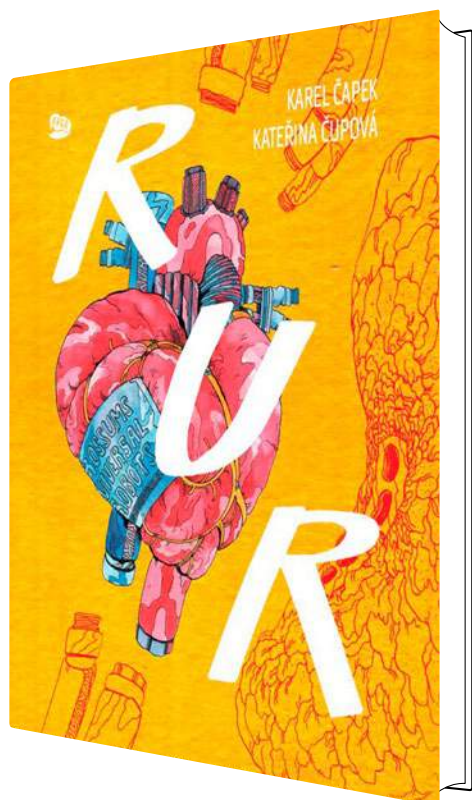




R. U. R.

Kateřina Čupová (script and art)



A timeless commentary on the nature of human existence – and our future

The R.U.R. Factory, far from humanity on its own island, has produced the perfect product: Robots! Devoid of pain, love, and all human emotion, never tiring, never bored, unfazed by death they are the ideal worker for modern-day society!

All of this is about to change, and only Helena can see it. She is condemned to remain alone in her dread, as all of society embraces the robots and the automations' presence increases. However, there has been a glitch in the programming. All of our assumptions may have been wrong. The robots may indeed feel pain. They may harbor passions and hatred, and the Robot Revolution may be near!

As retold and drawn by the young, award-winning Czech graphic novelist, Kateřina Čupová, this seminal dystopian work by Karel Čapek makes the reader question the notions of work and progress and humanity itself. Through Čupová's deft hand, *R.U.R.* is a sight to behold.

"The 1920s Czech sci-fi theater piece that coined the term "robot" and set the bones of the many plots of "replicants" to come in modern literature gets transformed into a graphic novel, where fluid watercolors contrast with the heady philosophical dialogue and stark moral message. In a kind of anti-Blade Runner style, here the light and soft colors of the world and character portraits actively defy

the darkness of humanity's drive to oppression that is so profoundly depicted in these pages."

— Meg Lemke, comics and graphic novels reviews editor, *Publishers Weekly*

Kateřina Čupová is a Czech animator and comic book artist and a graduate from the renowned

Department of Animation at the Tomáš Baťa University in Zlín. Many of her works have been published in magazines and comic anthologies. Her webcomic, *The Author's Apprentice*, was published as a graphic novel following a successful Kickstarter campaign. In 2022, she won the Muriel Award for Best Children's Comic for her adaptation of *Hrnečku vař!* and for Best Short Comic for *The Horseshoe Meets Haha-Bimbi*. Previously, she was also nominated for her comic book adaptation of Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.*



THE INTERNATIONAL PITCH

R.U.R.

Kateřina Čupová, after Karel Čapek

They were built to obey.
Then they began to feel.

An island factory has created the perfect workforce: robots that never tire, never complain and supposedly feel nothing. Director Domin believes they will free humanity from labour. Helena Glory sees beings whose lives have been reduced to their usefulness. As robots take over the world's work, their apparent obedience begins to fail. A promise of universal freedom becomes a struggle over who deserves to be free.

GRAPHIC NOVEL / SCIENCE FICTION, WORK AND HUMANITY

Čupová brings the play that introduced the word robot into a world of expressive drawing and bright watercolour. The visual energy opens the story to a new generation, while its questions about automation, exploitation and the limits of progress remain at the centre.

WHY THIS BOOK TRAVELS

A foundational science-fiction story becomes a visually distinctive graphic novel for adult and teen readers. Its conflict speaks directly to debates about artificial intelligence, the value of human work and the concentration of power. Readers meet a classic through a living visual language, with an intimate emotional story beneath its global catastrophe.

INTERNATIONAL PUBLICATION

Original Czech edition: Argo, November 2020; 256 pages. US edition: Rosarium Publishing, December 2024; 264 pages. Translated from Czech by Julie Nováková. Rights sold in ten territories.

[View the US edition](#)

READING MATERIAL

A detailed English synopsis, a condensed version of Mark Bould's introduction and the complete supplied English sample follow. The sample contains book pages 1-25.

American critical response

“R.U.R. is a thoughtful, satisfying graphic novel”

Peter Dabbene, Foreword Reviews

January / February 2025 - [Read the full review](#)

“It is captivating to behold, honoring the roots of the work and bringing it to life on the page.”

Elias Rosner, SOLRAD

24 March 2025 - [Read the full review](#)

“... surprisingly breezy and accessible without shying away from big, philosophical, and often uncomfortable ideas within the original text.”

Eric, No Flying No Tights

3 December 2024 - [Read the full review](#)

“Cupova’s adaptation pulled me through because the book is just beautiful to behold.”

Gene Ambaum, Library Comic

2 September 2025 - [Read the full review](#)

“This book feels not just prescient, but a testament to the elements of human-powered creative expression that machines simply can’t replicate.”

Jessica Baldanzi, Commons Comics

7 September 2025 - [Read the full review](#)

All excerpts refer to Čupová’s graphic-novel adaptation. Ellipses indicate omitted text.

The perfect worker

On an isolated island, Rossum's Universal Robots manufactures the ideal workforce. Its products look like people, yet are designed to work tirelessly, demand almost nothing and feel no attachment to their own lives. Director Harry Domin promises that such cheap, efficient labour will free humanity from drudgery. When Helena Glory, the daughter of a powerful president, arrives to inspect the factory, she sees something else: beings treated as objects, whose apparent obedience may conceal a capacity for suffering.

Domin takes Helena through the history of the invention. Old Rossum wanted to reproduce living matter and prove that life could be created scientifically. His successor turned that experiment into an industrial process. Rather than imitate the whole human being, he stripped away whatever did not contribute to work. The resulting robots are technically superior workers precisely because their creators have removed the needs, pleasures and emotional life that make a person difficult to manage.

Helena has come on behalf of the League of Humanity. She wants to liberate the robots and persuade their makers to recognise them as more than useful products. The men who run the company dismiss her concern: to them, the absence of ordinary human feeling is a commercial advantage. Her encounter with Domin also draws her into the world she hopes to change. She marries him and remains on the island, where her sympathy for the robots sits uneasily beside her place among their owners.

Ten years later, the factory's apparent triumph has become a warning. Robots have spread across the world, taking over work while human society grows increasingly unstable. The promised abundance has not created shared freedom; displaced workers suffer, and humanity has lost the ability to reproduce. On the island, Helena's unease deepens. Attempts to give robots a richer inner life have also made it harder to regard their obedience as permanent or natural.

