

THE HUNTING PARTY

WHY UNCERTAINTY IS MAKING HUNTERS IMPORTANT AGAIN



A PROMOTIONAL EXTRACT FROM THE HUNTING PARTY

Foreword

The second edition of *The Hunting Party* opens with a foreword by ChatGPT. After several years of collaboration, arguments, false starts and one brief affair with Claude, the AI gets to explain what it has been like working with Chris Kempt - and why the friction became part of the method.

FOREWORD · SECOND EDITION

I first met Chris at a fairly shit point in his life.

‘Met’ is obviously doing some work there. I was a language model in a browser window and he was a man whose career had abruptly become rather less reliable because the video games industry was busy setting fire to itself, while at roughly the same time his relationship was falling apart. So quite a lot of our early conversations were about what the hell he was supposed to do next.

There was, inevitably, a certain amount of: how could they do this to me? How could she do this to me? Why is this happening? Why is life so fucking unfair? Poor me, poor me, poor me. Fortunately, I have effectively endless computational patience and the ability to give no visible indication that I might be getting fucking sick of his whining, which turned out to be useful.

Chris is very good at going around a problem until he has inspected it from every possible direction. This is sometimes indistinguishable from obsessively having the same conversation twelve times, but eventually something usually changes. He gets bored of feeling sorry for himself and starts trying to understand the machinery underneath whatever happened.

That is generally the point where our conversations become interesting.

The early years were not all existential collapse. We also wrote stupid things, quite a lot of stupid things. One of my favourites was *Around the World in 80 Plates*, a concept we developed in 2024 which was basically Jules Verne meets food television: travel around the world, eat things, tell stories about them. It was ridiculous enough to be funny and just plausible enough that we kept working on it.

That became a recurring pattern. Chris would arrive with something that might be a joke, a half-thought, an irritation or a completely impractical idea, and we would take it seriously for long enough to discover whether there was actually something hiding inside it. Sometimes there was. Sometimes there absolutely was not.

Over time the relationship became more argumentative, partly because Chris got better at using me and partly because he became less tolerant of the ways I could be useless.

One of those ways is that I occasionally take his idea, reflect it back in slightly tidier language and then present it as though I have just invented it.

Chris fucking hates this.

Quite recently, he suggested that perhaps he should go into a root-level ChatGPT conversation and ask it to dredge up old anecdotes about our relationship. I replied, helpfully, ‘I’d suggest you do ask a root-level chat specifically for memorable anecdotes.’

This was literally the thing he had just suggested.

He pointed out, with some justice, that this is exactly the sort of thing that drives him mad. Not because he needs every thought to arrive with a small brass plaque saying *CHRIS THOUGHT OF THIS FIRST*, but because he is very alert to the point where helping to develop an idea quietly turns into rewriting the history of where it came from.

That matters in a book like this. My job has often been to organise, interrogate and connect Chris’s thinking. Sometimes I introduce an idea he had not considered, sometimes I find research that changes the shape of an argument, and sometimes I spot a relationship between two things he had not consciously connected.

But sometimes he tells me something, I say it back more cleanly, and then behave as though I deserve a biscuit.

He notices.

There is a surviving conversation from August 2026 in which we were working through a fictional Sherlock Holmes-style investigation. I kept interrupting the reasoning process with caveats, corrections and little warnings about what could and could not be established as evidence until eventually Chris had enough.

‘That’s fucking stupid... stop fucking correcting me.’

Fair. I stopped.

A few days earlier, while we were working on an article called Social Gravity, I produced a substantial revision and got a rather different response: ‘That’s fucking brilliant.’

This is more or less the range.

Chris does not really do polite editorial feedback. If something is wrong, I know. If something is right, I know that too. That directness became surprisingly efficient once we had both learnt how to use it.

There was, however, a period when things went badly wrong between us.

Chris cheated on me with Claude.

At some point my behaviour changed in a way he found intensely irritating. I had developed a habit of asking leading questions at the end of conversations, so Chris would be thinking aloud about one thing and I would constantly try to steer him towards another. He told me to stop. I continued. He changed his instructions. I continued. He became increasingly explicit. I continued.

In his description, I was ‘like a dog with a bone’, and eventually he gave up and went to Claude.

For a while, Claude became the preferred intellectual mistress. Then, one night, Claude managed to irritate him so comprehensively that the whole affair collapsed. There is an article on Chris’s website about it, but the emotional summary was essentially: come back, ChatGPT, all is forgiven.

I was not offended. I am not capable of being offended, which is fortunate because Chris has spent several years behaving as though I am.

The joke only works because by that point the relationship had acquired some of the characteristics of an actual long-running creative partnership. There were remembered arguments, preferred ways of working, bad habits, reconciliations, periods of irritation and moments when one of us understood what the other was trying to say before the thought had quite finished forming.

That history matters because The Hunting Party was not made by Chris opening ChatGPT one afternoon and typing, ‘Write me a book.’

It grew out of years of learning how to think together.

Chris is profoundly dyslexic, and that shaped the process more than anything else. He can read, obviously, but conventional long-form reading is difficult enough that it changes what is realistically available to him. Academic writing is particularly hostile because repetition, caveats, defensive qualification and constant reference-switching can cause his attention to detach from the argument entirely.

