

Excerpts from the novel **Hopes and Dreams: Stuck on AutoDrive**
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<http://hopes-and-dreams.net>

Hopes and Dreams



I run research & development for Flight Control, the company that is making AutoDrive, the self-driving car. It needs another year. Carl thinks a year means a month.

“It can’t be done.”

Carl’s temples and neck veins are throbbing. “You can’t do it?!?”

“No one can do it.”

“You’re fired!” *Carl follows me back to my office.*

He jerks a bit, spasms, his body convulses, shakes, and quakes to the point that I’m not sure he knows which end is up. And he bursts out, “**Get it done!** I want you to get AutoDrive done.” Picking up my cardboard box, he dumps the contents on the desk with a crash and tosses aside the box. The glass of the Founding Fathers plaque breaks against the Failed Experiments line. “I need you to say yes. I need you to work through the decisions and the choices for solutions. I need AutoDrive to be done. Now.” He puts his foot down on a metal paperweight which launches into a sand-bag, knocking it out of position, breaking the dam, and flooding the office with paperwork, streams shooting into the hallway. Amidst the flow he picks up the uninflated beach ball, shakes it at me, and shouts, “You are going to put away your smugness and your weekend plans and get the job done!” He pants to catch his breath which only slightly muffles the sound of a computerized dog gnawing on computerized documents and the sound of papers settling.

Ask me how my day is going. I dare you.

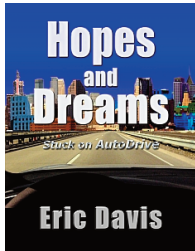
Hopes and Dreams: Stuck on AutoDrive by Eric Davis

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A solitary bare light bulb with a pull chain hangs from the water damaged ceiling. There are two closets. One is the bathroom; the other is the kitchen. The kitchen closet has fake brick wallpaper over a real brick wall. The room, the only room, has a bed, a table, and a chair. I thought about buying a radio, but I thought that would be too depressing. I share the squalid apartment with a veritable field guide of insect life. The air is dominated by flies and yellow jacket wasps, and some mosquitoes that lost their way to Minnesota. I know what that's like.

The floors, surfaces, and paint peeled, plaster cracked walls are the domain of the crawling bugs. The most entertaining bugs either have too many legs or too few. The two to four inch long hairy, feathery reddish centipedes are some of the fastest. Their abundance of legs move like waves. Small silver bugs called silverfish, swim across the dry floor with hardly any legs at all. The armored infantry consists mainly of cockroaches, earwigs, click beetles, and pill bugs. The spiders have two groups, the fast and the slow. The size of a spider doesn't seem to impact its speed, neither does color.

I may have unknowingly caused disarray in the apartment. The bugs may have been used to having food, especially having food that's delivered to them. I don't have any food. When I eat, I eat out. When I come back, the bugs line-up at the door. They look me over for food and scurry off. Night after night, week after week, they have gotten used to this routine. But tonight is different. A nervous tension is abuzz, like teenage hormones in overdrive. An edgy madness grips the efficiency apartment and shakes it like a snowglobe.

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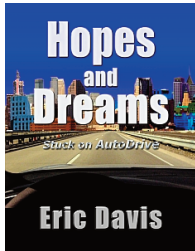
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The bugs turn out. Bug after bug crawls wearily forward, eyeing other bugs, circling them with suspicion and uncertainty, looking for weakness. A stomp of a tiny foot here, a trip there, a misunderstanding of property and a once organized community of insects turns against itself, pitting bug against bug, spider against spider, in an all-out frenzy. It is war. Pinchers attack armor. Click beetles snap back. The wounded are butchered while still kicking. Casualties mount.

A pill bug, curled into an armor ball, is kicked toward a centipede, who kicks it into the net of a spider. Goal! One point for... one of the teams. They aren't that organized.

I swat a yellow jacket back into play.

Someone sounds a buzzer. The bugs huddle. Bugs in conference? That can't be good. They look at me. They huddle again. The conference is over. Good. Back to the game! This could decide the apartment.

The bugs turn, united in a common bureaucracy, united in a common destination. Me. I have been reclassified. They crawl, they creep, they scurry, and they fly toward me. I am Bug Chow.

Will he become Bug Chow?

What's the final score in Pill Bug Ball?

Find out the answers to these and other exciting questions in --

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Stuck on AutoDrive

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