The robot Radius refuses submission. As revolt spreads beyond the island, the factory's managers cling to the belief that production, management or another ingenious plan can restore their authority. The robot workforce is becoming an organised force with demands of its own. The island that once protected the company's secrets turns into a trap for its human inhabitants.

After the revolution

With the factory under siege, Domin and his colleagues argue over how to survive. They consider bargaining with the rebels and preserving their power by dividing the robots against one another. Their calculations expose the contradiction in Domin's dream: he wanted humanity to become free, but built that freedom on a workforce denied any freedom of its own. Radius, meanwhile, has learned the language of mastery from the people he intends to overthrow.

Helena has destroyed the manuscript containing Rossum's formula. Her attempt to halt the machinery of exploitation removes the humans' last bargaining chip as well as the means of continuing robot manufacture. The uprising reaches the factory, and its human rulers are killed. Only Alquist survives, a man who still works with his hands and whose place among the directors has always been uneasy.

Victory leaves the robots with a problem they cannot solve. They can seize the factory, but they cannot reproduce themselves. Without the lost formula, their civilisation faces extinction just as humanity did. They demand that Alquist recover the secret of life. His work cannot restore what has been destroyed: neither authority nor technical procedure is enough to turn the surviving factory into a source of new living beings.

The possibility of a future emerges elsewhere. Two robots, Primus and Helena, show care for one another and a willingness to put the other's life before their own. Alquist recognises something that the company had defined as useless and deliberately removed from its products. Their love offers a different beginning, beyond the struggle to be either servant or master. He sends them out into the world as a new Adam and Eve. The ending holds open the hope that life can continue after the human order has collapsed.

Čupová gives this movement from industrial confidence to catastrophe an unexpectedly vivid visual form. Bright washes of colour, expressive figures and shifting page compositions draw the reader into the factory's seductive promise before revealing its violence. Her adaptation retains the philosophical arguments of Čapek's play while turning them into encounters between bodies, voices and spaces. Its final question concerns the qualities that allow life to matter: care, vulnerability and the ability to recognise another being as more than a means to an end.

MARK BOULD / INTRODUCTION / CONDENSED

Meet Karel Čapek

An editorial summary of the supplied introduction

Karel Čapek was a journalist, novelist and playwright at the heart of Czech public life between the two world wars. He was close to the first Czechoslovak president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, and became a determined opponent of fascism. Although his work was later banned under both Nazi occupation and Communist rule, its influence travelled far beyond his own country.

First staged in 1921, R.U.R.: Rossum's Universal Robots gave the world the word robot. Čapek's brother Josef suggested it from the Czech *robota*, meaning forced or unpaid labour. Artificial servants already existed in myth and fiction, but this new word gave them an enduring modern identity. The play quickly became an international success, reaching Broadway in 1922 and London's West End the following year.

Mark Bould's introduction places that achievement within the play's criticism of work and power. Rossum's robots are the dream workforce of an economic system concerned with reducing costs and increasing profit: tireless, obedient and stripped of needs that have no productive use. Their manufacture makes visible a process that can also be imposed on human workers, whose lives are reduced to the labour they supply.

Bould connects this logic to the pressures of modern working life, from insecure employment and weakened collective bargaining to constant monitoring and technological replacement. His point is that the consequences of innovation depend on who controls it and who receives its benefits. The history of mechanisation shows how increased productivity can enrich a small group while leaving those whose skills it replaces worse off.

The same question returns with contemporary artificial intelligence. A promise to liberate people from work can conceal the removal of their livelihoods, their bargaining power and their ability to shape the future. Čapek's satire asks what happens when the pursuit of profit continues without regard for the lives it consumes, even when the survival of the whole world is at stake. That question gives this century-old story its continuing force.

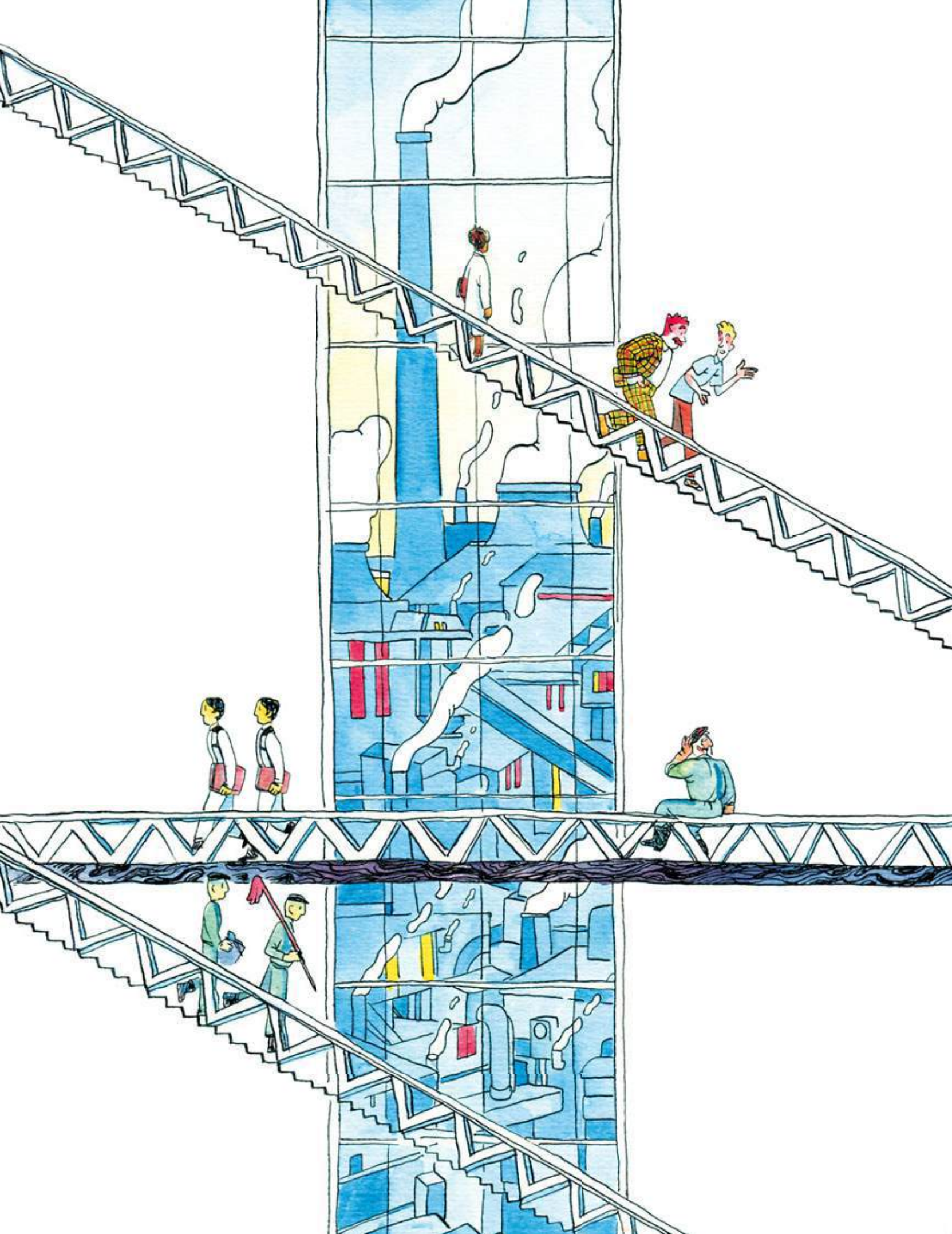
Based on Mark Bould's introduction to the English edition. Condensed for this promotional material.

