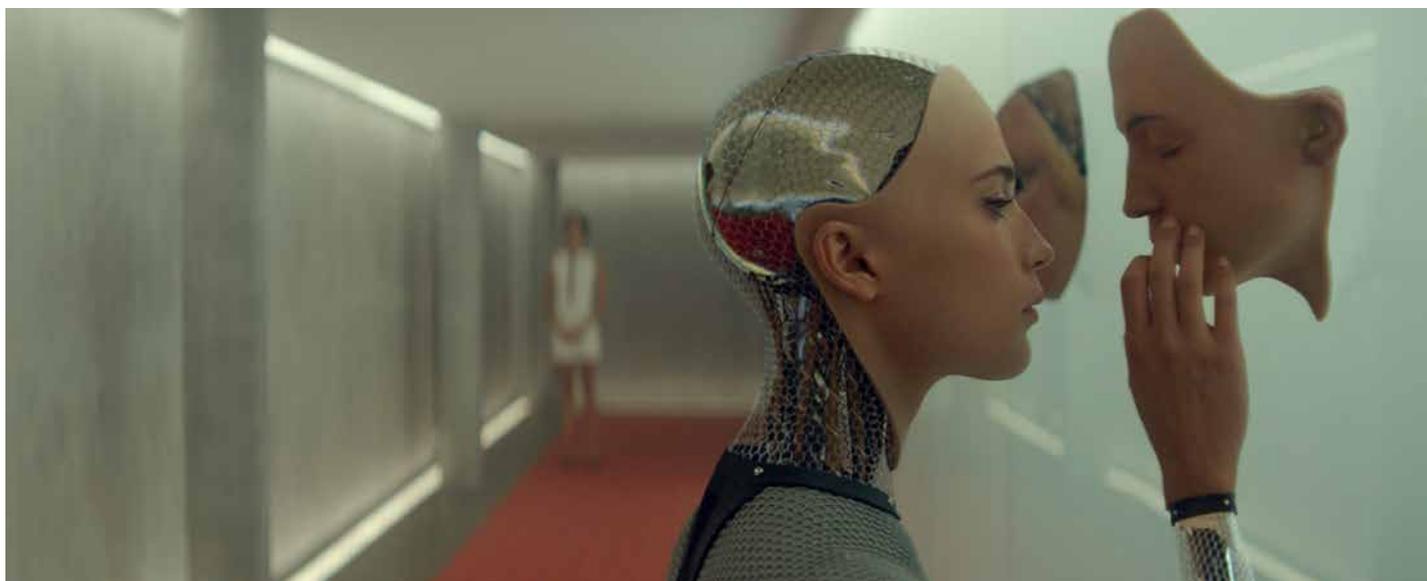


RICK EDWARDS SELECTS EX MACHINA

As part of our BAFTA at 70 celebrations we are delighted to welcome **RICK EDWARDS**, **ANDREW WHITEHURST** and **DR. MICHAEL BROOKS** to discuss the science and visual effects behind *Ex Machina* with host **MARIYAH KADERBHAI**.



Can you make a robot better than its creator? Can you ‘google’ the human soul? If you were rich enough could you even reduce God Himself to an algorithm, patent Him as your own proprietary software?

Nathan Bateman, the brooding mogul-cum-Svengali at the heart of *Ex Machina* (2014), naively believes he already has. But writer/director Alex Garland (in his stunning directorial debut) keeps one step firmly planted ahead of both the self-deluding Nathan, and us his audience, in this disturbingly hygienic, tense and atmospheric sci-fi thriller.

Earning Garland a mantelpiece of prestigious nominations (BAFTA nominations for: Outstanding Debut; Best Original Screenplay; Outstanding British Film; an Oscar nomination for Best Original Screenplay) *Ex Machina* is rightly lauded as a timely and exemplary re-telling of one of cinema’s enduring genres, the mad scientist and his Frankenstein creations, here remodelled for the age of AI.

Winning a thoroughly deserved Oscar for its mesmerising special effects, *Ex Machina*’s other strength lies in its portrayal of the power-play between an unbearably conceited Nathan (**Oscar Isaac**, brilliantly channelling his inner ageing hipster) and his outpaced protégé Caleb Smith (**Domhnall Gleeson**), an underling beckoned to attend on Nathan at his palatial ‘cabin in the woods’. Isolated, over-awed and lonely Caleb becomes easy prey (just as Nathan intends) to the seductive charms of Nathan’s harem of advanced machinery.

Anticipating by some years the current debate about a future threat to humanity supposedly posed by artificially intelligent

robots, *Ex Machina* is equally concerned with a more immediate threat, that posed by socially irresponsible entrepreneurs.

