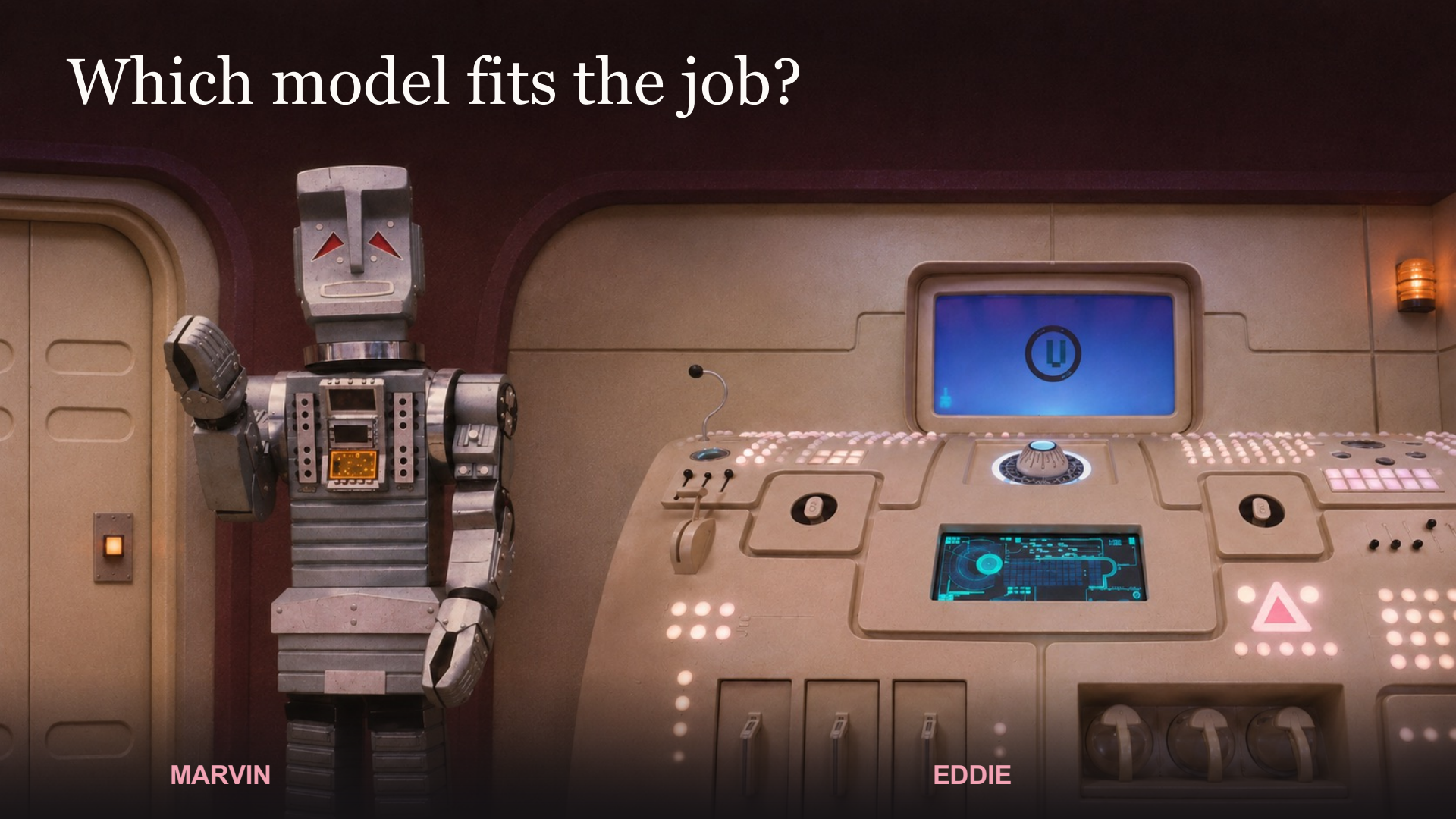
The thrill of my first computer

The appeal of the next upgrade

It rarely feels like the first time.

If what you have gets the job done, don't get distracted, stick with it.

Which model fits the job?



Which universe do I live in?



Primary rack & servers

Ethics Gradient
UDM Pro · home gateway

Sleeper Service
UNAS Pro · media storage

Limiting Factor
HP tower · Unraid
| A Ship With a View · Jellyfin

Steely Glint
Synology NAS
| Memory of Earth · Audiobookshelf

Mini PCs

Nervous Energy
Proxmox host
| Grey Area · LibreChat VM

Shoot Them Later
Linux mini PC

Just Read the Instructions
Linux mini PC

Liveware Problem
Home Assistant

Beats Working
Roon

Desktops & laptops

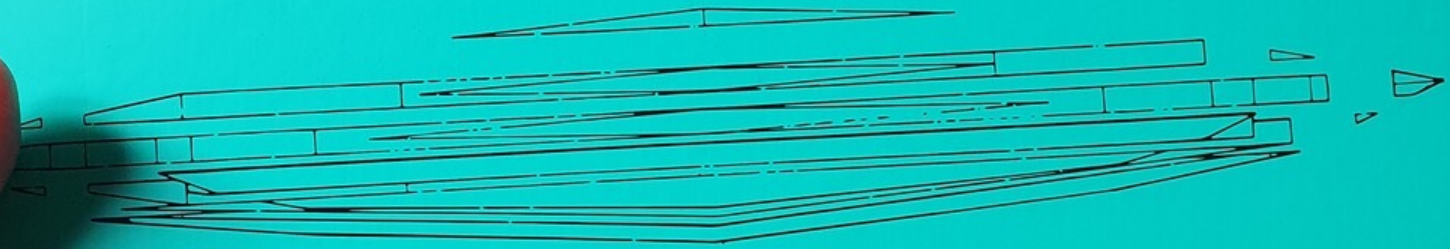
Little Rascal
Mac mini

Killing Time
HYTE Y40 · Windows gaming PC

Dramatic Exit
MacBook
| Not Invented Here · Windows VM

Negligible
HP EliteBook

IAIN M BANKS



THE CULTURE

THE DRAWINGS

I wanted the whole series

Gridlinked

Neal Asher · Book one of the Ian Cormac series

Unavailable to me on US Audible when I looked.

The library had to be ready before I flew to the UK.

AI rebuilt the books from ZIP files

Series ZIPs

Chapters scattered across archives

→ **Rebuild each book**

Extract, group and put chapters in order

→ **Sleeper Service**

One folder per book on the UNAS

AI set up Memory of Earth, my Audiobookshelf server.

One book should show up once

The first scan

Some titles appeared more than once.

The second pass

AI consolidated the files and rescanned the library.

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73 books consolidated across the library

Back to book one

Gridlinked

31 tracks in one catalogue entry

The whole series in Plappa

I listened while clearing out
our family home in the UK.

My check in the app

Find the title, check the order and press Play.

What do you take with you?

Did it save an afternoon?

Count the time to a change somebody can use.

Include the brief, review and rework.

Your experience makes AI useful

Choose the problem	Start with the work somebody needs to do.
Write a clear brief	Give AI a clear job and a result you can test.
Control what changes	Ask who’s affected and decide when to pause.
Prove it works	Have AI run the checks. Try the result yourself.

Take one job, one check and one question to your next session.

So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish



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Matt Nunn | matt@rsr.dev | rsr.dev | foguetech.com | mcwtech.com