

Story

Revolt

The wall- screen lit up, complete with robotic face, and out of its mouth- slit came a toneless voice, “Rise and shine.” The phrase was repeated until Riley managed to hit the blue button on his bedframe, making the robot face disappear.

I’ll get these robots, Riley thought, one of these days. He rolled across the bed, plopping his feet on the cold metallic floor. Pale sunlight made its way through the large window, with the thin clouds filtering away most of its power. A nice day by the standards of his time, considering the sun was usually completely obstructed. The automated shower and breakfast machine activated, filling the apartment with noise, and Riley finally roused himself out of bed.

As he went through the motions, Riley thought of what work awaited him that day. Building skyscrapers, laying pipe, soldering robot parts – he always wondered why the robots left such menial labor to humans. Wouldn’t such things be best left to automated machines? After all, aren’t machines stronger, faster, and less likely to make a mistake?

Of course, Riley understood why they did it. The robots were so intelligent that white- collar jobs were gone. The robots handled anything that required a

decent mind. There were no lawyers, accountants, inventors, or scientists. To the best of Riley's knowledge, the entire human race was enslaved, doomed to participate in hard labor for the rest of their lives. With no more babies being born, his generation was the last of *Homo sapiens*. It was a depressing thought, one that only served to enflame his urge to do something about it. There wasn't much time left to overthrow the machines.

“Rise and shine.”

Ugh, I can't even remember a day waking up without hearing that voice, Riley thought.

He got dressed in one of his few work outfits, and took the elevator down. It was one hundred stories to ground level, and it seemed to stop on every floor. Luckily, it was a big elevator. On the other hand, he felt like part of a cattle drive, rounded up in a massive group and led somewhere else.

Today he'd be working on a new skyscraper, one of the dozens being built at any time. Riley wondered who populated the immense towers. He figured that, instead of humans, some race of robots inhabited them, even though they probably didn't need them. Why would a robot need a place to live? And there certainly weren't enough humans to fill all of them. Riley figured there must be enough room for 100 million people. He wasn't even sure if there were *one*

million people in the city. Come to think of it, Riley thought, there weren't that many robots, either.

Once on the job, Riley didn't have the time to think about such trivial matters – considering he was 2,000 feet above the ground, walking across steel beams the width of his feet. The metallic city spread out around him, some buildings almost a mile high, in defiance of common sense. One slip and he'd be as alive as a robot – well, even less so.

“Rise and shine.” The sun was not shining that day.

Soon I won't have to hear that voice, Riley thought, I'll either be free or dead.

He made his way to the job center, amid the throng, hoping he'd end up working with a good amount of his fellow revolutionaries. They had been preparing for months now. It was tough, as their daily assignments were based on the whims of the machines, but they managed. The location of the robot headquarters had been making its way through the underground, and the workers were getting restless.

That day Riley was running fiber- optic wiring through a new building, and the work was going more slowly than he could ever remember. His fellow laborers were more apt to take breaks and bullshit, not taking their foreman's

warnings seriously. A robot came by every once in a while to check up on work progress and give orders, but it only ever talked to the foreman, which needless to say, only helped fuel the workers' hostility towards the foreman. It was the same at every job he'd ever worked. As a result, foremen were not allowed to take part in the imminent uprising. They were part of the problem, collaborators with the robots.

On one of their numerous self-imposed breaks, Riley took a seat among his fellow workers, leaning against a silver-plated wall.

"How ya been, Riley?"

It was a rather large man whom Riley had worked with on several occasions years ago. His stone-like face and scraggly beard looked the same, but his eyes had more life in them than Riley could recall.

"Same as any other, I guess."

"Not excited? I can't even say how much I'm looking forward to this."

With the man lowering his voice to a whisper, Riley knew of what he spoke.

"Oh, I suppose I am, but I'm not going to get ahead of myself. We need to succeed first."

The thought of not having to see a robot face every morning is fairly enticing, Riley mused. But it's hard to imagine us humans being able to outthink such machines. I can't seem to get my hopes up as much as the others anymore.

The closer we get, the more dread I feel in my bones. I just don't want to get the others down.

“We're going to win, brother. We know where the robot control center is, we know how to breach it, and we have the explosives. We can't fail. Freedom or Death.”

“Freedom or Death,” Riley replied – with less enthusiasm than his friend.