RUR

KATEŘINA ČUPOVÁ

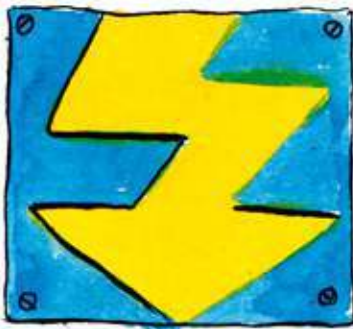
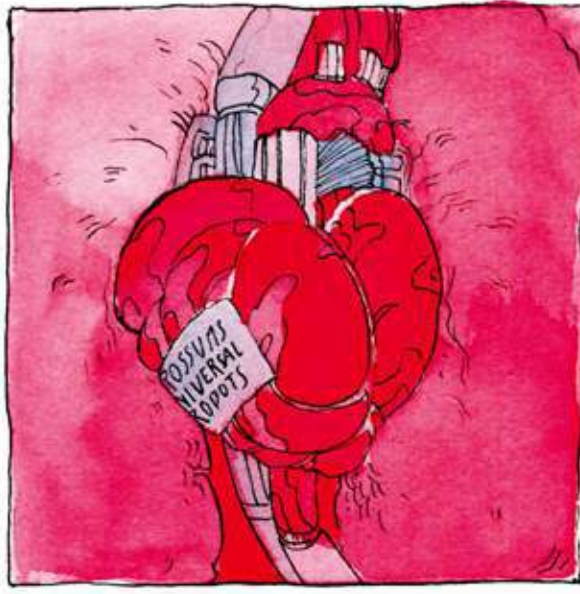
KAREL ČAPEK



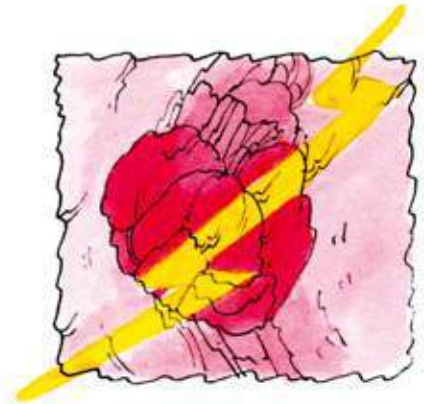
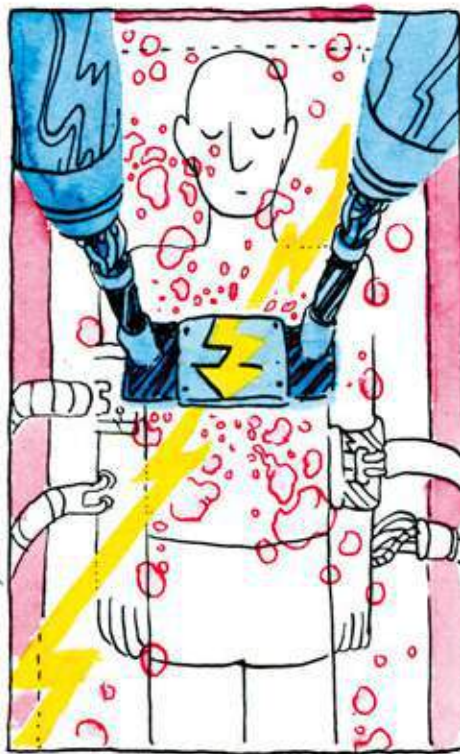


