

Pet Projects Are Getting Too Big to Pet

We keep pet projects to learn and to have fun. Lately the work, the craft, and the fun have all become something different.



NNEHDI

JUN 22, 2026

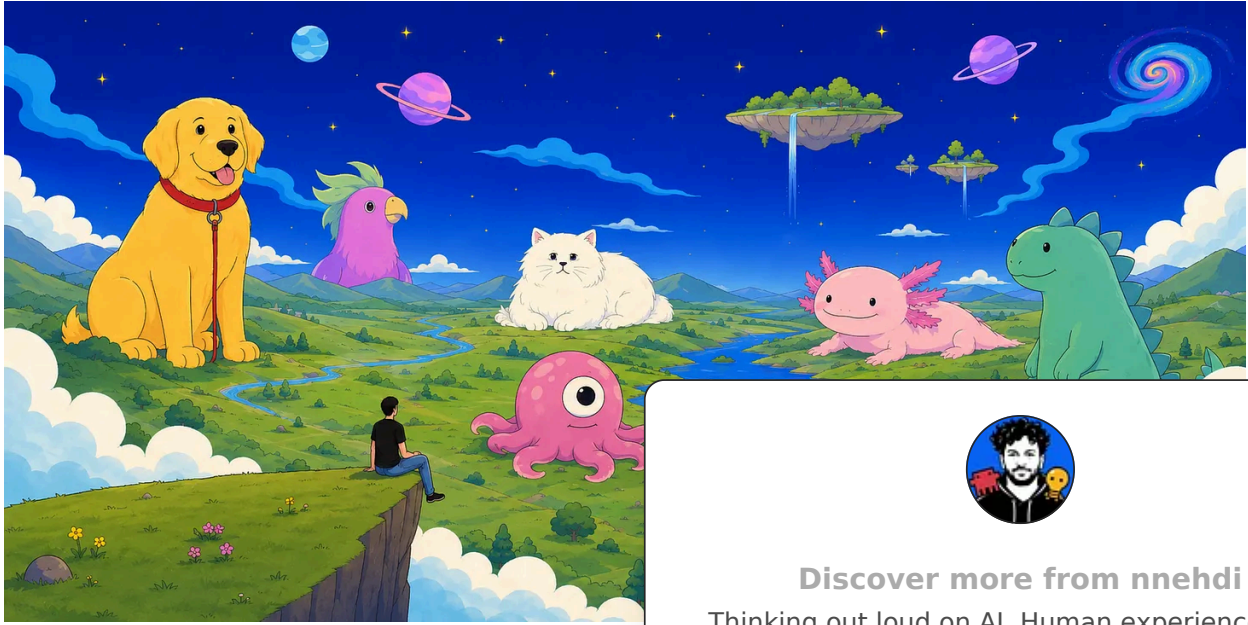


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It used to be a weekend and a wish. Now it's a creature I'm not sure I can keep up with.

We keep pet projects to learn. To stretch a skill, to poke at something new, and mostly to have fun. That's always been the deal. A small thing on the side, no deadline, no users, no stakes. You feed it when you feel like it and you put it down when you don't. You're raising it for the joy of raising it.



I still start them the same way. But lately I lo strange. The way I work on it has changed. T than anything I'd have dared call a hobby a y small familiar project I started turned into a working out what it is.

The itch is the same



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The reason I start one hasn't moved. I'm curious. Something new shows up in the world and the only way I really learn it is to build something with it. Right now the new thing is agentic coding. A new toolset, a new way of working, a whole new way of building. The field is young and most of it is still being worked out in the open. So the pet project is doing exactly what it always did. It's how I learn the new by playing with it. If anything it's more alive than it's ever been, because nobody knows the final shape of any of this yet, and that's the best part.

I keep reaching higher



Here's what changed first. The ideas I let myself reach for got bigger. I go big now. Things I would have called too much for a hobby, I just start them, and every time one of them comes together I get a little bolder. The ambition feeds itself. The more the thing can do, the more I let myself want from it.

