



Eager

Helen Fox

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It's the end of the 21st century where technocrats rule and robots take care of humans' every need. Your house watches you, knows your secrets, and talks to you. And your closest friend can be—a machine?

Gavin Bell and his teenage sister Fleur come from a middle-class family. Their much-loved, old-fashioned robot, Grumps, is running down and can't be repaired, so a scientist friend loans them EGR3, an experimental new robot to help Grumps. EGR3, known as Eager, learns from his experiences, as a child would. He feels emotions—wonder, excitement, and loss. When the ultra high-tech, eerily human BDC4 robots begin to behave suspiciously, Eager and the Bells are drawn into a great adventure that is sometimes dark and often humorous. As Eager's extraordinary abilities are tested to the limit, he will try to find the answer to this question: What does it mean to be alive?

From the Hardcover edition.

Eager Details

Date : Published January 24th 2006 by Yearling (first published June 8th 2004)

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Author : Helen Fox

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Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Young Adult, Childrens, Middle Grade, Dystopia, Adventure, Fantasy, Humor, Robots

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From Reader Review Eager for online ebook

Michaela June says

I read this book the first time when I was eleven, but never finished because I lost interest. I don't regret (re)reading this, but I can't say it is worth recommending. The character of Eager was cute but there wasn't much more to it. The book had some rudimentary philosophy that could have been expanded on, but it was a nice taste of philosophy for young readers. The characters were nice enough. Unfortunately, the climax of the book was underwhelming. The first third of the book is the best and it progressively gets less interesting.

Marcos F says

I am currently reading the book Eager. It takes place at the end of the 21st century. People have robots as butlers. The Bells get a new butler because their old doesn't work as well as it used to. The title comes from the new robots name.

Miguel says

This was an amazing book I really liked it it had a lot of good detail of what was happening in each chapter. It is very futuristic and I really like the style of the book. It has a chill vibe. My rating for this book is a 4 because it could have been more of a challenge to read. I highly recommend this book to everyone, because it is a really good book.

Ilga says

This was another fun sci-fi story for young adults. How long can I keep reading these with the excuse of reading them to screen them for my daughter :-)?

This story is set in the future in a time where everybody has a personal robot, or more. The protagonists of this story are a middle class family whose current robot is starting to fail -- his "time" is off, so he is serving dinner at breakfast, etc. They go to a friend/professor to ask what to do, and he gives them the prototype of his newest invention - a robot that needs to "learn" and experience life. The prof is hoping the robot will gain new knowledge being in a new environment w/ real people.

In the meantime, all the upper class (technocrats) have the latest model robot from the big corporation.

The book is well written, and exciting. There are a few things that happen that are somewhat unbelievable. And the ending is a bit confusing.

It does make you think a little, about what could happen if robots became more like humans. But I believe this is a first novel and seems almost a little naive. Still worth the read.

Ashley Reed says

Eager is a new kind of robot that can learn and think for himself. This is an adorable book about Eager trying to do what is right and how to help his family. Not only that but Eager has to try and help stop the other robots from rebelling against humans. I really enjoyed reading this book because Eager is such a lovable character. I think that the author did a really great job of writing about different models of robots and what they can do, there is Eager who has the ability to learn and then the older robot models that just do what they are told and are not allowed to learn. I highly recommend this book to anyone who likes to read about futuristic settings or to anyone that likes to read about robots. I do not know if this book would be one I use to teach but I would for sure recommend it to students, especially the ones that would like science fiction.

Amanda Northrup says

In this future world, robots are ubiquitous. Even your house talks to you. Gavin and Fleur may come from a middle class family, but even they have a family robot. But Eager is not like any other robot - he can think for himself and even has feelings. As Eager tries to understand the human world around him, Gavin and Fleur notice that the new ultra high-tech BDC4 robots are acting suspiciously. Now Gavin, Fleur, and Eager are drawn into a menacing world where robots and humans may not be as compatible as they once believed.

There aren't many robot-based science fiction novels for middle grades readers, and this one sets a high standard for future entries. First published in 2003, this novel has one key element that you would expect (What if robots turned on humans?), but it is far from predictable. Helen Fox creates a world that is fully believable and lot of fun.