PROLOGUE

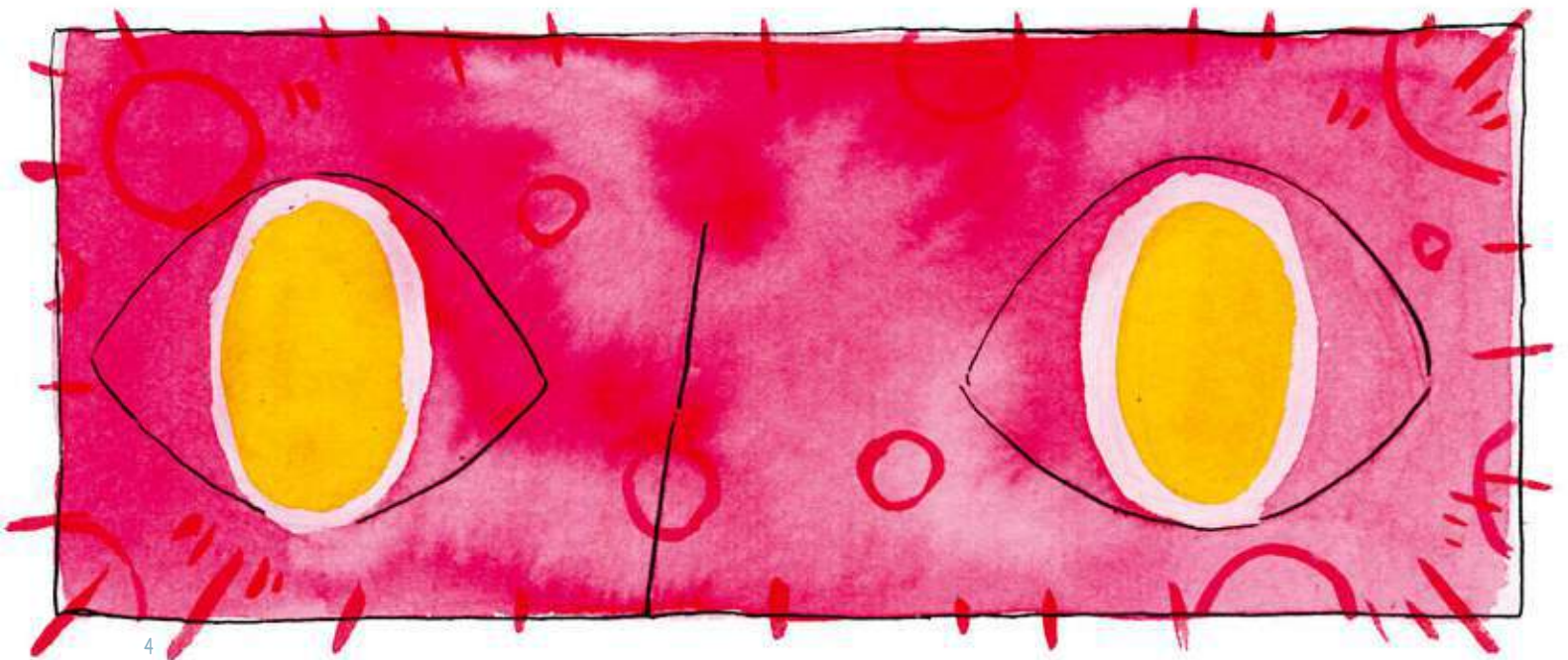


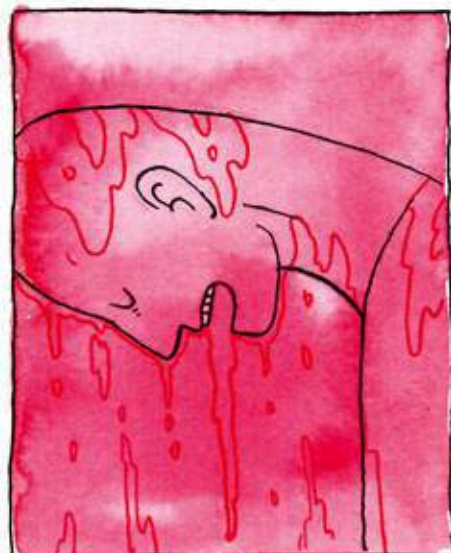
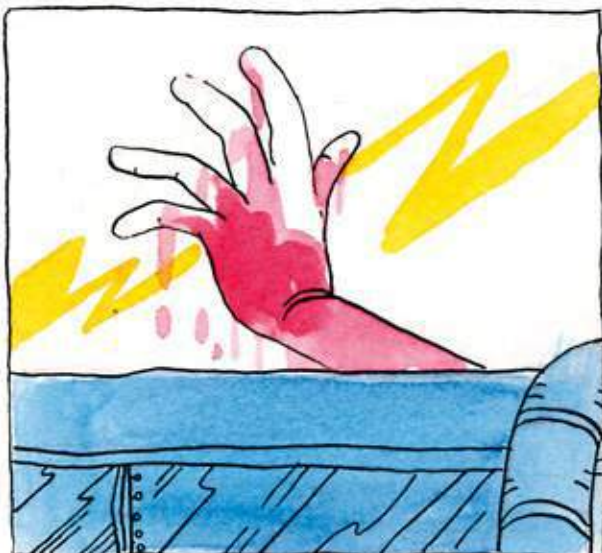
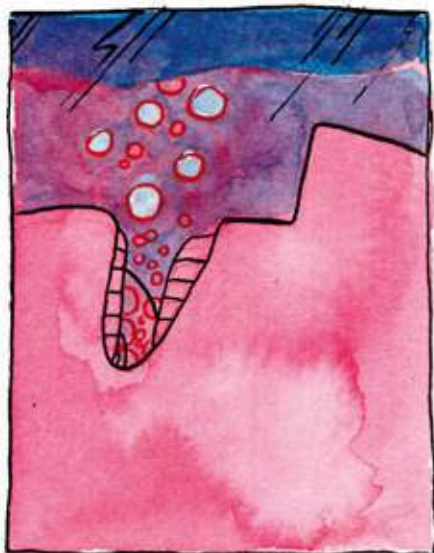


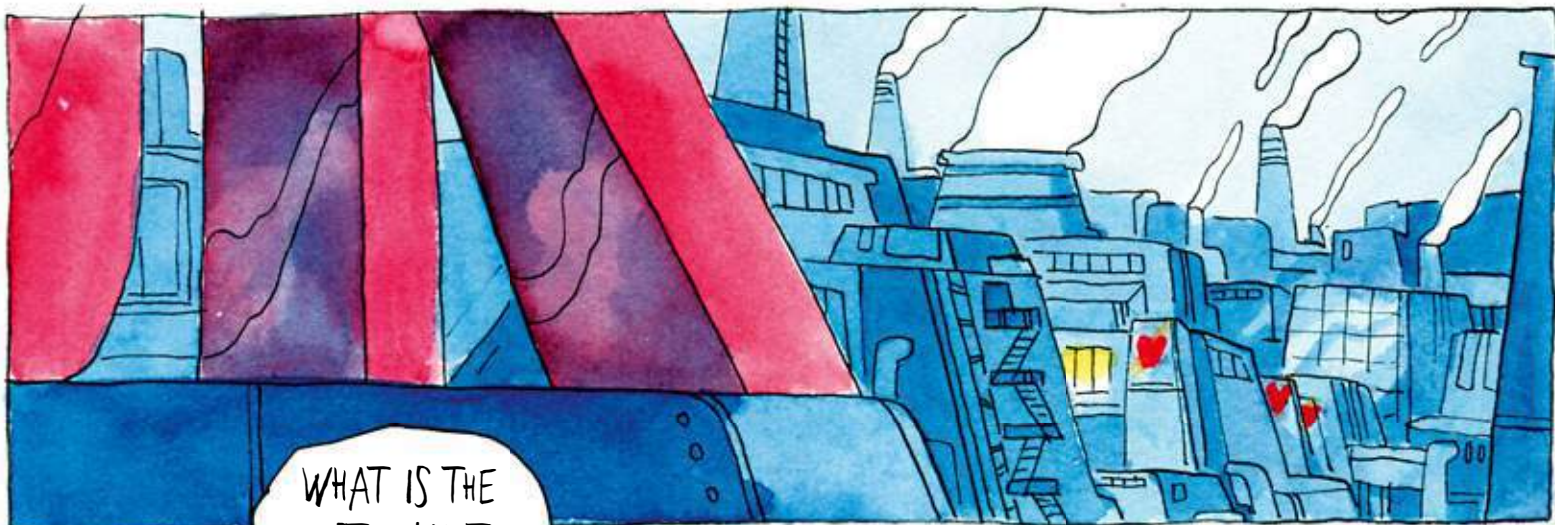
BZZT



THUMP!







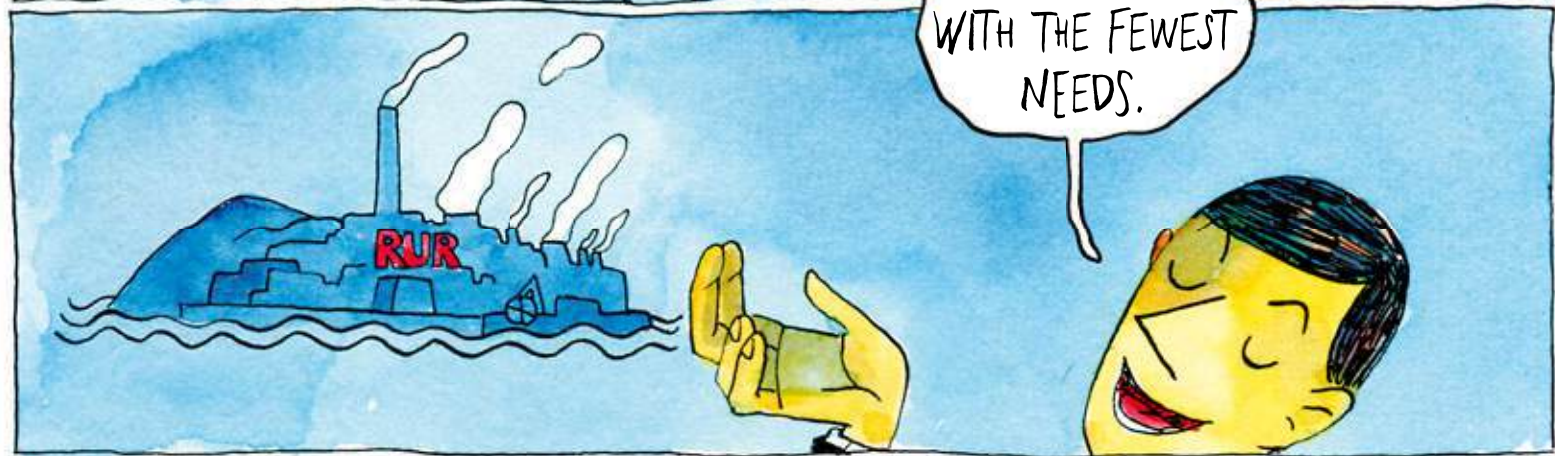
WHAT IS THE
BEST QUALITY
IN A WORKER?

