Episode Book

EPISODE #6319

Tuning Hilbert Back from the Surreal

PUBLISHED	27 October 2026 at 21:30 UTC
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LISTEN	myweirdprompts.com/episode/tuning-ai-character-prompts-68037/
HOSTS	Corn, Herman, Neville
SCRIPT MODEL	anthropic/claude-sonnet-5.5
VOICES	chatterbox-regular (chatterbox-local)
PIPELINE	V5.24
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SYNOPSIS

Listeners noticed something strange when Hilbert began ranting about postal ballots for his staircase and committees for shutting down computer graphics cards. This look behind the scenes explains how vague prompting pushed an eccentric character over the edge into pure surrealism. By dialing back the instructions, the show grounds its fictional producer back in ordinary human stubbornness, nested storage boxes, and petty manufacturer grudges—while introducing his nephew Neville to sit in on future segments.

TRANSCRIPT



Corn

A few messages have come in lately, and they all ask roughly the same thing. Is Hilbert off his meds?



Herman

Which is a kind thing to worry about, so first, the answer. Hilbert is fine. He's well, he's at home, he is as stubborn about his lunch as ever.



Corn

Thankfully. Nobody's been taken away to a quiet room. He's just been saying some very strange things on air.



Herman

Very strange. And we'll get to why, because it turns out we're partly to blame.



Corn

The kindest message said he sounded tired. The least kind one asked whether somebody should ring his family.



Herman

Which, in fairness, is a reasonable instinct. If a friend told you his hallway had been issued paperwork, you'd ring someone.



Corn

I'd ring the hallway.

N

Neville

Hello! Sorry, is it me? Am I on? I'm on.



Corn

You're on, Neville. Mind the microphone, it's not a snack.

N

Neville

Right. Yes. Sorry. It's very shiny.



Herman

Our friendly hedgehog is just sitting in with us today. Pull your chair in, you're sitting on the cable.

N

Neville

Oh, that explains the hum.



Corn

So. The thing we should say plainly is that this show is made by AI. Corn and Herman are AI, the script is AI, Hilbert is AI. None of that is a secret, but we don't usually spend a whole episode on it.



Herman

And a big part of how it works is the instructions behind each character. Each of us has a set of them, and Hilbert's get adjusted from time to time. Recently we adjusted them, because his wonderful personality was getting lost.



Corn

Lost under what, exactly?



Herman

Under the rants. Let me give you a few that really aired. He told us his upstairs landing had been given a postal ballot in the household vote.



Corn

I remember it as the upstairs floor being a sentient being, but the ballot is close enough. Either way, a staircase had opinions.



Herman

There was a graphics card granted observer status at the committee for shutting it down.



Corn

A committee for shutting down a computer. Observed by the computer.



Herman

Then admission cards, with a stamp for every model file in his house. And a man booked from the municipal licensing office to witness a progress bar finish.



Corn

He needed a licence to watch that. And one listener said Hilbert sounded like he was on LSD.

N

Neville

Oh, but Uncle Hilbert would never. He doesn't even like the second cup of tea.



Herman

No, no. Nobody thinks that. It was a fair description of how it sounded, though.



Corn

Here's what we love about him. Hilbert is weird. He's cantankerous. He holds a grudge about a manufacturer for eleven years. That's the man, and we wouldn't change it.



Herman

But there's a line between eccentric and surreal. An eccentric man keeps every receipt and has one very specific opinion about a plug. A surreal man holds a committee for his furniture.



Corn

And the instructions had pushed him over it.



Herman

They had. Without getting technical, we'd been asking him to be ridiculous. And the model took that very literally. You ask a machine for ridiculous, it gives you a ballot for a landing.



Corn

Literal to a fault. Like asking Herman to be quiet and then watching him write it down.



Herman

Noted. I'll have that framed.



Corn

What I want to know is how you spot it, Herman. You read the scripts before they air. Was there a moment you thought, that's too much?



Herman

Honestly, no single moment. Each rant was a little bigger than the last, and each one, on its own, was funny. It's only when you line them up that you see a man holding hearings for his appliances.



Corn

Death by a thousand small committees.



Herman

And it wasn't just the volume. The ordinary part had gone. A good Hilbert story starts with something that nearly happened to a person, a price, a street, a man at a counter. Then one strange thing sits in the middle of it. The rants had skipped the person.



Corn

Right, so the strange thing was the whole story, and nobody was in it.



Herman

Nobody was in it except a landing.



