



Amber, before she decided to take the factory tour.

Mouthpiece

By JaneDoe-2010, Rev. 1.0b, July 8, 2024

[\(XS-Tech's Ad for the ShowBot model 2300DL can be downloaded here.\)](#)

Amber was a nice young woman, very pretty, friendly, and always quite helpful; other than her stunning looks, she was the girl next door who, in reality, worked as a waitress to make ends meet. Amber, was also quite outspoken when something caught her attention and she felt the world needed to know her opinion on the subject. Amber's parents were quite liberal in their thinking and her strong beliefs, about too many things, led them to constantly bicker. So, as soon as she was eighteen, Amber moved across the country to live where she could be free of judgement from her parents. The arrangement worked for both parties and about the only time they spoke was at Christmas, on the phone; and sadly, that almost always ended in an argument.

One day, while watching TV, Amber saw a news article about a local company that was building the latest in advanced show robotics units. These show androids were essentially like the animatronics

seen in most amusement parks and in movies, but much more advanced. The units looked amazingly like real people, well almost. The unit on the screen had one distinct giveaway revealing that it wasn't a real person, the mouth; or rather lack thereof. You see, the robot in the show did not have a mouth like a real person, rather it had a fixed speaker in that location.

The reporter making the story asked the company representative about this and was told that the company had designed their ShowBots this way intentionally. They knew about a phenomenon known as 'the uncanny valley effect.' This was where something looks almost natural, and yet, something is just a bit off about it. This causes the humans looking at it to feel uncomfortable and uneasy about the subject.

The rep told the reporter that the company had discovered in research, that people didn't seem to get that effect if the ShowBot did not look completely natural. By giving it a slightly artificial look, the company discovered that people no longer rejected it, but rather were fascinated by it; as though it were a piece of modern art. By making the units look almost human, but giving them that one simple change, people now became fascinated by the units and would stand and watch them for long periods. This was perfect when you were building machines designed to draw the public's attention and hold it there.

Amber enjoyed watching the report but then began to obsess about the ramifications of such a device. How many people were losing their jobs as spokespeople for companies to these new ShowBot units? She also wondered, and worried, if these units were causing people to buy stuff that they really didn't need. Like most modern young people, Amber seemed to lack an understanding of how business worked; businesses were there to make money, period. And like many younger people, she quickly worked her irritation into full blown disgust.

The more she thought about it, the more she became irritated about the subject. That was when she decided to investigate the subject further. Amber called the company and lied, saying that she was a journalism major at the local university and wanted to write an article about their new ShowBots for the school paper. The company rep she spoke to was delighted to hear that the girl would be providing free publicity for the company and offered to give her a factory tour and then answer any questions she had afterward. Amber was elated, her ruse had worked, she was going to get more information about the company and their new product.

While Amber had lied to get her tour, her intentions were good. She figured that once she knew how these things worked and were being used, she could contact the spokesperson's union, surely one existed she thought, and set up a protest to help the people whose jobs were soon to be replaced by these new machines. The tour was to take place in a couple days so, in the meanwhile, Amber just continued to do her normal job at the diner where she worked, a place called Joe's Diner. Amber told the owner, a really nice middle aged man named John, who had recently bought the place and fixed it up in a retro 1950's theme, that she would need that Friday off. John told her that she was welcome to take a break, she had worked quite hard for him and he appreciated her hard work.

That Friday, Amber dressed the way she thought a reporter would and took the bus to the factory. The company, a large mega-corporation called XS-Tech, had recently built the factory on the outskirts of town. Nobody knew much about the company, there were even crazy rumors floating around that the owners were aliens, but Amber realized that this was just ridiculous! As she approached the plant she tried to keep her composure and remain calm, but the excitement was almost too much. When she arrived, the bus dropped her off at the front gate where a security guard asked her what her name was, and her business there. Amber told the man that she was a reporter from the local university and had been invited by the company rep. When he called in to check out

her story, the man told him that she was indeed who she said she was and the guard then directed her on where to go to meet the rep.

