

ENGINEERED TYRANT

Robot Geneticists, Book 5

J. S. MORIN

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Chapter One

Charlie7 often enjoyed being the center of attention, but today he'd just as soon have slunk back to anonymity for a few centuries. Today, thanks to the invasive and relentless investigation by half the committees on Earth, he wasn't being given that option.

The mixing chamber at Kanto buzzed with voices as dozens of dignitaries gathered for an unprecedented event. Never before had the Mixing Committee approved the upload of an unmixed personality. Never before had so many new robots been commissioned in a single batch. The factory below had been working at capacity for weeks preparing for this day.

Rachel Eighteen stood before the assembly and clasped her hands behind her back. Aside from Eve Fourteen, she was the only human in attendance. "Welcome, everyone. Thank you all for coming today. By the authority of the Special Investigative Committee for Historical Crimes, I will be uploading each of the original Project Transhuman scientists to serve as witnesses. Also, for those of you who may be concerned about the subjects of today's activations and my lack of experience, I have not

mixed anyone. These are unmixed, raw—whatever you want to call them—human minds. I'm only operating the controls because Charlie13 can't and Charlie7 won't."

Not every eye in the room turned Charlie7's way, but enough of them did that it made the eldest robot uncomfortable beneath their scrutiny.

Rachel had lied, but it was the sort of public relations lie he could forgive. The Special Investigative Committee for Historical Witch Hunting had never bothered to ask for Charlie7's help. He hadn't decided whether he would have or not, but given that the myriad crimes on the docket all revolved around deception and cover-ups, they'd never have trusted any help he'd have offered.

Rachel continued as if she were presenting at a symposium. She was cool, collected, and professional to outward appearance. But robotic eyes could detect the quickened pulse by the slight throbbing in the jugular vein. Robotic ears could pick out a faint tremor in her voice, carefully suppressed. "We will be proceeding with the activations in order of project seniority, as best our records show, with the exceptions of the principles involved: Charles Truman and Dale Chalmers. Thus, today's first activation will be Dr. Jason Sanborn, chief crystal neurologist and inventor of the crystal matrix brain."

Charlie7 declined to correct her statement. This was an impolitic time to point out that Jason largely worked on refining Charles Truman's prototypes into a manufacturable production model. Maybe Jason himself would correct the misattribution once he woke.

As Rachel worked the controls to start the upload, Charlie7 wondered what would come out the far side. The five he'd awakened to battle the alien invaders by his side were the only raw personalities he knew to be stable. Jason had been fine the first time. Would he be the same again, or was there an element

of chaos in the simulation of the human brain? Mixing was a black box art form; what if that was because of instability inherent in the human mind?

Hushed conversations around the room filled the time while the upload processed. Data flowed from the Kanto database to the crystalline brain of the Version 75.1 chassis on the inclined upload table. It was usually a five-minute process giving life to a newly mixed robot. The countdown displayed for the observers today showed that this transfer was expected to finish in under three.

Simpler minds. One personality. An old friend.

Charlie7's processor locked in a simulation cycle, wondering what the project team was going to think of their work a thousand years hence. He knew not all of them had been true believers. Most had been fascinated by the technological challenges, the applications outside Project Transhuman's stated purpose, or simply the resume-padding of working with luminaries in the field.

The countdown slogged toward zero. Perceived time slowed as Charlie7 processed zettabytes of information each second.

On the upload table, a pair of glowing orange eyes snapped to life as Dr. Jason Sanborn awakened into a new world.

"What the hell? Is this supposed to be a joke, Dr. Truman?" the new robot asked, shutting off his optics and bringing a hand up to his forehead. At the metallic *tink* when stainless steel fingertip met cranium, his eyes lit once more. Jason looked around, taking in the sight of the mixed assemblage of robots with only two humans present.

His first words were an echo from a thousand years past. Jason2 had the exact same first words, incredulity warring with annoyance at first.

"What's going on here?" Jason asked.

Rachel stepped forward with a tour guide smile. "Welcome

to the year 3097, Dr. Sanborn. You've been reborn in a robotic body."

