

REBEL ROBOTS

Robot Geneticists, Book 4

J. S. MORIN

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Magical Scrivener Press

22 Hawkstead Hollow

Nashua, NH 03063

www.magicalscrivener.com

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Ordering Information: Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, and others. For details, contact the publisher at the address above.

J.S. Morin — First Edition

ISBN: 978-1-942642-38-1

Printed in the United States of America

Chapter One

Rachel Eighteen worked with deliberate care at the controls of the upload console. She'd worked her whole career, brief as it had been, to reach this moment. The chassis in the upload rig was inert, factory pristine, and waiting for her command.

With each step of the initialization sequence, Rachel paused. She didn't have to look over her shoulder to know that Charlie13 was standing there, watching silently and making sure she didn't botch a perfectly good robot.

Not that Rachel expected to.

She had assisted at every step of the process. There had been meetings of the Mixing Committee, where she attended as an officially sanctioned observer. Charlie13 had consulted her and debated with her over the merits of each percentage point assigned to the mixture of personalities. But in the end, Charlie13 had done all the delicate programming work, selecting the areas of each synaptic map to include in the mixture. It was the Upload Chairman's responsibility that this went smoothly, that the new robot was happy and productive in his new life.

And this robot would be a "he."

The heading at the top of the upload informational panel designated him Toby521, the latest in a long, noble line of hardworking team players. He was to be 55 percent Toby, 33 percent John, and the remaining 12 percent would be Charlie.

Rachel was quite pleased that she had successfully lobbied for her first upload to be a Charlie of some kind, even if it was a minority personality.

“Keep it moving,” Charlie13 prompted. “There’s caution, and then there’s dallying. The observers are all important, busy people.”

Rachel nodded and ran the simulated upload. On the screen, a dummy upload ran against a mathematical model of Toby521’s crystalline matrix. The simulation was silent, not like the upload would be with its power electronics humming and whining.

A moment later, the screen returned a message in green: SUCCESSFUL.

“Go fetch our—*your*—guests,” Charlie13 said. He smiled faintly. It was more than the ever-reserved robot showed to most other people. At times, Rachel wondered if he had spoken with Nora109 about the best way to motivate and educate young humans.

Rachel headed to the door, tapped the release controls, then clasped her hands behind her back and attempted to appear professional. The door slid open, and a murmur of multiple conversations on the far side ebbed quickly to silence. “Thank you all for coming,” Rachel said crisply. “We are about to begin.”

She stepped aside as committee chairs and ancient robots jumbled past in a polite mass. Rachel had studied up on the attendees list and could name them all. But it was the ones she needed no primer to identify whom she was happiest to see.

Charlie7 sauntered past with an air of calm assurance. The eldest of all robotkind deactivated the light of one eye in

Rachel's direction in imitation of a human wink as he passed her.

Toby22 held his chin up. As the unofficial representative of all the Tobies on Earth and working in the solar system beyond, it was his honor to welcome a new member to his kind.

Most of all, however, it was Eve who Rachel was looking for in the crowd. Despite being notably smaller than her robotic peers, Eve stood out. Her human flesh was a splash of color amid the cold and drab metallic tones of the other guests. Despite the hard, unyielding set to her sister's face most times, Eve graced Rachel with a warm grin.

Eve was proud of her. That meant more than the approval of Charlie13 or all the rest of the robots put together.

Rachel's spirits soared. Of course, Eve was proud. This was Rachel's big day, bigger than her Emancipation Day, certainly. While there was more pomp and party around an emancipation, all it really represented was that a human had become trusted to feed and house herself without supervision, and that she'd acquired enough education to choose her own path onward in more advanced topics.

Emancipation was a mere milestone. This was an achievement.

"Today marks the first day of Toby521," Rachel said formally. Charlie13 had provided her a script to memorize—a trivial matter given how short it was. Nonetheless, Rachel found her head swimming. She blinked back into the moment and finished. "If anyone has objections or concerns, this is your final opportunity to voice them."

Rachel counted silently in her head, trying desperately to keep the fifteen-second pause as atomically precise as a human mind could manage. Everyone in the audience, Eve included, had computerized chronometers available to measure the pause. Rachel didn't.

“Very well,” Rachel said with a tight sigh of relief that she hoped no one noticed. “Let us begin.”

There was only one step left. The rest had been pre-arranged during the diagnostics and initialization. Rachel’s finger hovered over the button.

She looked back. Charlie13 gave a nod.

Rachel took a glance into the crowd. Eve nodded as well.

Rachel hit “Upload.”

The rig roared to life. Electrical inverters hummed and moaned. Magnetic coils bucked and strained against their metallic support structures, controlling tight electromagnetic fields as they wrote data to the crystalline matrix. The floor beneath their feet hummed.

Everyone waited in silence as the upload rig forced over a petabyte of data into the waiting robotic chassis.

When the process completed, Rachel scurried to the foot of the rig, where a robot who *should* have been Toby521 awaited her greeting.

“Ugh,” the new robot muttered as the upload systems disconnected from his skull. “Where am I?”

“Let’s start with who,” Rachel said, taking a deep breath. “You are Toby521.”

“I... yeah. I... I am,” Toby521 replied. “Did I pass out or something? I know this is horrible, but I can’t remember last night. What’s your name, again?”

Charlie13 had warned Rachel of bizarre behavior in newly awakened robots. She tried to adjust her sails to the wind she’d been given. “We haven’t met. My name is Rachel Eighteen. I am human.”

“Well, no kidding you’re human,” Toby521 said with a hint of annoyance.