In the largely unregulated, un-taxed and un-unionised world of the tech giants we have become familiar with the notion that a young CEO can quickly soar above his workforce and above society – becoming a Philip. K. Dickian ‘Geek-Genius’ whose only responsibility is to pioneer new components that boost shareholder value and his own net worth. Garland and Isaac have fun making Bateman a grotesque caricature of Silicon Valley’s real-life tycoons.

“...no matter how rich you get, shit goes wrong... you can’t insulate yourself from it...”

As *Ex Machina* opens we observe Caleb Smith at his work station. But we see Caleb only silently, as if separated from us by protective glass. The Caleb we see is a lowly young programmer, working for the (barely) fictional conglomerate ‘Blue Book’, a monopoly search engine and cutting-edge technology firm. Caleb is being congratulated by colleagues whose computer screens, like his, have just informed them he has won the company’s star prize – a week alone with their charismatic, remote billionaire owner Nathan Bateman on his private estate in Alaska.



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Baleful, self-obsessed and alcoholic though Bateman turns out to be, an impressionable Caleb is thrilled at the prospect of meeting his hero-boss, an indisputable engineering prodigy. But Caleb encounters Bateman's boorish arrogance long before he meets his idol, Bateman's private helicopter pilot pointing out to him Bateman's endless Alaskan land holdings below, evidence of his untrammelled wealth and self-imposed internal exile far away from lesser mortals.

RELEASE YEAR: 2014

RUNTIME: 108 mins

DIRECTOR: Alex Garland

WRITTEN BY: Alex Garland

PRODUCER: Andrew Macdonald,
Allon Reich

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: Eli Bush,
Tessa Ross; Scott Rudin

Caleb is deposited some distance from Bateman's breath-takingly beautiful rural retreat (*Ex Machina's* uncredited star – the Juvet Landscape Hotel in Norway). This isolated wilderness location Caleb assumes is Bateman's uber-cool, luxury home. But as Bateman rapidly explains it is in fact his laboratory – a bunker-like testing ground. Worrying early clues that all is therefore not what it seems, and that Caleb is perhaps in greater peril than he realises, are obscured by Caleb's pathetic eagerness to demonstrate his own intellect in the presence of his supposedly guru-like (but in fact dismissive and contemptuous) master.

Nathan's unethical treatment of those around him (whether robotic or human) is mirrored in his cavalier approach to scientific method. In an awkward 'Faustian pact' moment Caleb is forced by Bateman to sign a non-disclosure agreement, only then is he informed his 'prize' is in fact to carry out more company work for Bateman – conducting a verification experiment on Bateman's

latest, and admittedly mind-blowing invention, a self-aware female robot calling herself 'Ava' (**Alicia Vikander** netting a BAFTA nomination for Best Supporting Actress). But the terms of Caleb's experimental task (known as the 'Turing Test') have been deliberately invalidated by Nathan in advance. Caleb bridles but fails to appreciate how dangerously Nathan has abandoned orthodox scientific practices.

Once those in power believe that the rules no longer apply to them the gateway to catastrophe lies open. At one point Nathan unwittingly acknowledges that the terrible fissures in his personality are risking everything when he bemoans the fact his almost infinite wealth still cannot insulate him from 'shit going wrong'; Garland's talent is to blind Nathan (and us) to the most important malfunction right under his nose, until it is too late.

RICK EDWARDS

Rick Edwards is a television presenter, broadcaster, writer and Natural Sciences graduate from Cambridge University.

Amongst his numerous presenting credits are: ITV2's comedy roast *Safeword*, BBC Three's live current affairs debate show *Free Speech* and Channel 4's *Paralympic Breakfast Show*.

Rick is a passionate science enthusiast and hosts a long-running series of podcasts, *Science(ish)*, alongside Dr Michael Brooks. Their book on the series, *Science(ish): The Peculiar Science Behind the Movies*, is published later this month (October 2017).

MICHAEL BROOKS

Michael Brooks is an author, journalist and broadcaster with a PhD in quantum physics. He is a consultant at *New Scientist*



magazine, has a weekly column for the *New Statesman* and his writing has appeared in the broadsheet media.

He has lectured around the world and is the author of *At The Edge of Uncertainty*, *The Secret Anarchy of Science* and the bestselling non-fiction title *13 Things That Don't Make Sense*.

ANDREW WHITEHURST

Helping to secure Britain's place as the world's cinematic effects production hub, visual effects supervisor Andrew Whitehurst has already brought home the Academy Award for Best Visual Effects for *Ex Machina*, and was BAFTA-nominated for Best Special Visual Effects. These accolades he shared with VFX team – Sara Bennett, Mark Ardington and Paul Norris, the latter two being Andrew's colleagues at the celebrated Double Negative VFX house.

He has worked in CGI for twenty years and is currently working with Alex Garland again on *Annihilation*, due for release in February 2018.

Mariayah Khaderbhai is the Film Programme Manager at BAFTA

BAFTA HERITAGE SCREENINGS

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