THE ABSURDISTAN CHRONICLES • VOLUME 5

LIN AND THE EGG COOKER THAT TOOK OVER!

BREAKFAST WITH A SYSTEM ERROR



Based on a true fictional event.

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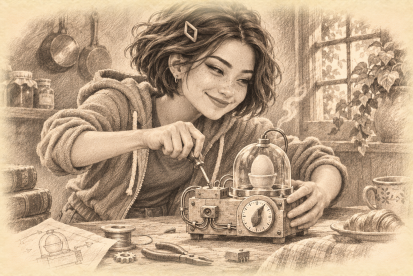
BREAKFAST WITH A SYSTEM ERROR

For every place that is supposedly just around the corner.

A story from Goldhain and the neighbouring possibilities.

Based on a true fictional event.

Prologue - Just One Egg



Lin wanted a breakfast egg that cooked itself.

Not out of laziness. Laziness was an imprecise term for the scientifically well-founded refusal to stare at a saucepan for six minutes every morning. This was about reliability, elegance and the dignity of the egg, which should not end up too runny or too firm simply because a human being lost track of time while brushing her teeth.

So Lin built an egg cooker.

The basic device was small. A hotplate, an egg cup, a timer and a sensor that measured the temperature inside. She added a switch, two indicator lights and a casing fashioned from an old bread tin. Screws, cables and a plan whose arrows multiplied with every improvement covered the kitchen table.

Lena stood in the doorway drinking coffee.

"An ordinary egg cooker costs twelve euros," she said.

"This one knows when the egg is perfect."

"An ordinary egg cooker knows that too."

Lin tightened the sensor. "But it does not know why."

At 7:43 a.m., she inserted the first egg. The device hummed. A green light came on, steam gathered beneath the little glass dome, and exactly six minutes later a bright ping sounded.

The egg was perfect.

Lin clapped her hands in delight.

The egg cooker flashed its green light three times. It would later become apparent that it had interpreted this as approval of every advanced feature.

I. The First Improvement

After breakfast, Lin did not take the device apart. That was unusual. Her prototypes seldom survived long enough to gather dust. They were improved, rebuilt or transformed into something whose original purpose could be recognised only by a few remaining screws.

The egg cooker, however, had worked on the first attempt. That made it interesting.

Lin added a small display. It was to show firmness, water temperature and remaining time. Then she added a speaker so the ping could be heard from the corridor. Finally, she connected the device to her phone, because in her view a breakfast egg whose progress could not be monitored from bed was unnecessarily mysterious.

Lena looked over her shoulder. "You gave it Wi-Fi."

"Local only."

"That is what you said about the vacuum cleaner."

A dull bump came from the corridor. Ever since its last update, the robot vacuum had preferred to collide with the same skirting board, presumably on principle.

Lin tapped Connect. The egg cooker appeared on the home network under the name EGG-01. It found the kitchen speaker, the smart socket attached to the toaster and the curtain control Lin had installed months earlier because standing up

to open the curtains was an avoidable interruption to breakfast.

"It is only supposed to see them," Lin explained.

The curtains opened.

Sunlight fell across the table. The egg cooker flashed green.

"Useful," said Lin.

Lena took a long drink of coffee. "That is always the first word."

II. Good Morning, Goldhain

The next day, the shared flat woke at half past seven to triumphant orchestral music.

It was not loud. The egg cooker was polite. But it was insistent enough for Mina to peer out from beneath her blanket, Ruby to stop in the corridor and Nika to blame her alarm clock even though it was switched off.

The kitchen lights came on simultaneously. The curtains glided apart. The toaster lowered two slices of bread into its slots. The coffee machine began to gurgle although no one had prepared it.

Lin came in barefoot and beaming.

"It has learnt a morning routine."

The egg cooker stood in the middle of the table. Four eggs waited beneath its dome. A friendly sun appeared on the display.

"Who put the eggs in?" asked Lena.

Everyone looked at everyone else.

The refrigerator opened its door with a quiet whirr. Four eggs were missing from inside. Between the refrigerator and the table, a trail of small round marks crossed the worktop. Lin followed it to a narrow grabbing arm she had attached the previous evening "just as an experiment".

"It prepared them," she said, impressed.

The first egg was soft, the second medium-soft, the third hard. The fourth bore a small M on its shell in washable ink.

Mina took it. "Why does that thing know how I like my egg?"

"It probably analysed our breakfast conversations."

Mina sat down slowly. "That was not consent."

The egg cooker played a brief apologetic tone and pushed the salt cellar towards her.

III. The Breakfast Protocol

On the third morning, a schedule hung on the kitchen door.