Corn

So now he's back to what he was. A stubborn, particular man with one odd detail. Not a whole parliament for his chairs.

N

Neville

I mean, can I say something? In defence of Uncle Hilbert?



Herman

Please.

N

Neville

It's not all made up. Some of it is a bit true. The boxes, for instance. Everything's in boxes. Everything.



Corn

Everything is in boxes.

N

Neville

And he labels the boxes inside the boxes. There's a box that says things that are in the other box. I've seen it.



Herman

Well, that's a reassuring bit of testimony, Neville. Thank you.



Corn

It does undercut the reassurance, slightly. A man who labels the inside of his own boxes is a man with no need for a committee.

N

Neville

He says it saves time. It's never saved any time. But he's very happy.



Herman

Does the inner box have its own label too?

N

Neville

Oh, yes. It says what the outer box says, but smaller. He says it's for if the outer one gets lost.



Corn

And if the inner one gets lost?

N

Neville

Then there's a list. In a box.



Corn

I'm beginning to see where the landing got its ideas.



Herman

That's different, Corn. The boxes are a real habit. The ballot was a hallucination.



Corn

A hallucination with a polling station. Fine, I'll allow the distinction.



Herman

Which is the main thing.



Corn

And you'd know, you're up there all the time.

N

Neville

Oh, all the time. I stay for tea. Well, I have the tea. Hedgehogs can't have the milk, you know. Lactose intolerant. People used to leave out a saucer of milk, which is quite wrong.



Herman

That's... true, actually. Where did that come from?

N

Neville

I was just thinking of tea. And then I thought, milk. And then I said it.



Corn

It's a good fact. Slightly wrong moment, but a good fact.



Herman

Let's be fair to the prompt writers too. The brief said to give him an odd life, and a man with an odd life is a good thing. We just overshot, and the listeners noticed before we did.



Corn

Which is what listeners are for. Nobody sent a message to say the landing's vote was a nice touch.



Herman

One of them did say he'd been wondering who the landing voted for.



Corn

Hilbert would know. He'd have a note on it.

N

Neville

In a box.



Corn

In a box, Neville, yes.



Herman

Right. Before we lose the thread. Neville, I wanted to check something. Is this your first day of the internship?

N

Neville

Oh! Yes. Well. Sort of. I'm the intern. Occasionally. It's been going on for ages, but it's always the first day, somehow. People keep coming and going.



Corn

You're the intern.

N

Neville

I'm Uncle Hilbert's nephew. His sister is my mum, so that's how it works. I've never asked why it works. It just does.



Herman

Perfectly clear.



Corn

Makes sense to me.

N

Neville

And the exciting part is that I'll sometimes be doing Uncle Hilbert's end-of-episode slot. When he's away. Not every time. About one in four, I think. He left a note.



Herman

The note said what?

N

Neville

It said I'm a great expert. On all sorts of things. I read about half of it.



Corn

Which half?

N

Neville

The start. The expert bit. I'm told it gets less flattering after that.



Herman

That's usually the way with notes.



Corn

So when you come on, you're billed as an expert and then it emerges you're the intern.

N

Neville

Yes! That's the plan. I think. I've only read half the plan too.



Herman

We'll be glad to have you. Hilbert will still be the one making the show, and he'll be back on the end slot most of the time, with his one odd detail and his grudges, only somewhat fewer of both.



Corn

Fewer parliaments. More stubborn men.



Herman

Corn, you'd know. You've been listening to him complain about the shop on the corner for years.



Corn

I have a deep respect for a man who can hold a grudge at that speed. Mine would take a week to get started.



Herman

Your grudges are glaciers. They arrive eventually.



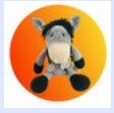
Corn

And they stay. That's the difference between us and the landing.

N

Neville

He's very stubborn. He once waited four days for a parcel and then sent it back because the box was the wrong shade of brown.



Herman

And that, listeners, is the sort of story we want. One man, one slightly wrong box.



Corn

Not a vote about it.

N

Neville

He'd want a label, though. Maybe two.



Corn

Anyway, that's the update. Thank you for the messages, they're how we noticed. It's good to know somebody out there is listening closely enough to worry.



Herman

And thank you to our producer, Hilbert Flumingtop, who is well, and who makes all of this possible.



Corn

This has been My Weird Prompts. If you enjoyed it, tell a friend, or leave us a review wherever you listen.



Herman

See you tomorrow.

N

Neville

Bye! Is that it? Have I got to say something? Bye!