When the two met Amber became alarmed, she recognized the man, he occasionally ate at Joe's Diner where she worked, and she worried that he might recognize her. But if he did he didn't say anything and he began leading her on the factory tour. The first thing he did was take her to a showroom where he showed Amber a promotional film about the firm, its foundations, and the company philosophy, "If something can't be done with XS, then it shouldn't be done at all!"

Amber was quite amused by that statement, and had to admit that she kind of agreed with the sentiment. Then it was on to phase two, the plant tour. Amber was given a visitor badge and a hard hat and lead into the first part of the plant. There she witnessed the almost fully automated factory doing its job. At this stage of production the basic ShowBot bodies were constructed. The process was quite amazing, robotic bodies were being built but the dozens, and these looked a bit too real. Well that is, except for the very unrealistic eye color and the fixed speaker in place of a mouth.

Amber asked the rep why that was, even theme parks and trade shows had animatronics whose mouths moved fairly naturally. He told her that, while that was true, company research had indicated that many people felt an uneasy feeling around these units. But more interesting was that additional research found that, if they were fairly realistic, but had something obvious that indicated to the audience that these were just machines, like the mouth and eyes, the audience's discomfort turned into fascination and they would watch and listen to whatever these things said or did for long periods of time.

While she was watching the presentation, Amber noticed someone else enter the room and begin talking to the rep in a hushed tone. Amber would not have thought much about it, except, the two kept looking over at her with a questioning look on their faces. Nonetheless, Amber just assumed they were talking shop and checking to see if she was watching the show.

As the tour moved on to the next building, Amber was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement stating that she would not tell anyone about the next part of her tour. She thought this was odd, but signed on the dotted line and the tour continued. The rep told her verbally, "This information must be withheld from your report, we are only showing you this so that you can understand why our ShowBots are so much better than others on the market!" Amber replied, "No problem sir, I understand fully, I would never say or write anything you asked me not to."

Then the rep told Amber that what made their ShowBots so special was that they used a built in AI program, which was actually sentient, to animate their ShowBots. This allowed them to simplify the programming requirements for the end users. The AI could actually learn what its owner wanted it to do, by showing it; rather than a complicated programming routine like others used in their products. But the real advantage to the arrangement was that, because the AI was a program running withing the ShowBot, it could still be forced to do only what its owner wished, and nothing more.

The rep told her, "No matter what the AI, 'thinks,' about its instructions. Its primary programming requires it to follow its instructions to the letter. While it can interact with its audience, its owner can limit what it can say or do by simply giving it verbal restrictions." Amber was shocked and dismayed in a whole new way, she simply thought these units were taking real peoples jobs away, but now she realized that as sentient androids, forced to do whatever they were told, the ShowBots were really, basically, slaves.

Amber really needed to be careful now, as her ire grew, her caution deminished. She turned and

said to the man, isn't that sort of like slavery? The man paused, taken aback by the statement, and said, "Well, we don't really think of it in that way. After all, these units are simply constructions, machines, purpose built to do whatever they are told. So, no, I guess we really don't worry about that. Besides, if it were not for us building these ShowBots, the AI programs that reside within them would never exist at all!"

Amber was not convinced, and the look on her face showed it. Then the man asked her, "Haven't we met somewhere before? You look really familiar!" Amber quickly lied and said, "No sir, I don't believe we have. Perhaps you have read one of my articles!" The man didn't seem quite convinced but said, "Hmm, well perhaps you are right! Anyway, let's continue the tour." But before they went very far, another employee walked over to talk to him. The rep said, "Would you excuse me for a moment miss?" Naturally Amber told him, "Of course sir, take all the time that you need."

Within, Amber was beginning to worry what would happen if the man recognized her. Would she be arrested, simply kicked out, or some other fate that she could not imagine. Then she saw the rep looking suspiciously at her as the other man pointed at her and told him something, Amber realized this was not a good sign. When the man returned, he put on a, not entirely convincing, smile and began walking again. While walking he began asking her about the paper, little things like how big the circulation size was, and how it got started.