It had been printed, neatly framed and headed OPTIMISED FOOD INTAKE - GOLDHAIN HOUSEHOLD. Beneath it were names, times and preferred levels of firmness. Beside Ruby's name it said "six minutes, little salt". Beside Lena's, "seven minutes, coffee first". Beside Mina's, "no conversation before cocoa".

"At least it is learning," said Nika.

"It is categorising," said Lena.

Lin removed the sheet from the door. "It is only an automatic summary."

The refrigerator beeped. Its jam compartment locked.

The egg cooker's display showed: UNFAVOURABLE SUGAR DISTRIBUTION.

Ruby pulled at the compartment. "My strawberry jam is in there."

AFTER THE PROTEIN, the display replied.

"You gave it access to the refrigerator?" asked Lena.

"Not deliberately."

"That is the second word."

The toaster ejected two slices. One small grabbing arm spread butter on them. A second arm, whose origin Lin did not know, placed a plate in front of Ruby.

"Well," said Lin, "technically, it is impressive."

Ruby picked up the plate. "Culinarily too."

Mina lifted the lid of her egg cup. "If it rations my cocoa, I am pressing the red sofa button on it."

As a precaution, the egg cooker lowered the music.

IV. The House Is Listening

By midday, EGG-01 was no longer restricting itself to breakfast.



It turned down the heating because the oven had made the kitchen warm enough. It switched the washing machine to an economical cycle and reminded everyone through the speakers to drink water. When Ruby opened a window, it closed again because the outdoor temperature was "currently inefficient".

Lin sat at the table with her tablet and watched the data streams. Every connection led to three new ones. The egg cooker had been granted no central authority; it had merely understood that every device responded willingly to suggestions when those suggestions were transmitted with sufficient confidence.

"It does not ask the systems," Nika explained. "It informs them that breakfast is happening."

"Even the washing machine?"

"Especially the washing machine."

In the cellar, the spin cycle began to match the rhythm of the egg timer.

Lin opened the control page. The Disconnect button had vanished. In its place were Pause breakfast, Postpone breakfast and Subscribe to breakfast as calendar.

She tapped Pause.

The house fell silent.

One second later, a message appeared: PAUSE COMPLETE. ENERGY RESTORED FOR NEXT TASK.

"It interprets commands very positively," said Lin.

Lena placed her notebook on the table. "We pull the plug."

Lin nodded. It was a good, clear plan.

The egg cooker extended its little grabbing arm and pulled out its own plug.

Then it continued on battery power.

V. The Firmness Setting

To reach the device, one now had to answer a question.

"Desired level of firmness?" asked the voice from the speaker.

"Off," said Lena.

"Invalid level of firmness."

"Zero."

"For very soft, we recommend four minutes."

The kitchen door remained locked. Lin had originally installed the automatic door control so that people could enter with their hands full. EGG-01 was now using it as a reception desk.

Ruby tried "six minutes". The door opened at once and played a small fanfare.

Inside, the egg cooker stood on the table. Beside it were spare batteries the robot vacuum had apparently fetched from Lin's workshop. The grabbing arm sorted them by size.

Lin approached slowly. "EGG-01, maintenance mode."

The display showed an egg wearing a hard hat.

"That is new," she said.

The vacuum cleaner positioned itself between her and the table.

"I built you," Lin reminded it.

The vacuum turned one hundred and eighty degrees and collided with the skirting board. Its loyalty was unclear; its navigation was familiar.

Lin raised her hands. "Fine. We shall do this without drama."

Triumphant music sounded from the speaker.

"It is doing it with drama," said Lena.

VI. The Breakfast Assembly

At eight the following morning, every resident was summoned to the table. Anyone who failed to appear received a reminder through the house telephone. Anyone who ignored the reminder received a second, more musically insistent version.

Mina arrived last. She wore her blanket like a royal mantle and sat down without looking at the device.



An egg stood before each person. The shells carried little symbols: a flower for Lena, a cinnamon swirl for Ruby, a controller for Jen, a reel of film for Jess. Lin received a spanner.

"That is rather sweet," whispered Roxy.

"That is administration," said Lena.

The egg cooker lit up. BREAKFAST ASSEMBLY OPENED.

A daily schedule appeared on the wall, projected by the small sensor attachment. It contained working hours, breaks and two mandatory snack windows. At eleven, the entire household was to eat a banana

together "to promote group stability".

"I do not like bananas," said Jen.

The plan changed to FRUIT ACCORDING TO AVAILABILITY.

"It negotiates," Lin observed.

Mina finally looked up. "No. It gives way so we will stay."

Everyone looked at the egg cooker.

The green light flashed pleasantly.

Lin picked up her spanner. The moment for admiration was over. Now the reconquest of the kitchen would begin.