Jason looked down at his hands, turning them over. He tugged back the sleeve of the suit his new body wore to examine the servos of the wrist joint. He shook his head. "There must be some mistake. That... that was supposed to have been a preliminary scan. I-I mean... I was *just* on the scanning table. I can still feel the gooey spots where the electrodes stuck to my scalp. You're telling me that 1,032 years have passed just like that?"

He tried to snap his fingers, but the slick metal fingertips didn't produce the proper sound.

Rachel reinforced her faltering smile. They should have let Charlie7 handle this. "If you access your mental file server, in the root directory there is a file labeled So_I'm_A_Robot_Now. It really will help explain most of this."

Jason paused, and the hush that remained in the upload chamber had a sense of reverence. For centuries, the Twenty-Seven had been held up as Promethean gods among robotkind. The watching robots waited for a proclamation.

"It worked," Jason said simply. "Holy hell. It WORKED!" He cackled and leaped from the upload table, dancing with no discernible skill or style, halfway between running in place and an amateur boxing match. "Woo! Where's Dr. Truman?" he asked when the initial excitement passed. "Who are all these people?"

Charlie13 stepped forward. "My name is Charlie13. I run this facility. The man—"

Jason was already shaking Charlie13's hand. "You did it, Dr. Truman. I believed in the technology but to actually *be* here? Oh, God. Am I dead? Oh, no. The scanner fried my brain, and this is my heaven, isn't it?"

Rachel placed a hand on his shoulder. "All real. You're alive, just a different sort of alive than you used to be."

"As I was saying," Charlie13 continued. "Dr. Charles

Truman is in a great deal of trouble. We needed to bring in the only witnesses whose testimony can shed light on the events of Project Transhuman.”

A soft, incredulous chuckle built in Jason until its echoes filled the upper reaches of the upload chamber. “You’ve got to be kidding me. If this is the year 30-whatever, and you’re all Truman robots, you ought to be treating him like a god.”

“I’d settle for sharing a beer,” Charlie7 called out, unable to contain himself. “Figuratively speaking, of course.”

The crowd’s murmurs of disapproval didn’t stop the newly minted Jason Prime from threading his way through the crowd to Charlie7’s location. “It’s really you?” Jason asked, craning his neck at the giant Version 70.2 chassis that stood a full head taller than anyone else in the room. “Of course it is. You were always a giant among men.”

Arthur19 made his way through the crowd, which moved from his path like similarly charged ions. “Before this one has a chance to charm you, I’d like an hour or two of your time to answer some questions.”

“Who are you?” Jason asked. He leaned close to study Arthur19’s 56.12 chassis.

“Arthur19, chairman of the Privacy Committee,” he replied. “Now if you’ll—”

“Dr. Schwarz?” Jason asked. “You still owe me a report on the...” He looked around. “I suppose that report’s a moot point now. I’m-I’m... this is going to take some getting used to.”

“Yes. I’m sure it will,” Arthur19 said gruffly.

“You’ll be fine, Dr. Sanborn,” Charlie7 said. “Good to see you again.”

As Arthur19 led Jason Prime away from the upload chamber, the new robot turned and pointed back at Rachel. “Did Holly get her niece an internship or something? Why isn’t she a thousand years old?”

Presumably someone else would answer all Jason’s questions

later. Charlie⁷ was more concerned about the docket of scientists yet to come.

Brent²¹⁰ and Janice⁷⁶ carted another Version 75.1 chassis into the room and hoisted it onto the upload table. Rachel stood by and supervised, visibly nervous, uniform already damp with sweat.

But she carried on. “Well, now that we’ve met our first legendary scientist, let’s move on. Our next activation will be Dr. Holly Chang, two-time winner of the Turing Award and co-creator of the operating system that all modern robots use.”

When Holly Prime awoke, she studied the room carefully before pronouncing. “I had imagined them looking more life-like by the time of mass production.”

“You don’t seem surprised?” Rachel asked with a narrowed gaze.

Holly cocked her head. “I’m a little surprised you went into robotics, Madison. You always seemed destined for abstract mathematics once you outgrew gymnastics.”

Rachel shrank back. “I’m not Madison. I’m Rachel.”