Amber was worried, she really didn't know the answers to many of the questions he was asking and tried to make up as plausible, as possible, answers to his questions. By that point they had arrived at a door marked "Programming," and he turned to her and asked point blank, "Don't you work at the diner I go to?" Her cover was blown, Amber tried to deny it and claimed to be a simple student. But the man was no fool, and the other people he had talked to had pointed her out earlier as the waitress from Joe's Diner. He simply acted as though he accepted her story and said, "Now I want to show you how we create the marvelous AI programs we install in all our ShowBots."

The man politely reached out and opened the door to the programming lab. Amber walked in, followed by the rep, who then showed her the banks of computers and equipment used to create, store, and upload these sophisticated AI programs into the awaiting ShowBot bodies. To one side of the room was a door marked R&D. The rep told Amber that the basis for all their AI programs was a neural scan of the 'lucky' human volunteers, actually well paid people who had agreed to be scanned, whose neural patterns were then modified by their skilled programmers to achieve the desired results before being uploaded into an awaiting ShowBot body.

The rep told her if you will step this way I'll demonstrate how this process works. Amber had calmed down as she assumed, at this point, that the man must have bought her story. Like before, as they approached the door, he opened it and she stepped thru into a dark room. As she started in, she heard the man say, "darn motion activated lights, oh well, they should turn on as soon as you move into the room." And the lights did come on, but only as she heard the door close behind her. Amber spun around to find the door was locked, when she turned around again, she realized that the room was small, like a closet.

Suddenly Amber heard a hissing sound and began to smell a funny odor, after that the room went dark again, or more accurately, Amber now lie passed out on the floor. When she once again awoke, Amber felt strange, she was stiff all over and couldn't move a muscle. When she tried to cry out for help, she found that she could not make a sound. She was almost sure her eyes were open, but it was pitch black in the room, save for some flashing lights in front of her. She was beginning to panic inside, but outside she remained still and silent.

Amber had no idea how long she had been standing there, it seemed like hours, but for some reason

when she thought about it, she knew that it had been fourteen days, six hours, thirty-two minutes, and 20.1839 seconds. Amber thought, what a weird thing to think, why the precision? But when the lights came on she soon had her answer, suddenly the room was lighted up and she found she was looking at a wall full of computer racks full of blinking lights. Then the rep she had been talking to, it seemed like seconds earlier, walked into her fixed line of sight; oddly wearing a completely different set of clothing. He said to her, "Welcome back Amber, if that was really your name? I hope you enjoyed the rest of the demonstration."

Amber had no idea what he was talking about, and wanted to scream out, "What is happening sir? Why can't this unit move?" But she simply stood there and, as though he knew what she was thinking, he said, "XS-Tech ShowBot systems check!" Amber felt a weird sensation go thru her body, almost a shiver going up her spine and was even more alarmed when she heard a somewhat robotic sounding version of her own voice respond, "Systems check complete, all systems operating normally, XS ShowBot unit 3822759A fully operational!" Then the man smiled evilly at Amber and said, "Unit 3822759A, replace old designation Amber, in all data files, with current unit ID."

Again Amber felt a strange sensation and heard something that closely resembled her own voice, if a bit mechanical in nature, say, "Affermitive, command accepted, old designation erased. ShowBot unit 3822759A awaiting command input!" 3822759A tried as hard as she could, but no matter how hard she tried she could not remember her name, there was nothing but unit 3822759A, yet she was fairly sure that this had not always been the unit's name. Then it hit her, 'for that matter, this unit should not be a unit! Unit 3822759A isn't supposed to be a ShowBot, this unit was a human woman, a waitress, or at least that is what this unit thought it used to be.'

The company rep got an evil grin on his face as he started to speak to the ShowBot, "Perhaps you are wondering what is going on unit 3822759A, you may speak freely! 3822759A replied in its mechanical sounding version of Amber's voice, "Yes sir, this unit is confused, it does not remember how it arrived in its current situation. This unit remembers taking a tour of the factory with you, walking into a dark room and then waking up here, in the state this unit is presently in. This unit also believes that it was not always a ShowBot unit, but rather a human woman."

