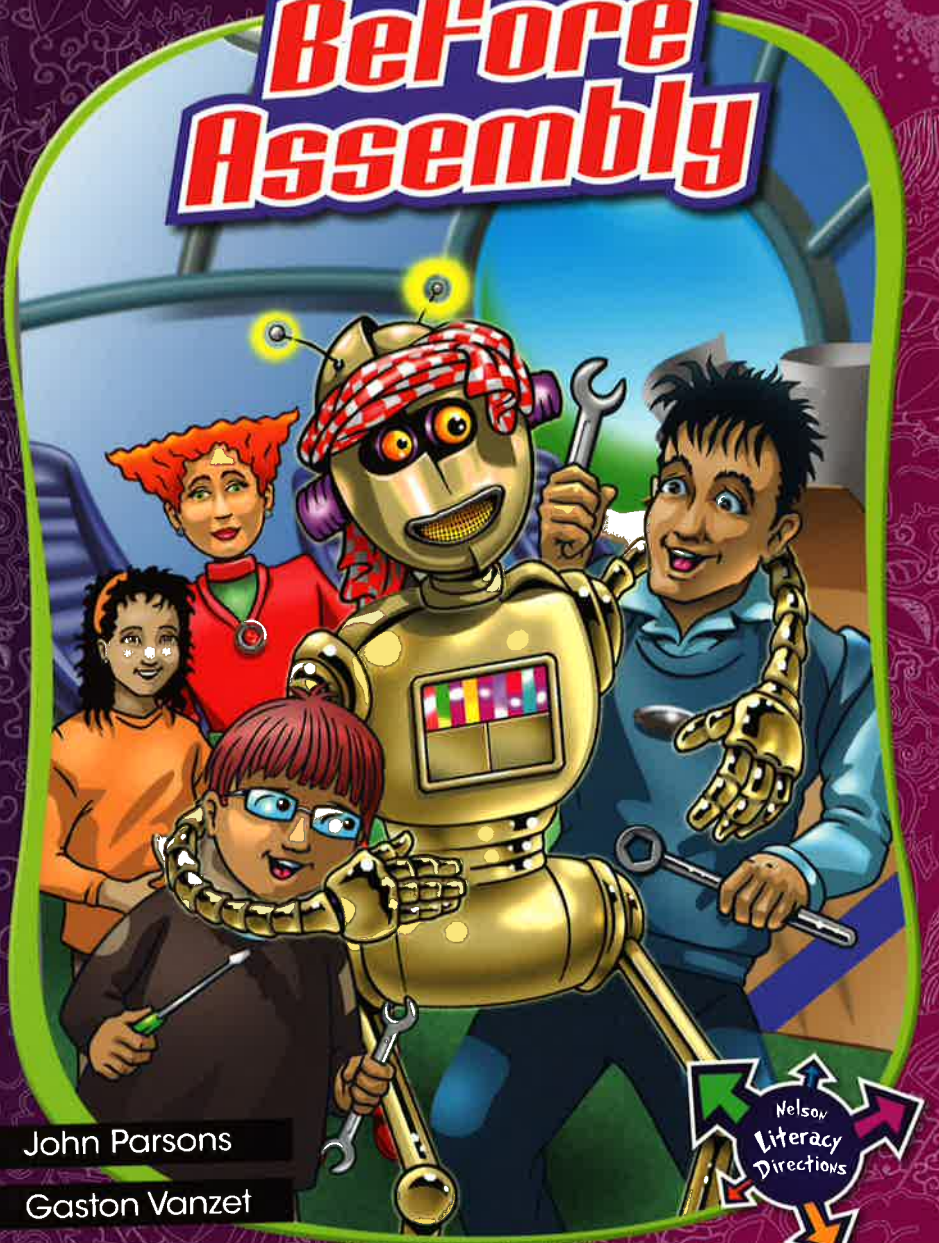
Read Before Assembly



John Parsons

Gaston Vanzet

Nelson Literacy Directions

For teachers' inspection ONLY

Read Before Assembly

Written by John Parsons
Illustrated by Gaston Vanzet

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Meet the Characters

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Alice

Our family's nanny.



Buzz

Our dad.



