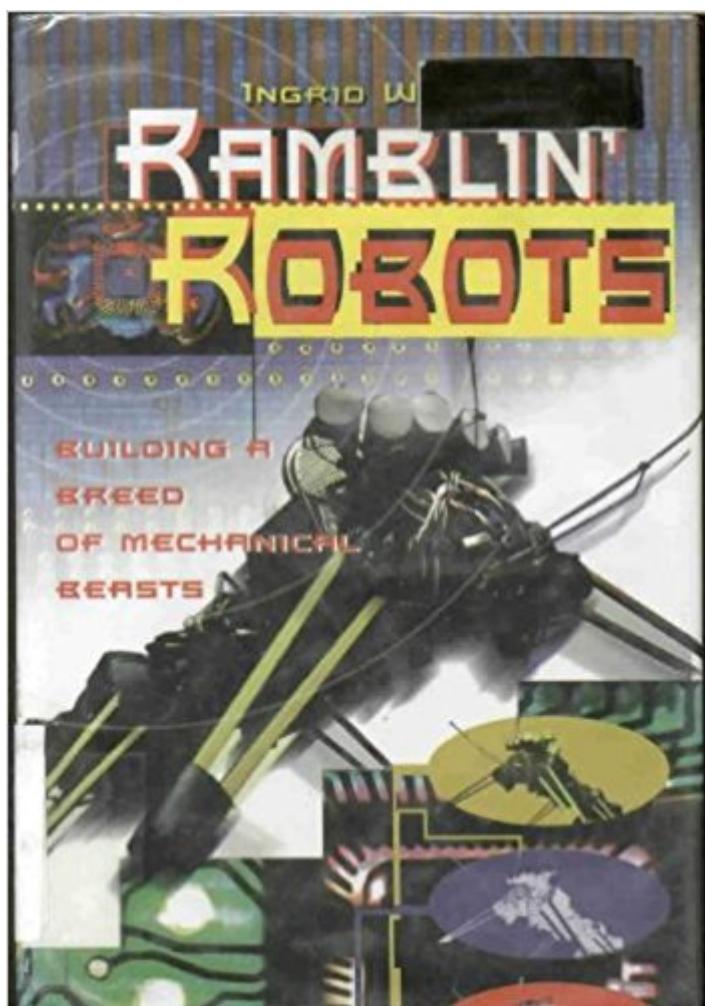


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Ramblin' Robots (Venture Books--Science)



Synopsis

Examines the evolution of robotics and the efforts of scientists to develop robots with the abilities of various animals.

Book Information

Series: Venture Books--Science

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Customer Reviews

Grade 7 Up. This useful overview focuses on recent attempts to create independent, mobile robots. The first chapters offer a definition and brief history of robotics, followed by a survey of some working robots, all of which are limited to specific tasks or require human guidance. Most of the book concentrates on the challenges involved in making robots that can simulate human and animal behavior. Wickelgren does an excellent job of explaining the obstacles faced by scientists and the various ways they have tried to overcome them. She neatly ties in the importance of biology to the mechanics of robotics, noting how crucial the study of animal movement and sensation has been to the field. The writing is clear and well organized, with occasional injections of humor. Enthusiasm for robotics is gently tempered with reminders of how far away we still are from developing machines that will truly act like humans. The black-and-white photographs are less successful. A few are not clear enough to make out key details, and many robots are described in some depth without an accompanying photo. Ellen Thro's *Robotics* (Facts on File, 1993) has broader coverage, but the writing is less lively. Gloria Skurzynski's *Robots* (S & S, 1990) has much more visual appeal, but less in-depth discussion. With its emphasis on current projects and an engaging text, *Ramblin' Robots* will be a welcome addition to most collections. Steven Engelfried, West Linn Public Library, OR

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Gr. 7^12. Wickelgren's fascinating and enlightening exploration of the history and development of robots will truly excite readers. From the beginning, the goal of roboticists has been to build sophisticated machines to accomplish complex tasks. The downside of this approach is that these robots can deal with only one set of external conditions. If the environment is changed, the robot will probably fail. But 15 years ago, researchers at MIT decided to create a different kind of robot: a "behavior-based" one with several simple computer brains, each based on an animal reflex, such as "lift leg" or "avoid objects." The result was a robot that combined these basic actions into complex behaviors so that it adapted to its environment much more successfully than its predecessors. "Reflexive robots" have since altered the landscape of robotics: equipped with the most basic animal instincts, they have the potential to reveal, through their reactions to their surroundings, how intelligence evolves. Without oversimplifying, Wickelgren outlines the background and issues of this intriguing area in terms the layperson can understand, using helpful analogies and illustrations to demonstrate difficult concepts. If they can get by the book's dull appearance, YAs will be hooked by the author's clear, enthusiastic approach. A natural resource for research reports, the book will undoubtedly spur some to investigate this fast-developing field more deeply. Black-and-white photos; glossary; endnotes; suggested reading list. Laura Tillotson

When I first picked up this book I had only a minor interest in robotics. It was very readable and made the whole subject seem exciting. It has inspired me to try to get involved in the robotics club at my high school and one day I may even have a robot of my own!

The author says that the book is geared towards 7th-12th graders, but the book is far more basic than that. If you don't know a thing about robots or robotics, or would like to interest a child in robotics - this would be a good book to get. If you already know about robotics, and are pursuing it, this would not be a good purchase. The book has no how-to information, only what the robot does. The information in the book is most often a picture and name of a robot, who it was built by, what the robot does, and what sensors it uses. I already knew about every mentioned robot, before I purchased the book just by surfing the internet.

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