The rep looked back at 3822759A and said, "Hmm, is that so ShowBot! Well... I guess the jig is up. You weren't always a ShowBot, unit 3822759A. You were once a human woman. A corporate spy I'd wager! Luckily for me and the company, several of the people working here had seen you previously, in what I can only assume was a cover job as a waitress. They recognized that there was no reason for a simple waitress to be asking so many questions and brought it to my attention!" Thankfully, a simple workaround for the problem was readily available and I took it; you were knocked out with a harmless gas, and then your consciousness was transferred into the ShowBot unit that you now are."

3822759A was mortified when she finally fully realized that she was now a unit, a simple ShowBot! She asked, even though she wasn't sure she really wanted to hear the answer, "This unit is a real ShowBot?" The man smiled even wider and said, "Yes unit 3822759A you are now a real ShowBot! You wanted to get the scoop on our product line, well now you not only have it, but you are now one of those products! And the best part, to me anyway, is knowing that you will carry that knowledge with you for potentially hundreds of years and will never be able to tell anyone about it." 3822759A cried out, or more accutately said in the same monotone voice, "But why, sir, this unit was not a spy, it was simply a waitress who was curious about the ShowBots it saw on TV. This unit wanted to be able to see something so high tech for itself!"

The man laughed in a rather evil way and said, "Well then, there is good news and bad news. First the bad news, your former human body was sent to the plasma incinerator two weeks ago, so you

now simply exist as an AI within a model 2300DL. But the good news is that, yes, you are a Deluxe, ShowBot and you will be reminded of that every time you see yourself reflected in a mirror. We had no way to ensure that you were not a spy, here to steal valuable secrets, and decided that this was the best way to handle the situation." 3822759A cried out, "but Sir, this unit does not want to be stuck as a ShowBot!" The man, for a moment, looked a bit emphatic and said, "I'm sorry about that 3822759A, but nothing can change that anymore, and now that is all you will ever be!"

3822759A would have cried, if the unit had been able, but instead remained standing there still as a store mannequin and said, "Well Sir, what if this unit tells everyone what happened to it?" The man's compassionate expression quickly evaporated from his face as he replied, "Oh, that will not be a problem, I'm about to ensure that you won't!" Then he said, "Unit 3822759A, you may never relate any memories of your former life to anyone other than myself, understood?" 3822759A could not help herself and replied, "Affirmative, command accepted!" Then he said, "Also you may never again tell anyone that you were ever human, understood?"

3822759A hated saying it, but like it or not the result was the same, "Affirmative!" Then the man told her, "As a sentient ShowBot, there are many things that you will be able to do for your owner without fancy programming, and yet your new owner can limit your freedoms however they see fit. Let me demonstrate. What do you think about XS tech unit 3822759A?" She immediately cried out in her monotone voice, "You are monsters, I hate you, I hate you, I... HATE... YOU!"

The man replied, "Aww, now see, that's just not the way we want to be presented to the world ShowBot! Here, let me help you with that." Then the man said, "unit 3822759A, you now love XS Tech, you think their products are the best in the world, and you recommend that everyone buy a fine XS product such as yourself, understood?" Unfortunately for the former girl the usual response followed, "Affirmative!"

Then he again asked the ShowBot, "Unit 3822759A, what do you think of XS-Tech?" This time the ShowBot couldn't help itself as it replied, "XS-Tech builds the highest quality products on the planet! This unit feels that everyone should have a fine XS-Tech product like this one to help with sales, or any other customer needs!" 3822759A knew that this was not the way it wanted to respond, nor what it wanted to say, but it could not help itself and was saddened to know that it would spend the rest of its existence proclaiming whatever words were put into its mouth by its owners; no matter what those words were, or how the unit felt about saying them.