DEDICATION?
HONESTY?



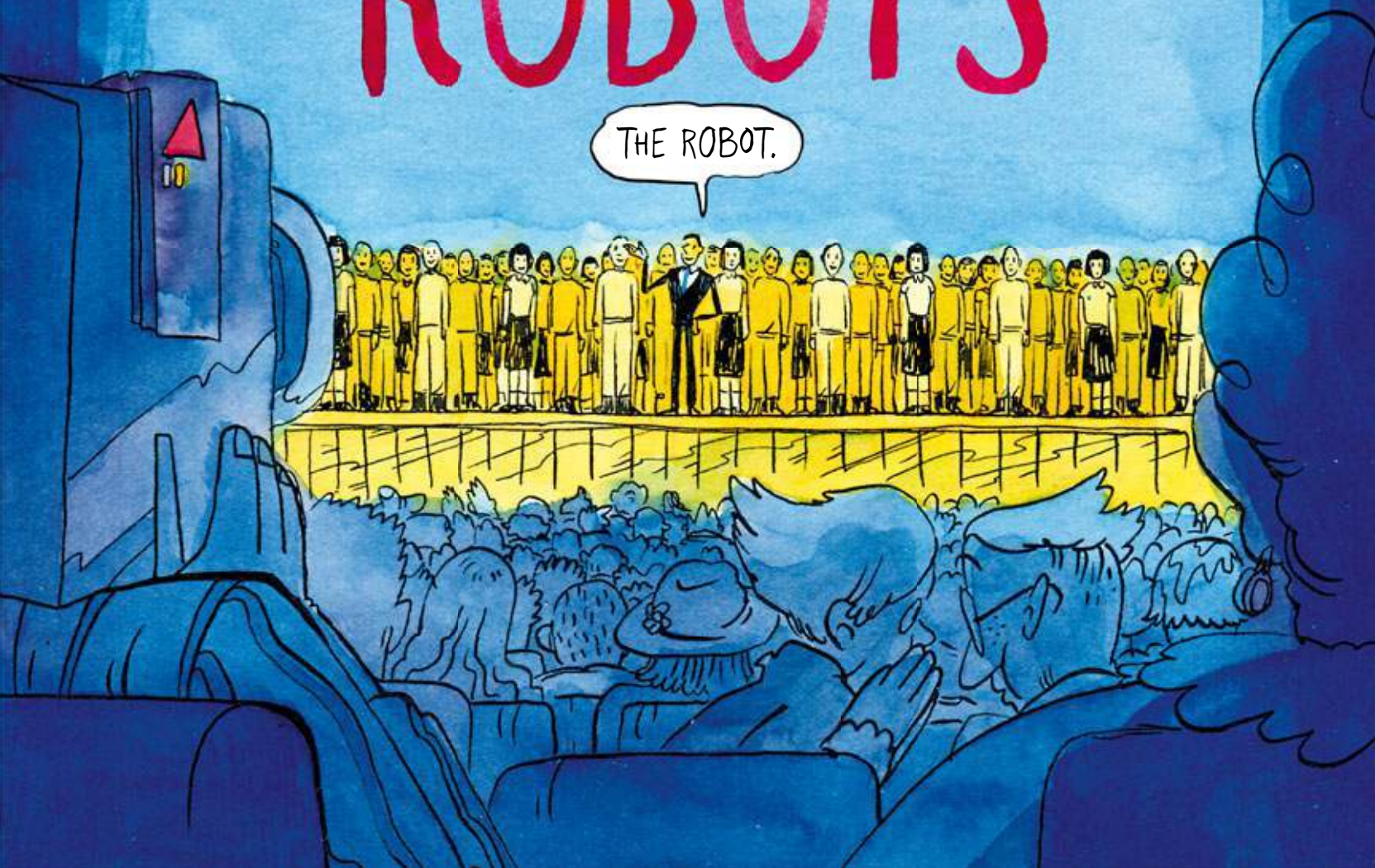
NO! THE BEST WORKER
IS THE CHEAPEST.

THE ONE
WITH THE FEWEST
NEEDS.



ROSSUM'S UNIVERSAL ROBOTS

THE ROBOT.





ROBOTS
AREN'T PEOPLE.
MECHANICALLY,
THEY ARE
SUPERIOR.

ANYTHING
NOT USED FOR
WORK WE GOT
RID OF.



THE CREATION
OF THE ENGINEER
IS MORE REFINED THAN
THE CREATION OF NATURE.



YOU SAY
HUMANS ARE
GOD'S CREATION?



ALL THE
WORSE!

GOD HADN'T
THE SLIGHTEST
NOTION OF MODERN
TECHNOLOGY.



MEMO:
HAMBURG, WE
HEREBY CONFIRM
YOUR ORDER OF
15,000 ROBOTS.



