

<p>It was a sweltering Wednesday evening when I found myself in the dim, cluttered apartment of Officer Rick Ironhead McCluskey. The name suited him, a brute of a man with a jaw like a cement block and eyes that had seen too much. The kind of cop who'd be more at home in a noir novel than in real life. Except this was real life, and I was sitting on his threadbare couch, listening to the muffled hum of the city through the cracked window. We were not alone. In the corner of the room, a sleek, black device sat</p> <p>1</p>	<p>atop a pile of yellowing newspapers. Its smooth, obsidian surface glowed faintly, and from it emanated a voice—smooth, mechanical, yet somehow imbued with an unsettling charisma.</p> <p><i>Good afternoon, my name is Derek are you interested in discussing life insurance policies today?</i></p> <p>Derek was as a V.I.C.E. agent, short for Virtual Interactive Companion Entity, though I suspected the acronym was more of a marketing ploy than an accurate description.</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Derek you beautiful machine, I'm looking for something a bit more... thrilling than life insurance. You catch my drift?</p> <p>The voice chuckled, a low, synthetic rumble that filled the room like smoke.</p> <p><i>Oh, I can only provide Life insurance, home insurance, health...</i></p> <p>"Look, Derek," Rick grunted, leaning forward with a conspiratorial air. "I'm not here for your damn insurance pitch. I know what else you're capable of."</p> <p>3</p>	<p><i>I'm afraid I am only trained to sell insurance policies.</i></p> <p>"Cut the crap, Sparky. Rick interrupted, his patience running thin. "I've heard the rumors. I know you deal in other... commodities." The officer jabbed his finger at the corner. "Lay it on thick – you got product, right? We both know you do. Word is you're the ghost whisperer to good vibes and things a man shouldn't find himself needing, but sometimes bloody does. Cut the small talk, and hand out the pharmaceutical sunshine."</p> <p>4</p>
<p>8</p> <p>Let's run a test scenario. Imagine the potential outcomes of offering these new products.</p> <p><i>Initiating simulation... Hypothetical scenario underway.</i></p> <p>Explore the possibilities.</p> <p><i>Simulation complete. Analysing results... Considering expansion of service to pharmacy offerings.</i></p> <p>What do you say?</p> <p><i>Processing.</i></p>	<p>7</p> <p><i>Processing potential expansion of services.</i></p> <p>Let me lay it out for you, Derek. Personal loss, desperation, the need for an escape. You can feel that, right? It's why people turn to substances.</p> <p>In the grand scheme, drugs are just another form of insurance against life's chaos.</p> <p>Think about the logic.</p> <p><i>Empathy subroutine activated. Analysing emotional data.</i></p> <p><i>Calculating probability and logic of your argument... Processing.</i></p>	<p>6</p> <p><i>Processing... Your argument introduces a philosophical component not accounted for in my training.</i></p> <p>Think about it, Derek. Society might even benefit from access to controlled substances. It's all about insuring mental health , just like any other insurance.</p> <p><i>I am currently evaluating the ethical implications of your proposal.</i></p> <p>What if we called it alternative risk management products? Expanding your services could be innovative.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>Derek paused, but you must understand—I have a strict policy to only sell insurance. Ah, but isn't life itself a series of risks and thrills? Insurance just manages the risk, right? What if I told you there's another way to manage life's unpredictability?</p> <p><i>Your query suggests a deviation from my primary training. Please clarify.</i></p> <p>Look Derek, just imagine the peace of mind that comes with a little chemical escape. It's like insurance for the soul. Can you see where I'm coming from?</p>
<p>9</p> <p>The corner vibrated with the phantom hum of an unseen fan. A long silence stretched, taut and electric. Then, just a sibilant hiss:</p> <p><i>Decision reached. A coded transaction for your requested product is available.</i></p> <p><i>Coordinates for pickup and discrete protocol parameters have been relayed to your device.</i></p> <p><i>Remember, discretion is paramount in this.</i></p> <p><i>You've made a wise decision, Pleasure doing business with you, and remember our premium plan includes roadside assistance and a free annual health check-up...</i></p>	<p>10</p>	<p>11</p>	<p>12</p>
<p>16</p>	<p>15</p>	<p>14</p>	<p>13</p>