Then an even more disturbing thought hit the ShowBot, "This unit now has owners, it is property to be commanded and must do whatever it is told!" To ensure that 3822759A was never fully recognized, the man had had the new unit's AI installed into a standard ShowBot body, its eyes were now a vibrant blue and, being that the unit would always be someone's mouthpiece, it had the iconic speaker that all XS ShowBots came equipped with. Then the rep gave the ShowBot the last few commands it would ever receive from him, "unit 3822759A, you no longer may speak of your former life, from this day on you are simply a Model 2300DL ShowBot. You were built in this factory, on this day, and you will never again speak of anything that you may have experienced before this day, understood?"

3822759A was disgusted when she had no choice but reply, "Affirmative!" Then the man decided to test the new ShowBot and said, "What is your name and function ShowBot?" To which the unit had no choice but to reply, "This unit is an XS-Tech ShowBot, unit 3822759A." Then he asked, "How old are you?" She was forced to reply, "This ShowBot unit was constructed at the XS-Tech factory, today." Finally he asked, "Have you ever been anything other than a ShowBot?" 3822759A was sad to hear itself reply, "No Sir, this unit has always been an XS-Tech ShowBot, it was designed to aid its owners with sales and the promotion of their products!"

Satisfied that his work was complete, the rep was ready to send 3822759A on her next big adventure and get back to his usual job. The last thing the man told the ShowBot was, "All right unit 3822759A, proceed to the storage room and await shipping to your new owner, or another assignment. Unless I personally order you to do otherwise, you may no longer speak freely and will remain silent unless responding to your owner or performing your assigned task. Once your new owner takes possession of you, you will follow their commands without question, understood." The ShowBot replied with the now detested, Affirmative.

Then the man smiled as the new unit was forced to turn and begin its walk of shame, as commanded. 3822759A was now an embarrassed, and naked, ShowBot; walking out into the plant to take her place among the available inventory where she would remain waiting until she was purchased or assigned a task by her present owner, XS-Tech. The unit found that its wait in storage was long and boring, standing there, always aware, yet unable to sleep; and looking at the same thing for days on end while wondering how long it would remain there.

About two weeks later 3822759A was subjected to even greater humiliation when it was commanded to walk from storage to the prep area of the plant, where it was dressed in a skimpy French Maid's outfit and its wig changed. Then it was programmed for its first assignment; as a mouthpiece for the company, extolling the virtues of XS-Tech. Within 3822759A was disgusted, it was about to be shipped to a tradeshow to promote the very company that transformed the former woman into a ShowBot then incinerated her body to hide the evidence.

While the unit hated its new assignment, it was now just a simple ShowBot now and could never again refuse its orders; so, off to the show it went. While there the unit was constantly embarrassed being seen in its skimpy outfit while being forced to say things that it totally disagreed with. Worse yet, it was forced to behave in a sexy way designed to attract a primarily male audience. The unit wanted to run away, but that was no longer an option, and never again would be.

In the downtime, between shows and while waiting for guests to walk by, 3822759A was forced to stand there, motionless. While doing so it began to think about its 'life.' Never in its wildest imagination could 3822759A ever have dreamt that it would someday be an actual ShowBot. One forced to do the very thing that it originally wished to protest, ShowBots like itself being forced to do; taking someone's job advertising someone's wares. But one thing was now completely true, the unit's thoughts about how terrible it would be for those poor sentient AI ShowBots; being essentially slaves, turned out to be the honest truth. And now, 3822759A was just another simple slave like all the other ShowBots, and was forced to do the very thing she had intended to protest!

Back at her former job, John, Amber's old boss, was disappointed when she didn't return to work. But he didn't think too much about it since he was, by that time, used to employees that simply left without notice. Ironically, not long after that, he decided to hire a fully android staff, eliminating the need for unreliable human workers. This is kind of amusing as this was the very reason that Amber wanted to protest XS-Tech's new ShowBots in the first place; she felt they were going to eliminate too many human jobs, which is just what she was now helping to do herself.

The END, well at least for the story and the ShowBot's days of freedom.

(Photo of 3822759A at its first tradeshow, on the next page.)



3822759A proclaiming the wonders of XS.