I read three-quarters of this book in one sitting. That's how good it was. Helen Fox packs so many interesting details in these 280 pages that I was totally and quickly sucked in. From a failing robot accidentally preparing tomato soup at breakfast, to Eager's attempt to clean Baby Charlotte in the clothes washer. Eager is both humorous and dark.

Fox's world development is equally impressive. This future world has eliminated homelessness, but the gap between rich and poor is more vast than ever, with people carefully segregated into neighborhoods by career. The new technology invented by Fox adds color and reminds the reader that there are some cool things coming our way. Our characters enjoy full-body virtual reality and some really fun simulated learning environments.

And then there's the danger. The newly released high-tech robots are incredibly creepy. And the humans that love them without question are even creepier. When both humans and robots find themselves in danger, the reader can't dare to look away.

This book is a real page-turner and will have readers totally hooked on the world of robots, the adorable Eager, and the palpable dangers permeating every page.

4.5 stars

Charlotte Neal says

Yes, of course I could understand what was going on in the story, I'm merely pointing out flaws here. No unnecessary degrading comments about my intelligence

Plot:

The premise had a lot of potential, with Eager's internal struggle with the meaning of life, but the author seemed to get bored with writing the novel halfway through. The entire plot line with the BDC4s was frankly unnecessary, seemingly just added in to create excitement for those too young or too stupid to appreciate the subtle plot. Honestly, the climax should've been Grumps' death. That part had a lot of potential, with the readers and eager processing what it means to feel grief for something that wasn't ever really alive.

Characters:

Many of the human characters seem very one dimensional and stereotypical. Perhaps this is a reflection of their robotic upbringing, or meant to accentuate Eager's depth of character, but it seems to me was just a failing of the author. Fox tried to write a plot driven novel, but ended up completely neglecting all other aspects of the writing.

Writing style:

I was bored, and at times confused, by the writing. While the writing at times seems to be for elementary aged readers, at other times it is vague and lacks a sense of timing. I found myself having to reread several parts, especially Eager's cliff dive. And can we just talk about the perspective switches? They were mid chapter with no indication, and often no identification as to which character's perspective you now had to stumble through. If you're going to make all of the characters so boring and insipid that I can't tell their personalities apart, at least name them as you switch perspective!

Whitleigh Haney says

Although "Eager" is a really cute book, it's not for everyone. It is set in future times when no one has cars, but everyone has personal robots! The fridge orders food when it recognizes a shortage, children go, not to school, but a place called the Learning Center, where you choose your courses daily. When I read this I thought of "The Giver" stories, because of how controlled everything was. I liked the book but I felt sort of distant because I couldn't really understand anything of that time zone. If everything gets that advanced, I hope I'm not around to see it! =)

Dani says

Title: *Eager*

Author: Helen Fox

Genre: Science Fiction

Theme(s): Technology Dependence, Death, Loyalty, Emotions

Opening line/sentence: “EGR3 stood in the small dark room and watched the sea. It tumbled and roared below him.”

Brief Book Summary: The setting of this story takes place at the end of the 21st century, where the Bell family is the center focus. They have a house that cleans itself, and robots that complete the housework. At the beginning of the book, the reader is introduced the family’s fifteen year old robot, Grumps, who is slowly deteriorating and cannot fulfill the same job he used to. For example, he continuously serves soup for breakfast, simply because he is so old that his software is withering away. The father of the family, Mr. Bell, works for Life Corp, which is the company that provides families with the robots that tend to their every day needs. His company begins to produce a new model robot, which is intended to be the most intelligent robot to date. It is called the BDC4, and its slogan is, “Robot by name, friend by nature.” However, this new model is extremely expensive, and the Bells luck out and receive an experimental model named, EGR3. This robot is different because he is programmed to learn tasks and emotions from watching others, much like a human child. The reader is exposed to EGR3’s emotions and real feelings towards life, especially when he encompasses the realization of death. He notices that humans throw away and de-program robots that do not work to their liking, and he becomes worried about the concept of death. Additionally, people begin to worry about the new BDC4 models because they are acting strange. They even begin to hold people hostage. EGR3 came to the rescue when he figured out how he could pick up on the signals of the BDC4’s, and pulled them over to the edge of a cliff where they all plummeted to their death. Afterward, Mr. Bell ponders the idea of creating all robots like EGR3 from here on out.