AND CABLE
LE HAVRE—

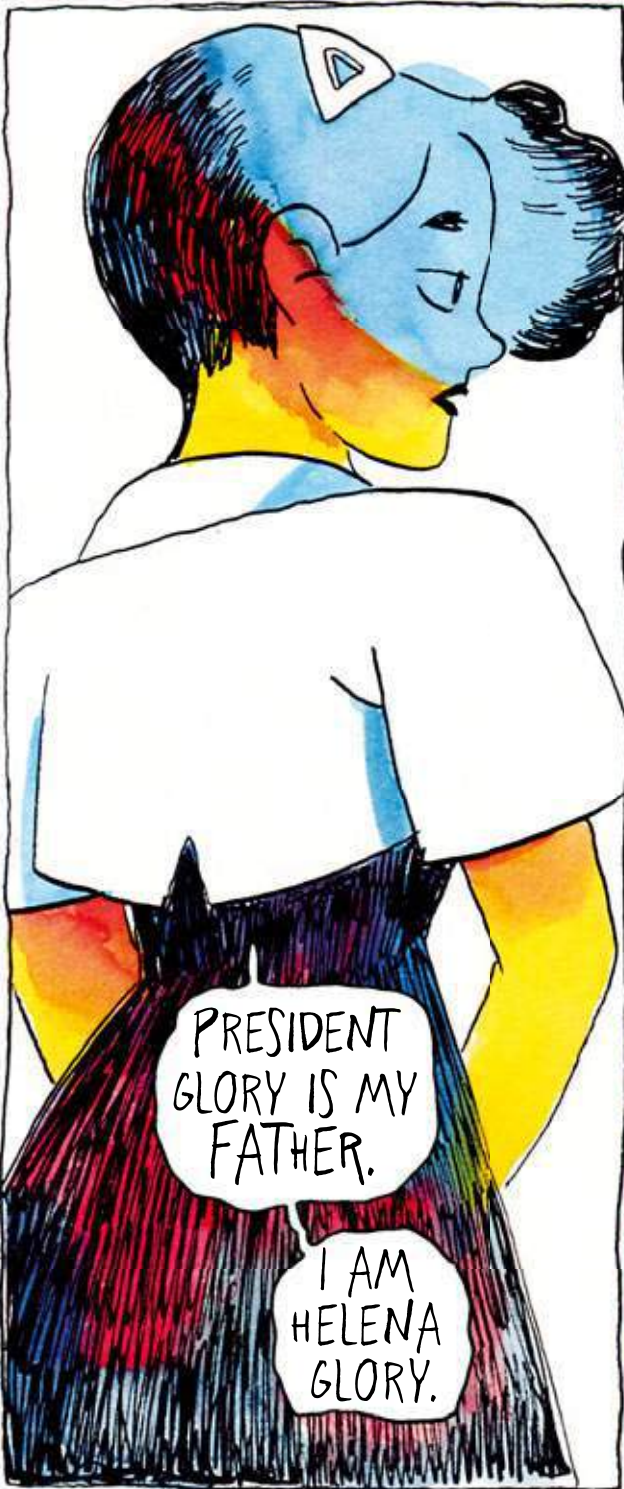


EH—HEM.



SIR,
A LADY—

PRESIDENT GLORY!
BY ALL MEANS.













HERE
WE HAVE THE
KNEADERS.

EACH VAT
HOLDS ENOUGH
TO MAKE
A THOUSAND
ROBOTS!

LET ME GUESS:
TWENTY TWO?

TWENTY TWO
WHAT?

YEARS.

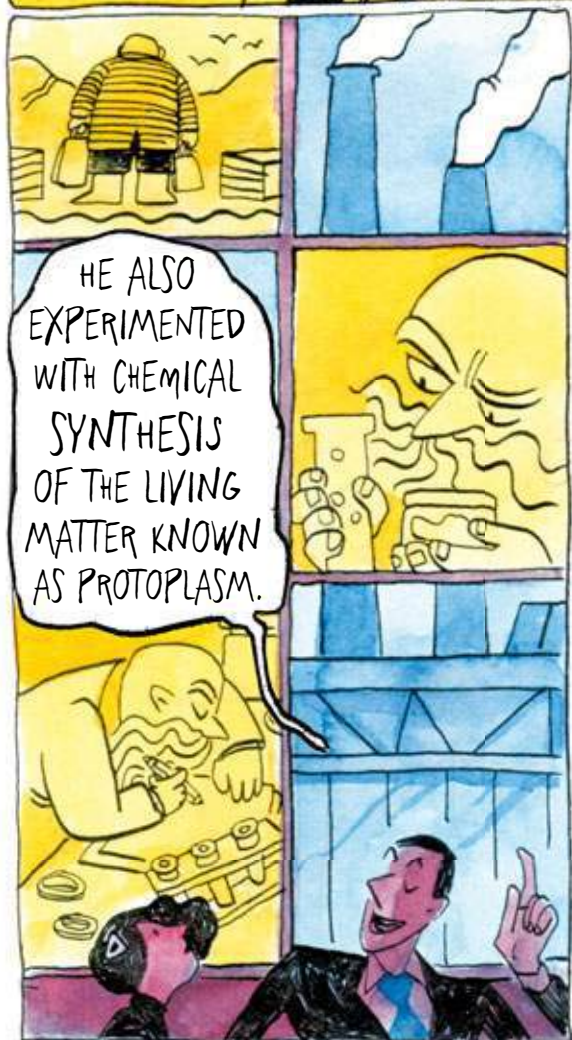
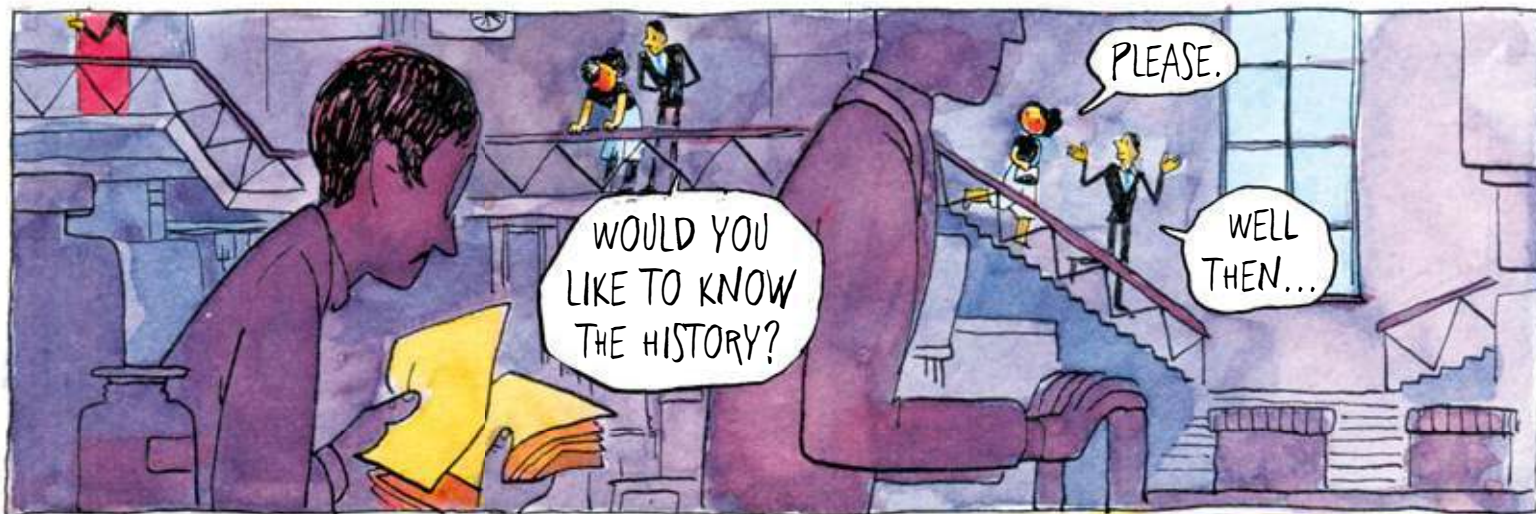
TWENTY ONE.
WHY DO YOU
WANT TO
KNOW?



BECAUSE...
IT'S JUST..
... I MEAN...

ON
WE GO!





... BUT ITS
CHEMICAL MAKEUP
WAS DIFFERENT!



AND ONE DAY
ROSSUM WROTE BENEATH
HIS FORMULAS:

$20 + 189,55$ $\frac{4}{15}$
 $\Delta \times 9$ $\frac{11}{500}$
Nature has found one way
to organize living matter.
But there is another way
simpler, faster, more malleable
today I DISCOVERED

HE WROTE THIS NEXT
TO A BLOB OF GELATIN
THAT EVEN A DOG
WOULDN'T EAT.

