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Get Ready! The Robots Are Coming

THE VOICE on the phone said: "I am a computer. I want to ask you a few simple questions." It sounded like a human being but how could one question the veracity of a stranger — even a computer?

Interviews by computers show where the world is headed. We are becoming displaced by robots, whether we like it or not.

Some people don't like it and refuse to speak to non-human devices. For years we have used a telephone answering recorder but about half of the callers hang up without speaking.

Some time ago I needed certain information from a specialist at Oklahoma State University. Unable to locate him I asked Charles Voyles, head of agricultural information, for assistance.

An hour or so later Voyles reported that he had located the professor, interviewed him by phone and taped his responses. Voyles then played his tape by long distance to my tape recorder.

Much of what we do is accomplished through similar remoteness.

A recent estimate says the TV is turned on in the home for 6 hours and 48 minutes per day, on the average. This could increase if predictions in Fortune magazine materialize (Nov. 14, 1983).

"At long last, after years of study and product testing, the business of providing computerized services in the home finally is bursting to life across the U.S.," Martin Mayer writes. "Publishers, banks and retailers are about to begin selling services that enable people to make purchases, check bank balances, even buy and sell stocks — all without leaving home or talking to a human."

For a monthly fee it appears that you will be able to get your TV to do things for you, giving it new usefulness.

Devices ready to come onto the market might not look like metallic humanoid beings, as we tend to visualize robots, but they perform functions ordinarily done by people in factories, offices and other workplaces. Battelle Memorial Institute

says robots may plant and harvest farm fields in the next century.

Japan leads the world in building and using robots but experts say that by 1995 some 315,000 robots will be in use in the United States, many of them helping to make more robots.

Difficulties of sending people on long journeys into space apparently have been solved by sending robots instead. They can observe, make tests and send reports back to earth.

Some robots act like humans. In August a Detroit jury awarded \$10 million to the family of an auto worker who was killed by a robot arm as he tried to do the machine's job himself.

In Florida a Vietnam veteran confined to a wheelchair pulled out a pistol and fired six times at an automated bank teller when the machine swallowed his plastic bank card and refused to give him the money he wanted.

It looks like robots may be liable for the way they treat people, but it is against the law to shoot a robot.