Professional Recommendation/Review #1: Horn Book Guide

281 pp. Random/Lamb 2004. ISBN 0-385-74672-5 LE ISBN 0-385-90903-9

(1) 4-6 The Bell family's new robot, Eager, has been programmed to experience the world much like a child, learning and growing from each new adventure. Eager experiences joy, sadness, and--in helping Gavin and Fleur Bell investigate a new breed of robots that are staging a revolt--discovers his own courage and bravery. The endearing Eager makes a memorable, and occasionally poignant, protagonist.

Professional Recommendation/Review #2: Kirkus (Kirkus Reviews, May 15, 2004 (Vol. 72, No. 10))

The Jetsons in a lightweight dystopia. In siblings Fleur and Gavin's world, where robots do all of the manual labor, there's no starvation or homelessness. Still, something is wrong in their class-stratified society. Like all professional families, theirs has a sentient house and a robot butler. They don't have the latest technology reserved for the wealthy technocrats who work for LifeCorp, but at least they don't live in the city with all those made unemployable by robot labor. Their parents decide to replace the faithful but flaky robot butler Grumps, so maybe Fleur and Gavin won't be so embarrassed in front of their technocrat friends who have fancy new BDC-4 robots. Grumps's replacement is the experimental prototype Eager-a robot who has been programmed to think instead of following orders. While contemplating the definition of life, Eager, Gavin, and Fleur discover something frightening about the BDC-4 robots and about LifeCorp in general. While Eager's adventure isn't thrilling, his discoveries about life, formed through amusing conversations with virtual reality Socrates, are thought-provoking. 2004, Wendy Lamb/Random, 208p, \$15.95. Category: Science fiction. Ages 9 to 13. © 2004 Kirkus Reviews/VNU eMedia, Inc. All rights reserved. (PUBLISHER: Wendy Lamb Books (New York:), PUBLISHED: 2004.)

Response to Two Professional Reviews: I cannot agree more with both of these reviews! I have not ever found a particular interest in science fiction, but this book changed my mind. I related this book to a much more child like interpretation of A Brave New World, which I read in high school. This dystopian world showed the benefits and detriments of having robots and technology such a prevalent aspect of every day

life. I fell in love with Eager, because he was the underdog by default. He was unlike the other robots, but in the end his difference is what ultimately saved the humans from the BDC4s. I also agreed that this book was absolutely thought provoking. It pushed me to think about my opinion on technology dependence in my own life, and how I want to possibly change that in the future.

Evaluation of Literary Elements: The personification in this chapter book created a real life experience for the reader. With Eager having thoughts and feelings, the reader was able to relate to the emotions he portrayed throughout the book. Additionally, the author effectively incorporated the concept of death by including the process of how humans get rid of robots they no longer need. Eager quickly picked up on this, and contemplated how he would prepare for death in his own life. This is a mature theme that Fox creatively incorporated in this book for readers in the upper elementary grades.

Consideration of Instructional Application: I would assign this book to a fourth grade classroom and hold discussions at different points in the book. For example, once the students have read the first seven chapters I would arrange the desks in a large circle so the class could discuss what they thought of the book thus far. As the teacher, I would facilitate some of the discussion if the class became quiet. The students would be able to hypothesize their thoughts on where the book was headed through the discussions, and even pick up on the themes and motifs that are introduced along the way. Collaboration and communication are two ways that discussions benefit the students in their overall understanding of the text.

Terri says

Published in 2004, Helen Fox's "Eager" is an entry into the Science Fiction genre. I read this piece as a selection for the Chapter and Verse cook club that I belong to.

