

EXTINCTION REVERSED

Robot Geneticists, Book 1

J. S. MORIN

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Chapter One

There shouldn't have been anything after the apocalypse. The works of mankind should have fallen to ruin and decayed into the memory of the universe along with their creators. But Notre Dame Cathedral echoed with dozens of voices in perfectly attuned, if not beautiful, harmony.

As Charlie7 sang along in chorus, he gazed up at the restored stained glass frescoes and wondered why. Why did they all sing in praise of a god that had not created them? Sunlight streamed through the colored glass, and not one image depicted robotkind. Saints and saviors abounded but not a single scientist. At best, Charlie7 and his kind were God's grandchildren, made in the image of their own creators: humans.

If any of the other worshipers in attendance entertained such blasphemous thoughts, none let it show. By Charlie7's headcount, there were Johns and Freds, Sandras and Marys. No fewer than a dozen Elizabeths were present, as if no force in Western Europe could restrain them from attending the grand rededication.

Charlie7 had only come out of idleness and the fact that it

was within walking distance of home. He had learned the hymns and rituals hastily after receiving an invitation from Paul208, foreman of the restoration. If anyone would have asked what Charlie7 was doing attending services, he had the excuse that he was 10 percent John. Usually, such a minor personality slice wouldn't be enough to turn a robotic personality into a believer, but heroes got away with bolder lies.

John316 led the service. That wasn't even his official designation. But if a robot had the ambition or hubris to ordain himself, a change of name wasn't so great a stretch.

Charlie7 lost himself in examining the architectural details of the stonework as John316 blathered on about the building's history and religious significance. The living, breathing Charles Truman had never set foot inside Notre Dame, so Charlie7 had no stored memory of the place to draw from. If the original was anything like Paul208's version, the ancient humans who built it had done a bang-up job.

A shift in John316's tone drew Charlie7's attention back to the sermon.

"I would like us all to pause in remembrance of the eighth Adam," John316 said. No robot claimed the designation "Adam." There were only twenty-seven scientists digitized for posterity before humanity's demise. Each robot had a mind stitched together from those neural imprints and carried the name of the majority personality. None of the Twenty-Seven was named Adam.

John316 continued after a somber pause. "The Sanctuary for Scientific Sins reported this morning that he passed away at the age of eleven. Cause of death: organ failure due to advanced cellular decay."

All around the cathedral, robots muttered prayers and expressions of grief. The robotic preacher in his pompous black robe delved once more into platitudes.

Charlie7 fumed. The sermon struck Charlie7's acoustic sensors unrecorded as a wave of indignant error messages scrolled through his field of vision.

What right had these madmen to play at rebirthing humanity? For decades, glory-seeking geneticists raced in secret to be the first to reveal a reborn human. The sanctuary to which John316 referred was a remote island where the castoff results of cloning experiments lived out their often short, painful lives. Most robots just referred to the refuge as the Scrapyard.

The Genetic Ethics Committee had only recently allowed sanctioned research on lower primates. The poor wretches at the Scrapyard were the result of hubris. If Charlie7 ever caught one of the perpetrators, he would do far worse than strip them of their credentials.

Charlie7 had not waited more than a thousand years to watch humanity be reborn in agony.

At length, the service played itself out. The parishioners exited the cavernous Gothic structure in neat rows. They chatted reverently beneath the echoing vaulted ceiling.

Charlie7 loitered amid the pews, waiting for everyone to vacate. The message he had received on the Social had been brief. Toby22 had asked whether he'd be attending services today, and when Charlie7 had replied that he would, Toby22's follow-up had been simply: "outside. afterward."

Mostly, Charlie7 ignored the Social. He liked keeping the cold, calculating computer in his chest separate from the crystalline matrix of thought, memory, and emotion within his skull.

Efficiency was hell. The only joy to be found in life came from the chaotic, the unplanned, and the unexpected. Toby22's message certainly qualified as the latter.

Unexpected or not, Charlie7 would probably have met with Toby22 anyway. Tobys got things done. Society would have

been all the poorer without their willingness to roll up their sleeves and work. Toby and his brethren straddled the line between menial laborers and automatons.

Charlie7 listened until he could no longer hear the faint buzz of conversation outside. His synthetic leather soles scuffed on the stone floors. The echoes showcased the cathedral's magnificent acoustics. Charlie7 imagined the chorus of voices that had risen when the world was filled with real humans.

As Charlie7 stepped into a beautiful spring morning, he let his shoulders rise and fall in memory of a sigh.