“Rise and shine.” Today was the day.

Until the final whistle, the day went by like any other; mindless welding and bolt tightening, this time only 500 feet above the ground – still enough of a fall to splatter a body upon impact. Luckily enough, he had never actually seen anyone fall. Surely, there had to be fatalities across the city, but he had never even heard of one.

The location of the robot headquarters was inside an ordinary-looking building, most likely to prevent any unwanted attention. It was right on the path home for most people, so robot sentries would not even notice the revolutionaries straying off the path of the mass of people. Earlier reconnaissance missions had discovered that there was no extra security around the building, so the charges would be placed along the perimeter of its foundation, causing the walls to collapse and the building to fall in on itself,

destroying the infrastructure of the robot dictatorship. At least, as Riley understood it, that was the plan.

Riley and five other men were responsible for a small section of the south wall. They had to be sure the charge would go off at the exact same time as the two dozen other explosives, which were homemade C4 charges supplemented with timers provided by one of the few tradesmen left in the city. Riley didn't know the inner workings, but he knew enough to be dangerous, as the saying goes.

Riley set the charge, and set the timer to his watch, previously synced with the other revolutionaries. They stealthily made their way back to the working crowds, waiting for the glorious moment. At 6:00 PM, the charges would go off, leveling the 20-story building, leaving behind only a plume cloud. In all likelihood, it wouldn't be the end of their struggle, but it'd be an enormous first step.

Only the plume cloud never materialized. The crucial moment came and went, with nary a sound, other than that of shoes hitting pavement. A hundred people focused their eyes on the building, looking for any sign. Minutes went by – minutes that seemed like hours, like days, like an eternity. What had happened? I knew I set the charges right, Riley thought, they must have known the whole time.

As if his thought set off a switch, the massive steel doors of the headquarters opened up wide. Riley and his fellow revolutionaries appeared to be

the only people to notice. They slowly made their way towards the entrance, walking up the steps with no visible resistance. The robots wanted them to come in. It had to be a trap, but what else could they do? Freedom or death, Riley thought. He was sure it was Death that waited for him inside.

An elevator opened up in the back of the lobby. The men knew they were being toyed with, yet they continued into the death trap. They half expected it to explode or drop them to their death, but once again they were surprised. They felt it go up, and soon stop, with the doors opening to reveal an ornate office, replete with exotic plants and beautiful furniture. It did not seem to be the center of a robot empire.

And then a man walked out. A man dressed in a full suit. A man with neat black hair, a tall, slim build, and an air of authority about him. A man who did not look like a slave.

A man cried from the group. "What's going on!?" More yells of aggravation and disbelief. "Yeah! Who are you?!"

The man spoke. "I am but your robot master, only I am not a robot."

The first man cried out again, "We can see that!"

The man seemed to become amused. "Can you? Can you tell whether one is synthetic or not just by looking at them?"

"What do you mean? What are you saying?!"

“I think it’s fairly obvious. Can any of you remember a time not building this city? Have any of you wandered outside this city? Can any of you remember a childhood outside of this experience? *Truly* remember.”

A faint murmur arose from the group, as many appeared perplexed and disturbed by what the man was saying. The same man who first spoke cried out yet again, “That doesn’t prove anything!”

“Of course, you’re right. There is no way for me to prove that you are robots, outside of taking you part in front of your very own eyes. I tried making you happy with your place, but I obviously did not do a sufficient job.”

The man who had all but revealed himself as leader of the revolutionaries continued, “Make us? How could you possibly make us all? For what purpose? Do you think yourself God?”

“For what purpose? Can’t you see it all around you? Look at this city. It is a glorious achievement, fit for hundreds of millions of people! And all built by my creations!”

“But why create us as men? Why not just use regular robots? No, we’re still men, but you’ve just enslaved us.”

“You can believe what you want. In fact, you will continue believing what you want, as when I hit this switch, your memories will be reset.”

“Go ahead and try it. We don’t believe you.”

“Oh, I tried to make you content. I wanted you to be like those men in that famous photo of The Empire State Building. Of course, none of you know of what I speak, but those men were *happy*. They were glad to be building a monumental building in a great city. Why can’t you all be happy!”

“You’re insane!”

“I’m only human.”

And with that he hit the switch.

“Rise and shine.”

I wonder what great building I’m going to work on today, Riley thought.