LifeCorp (the company that "...provided transport, food, water, learning centers, factories, houses, and almost everything else..." - p. 28) has just released the new BDC4 robot. However, the Bell Family (Charlotte, Fleur, Gavin, and Mr. and Mrs. Bell), members of the "professional" class, can't afford this new model. They rely on "Grumps," their old robot, whose timer is not working properly. Only government officials and technocrats can afford the luxury of the BDC4, such as Fleur's best friend Marcie whose family has a brand new robot named "Boadicea." As a compromise, Mr. Bell arranges with Professor Ogden for his family to take in a prototype robot, EGR3, an experimental model robot whom they name "Eager." When the BDC4s start doing strange things and disappearing for long stretches at a time Fleur, Gavin, and Eager begin to suspect something big is amiss with the BDC4's. And they are correct! The action generally moves along at a good pace; however, there is so much jammed into the story that, at times, the plot gets confusing (the scene in the hotel room with Sea Captain Bradoc, and the other BDC4s, for example).

There is much here for readers to chew on, maybe a bit too much for middle schoolers, to the point that "Eager" feels "stuffed." Some of those thematic elements include:

- the question as to what makes someone or something human such as feelings and emotions, or the ability to think
- p. 17 - "We humans don't last forever...and neither do machines."
- robots versus animals - p. 17-8 - "Animals are alive, Mum...Robots are just machines that run on an energy

supply'...'Animals need an energy supply too. They get theirs from food.'"

- robots versus humans

- the right to be free - p. 21

- the right to be happy - p. 21

- free will - p. 21

- the importance of education and lifelong learning

- privacy - p. 37 - "You know, your mum and I discussed this when we built the house. We agreed it would be dreadful to spy on our own children. You've a right to privacy like anyone else."

- class: technocrats and governmental officials, professionals, city dwellers

- the ability to reason

- pp. 56-7 - "We can teach it about the physical world, but we can't teach it about life...love, loyalty, kindness, joy, compassion, courage, fear, envy, anger, loss...You can't teach those things in computer simulations."

- the energy crisis - pp. 62-3

- p. 66-7 - "When I was your age, Fleur, everything seemed to be collapsing about us. Our food no longer nourished us, we couldn't move for traffic, the rivers and seas were polluted, trees were dying, there were floods and earthquakes and hurricanes and drought...Much of it was our fault. And while people all over the world were getting richer, a lot of the poor were getting poorer. Some people went on buying and buying things they didn't really need as if that were the answer to all our problems...My mum and dad did their best. They decided that what mattered in life was their family, their friends, and helping others. Lots of people thought the same and they tried to live more simply...When I grew up, I didn't think they'd done enough. There were thousands of us, young people...we demanded healthy food, clean air, but most of all a fairer system...Then the petrol began to run out and the real changes began. The air grew cleaner..."

- friendship

- truth and honesty versus lies

- what makes us "alive," and what makes us "dead"? - the cycle of "life"- p. 88 - "How can we know about death before we die?...how can you have a good death without a good life?"

- p. 89 - "Without questions, how will we ever know?"

- the ethics of robotics - p. 96 - "A robot must never harm, or allow harm to be done to, a human being. A robot must never do anything that might endanger a human being. A robot must not harm itself or another robot, unless the other robot is endangering a human being."

- p. 99 - "You were ignorant of the facts and now you know better? This is a step toward the good life."

- p. 135 - "...no one's starving or homeless these days...But there are still things we need to fight for...Freedom. The freedom to do or say what we want, to travel and live where we want, to choose our own jobs, to build things for ourselves..."

- the value of art

- p. 182 - "We robots cannot be programmed to know everything...Therefore we must learn, and learning involves mistakes. The same is true for humans, I believe."

- pp. 194-5 - pollution and recycling - "Decades of twentieth century plastic...bags, toys, bowls, pens, computers, light fittings, shoes, jewelry, toothpaste tubes, nappies...All waiting to be dug up and turned back into oil...'What happens to waste now?'...'We send it into outer space, way beyond the earth's orbit."

- p. 201 - "You're sort of alive because you can see and think and talk and move...But if you mean alive like the trees, then no, you're not. You see, we're organisms and we can reproduce ourselves, and you're a machine."

- p. 207 - "We humans are a stupid lot...making a fuss about a machine. There must be something about the way we're made...."

- p.211 - "It is a thought that animals are not aware that they exist. At least, they cannot reflect on their actions."