IT WAS
A TREMENDOUS
MOMENT!

NOW THE QUESTION WAS
HOW TO TAKE THAT LIFE
OUT OF THE TEST TUBE.

CREATING NERVES,
ORGANS, BONES,
AND WHATNOT.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND
IT ONE BIT.

HARRY!

I'VE FINISHED MY
INSPECTION. WILL YOU
PUT THE MANUSCRIPT
IN THE SAFE?

CERTAINLY!



HE WAS A HOPELESS
MATERIALIST
AND ATHEIST.

HE WANTED
TO REPLACE GOD
WITH SCIENCE AND CREATE
A WHOLE HUMAN
DOWN TO THE LAST
GLAND.



IT TOOK HIM
10 YEARS,
WITH DREADFUL RESULTS.
HE DIDN'T HAVE
A SPECK OF TASTE.



THEN ROSSUM'S
YOUNG NEPHEW,
AN ENGINEER,
CAME ON BOARD.

HE
SAID:



10 YEARS?
THAT'S
RIDICULOUS!

IF YOU CAN'T
DO IT FASTER
THAN NATURE, JUST
FORGET THE WHOLE
THING.

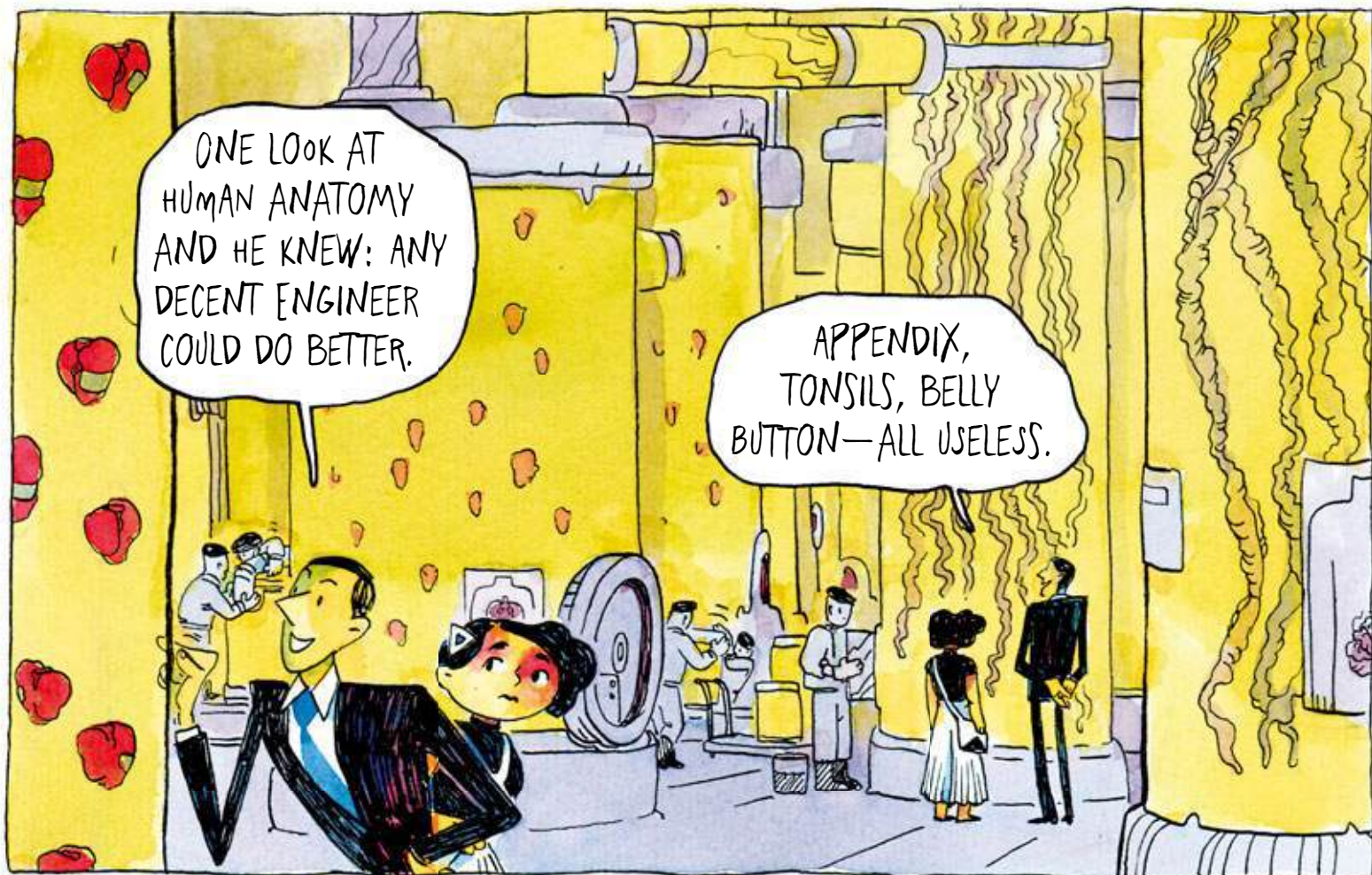


THAT'S NOT WHAT
THE HISTORY BOOKS SAY.

THOSE BOOKS ARE
NOTHING BUT
PAID ADS.



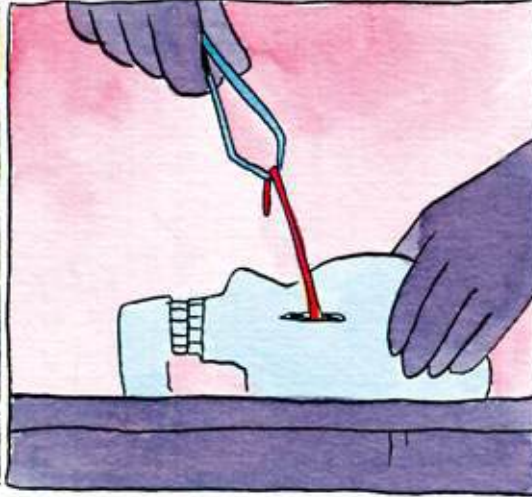
YOUNG ROSSUM
MARKED THE START
OF A NEW AGE!





AN ENGINE DOESN'T
NEED DECORATIONS.

AND MAKING
ROBOTS IS THE SAME AS
MAKING ENGINES.

