



# Kicking It With Robots

RoboCup and the new Robots Guide are gateways to the wonderful world of robots

**I**n July of 2010, I traveled to Singapore to take care of my then 6-year-old son Henry while his mother attended an academic conference. But I was really there for the robots.

IEEE Spectrum's digital product manager, Erico Guizzo, was our robotics editor at the time. We had just combined forces with robot blogger *par excellence* and now *Spectrum* senior editor Evan "BotJunkie" Ackerman to supercharge our first and most successful blog, Automaton. When I told Guizzo I was going to be in Singapore, he told me that RoboCup, an international robot soccer competition, was going on at the same time. So of course we wrangled a press pass for me and my plus one.

I brought Henry and a video camera to capture the bustling bots and their handlers. Guizzo told me that videos of robots flailing at balls would do boffo Web traffic, so I was as excited as my first grader (okay, more excited) to be in a convention center filled with robots and teams of engineers toiling away on the sidelines to make adjustments and repairs and talk with each other and us about their creations.

Even better than the large humanoid robots lurching around like zombies and the smaller, wheeled bots scurrying to and fro were the humans who tended to them. They exuded the kind of joy that comes with working together to build cool stuff, and it was infectious. On page 40 of this issue, Peter Stone—past president of the RoboCup Federation, professor in the computer science department of the University of Texas at Austin, and executive director of Sony AI America—captures some of that unbridled enthusiasm and gives us the history of the event. To go along with his story, we include action shots taken at various RoboCups throughout the 25 years of the event. You can check out this year's RoboCup com-



petitions going on 6–9 July at the University of Bordeaux, in Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France.

Earlier in 2010, the same year as my first RoboCup, Apple introduced what was in part pitched as the future of magazines: the iPad. Guizzo and photography director Randi Klett instantly grokked the possibilities of the format and the new sort of tactile interactivity (ah, the swipe!) to showcase the coolest robots they could find. Channeling the same spirit I experienced in Singapore, Guizzo, Klett, and the app-maker Tendigi launched the Robots app in 2012. It was an instant hit, with more than 1.3 million downloads.

To reach new audiences on other devices beyond the iOS platform, we ported Robots from appworld to the Web. With the help of founding sponsors—including the IEEE Robotics and Automation Society and Walt Disney Imagineering—and the support of the IEEE Foundation, the Robots site launched in 2018 and quickly found a following among STEM educators, students, roboticists, and the general public.

By 2022 it was clear that the site, whose basic design had not changed in years, needed a reboot. We gave it a new name and URL to make it easy for more people to find: RobotsGuide.com. And with the help of Pentagram, the design consultancy that reimagined *Spectrum*'s print magazine and website in 2021, in collaboration with Standard, a design and technology studio, we built the site as a modern, fully responsive Web app.

Featuring almost 250 of the world's most advanced and influential robots, hundreds of photos and videos, detailed specs, 360-degree interactives, games, user ratings, educational content, and robot news from around the world, the Robots Guide helps everyone learn more about robotics. ■