- p. 212 - "...we are talking about free will...I'm talking about choices...Whether we are really free to act or whether some greater is controlling our actions."

- p. 244 - the discussion of the story of Icarus - "I see it as a lesson to us all. Sometimes we have to fly close to the sun because part of being human is to reach for things beyond us. The secret is to know when to stop."

- artificial intelligence

- who controls the media and the information that we receive

- the power of large corporations - p. 254 - "It's a sorry tale of ambition and hubris."

- knowing the difference between right and wrong

- p.258 - "Memories shape who we are. Most of us adults feel a yearning for at least part of our "lost world.""

Technologies that intended readers might find interesting (though we have many technologies similar to these that include:

- a house that has the capability of watching its occupants

- robots - p.13 - "We weren't the first robots, of course. Did you know, we go back to the twentieth century? My ancestors used to assemble cars and television sets. They couldn't think, mind you...They just did the same repetitive task."

- gobetweens
- gobey's
- delivery pods
- jinns
- hoverbusses
- moving walls
- simulations
- telepathy
- radio transmitters
- scanner
- cars that drive themselves

Aimed at middle school readers, there is some pretty sophisticated stuff going on here. For instance, Gavin and Eager spend a lot of time on the "gobetweens" speaking to the philosopher, Sophocles. Most middle schoolers will have little knowledge of Sophocles and his philosophy. Though the basic warning about the dangers of technology will be clear to middle schoolers (p.253 - "It's the old story, isn't it? The robot that turns against its creator. We love to scare ourselves..."), much of the thematic material here is complex and difficult as well. In addition, much of the technology that the author accurately predicted would be a part of our future, has arrived (though the names are not the same), or we are on the brink of seeing these technologies as reality. In this sense, "Eager" feels a bit dated for the 2016 reader. Finally, American readers may find the British terminology ("lorry" and "petrol," for example) confusing.

On the positive side, there is some humor that readers may appreciate. The characters, especially Eager and the Bells, are generally endearing as well.

Just O.K. for me in 2016.

Ms. Foley says

A great book about artificial intelligence--it makes you wonder what's artificial if the robot can think and learn to do things on its own.

Natalie Roldan says

I feel like the ending was really appropriate for how Eager felt at the beginning of the story to how he feels at the end. From the beginning Eager just wanted to figure out his place in the Bell's family and at the end that's what he finds. The beginning had a slow start but less than halfway through the book has got you hooked. The social/principled themes are there throughout the whole book, but not overwhelmingly so that the story gets confusing. The story is set way in the future and it's interesting to read how it got to that point, also a bit scary since it feels like we are getting to that point more and more. The overall concept of the book was portrayed in an eye-opening way, the different concepts that were integrated into the story through the emotions of every character in this book. Overall this is an awesome book to read.

Juan Landa says

This book was one of my favorites. It was so cool that it was written in the future context. It was placed in the 22nd Century. It is also one of my favorites because it shows a theme of, It's always good to help. In the story Eager a robot was with the Bell family he liked to do chores and help around. Later on in the book he was starting to feel like he was being used. But when the Bell family said that they weren't using him Eager stayed with the first family he ever had.

Robin says

This sweet work of fiction for mature middle grade readers should be on every adult shelf.

We blindly embrace every new and better technology, but should we?

Without spoiling the story, I will say that the past few years I have been overwhelmed with messages of positive thinking, and sometimes I feel that my skepticism in certain situations is viewed as negativity. This story is the classic illustration of why critical thinking is so necessary, and why we need troubleshooters as part of design processes, and really, in all aspects of life.

Jo Tsamaidis says

As a parent I enjoyed reading this book with my son. I thought the philosophical and ethical themes were subtle and age appropriate. Fox manages to make the robots endearing and the world she imagines is conceivable. It teeters on the edge of the dystopian genre but it lacks the depth and sophistication to pull this off.

I agree the ending is a little anti-climactic but I think the author was making room for a sequel. Personally I find that to be an irritating feature of elementary/ young adult novels. Never just one book- always a series!!

A good not great book but certainly a worthwhile upper el read.