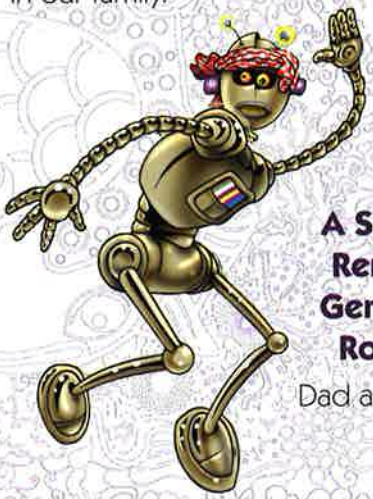
Me

The only sensible human in our family.



Reginald

My hapless little brother.



A Super X5-HI-SPEC Remote Operating General Engineering Robot Model 334

Dad and Reginald's project.

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Dear Reader

Like a lot of people, I think I'm quite good at building things. So good, in fact, that I never bother to read the assembly instructions that often come with furniture, appliances or anything that needs to be put together. Oddly enough, I always end up with leftover bits at the end. I wonder why they put those in?

John Parsons
Author

Our House



1. The living quarters
2. The garage
3. Our spaceway vehicle
4. Our backyard

1 Do You Need This Bit?

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The three universal laws of robotics are fairly straightforward. Firstly, a robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. Secondly, a robot must obey the orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the first law. Thirdly, a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the first or second laws.

Here on Earth, in the late twenty-first century, these laws were better known than the ones about who should give way while flying right at busy spaceway intersections. Usually, you could rely on robots to behave much better than impatient spaceway drivers.

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The statistics couldn't be argued with. People injured in spaceway pile-ups each year: 6 459. People injured in accidents caused by robots: zero.

But there was another statistic that suggested we should introduce a fourth law. The number of humans who are so incompetent they shouldn't be allowed near an otherwise harmless robot: two. That would be my dad, Buzz, and my younger brother, Reginald. And that fourth law should state, "the owners of robots, especially fathers and brothers, *must* read the instruction manual and should avoid all temptation to go fiddling inside complex positronic robot brains with screwdrivers and pocket knives".

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From the blood-curdling screams coming from the garage, it seemed both my dad and my brother would have agreed. But, as incompetent humans often discover, it's all very well feeling sorry for oneself after the fact. As our nanny, Alice, and I pointed out when they limped back into the house looking for sympathy and bandages, they should have thought of the consequences *before* they started fiddling.



Buzz and Reginald's first mistake was when they were unpacking our new household robot. With scarcely a glance at the 300-page booklet marked "Super X5-HI-SPEC Remote Operating General Engineering Robot Model 334 (Household Use Only) READ ME!" in large red print at the top of the carton,

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they emptied the contents of the box on the living room floor. Then they stuffed all the plastic wrapping, polystyrene packing, protective padding and the 300-page booklet back into the empty carton for recycling, and set about assembling the 9 324 components.

"Are you sure you know what you're doing?" asked Alice.



"I'm an expert at kitsets," Buzz assured her. "Watch and learn, Reginald, watch and learn," he said to Reginald with a wink.

I sighed, remembering the days when my brother was just a toddler and my dad would sit on the floor with *me*, imparting his vast knowledge of how to incorrectly assemble everything from furniture to small appliances.



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"I don't know why they put all these extra parts in," he would mutter, examining a cog or a circuit board or a chair leg that just didn't seem to fit anywhere. "And who writes these assembly instructions? No one from this planet, that's for sure."

Thankfully, I had watched and learned, and by the age of twelve I was an expert at being busy with something that needed my urgent attention, preferably in another room, whenever my dad gleefully unpacked a kitset. Poor Reginald. He was only seven and still had those awkward growing-up years in front of him.

Buzz was examining the Super X5-HI-SPEC Remote Operating General Engineering Robot Model 334's cranial compartment, humming and hawing knowledgeably.



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"Look at this, Reginald," he said. "A century of human technological innovation, all wrapped up in a container smaller than the size of a tennis ball!" He tapped the cranial compartment with a cross-head screwdriver and a small diode flew off, dislodging one of the microchip arrays. He sighed and looked at Reginald. "They've sent human beings to colonise Mars, but they still can't build a Model 334 that doesn't break. Typical." He set about reinstalling the positronic circuitry with all the finesse of a neurosurgeon performing a delicate operation with a bread knife and a carving fork.

"Typical," echoed Reginald, who sadly still thought that Buzz knew what he was doing. "Do you need this bit, too?" He held up a tiny LED capsule that had dropped onto the carpet.

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"Probably not," replied Buzz, after scrutinising the part for at least a second. "Toss it back into the empty carton with all the other rubbish."