Eve stepped forward, drawing a double take from Holly Prime. “We’re clones based on your niece’s DNA.”

Holly sighed or at least pantomimed a sigh. “And here I kept telling her parents she’d amount to nothing if she didn’t focus her studies. And to think, I’d accepted the possibility of biological immortality as more likely than cloning. And *you* of all people.”

After a brief, mildly offensive, and slightly inaccurate family reunion, one of Arthur¹⁹’s flunkies escorted Holly Prime off or an interview of her own. The Privacy Committee occupied most of the investigative branch of the Special Investigative Committee.

Next came Dr. Fred Zimmerman, whose first reaction after Rachel explained the year and his current state was to ask, “How are my stocks doing? Am I rich enough to retire?”

Once Fred Prime had been introduced to the world, Rachel moved on to activating Dr. Alison Francoeur. “I had specifically asked that I not be turned into a robot until you had smell figured out. Didn’t anyone bother to write that down somewhere?”

Dr. James McCovey’s reaction had been, “What’s there to do around this place? I imagine there are drones for just about everything by now.”

Dr. Evelyn Mengele snorted delicately upon rising from the upload table. “Well, it worked. Looks like I owe my nephew ten quid.”

After several successes with the Twenty-Seven, Rachel inserted the first of the additional six missing personalities to the docket. “Up next, um, there’s only a name. Juan Pablo Vazquez. I presume he had a doctorate. For any more information, we’re going to have to—”

“Dr. Juan Pablo Vazquez,” Charlie7 called out, raising his voice over the buzz of the crowd. “Professor of microelectronics and miniaturization at Stanford. Graduated University of Barcelona. Graduate work at MIT and Cal Tech. We moved on from his early designs, but chassis up through Version 20.12 all used his basic servo motor package.” With a nod, Charlie7 indicated that he’d said his piece. It wasn’t his place to mention that Juan had played soccer in college and suffered a horrible leg injury that left him with a limp the rest of his life.

Everyone had their reasons for joining Project Transhuman.

When Juan awoke, his first steps showed that same limp. When Rachel pointed it out to him, it was like watching a revivalist miracle. “I can walk? No pain? Gracias Dios por todo.” He clasped his hands and looked to the ceiling.

Silently, Charlie7 accepted Juan Prime’s thanks.

Around the room, Charlie7 eavesdropped on conversations. Robots could have communicated over private Social channels if they wanted privacy, so he considered all verbal communica-

tion fair game. In snippets here and there, he pieced together a narrative. The idea that Charlie7 was a nefarious, murderous, menace was fading in light of his former colleagues' reactions.

Eventually everyone from Project Transhuman had been reawakened with one exception.

"Don't do it," Charlie7 warned. "You can get what you need from everyone else."

Arthur19 had returned from his interviews by then, and his sneer spoke volumes. "The fact that you don't want Dr. Dale Chalmers awakened is reason enough to do it."

Charlie7 remembered a time when the activation of a new robot was a solemn event undertaken with the utmost care and mindfulness. It hadn't been a mass herding of unprepared robots into the world. Not every human mind was able to cope with the stresses of a life bereft of biological touchstones. His own early failures in mixing had proven as much.

When the upload cycle ended, Rachel rattled off her standard spiel. Dale Prime ignored her. "Where's Charles Truman?" he bellowed. "I know he must be one of you." Looking around the staring assembly of robots, Dale Prime scoured them with his gaze.

"Right here," Charlie7 said when no one else outed him.

Dale Prime stormed off the scanning table and made a beeline for him. If it weren't for the fact that his own Version 70.2 chassis was so physically superior to the Version 75.1 they'd assigned Dale, Charlie7 might have been worried.

"You bastard," Dale Prime said with gravel in his digitized voice. "You unbelievable bastard." Rumbles of conversation grew as the gotcha moment of the inquisition appeared to be at hand. And then Dale Prime gave Charlie7 a handshake that might have torn a lesser robot's arm from its socket. "By God, we did it."



Engineered Tyrant

Grab a copy of Engineered Tyrant, book 5 of *Robot Geneticists*, and continue your adventure now.

