Column

"Always Interesting"
AI in the news

Science Series Scheduled at Westerly Library. *The Westerly Sun.* July 7, 2003 (www.thewesterlysun.com). "The Westerly Public Library and The Westerly Hospital are co-sponsoring a video and discussion series from July 15 through Aug. 19, that will encourage participants to investigate scientific issues that are now in the news.... The library programs are as follows: July 15: Robotics. Are advances in machines the greatest thing since sliced bread, or are we undermining our own future by developing artificial intelligence and robotics technologies?"

Machine vs. Man: Checkmate. Steven Levy. *Newsweek* (available from *MSNBC*). July 21, 2003 (www.msnbc.com). "There's a scary lesson in these contests between the grandmaster and his soulless opponents. We are sharing our world with another species, one that gets smarter and more independent every year. Though some people scoff at the idea that machines could become autonomous, remember it wasn't long ago that almost no one thought a computer would ever beat a human chess champion. Could we ever face anything akin to the horrendous sci-fi nightmares that we see in *Terminator 3?* In the long run, it's well worth worrying about."

Computer Fear Factor in Hollywood. Julie Moran Alterio. *The Journal News.* July 4, 2003. (www.thejournalnews.com). "Here's a quick quiz: As technology advances and computers get smarter, is it possible machines could one day take over the world? Pick an answer: *I think it is likely. *It could happen. *No way. If you're like 46 percent of the people who were asked this question at Blockbuster's Web site, you'll respond, 'It could happen.' If you're worrying that this puts you in the company of crackpots, consider Murray Campbell. The IBM scientist and co-creator of chess-playing supercomputer Deep Blue says it's only a matter of time before his peers create machines smart enough to take over the world. 'There's no fundamental reason there can't be intelligent machines, but I think it's a ways off,' Campbell says."

***Matrix* Plugs In to Modern Anxiety.** Mark Caro. *Chicago Tribune.* May 18, 2003 (www.chicagotribune.com). "'There is this long history of viewing technology and culture...with this view that technology eventually will destroy us,' said Dan Sandin, director of the Electronic Visual-

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ization Laboratory at the University of Illinois at Chicago. These concerns, he added, date to ancient philosophers fearing that the act of writing would destroy the oral tradition. 'Socrates was against it because he thought people would become forgetful.'... 'There's almost a daily onslaught of news in which things that seemed to be science fiction have suddenly become science fact or on the drawing boards, like mergers between electronics and humans, said [Ray] Kurzweil, who runs Kurzweil Technologies in Wellesley, Mass. 'Neural implants for Parkinson's (disease) didn't exist four years ago. When I said four years ago we would have computers powerful enough to emulate the human brain, that was considered very speculative. Now if you talk to mainstream experts, they say of course there will be three-dimensional molecular circuits in about a decade.'"

Rooting for the Robot—In the Battle between Man and Machine, Which Has More Soul? Science Fiction Has Disturbing Answers. Reed Johnson. *Los Angeles Times.* May 25, 2003 (www.calendarlive.com). "Not so long ago, when men were men and machines had cogs, we imagined robots and other mechanical pseudo-humans as our opposites. Now, wired to our home computers, Prozac and Palm Pilots in hand, Botox and breast implants lending a spooky 'perfection' to our fea-

tures as we ponder shuffling our genes in order to build a better kindergartner, we don't seem as fazed by the idea of reprogramming ourselves into something beyond the merely human. No wonder pop culture is increasingly ambivalent about whether people or androids and their ilk deserve to inherit the earth—and which group is ultimately more 'human.'... Are robots and other intelligent machines our enemies, or our alter egos and heirs? *The Matrix Reloaded* likely won't be the last film to raise that uncomfortable question, to make us interrogate our own identities and even wonder if life as a Tin Man or Tin Woman might really be so bad after all—if we only had a heart."

Science Faction. Fiona Williams. *The Sydney Morning Herald.* July 5, 2003 (www.smh.com.au). "Set in the not-too-distant future, sci-fi films offer insights into what the world might be like and what impact evolving technologies might have on daily life, says Dean Economou, chief technologist of the CSIRO's Centre for Networking Technologies for the Information Economy (CENTIE).... '[The films] mean people have a vocabulary about the future and you find a lot of the young researchers were very inspired by *2001, Star Trek, Blade Runner* or *The Matrix.* In a very real way, the technologists are inspired by the sci-fi people and the sci-fi people are similarly inspired by the technologists.'"

The Robot Won't Bite You, Dear. Michelle Delio. *Wired News.* July 15, 2003 (www.wired.com). "Fear and loathing of potentially rabid robots and other supposedly sentient technology is exactly what motivated ArtBots' organizers to host the show, which brought together 23 robots whose talents ranged from creating art to inspiring affection from passersby. 'I thought that there was an awful lot of attention focused on violent, competitive aspects of robotics,' said Douglas Repetto, one of the three curators of *ArtBots: The Robot Talent Show.* 'It's important to me to make the point that a given technology doesn't have a given purpose or application,' Repetto said. 'It's humans who decide what to use technology for...who get to decide how this technology is applied to their life.'"