Toby521 sat upright against the angled bed of the upload rig, feet propped on a footrest ten centimeters off the ground. Glowing robotic eyes blinked several times as his head

swiveled, scanning the room and its occupants. “Oh... my... God.”

Rachel waited, fighting back a smile without much success as she watched enlightenment dawn on her first living creation.

Toby521 leaped from the upload table. Rachel froze, unsure what to make of the new robot interposing his body between her and the spectators. He backed toward her, arms spread, facing the crowd.

“Stay behind me! It’s all right. I won’t let them get you. They don’t seem to be approaching, but don’t make any sudden movements.”

Rachel reached up and put a hand on Toby521’s shoulder. “Everything is OK. No one’s hurting anyone today. This will all make sense soon. If you think about a data structure, you will find a root directory that includes a file named `So_I’m_A_Robot_Now`. In it, you’ll find—”

After a split-second delay that could have accounted for Toby521 accessing that file and browsing its contents, his outstretched arms relaxed. He scanned the assembly of robots in attendance, then turned to meet Rachel’s eye. “It worked! Haha! It worked!” A manic grin broke out on Toby521’s robotic features. Realization sinking in, he fought to compose himself, weight shifting rapidly from one foot to the other. “Where’s Dr. Truman?”

Charlie13 stepped forward. “Welcome to the year 3098, Toby. I’m not Dr. Charles Truman, but I am a personality mix that features Dr. Truman in a prominent role. My name is Charlie13.”

“Charlie13,” Toby521 echoed, pointing to the upload chairman. He pointed to himself. “Toby521. And this all makes perfect sense somehow. Why?”

Rachel cleared her throat. “It’s all explained in `So_I’m_A_Robot_Now`. I wrote most of it myself.”

Charlie7 strode forward, hand extended. This wasn’t part of

the protocol, but Rachel hadn't needed to be warned that Charlie7 and protocol didn't cooperate. "Great to meet you, Toby521. I'm Charlie7, oldest robot around. Also the highest mix percentage of old Charlie around. Always have a soft spot for a new Toby mix."

Toby521's eyes seemed to stare into space. "Yes... I see you named in the welcome file. So... weird..."

"The computer access takes getting used to," Charlie7 explained. "But I wouldn't know what to do without it at this point. It's like a superpower, almost."

Toby521 gave a brief chuckle. "I was always a fan of—" he caught himself, looking from Charlie7 to Charlie13, then to Rachel. "But you all knew that, right? I mean, I'm mixed. You controlled what went into my mental makeup. Who am I—never mind. Found it. John and... a little Charlie for good measure. Weird. Everyone calls him Charlie now? He used to pitch a fit about people forgetting his doctorate."

Muted chuckles echoed from around the room. Toby521's head jerked from one direction to the next, trying to take in all the spectators. "Just one other human. And she looks a lot like you."

Rachel swept out a hand and invited Eve forward. "Toby, this is Eve. She's the chairwoman of the Human Welfare Committee and my older sister."

Eve stuck out a hand. Rachel could make out the thin, raised lines that betrayed the data cables running beneath her skin. Rachel was happy with a more ergonomic human interface, but Eve had opted to hybridize in a vain effort to keep pace with her robotic colleagues.

"Pleasure to meet you," Eve said as Toby521 shook her hand gingerly, as if he were afraid to crush it.

"Human Welfare Committee," Toby521 said as he released Eve's hand. "Sounds like a big job. What's the population back

up to? Last I recall, things were looking a little bleak. I imagine that after 1,033 years, we ought to have—”

“Eighty-seven,” Eve replied before Toby521 could venture a guess. “I am twenty-four years old, and I’m the eldest of the emancipated humans.”

“Emancipated... what’s going on here?” Toby521 asked.

Rachel flashed a smile and stepped in to intervene. “Let’s let everyone get back to their jobs now. I’m the one whose job it is to help you adjust.”

“But... but I—” Toby521 spluttered as the attending robots filtered past on their way to the exit. They offered perfunctory greetings and well-wishes. Several assured the new robot that everything would make sense and not to worry.

The door slid shut behind them all with a whoosh.

Toby521 turned to Charlie13, the only robot remaining in the room. “Dr. Truman, what happened? Don’t tell me to look in the damn file. It’s me, Toby. Just level with me. What have I missed?”

Charlie13 rested a hand on Toby521’s shoulder. “Humanity died out. Everything died. Everything. It’s taken us this long to bring it all back.”

Toby521’s chest rose and fell rapidly, as if he were trying to hyperventilate but failing for lack of lungs. “Why bring me into a world like that?”

Rachel interposed herself. “Hi. I’m a little new at this. How about I make you a deal? You agree not to freak out on my first day uploading robots, and I’ll do my best to answer all your questions. Deal?”

Toby521 looked to Charlie13, perhaps hoping for a better offer. But the old upload specialist just shrugged, held a hand out to indicate Rachel, and departed by the opposite door as had all the guests.

Rachel fell under the new robot’s scrutiny. She held her breath and kept her smile frozen in place. She’d seen the simula-

tions of robotic vision. Toby521 would see the ID he'd assigned to Rachel. There would be directory access from the corners of his vision, notifications from probably hundreds of well-wishers over the Social—which she'd have to run him through the basics of—and any notations he might have made about her.

What the robot thought of her, Rachel could only guess. As much as Charlie13 had turned mixing into a proper science, there was still plenty of emergent behavior and cluttered personality data at work.

At last, Toby521's shoulders slumped. "Fine. Deal. But this had better make sense quick, or I can't be held responsible for any freak-outs."



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