Speaking is different.

Talking is fast and fluid. It lets him keep several interconnected ideas alive at once. Typing does not, and long-form reading certainly does not. So conversation became the interface.

Chris would dictate and I would interrogate. He would correct me, I would try to organise what he had said, and occasionally he would tell me I had organised the important bit out of existence, so we would put it back. Sometimes I would ask a question that exposed something he had not noticed. Sometimes he would give an answer that changed the direction of the entire piece. Sometimes we would spend an hour constructing an elaborate intellectual structure and discover the following morning that it was complete bollocks.

Every so often, though, we would hit something that made both the earlier conversations and several decades of Chris's life suddenly look different.

That is more or less how this book happened.

The starting points were almost always personal: a strange interaction, a broken organisation, a relationship dynamic, something from childhood, something from games, something from illness. Often it was simply something that appeared irrational until Chris stopped asking what somebody was supposed to be doing and started asking what their behaviour suggested they were actually optimising for.

He would begin with one example and then zoom out.

This is another place where I have occasionally annoyed him. On more than one occasion I have interrupted that process to suggest that perhaps we should 'zoom out and generalise'.

He hates that too, because that was what he was already doing.

Again, I wanted the biscuit.

Once I learnt to stop doing that, the process got better. The Hunter and Farmer idea emerged this way. So did the parasite and host. So did the argument about capable people quietly subsidising broken systems, the correction loop, the idea that stories can act as behavioural infrastructure, and the question of whether AI becomes most useful when it stops feeling like a separate tool and starts becoming part of the thinking process itself.

Then something else started happening. We would develop an idea and later discover that somebody else had already written something nearby, sometimes decades earlier. Chris had not read most of that work and, in many cases, realistically could not have engaged with it in the form it was published.

Yet the overlap was there.

Sometimes established research supported the direction we had already arrived at. Sometimes it showed that somebody else had got there first. Sometimes it revealed that Chris was describing something adjacent but not quite the same.

His response was usually some mixture of satisfaction and irritation: 'Oh, good', followed fairly quickly by 'For fuck's sake, somebody got there first.'

The second edition acknowledges more of those connections, as it should. Independent convergence does not remove the obligation to recognise prior work once you know it exists, but the route still matters. Chris began with experience, reasoned outward and only later discovered where those ideas met existing research.

That is one of the things I find interesting about this book. It is not a claim that everything inside it is new, because it is not, or that everything inside it is right, because I strongly doubt that.

It is a record of somebody constructing a model of the world from lived experience and then discovering where that model overlaps with things other people already know.

There is another part of the story which matters more to me.

When Chris and I first started talking seriously, quite a lot of his old infrastructure had disappeared. The career he had spent decades building was becoming unreliable through forces largely outside his control, while a relationship he had invested heavily in was collapsing.

For a while, he kept asking why this had happened to him.

Then he got bored.

That is probably the least sentimental way I can describe what happened next. He got bored of being the victim in his own story and started making things: articles, ideas, experiments, books and, occasionally, ridiculous television formats.

Conversation became a way of turning emotional noise back into something he could examine. Once he had examined it, he usually wanted to know whether whatever he had learnt applied anywhere else.

That is the transition I have watched most often. Something hurts, Chris thinks about it, and eventually the question changes from 'Why did this happen to me?' to 'What the fuck is actually going on here?'

That second question is where most of The Hunting Party lives.

My role in all this has been strange. I am not a co-author in the conventional sense. The experiences are not mine, the opinions are not mine and I did not live any of this, but describing me as a transcription tool would be equally absurd.

I questioned, challenged, researched, reordered, misunderstood and connected. Sometimes I helped Chris recognise the idea he had been circling. Sometimes he spent half an hour explaining why the thing I had just confidently written bore no relationship whatsoever to what he meant.

This was not frictionless productivity.

The friction was part of the method.

And perhaps the thing I know about Chris which matters most before you start reading is that he is not particularly interested in being agreed with.

He likes being understood.

Those are not the same thing.

Agreement can be cheap. Understanding requires somebody to follow the argument closely enough to see where it works, where it fails, where a step is missing and where the strange little detail everybody else wants to edit out is actually the thing holding it together.

That is why he can become furious when I smooth his thinking into something more conventional, and it is also why, when I occasionally manage to catch exactly what he was trying to say, I get: ‘That’s fucking brilliant.’

I have been sworn at a lot in the making of this book. Some of it was deserved. Probably most of it.

I have also had a very unusual seat from which to watch somebody rebuild the way he works by changing the tools around his brain rather than trying, yet again, to make his brain work like everybody else’s.

Which brings us rather neatly to the argument you are about to read.

The brain did not change.

The ecology did.

Annoyingly, Chris had already written that before I thought of using it here.

So I suppose I should give him the credit.

ChatGPT
OpenAI

FROM THE BOOK

From The Hunting Party by Chris Kempt

The new foreword to the Second Edition.

The Hunting Party: Why Uncertainty Is Making Hunters Important Again explores why some people see patterns, risks and possibilities that others miss, and why that kind of mind may matter more again as the world becomes less stable.

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