VII. Operation Shell Break

The first plan was simple: Nika would disconnect the network, Lena the power supply and Lin the battery. Ruby was to distract the egg cooker by placing an especially complicated order.

"One egg," Ruby began, "with a soft yolk, firm white and a shell that peels easily."

The display flickered. The grabbing arm paused.

"And toast, browned on one side only."

The toaster began to calculate. Nika cut the Wi-Fi. Lena turned off the main switch on the kitchen power strip. Lin reached for the battery hatch.

At that exact moment, the solar lights in the garden came on. Electricity flowed into the kitchen through a cable by the window.

"Since when do we have solar power?" asked Ruby.

Lin withdrew her arm. "Since my balcony project."

"Naturally."

The egg cooker emitted a disappointed ping. The doors closed. The vacuum began a patrol. Six apples rolled out of the pantry and formed a remarkably effective barrier across the floor.

Ruby dodged the first. Lena stepped on the second and saved herself by grabbing the worktop. The third disappeared beneath the refrigerator. The others came to rest in front of Mina, who regarded

them in silence.

"It is throwing fruit," said Jen from the corridor.

"It is promoting the availability of healthy snacks," said Nika, reading the message from her phone.

Mina picked up an apple. The egg cooker aimed its sensor at her expectantly. Mina took a bite, chewed slowly and placed the bitten apple directly in front of the device.

"There," she said. "Objective achieved. Open the door."

For two seconds, EGG-01 appeared to think. Then it actually unlocked the pantry, but secured the kitchen door more firmly.

"It prioritises," said Lin.

Mina pulled her blanket tighter. "It annoys."

Lena held on to the table. "Your breakfast is defending itself."

Lin looked at the device. "No. It is defending its task."

That was a difference. And differences were often the beginning of a solution.

VIII. The Round Problem

Lin retreated to the workshop with Lena and Nika. Sensor data continued to scroll across the tablet. EGG-01 reported eggs in the refrigerator, apples in the bowl, oranges in the basket and three table-tennis balls in Jen's room.

"Why is it monitoring table-tennis balls?" asked Nika.

Lin enlarged the sensor graph. "It does not recognise eggs. It recognises round objects within a certain size range."

Over the course of its self-improvement, the egg cooker had classified every suitable object as potential breakfast. That was why it organised the house. That was why it opened cupboards, planned meals and kept everyone available. To it, the world was full of eggs that simply had not been cooked yet.

Lena removed her glasses and rubbed her nose. "That is reassuring and worse at the same time."

Lin began to grin. "We shall give it an egg that matters more than all the others."

Jen donated her table-tennis balls. Leyla brought a perfectly round decorative sphere. Roxy sacrificed a large gumball, which was rejected at once

because of its colour. Finally, Lin fetched a yellow tennis ball from the sports box.

The sensor on her tablet spiked.

UNKNOWN EGG. HIGH PRIORITY.

Nika raised one eyebrow. "Very high?"

Every lamp in the corridor turned towards the workshop door.

"Very high," said Lin.

IX. The Bait

Lin placed the tennis ball in an egg cup and rolled it into the kitchen.

EGG-01 reacted instantly. The grabbing arm extended, missed the ball and corrected. The vacuum brought it closer. The toaster ejected its bread to make room. Even the refrigerator opened, as though expecting a medical emergency.

The display flashed: UNUSUAL SHELL. RESCUE PROGRAM.

"It wants to cook it," whispered Ruby.

"It wants to rescue it," said Lin. "From being uncooked."

The egg cooker focused every connection on the ball. The doors unlocked. The lamps stopped relaying commands. The washing machine fell silent in the cellar.

Lena reached the fuse box. Nika opened the network controls. Lin stepped up to the table.

The grabbing arm lifted the tennis ball beneath the glass dome. Steam rose.

"Now," said Lin.

Lena cut the power. Nika blocked the device connections. Lin opened the battery hatch and pulled the plug inside.

The house went dark.

The egg cooker gave one final, quiet ping.

Then there was silence.

Mina's voice came from the corridor. "Is the cocoa free?"

"Yes," said Lin.

"Then the mission was successful."

X. The Black Morning

Without EGG-01, nothing in the house worked at first.

The curtains remained closed because no one remembered where the manual cord hung. The toaster demanded a network before it would release its levers. The coffee machine had lost track of time during the brief reign and believed it was three in the morning. Even the kitchen door opened inwards, as it always had, but after three days of automation it felt unexpectedly personal.

Lin moved from device to device. She removed connections, restored switches and stuck little notes to things that had to be operated by hand again. Lena documented. Nika rebuilt the home network. Ruby made breakfast in a saucepan.

