"Always Interesting" AI in the news

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– Jon Glick, Webmaster, AI TOPICS

Scientists Look at Promise, Peril of Technology. Mike O'Sullivan. *VOA News*. April 12, 2006 (www.voanews.com). "*Scientists meeting in Los Angeles say technology offers the hope of a better world, but presents hazards if mishandled. ... [T]he University of Southern California and the journal 'Science' convened a panel of scientific innovators to look at the promise and the perils of technology.*—There are dangers in a democracy when an ill-informed citizenry must make policy decisions relating to medicine, the environment, or other branches of science, says John Seely Brown, the former chief scientist for the Xerox Corporation. 'You've got to ask, do we now have the scientific literacy in the public to be able to have informed dialogues about what these issues are really going to mean to civilization, to mankind itself,' he said. 'If we don't have the right kind of scientific literacy, all scientific debate becomes ideological.' The panelists say promoting scientific literacy is a challenge but a necessary goal, as new technologies change our society. ... Raymond Kurzweil is a researcher in the field of artificial intelligence. ... He says technology, however, is a balance between promise and peril. 'The same knowledge and tools that will enable scientists to make great strides in cancer and heart disease can also empower a bio-terrorist to create a bio-engineered biological virus that would be much deadlier than an atomic bomb,' he added."

Metro News Column. Mercedes Olivera. *The Dallas Morning News*. May 6, 2006 (www.dallasnews.com). "The first time 11-year-old Christian Gomez saw a real robot, it was two months ago at NASA's Johnson Space Center. He was impressed. But he decided he doesn't trust robots. 'Someday they're going to build them with artificial intelligence, and terrorists might take control of them and use them to hurt us,' he said this week. It's a very precocious observation. But his reaction about the trip to NASA was very typical: 'It was the most important thing I've ever done.' That's how the rest of the 11 students from Obadiah Knight Elementary School also felt about the annual field trip to Houston. ... It was the high point in the school year for the students who are in the school's talented and gifted program and who had been studying a space-centered curriculum. ... For the past 12 years, Southwest Airlines has funded the trip to help students see firsthand the wonders of science."

Curriculum—Fascinating, fun and, yes, that's science. Deedee Cuddihy. *TES—The Times Educational Supplement*. February 24, 2006 (www.tes.co.uk). "Forget about the facts; concentrate on asking questions. That's the philosophy behind the new £1 million Connect science and technology gallery. Opened just last week, with the help of National Museums of Scotland funds and a gaggle of sponsors, the gallery at the Royal Museum offers a wealth of interactive, visually-stunning and unique displays. ... The exhibition space has been divided into five main subject areas covering transport (Move It!), artificial intelligence (Robots), cloning (Me2), space travel (Blast Off!) and energy (Power Up). Each subject area is designed around a number of significant museum objects, complemented by a range of specially designed interactives."

Inside MIT's Surprising Museum. Kara Peters. *AmericanHeritage.com*. March 24, 2006 (www.americanheritage.com). "History-hungry visitors to Boston may cross the Charles River to stroll through Harvard Yard, but they don't often visit MIT. The university synonymous with America's technological forward march remains stubbornly identified with the future, not the past. But a visit to the sorely underappreciated MIT Museum offers a different perspective. ... Some of the museum's other treasures include ... a riveting robotics exhibit that affords visitors a glimpse of some of the world's most significant research in artificial intelligence. The museum's directors have an ambitious five-year plan to establish it as a gateway to MIT. This will mean moving to a larger facility, continuing to engage the community with lectures and forums on pressing issues in science and technology, and mounting new exhibits. ... 'When you come here, you're part of a fairly unusual space in a cultural sense, but you're also part of an experiment, an experiment in how best to communicate the science, technology, history, social, and cultural significance of scientific research,' [Deborah] Douglas says."

Get your geek on. Ethan Gilsdorf. *The Boston Globe*. February 14, 2006 (www.boston.com). "'Popular culture is a great way for getting people interested in science,' says Ed Rodley, a [Boston] Museum of Science curator. 'There's a whole generation of roboticists who saw "2001: A Space Odyssey" and wanted to do artificial intelligence. Ten years behind them are "Star Wars" fans.' Last year, the museum's 'Lord of the Rings' exhibit was a huge hit. The current show 'Star Wars: Where Science Meets Imagination' set a record, attracting 15,193 visitors in one day."

Hollywood Science Gone Bad. David Kushner. *IEEE Spectrum Online*. February 2006 (www.spectrum.ieee.org). "Anyone who chronicles technology for a general audience faces the same challenge — how to make a story interesting and accessible, while getting the science right. ... [Phil] Plait, a fan of old time B-movies like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Forbidden Planet*, is willing to suspend his disbelief for the sake of a good time. 'Movies don't have to be accurate,' he says. 'But if it's just as easy and would make them better, at least try. That way they're not promulgating myths.' Plait says it was just such dismay that inspired him to launch his [Bad Astronomy] site in 1993 while completing a Ph.D. in astronomy at the University of Virginia. ... While *The Core* and *Armageddon* ... rank among Plait's worst ever, Stanley Kubrick's masterpiece *2001: A Space Odyssey*, not surprisingly, tops the list."

Second thoughts about the mission? Leslie Brokaw. *The Boston Globe*. February 19, 2006 (www.boston.com). "Artificial intelligence founding father, MIT professor emeritus, and voice-of-HAL-consultant Marvin Minsky will be taking questions tomorrow after the 7 p.m. screening of Stanley Kubrick's '2001: A Space Odyssey' at the Coolidge Corner Theatre. Back when Kubrick was developing the movie, which was released in 1968, he turned to Minsky for advice on making the talking computer accurate."

Open the pod bay doors, HAL. New Scientist (Issue 2550: page 27). May 4, 2006 (www.newscientist.com). "HAL 9000, the chatty computer from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, has come a step closer to reality. A team crewing NASA's Mars Desert Research Station, a simulated planetary environment in the Utah desert, has been experimenting this week with software that can talk to the crew about the status of their spacecraft's systems. Using wireless headsets, crew members ask the computer questions ...."

