



"Always Interesting" AI in the news

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The Movie, *I, Robot*, Meets The Company, iRobot. W. David Gardner. *TechWeb News*. June 30, 2004 (www.techweb.com). "[iRobot Chairman Helen] Greiner believes the movie may influence a new generation to become interested in robotics much like the *Star Wars* movies influenced her. She said the R2D2 robot's humanlike characteristics in *Star Wars* had an impact on her when she saw the movie as a schoolgirl on Long Island. She went on to MIT where she earned undergraduate and graduate degrees in mechanical engineering, electrical engineering and computer science. 'It takes all three (disciplines) and they must all come together in robotics,' she said"

DARPA Tech Chief Envisions the Future—Sci-fi Inspires Brachman to Use Computers in Creative Ways. Frank Tiboni. *Federal Computer Week*. April 19, 2004 (www.fcw.com). "Ron Brachman's curiosity about robots programmed to think on their own dates back to his childhood in New Jersey. It was the 1960s, *Star Trek* first appeared on television and putting a man on the moon became a remarkable reality. When he was in high school, Brachman and his father, an electrical engineer, built a robot equipped with a light and photo sensor that allowed it to follow a taped line on the floor of his basement, even in darkness. He became a science-fiction aficionado, watching Mr. Spock and *The Twilight Zone*. ... Now Brachman works at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency as director of its Information Processing Technology Office, where he oversees programs that study and develop cognitive computing. He wants to solve the same problem he pondered as a teenager watching *Star Trek*—how to get people and computers to collaborate."

Rise of the Machines: The Bionic Engineer—Driving School on Mars. Dan Cray. *Time Magazine*. June 14, 2004 (www.time.com). "Television critics will tell you that *The Bionic Woman* was just another cheesy '70s sci-fi series, but for Ayanna Howard it was a springboard to a career. When she was 12 years old, she became so captivated by the show's cyborg premise that she started reading books that reaffirmed the concept of integrating machines with humans. A thousand reruns and an electrical-engineering Ph.D. later, she's creating robots that think like humans for NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory."

Robots to the Rescue. Dave Scheiber. *St.*

This eclectic keepsake provides a sampling of what can be found (with links to the full articles) on the AI Topics web site. Please keep in mind that (1) the mere mention of anything here does not imply any endorsement whatsoever; (2) the excerpt might not reflect the overall tenor of the article; (3) although the articles were initially available online and without charge, few things that good last forever; and (4) the AI in the News collection—updated, hyperlinked, and archived—can be found by going to www.aaai.org/aitopics/html/current.html.

—Jon Glick, Webmaster, AI Topics

Petersburg Times. March 2, 2003 (www.sp-times.com). "In the war on terror, University of South Florida engineering professor Robin Murphy finds herself a pioneer on the front line with a new kind of soldier: the search-and-rescue robot. ... As a professor of human-robotic interaction and head of CRASAR, Murphy has led her team of students to worldwide recognition as leaders in the field. ... Her father was a mechanical engineer, and growing up in Mobile, Alabama, Murphy took notice: 'That's what I always wanted to be.' She immersed herself in science fiction, a passion that one day would lead her to name her robots after female science-fiction writers. 'I never really identified with the heroes, the ones who fought all the space wars,' she says. 'I always thought the scientists who built things for these guys to go and do great things were far more interesting.'"

Standing on Principal. Alan Taylor. *Sunday Herald*. January 18, 2004 (www.sundayherald.com). "Back in the mid-1970s, Timothy O'Shea had a vision of the future which he has lived to see come to pass. In those far off days he was based at the University of Edinburgh, of which he is presently Principal, in the department of artificial intelligence. 'People just thought we were crazy,' he says. He is not exaggerating. The way he and his colleagues were portrayed in the media you might have thought Dr. Who had been given an academic chair with Batman and Robin as research students. 'And now,' says O'Shea, resisting the urge to indulge in smugness, 'a lot of the stuff we

thought of as being crazy then is there in your mobile phone'. ... O'Shea, however, was initially inspired by science fiction, which he read voraciously as a boy. 'One of the interesting things about good science fiction writers - the really good ones, like H. G. Wells and Arthur C Clarke—is that they are actually quite good at predicting the future. And not just in computing. Quite a lot of technological inventions were predicted by those sort of writers. In terms of the capabilities that we get in modern computers, they could see some of that. What I find so interesting is that we start with these ideas which we take to be fantastic and then people just get used to them.'"

A Conversation with Cynthia Breazeal: A Passion to Build a Better Robot, One with Social Skills and a Smile. Claudia Dreifus. *The New York Times*. June 10, 2003 (www.nytimes.com). "Dr. Cynthia L. Breazeal of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is famous for her robots, not just because they are programmed to perform specific tasks, but because they seem to have emotional as well as physical reactions to the world around them. ... Q. What is the root of your passion for robots? A. For me, as for many of us who do robotics, I think it is science fiction. My most memorable science fiction experience was *Star Wars* and seeing R2D2 and C3PO. I fell in love with those robots. Q. R2D2 and C3PO were good robots, friendly. But so many of the robots of science fiction are either hostile, or at least misunderstood, like Frankenstein's monster and HAL of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Why have fictional robots been so menacing? A. We have a lot of suspicion of robots in the West. But if you look cross-culturally, that isn't true. In Japan, in their science fiction, robots are seen as good. They have Astro Boy, this character they've fallen in love with and he's fundamentally good, always there to help people. In a lot of Western science fiction, you need some form of conflict, whether it's aliens or robots. I think in Western culture, being more suspicious of science, and hubris, you'll see a lot of fear of creating something that goes out of control. Also a lot of Western sci-fi books and movies are about the basic notion of taking responsibility for what you create. If you're talking about creating any new technology, this is always an issue."