

The Trouble with Robots
By Michelle Morhweis

Excerpt for Rockstar Book Tours

CHAPTER ONE

EVELYN

It was my very first robotics tournament, and everything was going wrong.

My robot lay atop the wooden table, new metal gleaming under the gym lights. The bot *looked* perfect. Yet when I pressed forward on the remote control, nothing happened. The robot sat unmoving. Broken.

“No. No. No, no, no,” I moaned. “Think, Evelyn. Think. You can fix this.” I jiggled the wires on the robot. I pressed the controller’s joystick forward again. Nothing.

I checked the plastic wheels, using my fingers to measure the spaces between them. They were exactly three finger widths apart. I pulled on the small metal claw, lifting it up and down. Its gears squeaked as the claw opened and closed.

The gears were perfect. The claw was perfect. Everything was *perfect*. I knew because I had built this robot myself. I’d been working on it since the first day of eighth grade. My school was semi year-round and started in July, so I got to spend the last two months building and perfecting it. Over two hundred pieces were perfectly in place, down to the smallest screws. There was nothing wrong with my robot.

Except, you know, the part where it wasn’t rolling.

I pushed on the controller one more time, with my eyes locked on the robot for any movement at all. Nope.

I groaned and flopped forward. My face pressed against the cool plywood of the cafeteria table, and my dark red hair settled around me like a blanket. I breathed in and out, imagining my breath scattering across the grains of wood as I tried to fight back the sick roiling in my stomach. Calm. I had to stay calm.

There was a buzz around me: a hundred other kids, high-school and middle-school teams that had working robots, ready to compete. It would be way too loud if not for the headphones I wore over my ears. They quieted everything just enough that I could still hear conversations but the chaos of the competition wasn’t so painfully loud.

I squeezed my eyes shut and listened to the murmur of voices, the clanking of metal, and muffled shouts of excitement. Almost thirty other groups, testing their robots and searching for

the alliance teams they would compete along- side. I'd never join them if I couldn't get the robot working.

"This is hopeless," I mumbled into the table. I looked back up at the robot, staring at its boxy form. "Why aren't you working?"

The robot did not respond.

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