

FOR THE READER

Welcome to The Fiction Laboratory. This is a companion to the novella, not a replacement for it, and no substitute for actually reading the book. Its whole job is to make the reading richer: to show you the world *All Systems Red* came out of, the argument hiding under the mystery, and the real science the story is built on and, in a few places, bends.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Read the companion alongside the book, in whatever order suits you. Four short sections come with it:

- **The Author.** Who Martha Wells is, and how an anthropology degree produced a narrator who watches humans for a living and is not one.
- **The Moment.** What was happening in 2017, mostly at work, that made a story about a rented security guard feel less like the future than like a description.
- **The Real Subject.** What the story is actually about, and why it refuses the ending you are expecting.
- **The Science.** The biology and computer science inside the novella: what it takes to build something half alive, where the engineering holds up, where it breaks, and what the book may or may not have set loose in the real world.

One rule, and it is the whole point: **do not take our word for any of it.** Every claim in here is built on real research, and most of the sources are free. If something surprises you, or you think we have it wrong, every source is listed in Sources and Additional Resources, which came with this packet. Go check.

Two things worth knowing before you start. Murderbot is called “it” throughout, including by itself, and that is deliberate rather than an insult; the

book has reasons and wants you to notice them. And the science here is unusually live: some of it was published after the novella, and some will have moved by the time you read this. That is not a flaw. It is the most interesting thing about studying a book this recent.

When you finish the novella, there is a short quiz. It draws on both the story and this companion, so read both.