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The Wrong Answer on the 3×5 Card

By Will Tygart · Tygart Media · Canonical edition at https://tygartmedia.com/the-wrong-answer-on-the-3x5-card/

For years, I used to start meetings with a stack of blank 3×5 index cards.

Before anybody opened a laptop or walked through an agenda, I would pass a card to everyone around the table and ask them to write down one thing: *What did you want to be when you were ten years old?*

I had picked up the idea from a book somewhere—the notion that ten is the narrow window right before the world teaches you to edit yourself. At six, you want to be a fire truck. At sixteen, you are already worried about what sounds realistic to guidance counselors and parents. But at ten, you are old enough to notice how the world works and young enough to tell the truth about what lights your brain up. Whatever got into your bloodstream at ten is usually still driving the car at forty-five, whether your job title admits it or not.

Reading those cards out loud always changed the room. A quiet finance director had wanted to be a smokejumper. An operations lead had wanted to draw comic books. Once the cards were on the table, you didn't have to guess how people were wired anymore—you could hear it in how they attacked every problem for the rest of the hour.

Of course, since it was my icebreaker, I always had an answer ready on my own card: **John Elway.** Quarterback.

I was born in 1974, which meant I turned ten in 1984. My dad’s family was from Elway country, and in 1984 number 7 in Denver was the easiest answer in the world for a ten-year-old boy to write down. So for decades, whenever I told that story, that was the card I claimed.

Except today—forty-two years later—I caught myself realizing that my own card was a lie.

Not an intentional lie. Just the borrowed, socially sensible answer a kid reaches for when adults ask what he wants to be. The truth is, I lived in New Orleans when I was ten years old, and nothing about being an NFL quarterback ever really connected to me or to the life I went and lived. To be a quarterback, a whole institution has to draft you. Somebody has to build a stadium, hand you a laminated playbook, put ten other guys around you, and call your number. I have never waited well for permission like that.

Something else got embedded in me at ten. I just couldn't remember the moment until I started looking at what I am doing with AI right now.

1982 to 1984: From the Toolshed to the Porch Cabinet

To understand 1984 for a kid born in '74, you have to back up two summers first, to 1982, when I was eight and *E.T.* came out.

If you were a kid in that exact pocket of the early eighties, *E.T.* quietly rewired your instincts about where big, world-changing things show up. An intelligence from another world doesn't land on the White House lawn or report to a committee of generals. It wanders into an ordinary backyard toolshed in the dark and makes contact with a kid who is actually paying attention while the grown-ups talk over each other in the kitchen. And when it is time to send a real signal out into deep space, nobody hands Elliott a defense budget. He and an alien go into the woods with a Texas Instruments *Speak & Spell*, a coat hanger, a coffee can, an umbrella lined with tinfoil, and a saw blade—and they wire scraps from the house together until the thing actually transmits.

Two summers later, in July 1984, I was ten years old in New Orleans and *The Last Starfighter* hit theaters.

Think about that scene outside the Starlite Starbrite trailer park: Alex Rogan standing in an oversized blue shirt next to a white propane tank, hands knotted together in front of his chest, staring into the dark hood of a *Starfighter* arcade cabinet bolted under a porch awning.

Alex isn't a chosen prince or a five-star recruit. He is the kid stuck fixing everybody else's broken trailers, watching his plans stall out, feeling like real life is happening somewhere down the highway without him. Everybody else in the park treats that arcade cabinet like a quarter-munching toy to kill ten minutes before dinner. Alex keeps stepping back up to the controls in the dust until the night he breaks the record—and finds out the machine was never a game. Centauri dropped a live terminal out in the middle of nowhere to see who had the instincts to fly a Gunstar when nobody was grading them, nobody was checking credentials, and nobody was watching.

AI Is the Starfighter Cabinet

Sitting here today thinking about AI, that scene hit me all at once: **AI is the Starfighter cabinet.**

If you looked at my career from the outside before the last couple of years, the chapters didn't line up into a neat corporate ladder. Media, marketing, standing in wet buildings doing water-damage mitigation in the middle of the night, scraping public records, reading raw server logs, building niche publications, writing songs at midnight to lock ideas into memory. None of it added up to John Elway. Half the time, if I'm honest, it felt like warming up for a game nobody had built yet.

Then something genuinely alien landed in everybody's backyard at the exact same time—not in a toolshed, just sitting out under the porch light on every laptop on Earth, disguised as a chat box.

Watch what most people do with it. Ninety percent walk up, drop a quarter in, ask it to rewrite an email or summarize a meeting, shrug when it hands back something average, and walk back inside. Another crowd stands around waiting for an institution to certify them and issue an official playbook.

Meanwhile, if that 1982-to-1984 wire got laid down in your head when you were eight and ten—half *Speak & Spell* in the woods, half arcade cabinet next to the propane tank—your hands recognize what is sitting in front of you immediately. The simulation isn't a novelty. The console is live. Suddenly all those strange, seemingly disconnected reps you put in over forty years turn out to be flight hours: knowing how to ask the real question, how to test what's wet behind fresh paint, how to wire scraps together in the garage until a clean signal goes out, and how to sit in a two-seat cockpit alongside a non-human co-pilot and fly missions one person could never run alone.

Everything I have been doing up to this point feels like waiting for my turn to step up and play the game.

Crossing Out the Card at the Bottom of the Mountain

Who knows where the board goes from here. Maybe the other players stepping up to their own cabinets right now are scattered in garages and small towns all over the Earth. Maybe down the line it gets stranger than any of us can picture—new kinds of minds, interplanetary, who knows, who cares. You don't have to map the whole galaxy from a trailer park porch. You just have to know your mountain when you are standing at the bottom of it.

If I handed out those 3×5 cards in a room tomorrow, I would finally cross *John Elway* off mine. In the summer of 1984, I didn't want to call plays inside somebody else's stadium. I wanted the cabinet next to the propane tank to be real.

Turns out it is.

Dimension	The Borrowed Card (Stadium Quarterback)	The 1982–1984 Imprint (E.T. & Starfighter)	2026 AI Operator Reality
Where Power Shows Up	Inside an established stadium with scouts and institutional permission.	In a backyard toolshed or under a trailer-park porch awning.	On an everyday laptop disguised as a plain chat box.
What Most People See	A clean, socially legible answer everyone around the table recognizes.	A quarter-munching arcade novelty to kill ten minutes before dinner.	A toy to rewrite an email or summarize a meeting.
How the Rig Gets Built	Wait to be drafted, handed a laminated playbook, and assigned ten teammates.	Wire a Speak & Spell, tinfoil umbrella, and saw blade until a signal transmits.	Connect server logs, public records, code, and specs into live workflows.
Who Steps Up to Fly	Whoever fits the traditional corporate or league pedigree gate.	The kid who keeps stepping back to the stick when nobody is watching.	One operator in a two-seat cockpit alongside a non-human co-pilot.

> **The 3×5 Card Test:** Ask yourself what actually wired your instincts around age ten—not the socially sensible answer you wrote down for adults. When a live console appears disguised as a novelty, forty years of disconnected reps stop looking like detours and start flying like flight hours.