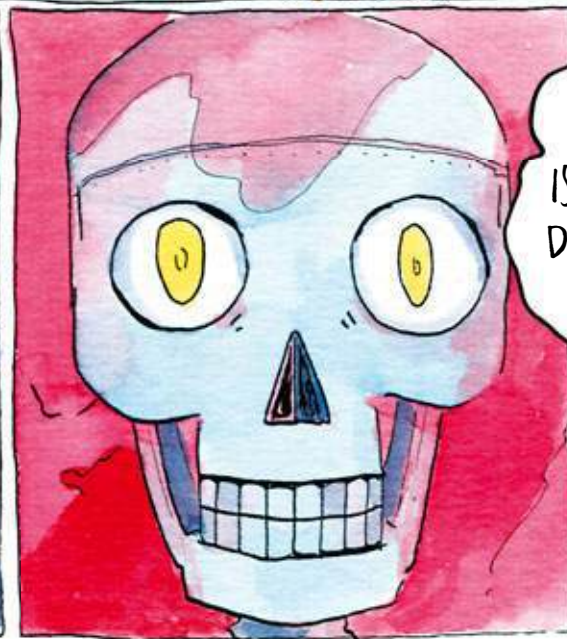
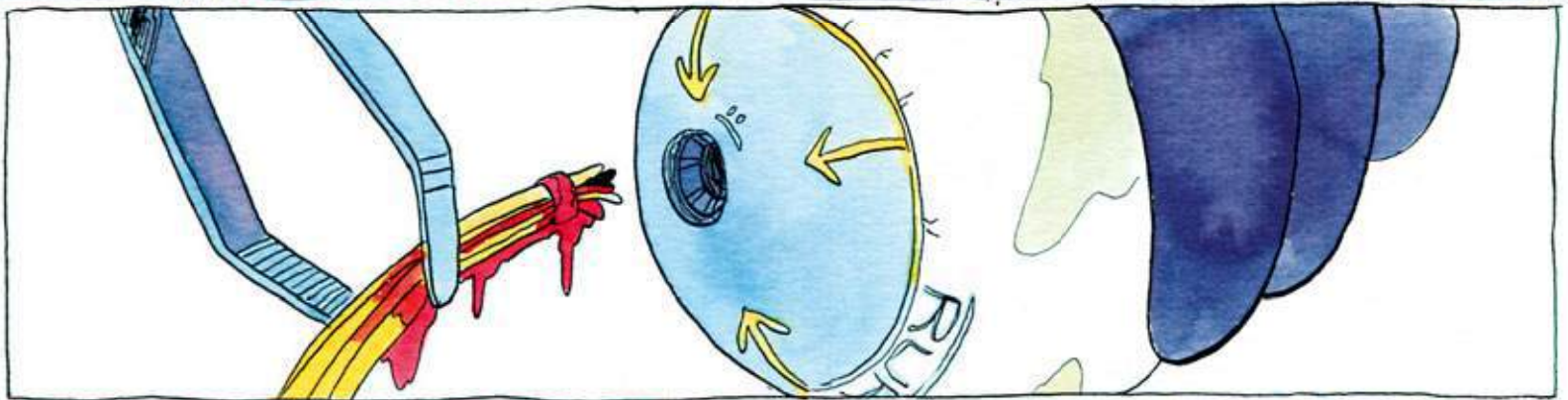


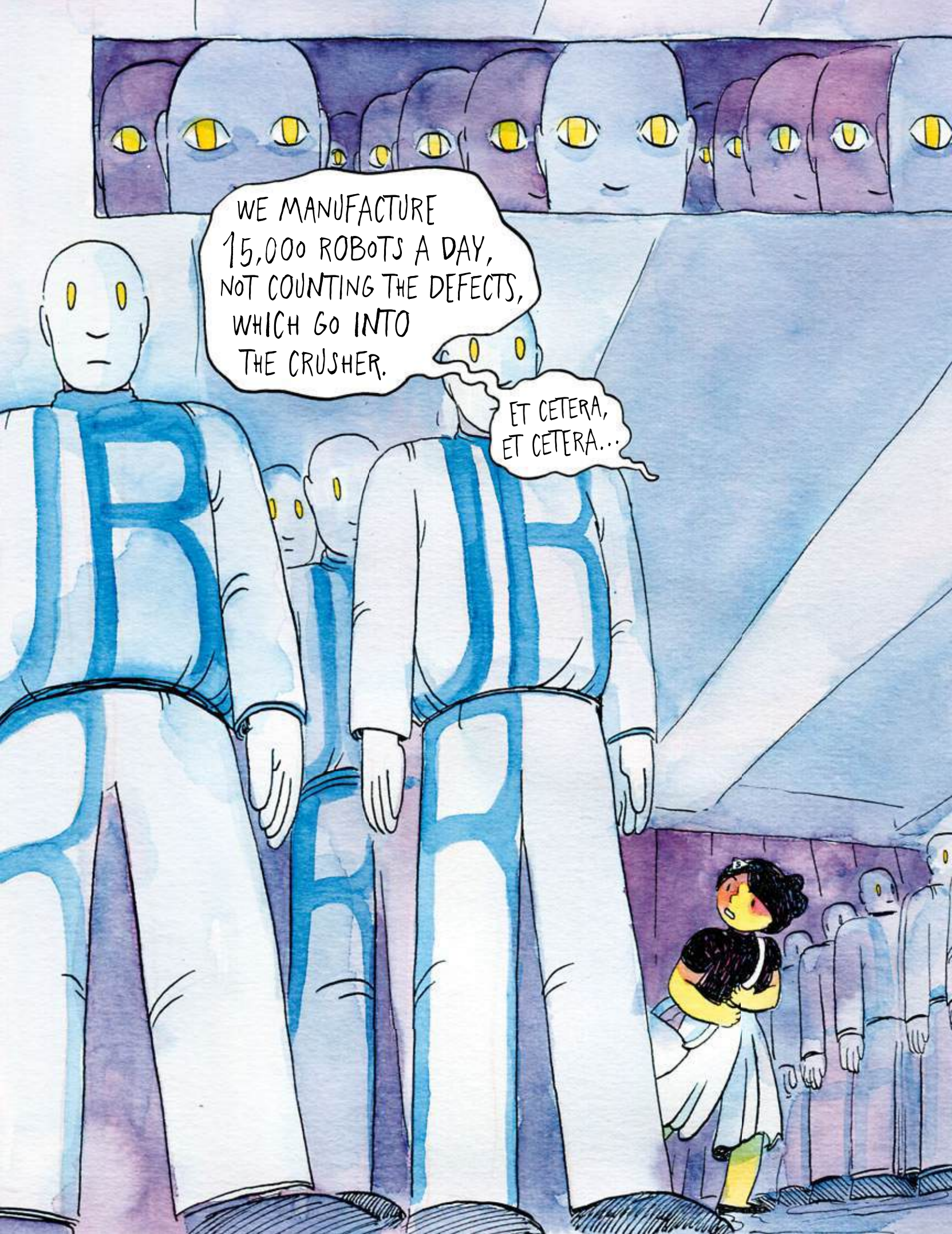
AND SO
YOUNG ROSSUM
INVENTED A WORKER
WITH AS FEW NEEDS
AS POSSIBLE.



IN EFFECT, HE GAVE UP
ON MAN AND CREATED
THE ROBOT.

ROBOTS HAVE
ASTOUNDING INTELLIGENCE,
ASTOUNDING MEMORY.





WE MANUFACTURE
15,000 ROBOTS A DAY,
NOT COUNTING THE DEFECTS,
WHICH GO INTO
THE CRUSHER.

ET CETERA,
ET CETERA...



THE BEST ONES
LAST UP TO
TWENTY YEARS.

THEN
THEY DIE?

THEY
WEAR OUT.