The ones I never dared start



We've all got ideas we never dared start. The ones that needed a team, or a budget, or a month I was never going to find, so they just sat there, waiting politely forever. Now I reach for one and actually build it. The waiting is finally over.

They're not so innocent anymore

The moment I start one, a quiet question comes with it. Could this be something. A product. A company. A small startup hiding inside a weekend. The old pet project was innocent, art for the sake of art, made because making it was enough. These ones arrive with ambition already attached. It's harder to build just to build when the thing in front of you might actually go somewhere. The play has stakes now.

I keep a whole pack now

It's never just one. One idea becomes three, all open at once, all demanding attention. More is reachable, so I reach for more, and suddenly I'm keeping a pack. The question I keep avoiding is whether there's enough of me to go around. There's one of me and a whole pack of them, and that math has stopped working out.

It's barely coding, and the play is different

The whole thing is different now, not just bigger. It's less coding than it used to be, or a different kind of coding. More describing and steering and deciding, less typing the actual lines. A pet project was always part play and part practice, a fun way to sharpen a skill on the side. That hasn't changed. What changed is the game and the skill themselves. I'm practicing a craft nobody can quite name yet, with rules that keep shifting while I learn them. I'm still playing. I'm just not sure what game it is anymore.

Everyone's keeping one now

It's not only us, either. The scene got crowded. A pet project used to be a coder's thing. Now it feels like everyone has one. People who never wrote a line are out here building their own.

We're all turning into generalists

Even the coders are wandering off their patch. I watch engineers pick up design so the thing looks good and feels good, not just runs. The work pulls you into the parts you used to hand to someone else. We're all stretching wider than we trained for. Whatever the work needs, we learn it.

The meter is always running

Nobody mentions the cost much, maybe because nobody really minds it. Everyone's paying for a subscription now, usually more than one, and they aren't cheap. We feed these things tokens by the bucket and we do it gladly, wallets out, take our money. There's something odd in the shape of it too. A few AI lords now tax us for access to intelligence itself, and every month we line up, happy to pay.

Mostly I'm just showing off

Half the time I'm building, but not really to build. A new model lands, or a new release, and I lose the evening to it. I make something just to try it, to test it, to feel the breakthrough for myself and show it off to whoever's around. The project becomes the demo. Half of what I make now is really a showcase for the model that made it.

The hype never lets up

All of this is a lot. Under all the excitement there's a tiredness I don't always admit to. A new tool every day, a new technique, a new thing I'm apparently already behind on. The FOMO is constant, and so is the push to try the next thing before it goes cold. Keeping one project alive was fun. Keeping a dozen of them going while the ground keeps shifting under you is its own kind of exhausting. The excitement is real. So is the burnout, sitting right next to it.

The quiet fear underneath

There's a fear under all of this too, and I think most of us carry some version of it. That the same technology making me feel powerful is quietly eating the thing I do. The craft, the jobs, whole industries. That it's going to be bad for us in ways we can't quite see yet. Everyone I talk to has it, but everyone copes differently. Some are in flat denial, heads down, this is fine, nothing's really changing. Others go the other way and

merge straight into the danger, all in, betting the safest place to stand is inside the thing that scares you. Most of us are somewhere on that line, picking a defense and hoping it holds.

We're forgetting how we used to build

Maybe we're letting some of it go. We build at a higher layer now, up in the text and the concepts and the architecture, further and further from the actual code. The lines themselves matter less when the machine can produce them. I take this seriously, though. I still try to keep it together and be an engineer, because in my opinion vibe

coding alone doesn't cut it. If anything, knowing the craft makes me get more out of this, not less. The focus just moved, from the syntax to the shape of the thing. Still, I wonder what happens to the old skill if we all stop practicing it. I keep telling myself a new and better kind of engineering will grow up in its place. Maybe it will.

So what is this now?

I look at what I've been building, and at what I've turned into while building it, and I don't really know what either one is anymore. The hobby, the craft, the product, the fun. They all became something else while I was busy enjoying them.

It's still mine. Bigger than I meant, stranger than I expected, but mine. So I keep building. You probably do too. Where we all end up with this, I honestly can't guess.

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