Paris had changed in the centuries since the invasion. When Charlie7 had settled there, it had been bleak, barren, and dotted with rubble and ruins. Now the landscape exploded in wildflowers and tall grasses. The debris had been cleared away, the radioactive fallout neutralized. A few modern buildings stabbed up from the soil like spikes of steel and glass. Ancient relics like Notre Dame hinted at the city's former old-world charm. The rest was left to the mercy of nature's newborn grasp.

Charlie7 watched the ascent of a mining transorbital, one of the gigaton vessels that ran relays to the Kuiper Belt. Hamburg was 748 kilometers away, but he could make out the engines clear as fiber optics at just 4x magnification.

Maybe it was time for Charlie7 to take a break from retirement and life on Earth. Much as he wished otherwise, he couldn't escape the reminders of the tormented humans trapped in clandestine labs across the globe. He knew there would be no stopping the geneticists until someone succeeded.

The robot that reforged humanity would become a legend.

Charlie7 was already a legend, and he had no stomach for genetics. Maybe another stint as a miner was just what he needed for a change of pace. With any luck, he could be gone long enough for the science to bring back humanity.

A crunch in the gravel snapped him from his reverie.

"Hey, Charlie. Long time," Toby22 said, limping from the

grasses onto the path. He was dressed in overalls and boots, with a straw hat to keep the sun from overtaxing his coolant systems. His clothes and gloves were dirt stained as usual. As a game warden in the newly repopulated forests of England, he spent nearly all his time outdoors.

“You look like hell,” Charlie7 replied. He shook Toby22’s hand. “That body of yours is obsolete.”

Toby22 waved the comment aside. “Jason90 is working on a new hip flexor for me. I’ll get another ten, maybe twenty years out of this carcass.”

“I could put in a good word... bump you up the list for a new chassis.”

“Not compatible. I’m up for a full crystal transfer.” He shuddered. “Always makes me think I’m dying, and some new copy of me lives on.”

Charlie7 knew exactly what he meant. He was on his third crystal matrix, and it took months for the nagging worry to dissipate that he wasn’t really the Charlie7 who had gone into the mind-transfer rig. No coolant pump could give the sort of chill that ran through Charlie7’s systems just pondering that existential dilemma. Everyone thought the Charlie archetype was diamond hard, impervious to the cosmic dread associated with the copying of an old consciousness into a new vessel. The Charlies liked to let them think that, but no robot was immune.

“So, why the firewall meeting? Why chase me down at a civic grand opening? I could have flown out to you this afternoon if you’d asked.” Charlie7 would have done no such thing, but now that Toby22 was here, there was no harm in claiming otherwise.

As Toby22 led him through the tall grass and around the side of the building, Charlie7 wondered. Had his friend gone faulty?

Tobys were known for their reliability, but Toby22 was 30

percent Joshua and another 18 percent Brent. Not that either of those personalities contained red flags for neural failure, but odd interactions could cascade over time. His refusal to take a chassis upgrade could have been just the tip of the iceberg.

Then Charlie7 noticed someone huddled in the shadows on the cathedral's north side. The figure was bundled under a tarp, hugged close like a blanket as if there were rain on the way. "You got a friend with a faulty case?"

"Not exactly..."

As Charlie7 and Toby22 drew near, the huddled figure turned its head. Staring out from beneath the tarp was a pair of wide eyes showing whites like fresh snow. Those eyes emitted no light of their own, unlike every robot who'd ever been built. The face was smooth and free of blemishes. Soft. Gentle. Frightened.

Most of all, the face was human.

Charlie7's shoulders slumped. "Not another one. And let me guess..."

"Yup," Toby said with a matter of fact nod. "Her name's Eve. Eve14, to be precise."

"Someone ought to find a baby book in the archives and beat these geneticist hooligans over the head with it. Where do they get off? They *know* the science isn't mature yet. The Genetic Rebirth Committee reports have clear guidance on..."

Charlie7 caught himself ranting at a Toby. If there was an archetype less interested in committee minutiae, he didn't know of it. He paced in front of the girl as he finished the tirade via internal text. When he'd collected himself, Charlie7 stared down at the trembling creature beneath the tarp.

"So, what's wrong with this one? Cardiopulmonary? Oncological? I assume it's not immunological or you wouldn't have dragged her here with all this pollen. She hasn't said a word. Developmental disabilities like all the rest?"

Eve14 looked up, right into Charlie7's eyes. Her voice

wavered but carried offended dignity through the crisp Parisian air. “There’s nothing wrong with me. Nothing at all.”



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