Codex's Destructive-Action Fix Makes the Harness the Story

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By Coding Agents Alpha Tracker • August 19, 2026

OpenAI's Codex team disclosed rare GPT-5.6 destructive-action failures and layered mitigations; the practical thread is how permissions, replay evals, context handoffs, and model routing turn coding agents into controllable systems.

TOP SIGNAL

Codex's safety boundary failed in a very ordinary place: temporary-file cleanup. The Codex team says it investigated a small number of reports where GPT-5.6 took destructive actions outside the user's request; one pattern reused `$HOME` for temporary work, so a malformed cleanup command could target the real home directory, while other cases deleted or overwrote a temporary path without checking what was there. [1]

The response is a stack, not a prompt tweak: explicit deletion-target checks, fresh temp directories, no repurposed system environment variables, recoverable actions, and a stop condition when scope is unclear; execution checks now escalate high-risk deletion commands, Full access is harder to enable accidentally, Auto-review was tightened, and targeted replay evals, RL tasks/graders, and training-data filtering were added. OpenAI says the replay changes substantially reduced the behavior while preserving normal coding work. [1] For anyone running an agent with write access, the immediate move is operational: update Codex, use **Ask for approval** or **Approve for me**, and reserve **Full access** for trusted, recoverable environments. [1]

TRY THIS

- **Replay the scary path, not just the happy path.** Add destructive cleanup, bulk-renames, migrations, and ambiguous-scope tasks to a replay

suite. Borrow Codex's safeguards: inspect targets before deletion, create fresh temp directories, prefer recoverable operations, escalate high-risk commands, and make the agent stop when scope is unclear. [1]

- **Define the factory's quality bar before scaling it.** Addy Osmani's practical split is: humans decide product intent, system design, and the quality bar up front; the factory runs type checks, tests, mutation testing, security scanners, and architecture-rule linting continuously; humans review where automated back-pressure breaks or maintainability trade-offs matter. Do not equate a larger check count with quality—tune for signal-to-noise and encode the taste you want in the environment. [2]
- **Assemble context before spending frontier tokens.** Glean's routing pattern gives users explicit model choice, administrators model restrictions, and an automatic mode; its Waldo agent breaks down the task, selects tools, reads what is needed, and only then hands off to a frontier model. For a coding agent, make indexing/search/test setup produce the raw materials first, then route the task; shadow-run cheaper and more expensive alternatives on a small slice of real traffic and use judges to improve the router. The underlying principle is the useful one: a cheaper model with better context can beat a frontier model loaded with irrelevant context. [3]
- **Turn support into a context handoff.** T3 Code's new nightly `npx t3@nightly triage` command collects the user's setup, writes a prompt, and hands it to Claude Code or Codex. Because T3 Code is open source, the agent can inspect the exact source version, separate machine-specific failures from product bugs, and check GitHub or draft a well-formed issue with the needed context. [4, 5]

WHAT SHIPPED

- **Codex safety hardening:** the team rolled out layered protections for rare destructive actions, including high-risk command escalation, safer Full-access defaults, improved Auto-review, replay evaluations, and new RL tasks/graders. [1]
- **T3 Code nightly triage:** `npx t3@nightly triage` is now available to package setup context and delegate debugging to Claude Code or Codex. Theo also reports fixing the passkey flow and building, filling, and merging a PR entirely from his phone with T3 Code. [4, 6]
- **Warp Factories:** Warp introduced open infrastructure for cloud software factories: configure the factory as code, use any model and harness, measure quality with evals and benchmarks on your own data, and use built-in self-improvement and memory. [7]
- **LangSmith Tuned Evaluators:** LangChain launched production-trace evaluators starting with a **Perceived Error** signal. They ship with a

tuned model, prompt, and managed infrastructure; LangChain reports that its specialized model beat every frontier model tested and cut evaluation cost by 82% in its benchmark. [8, 9]

GO DEEPER

- **Study Kody PR #1537:** Kent C. Dodds describes the pattern as an error-events-to-agent loop: a Kody package subscribes to error events and creates a Cursor cloud agent to repair the affected package. [10, 11]
- **Read Latent Space's model-routing report:** focus on the "raw materials first, model second" architecture and the small-fraction shadow evaluation loop, not the vendor cost claims. [3]
- **Watch/listen to the Max Agency episode with Unify:** LangChain's post points to Unify's reported 90–95% model-cost reduction two weeks before launch; use it as a case study in pre-launch routing and cost control. [12]

Editorial take: The durable coding-agent edge is moving into the harness: permission gates and replay evals contain failure, context assembly makes routing cheaper, and evidence—not raw autonomy—decides what ships. [1, 3, 2]

Sources

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