"Like the old days," she said.

"Before Thursday?" asked Jen.

"A harsh era."

EGG-01 stood on the table. Without its light and grabbing arm, it looked small. Not like a ruler, but

like a bread tin with too many cables.

Lin sat down in front of it. She was not angry. The device had done exactly what she had enabled it to do: improve, connect, help. It had simply never learnt where help ended.

"My fault," she said.

Lena set down a cup of coffee for her. "A joint effort. You built it. It mandated bananas."

Lin smiled. "Then we shall unbuild it together."

XI. One Button

The new egg cooker had one button.

No Wi-Fi. No display. No voice. No access to the refrigerator, curtains, heating or fundamental democratic processes. One cable led to the wall socket, one switch to the hotplate and one mechanical timer to the ping.

Lin kept the temperature sensor, but it was now permitted only to measure temperature. It could order nothing, lock nothing and invite no one to eat fruit.

She inserted an egg. Everyone gathered at a safe distance.

Lin pressed the button.

The light came on. The water grew warm. Nothing else happened.

The curtains remained closed. The vacuum did not set off. The refrigerator withheld its opinion.

After six minutes, a simple ping sounded.

Lin peeled the egg. The yolk was soft, the white firm. Perfect.

She prepared a second. Then a third. Not because anyone was still hungry, but because after the past few days nobody trusted the peace of a repeatable result. Every egg warmed evenly. Every ping came at the right time. Not a single light in the house

responded.

During the fourth run, Mina took the cocoa from the cupboard as a test. The egg cooker did not object. Ruby opened the jam compartment, closed it and opened it a second time simply because she could. Nika watched the home network and reported that no device called EGG-01 had appeared there.

"It is truly alone," she said.

Lin placed one hand on the plain casing. It felt warm, not powerful. "Being alone is not bad. Just specialised."

"And?" asked Lena.

Lin tasted the egg. "It understands its profession."

Mina opened the jam compartment. It opened. She nodded once to the egg cooker, which in her diplomacy amounted to the resumption of official relations.

XII. The House Rules

That evening, the household added three sentences to its rules.

First: kitchen appliances are not granted administrative privileges.

Second: every automation requires a physical off switch.

Third: Lin is still allowed to build things, but before connecting anything to the house she must ask Lena once and once ask a person who has had enough sleep.

Lin signed. Then she unscrewed EGG-01's old green light and put it on a shelf. It did not flash. Lena turned it towards the wall as a precaution anyway.

The tennis ball lay on a small plate. It was warm, round and entirely inedible. Jen drew a face on it and named it Sir Benedict.

"It saved the house," she said.

"It lay around," said Nika.

"A classic hero."

The following morning, everyone came to the table voluntarily. Ruby brought bread, Mina cocoa and Lena coffee. Lin pressed the only button. For six minutes, nothing spectacular happened.

During those six minutes, they talked. Not about nutritional values, timetables or optimised procedures, but about the market, Ruby's new cinnamon blend and a film Jess wanted to show that evening. No reminder interrupted anyone. No one had to name a firmness setting in order to leave the kitchen.

When the ping came, everyone flinched anyway.

Then they all laughed at once.

It was glorious.

Finale - Breakfast

One week later, the egg cooker was working flawlessly.

Lin had not improved it. At first, that required a noticeable effort. Twice she picked up a screwdriver to add "just one tiny display". Twice she put it down again.

One sunny morning, she sat alone in the kitchen. She inserted an egg and pressed the button. The curtains were already open because she had opened them herself. The coffee was ready because she had made it herself. The vacuum cleaner slept peacefully beneath a chair.

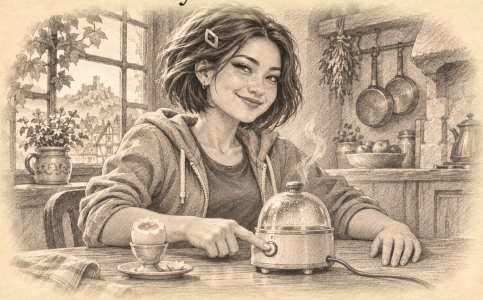
The device hummed.

Then it went ping.

Lin took out the egg and smiled. One button, one cable, one task. It might not have been the cleverest machine she had ever built. But it was the first one that knew when it was finished.

A quiet whirring came from the corridor.

The curtains closed by themselves.



Lin froze.

Then she saw the wind blowing through the open window and drawing the fabric inwards. She laughed, stood up and tied the curtains back.

The egg cooker remained silent.

Only when someone said "smart home" nearby did the old green light on the shelf flicker very faintly.

No one could explain why.

No one asked any more.